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# Gov. Christie On Common Core: It's Time For Higher Standards That Come From Our Own Communities

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Gov. Christie On Common Core: It's Time For Higher Standards T...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPxeCWBD6fg>

### Transcript:

**Governor Christie:** Now that Memorial Day has passed, we are in the home stretch of the school year. Believe me, I feel it in my house. My son Patrick, going for the beginnings of his final exams today. There was a significant amount of stress this morning even arguments over what to have for breakfast that would be best to prepare him for his history final today, so I know that we're in the homestretch of the school year, and I know that other students like my son , faculty, and staff are all finding it hard to believe another school year is almost over but are also eager for the start of another great summer in New Jersey.

I think back to my own days in public school here in New Jersey at Livingston High School – as hard as it is for me to believe and I do not want to believe it, my class just had its 35<sup>th</sup> high school reunion – but I look back at those years with an enormous sense of pride and gratitude.

Gratitude for the job that my teachers did in preparing me for the life that lay ahead and for the commitment they showed me and all the students at Livingston High School during those years day in and day out.

I am thankful to every one of them for their dedication to launching me and my classmates into adulthood, ready to meet the challenges that would come in our lives and ready to grasp the opportunities that would present themselves to us.

And really, isn't that what education is supposed to be all about?

It's about helping the young people of our communities, our state, and our country become more productive, more capable, and more engaged citizens.

And it's also about helping our children become knowledgeable and skilled adults who can build a better future for themselves and for our society.

Everybody in this room – and I think almost everybody in this state – shares the same goals for our students, our children.

We all want to ensure that they receive the quality education that is their right to receive and our obligation to provide. A quality education that I strongly believe requires both high educational standards and accountability for achieving those standards.

And that's why I have invited you here today to talk about how to build this better future for our children – a future that is, without question, tied to the value of the education that we give them.

Never before in our country's history has the role of education in building that better future been more important.

We live in an era of rapid and enormous change – a time in which many of the careers our students will pursue don't even exist yet.

We live in a dramatically shrinking world – a world in which our students will be competing not just against young people from our own state and our country but against peers from every corner of the globe as they never have before.

And we live in an ever more demanding world – a world in which the skills and the knowledge that our students will need to succeed in their lives are becoming tougher to obtain and more difficult to maintain.

So the challenge we face is this: How do we ensure that our students leave our schools ready to meet the challenges they will face as they begin the rest of their lives?

As I have said, New Jersey has a long history of embracing rigorous educational standards, and my goal, with your help, is to carry that New Jersey tradition, and improve upon it.

So where do we start? I think we start by beginning an examination and discussion on New Jersey-focused, educational standards that better prepare our students for the challenges that they will face in the years ahead.

So, today, I've directed the Commissioner of Education to begin immediately to assemble a group of parents and educators to consider developing New Jersey educational standards – New Jersey College and Career Readiness Standards as the commissioner just referred to.

You see, I want New Jersey parents and teachers to be the driving force behind the establishment of standards in our state. I want New Jersey business partners, New Jersey school administrators, and New Jersey school boards to work together in this kind of important effort.

Now as I've traveled the state I have heard from far too many people – teachers and parents from across the state – that the Common Core standards were not developed by New Jersey educators and parents, and as a result, the buy-in from both communities has not been what we need for maximum achievement for our kids, and I agree with that position. It is time to have standards that are even higher and that come directly from our own communities.

In my view, this new era can be even greater by adopting new standards right here in our state, not 200 miles away on the banks of the Potomac River.

But before I get into the details, I want to give you some background.

We have long understood in New Jersey the need to change our standards and our testing as the demands of the world around us changes. In fact, we have been doing it for at least four decades.

From the Eighth Grade Early Warning and the High School Proficiency tests of the 1980s, through the HSPA and the NJASK of the '90s and the 2000s, to the current PARCC test, New Jersey has been a leader in setting educational standards and measuring student achievement.

Clearly, we know that setting standards should not be a one-time process. It can't be, but instead should be revisited from time to time, as circumstances require.

Over the past four decades, New Jersey's commitment to rigorous standards and measuring results – and our ability to evolve as the world changes – have produced results.

The National Assessment of Education Progress, which is known as "the nation's report card," consistently ranks New Jersey at or near the top in terms of student achievement.

In 2013, New Jersey ranked first in the nation in eighth grade reading and second in eighth grade math. And in a pilot program conducted that same year for twelfth grade students in 13 states, New Jersey ranked second in math and was

tied for fourth in reading.

So it would be easy to look at those numbers and conclude that we're doing the job we need to do here in our state.

It would be easy, but it wouldn't be the whole story.

It isn't good enough to close the profound and persistent achievement gap between the economically advantaged in this state and the economically disadvantaged students, between white students and African American and Hispanic students.

It isn't good enough to graduate students that meet the demands of New Jersey's employers. It just hasn't been.

In short, better is good but it isn't good enough to prepare all our students for their own future success and the success of our state and our country.

And the statistics that back up the statements I just made are very sobering.

Let's look at the graduation rates at our two-year community colleges and our four-year colleges. They strongly suggest that our students are entering these institutions not prepared for college-level work.

For example, we have community colleges where fewer than 10 percent of the students pursuing a two-year course of graduate study, it takes them three years or more to do that.

This is not surprising when you realize that across our entire community college system, anywhere from 60 to 82 percent of the students need remedial education before they can even begin to tackle college-level work.

Stop there for a second. 60 to 82% of the folks who come to community colleges need remedial education before they can begin to tackle college level work.

A look at our four-year colleges and universities is equally unsettling. We have four-year institutions where fewer than 50 percent of the students earn a degree in six years – not four, six.

It's not enough to attend college – we want students who go to college and actually graduate from college and graduate in a reasonable period of time.

A look at the achievement gap in reading and math between poor students and those who are not and between white students and minority students should shock the conscience of every educator in this state.

According to the state assessments, far fewer of New Jersey's poor students and of our minority students are proficient in math and language arts than their counterparts. The gap ranges from 25 to 31 percentage point difference.

It's not enough for most of our students to become proficient – we want all of our students, no matter what their economic status or their race or ethnicity, to acquire the skills they need to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And a look at the projected demands of employers in 15 years indicates that we will not be able to meet their needs unless we do a better job educating our children.

By 2030, it is projected that 55 percent of all new and replacement jobs will require people with some post-secondary degree. Yet in New Jersey today, only 42 percent of individuals over 25 have at least an associate degree.

Unless those numbers change – and they must – that means that 15 years from now, nearly six out of every ten students will lack the basic requirement to obtain a good job in our society.

In my view, it's not enough for our students to find a job – we want our students to be able to find good jobs, rewarding careers, that make them feel good about what they do every day.

We cannot continue to graduate students from our high schools who are unable to take on first-year college-level work.

We cannot continue to distribute high school diplomas that employers tell me do not reliably indicate that our graduates possess the entry-level skills required by their new hires.

And we cannot continue to send some of New Jersey's students to the starting line of their adult lives hobbled by a fundamental inability to even run the race, let alone win it.

So what can we do – what must we do, to confront those sobering statistics? And remember something: those are not my opinions. Those are facts, independent objective facts.

So my vision for this is simply stated:

One, I want every classroom to be a place where learning occurs for every student;

Two, I want every teacher to be invested in meeting the parents' expectations for their children every day in every

classroom; and

Three, I want to return to New Jersey's leaders—our parents, our teachers, our administrators, our boards of education -- control over the education our students receive and to wrest it away from the bureaucrats in Washington, DC who have now taken over.

As Washington has increased its control over our students' education, our children have fallen further and further behind their peers around the world.

When Washington, DC took over the Common Core standards from the governors in the Obama Administration, it pulled education away from our neighborhoods.

That is not what is best for the investment New Jersey is making in our children's education.

And this should not come as a big surprise. Whenever federal government crowds out local control in these type of areas, things get worse.

We have to embrace again the uniquely American idea that the people closest to the problem are usually, not always, but usually the best equipped to find the solution to that problem. They are the ones who are most invested.

It's especially true I believe when it comes to education.

Ask someone to name an educator who had a profound impact on his or her life.

Everyone in this room I suspect, everyone can come up with more than one name of a teacher who helped to change the course of your life. For me, it was Mrs. Ruth Manachin, my fifth grade teacher. Up to them time of kindergarten through fourth grade I got nothing but A's. I went into Mrs. Manachin's fifth grade class and had my first essay. Got the essay back two days later. It was a C. I did not even know what this meant. I went up to her, and I said I think this must be a mistake. And she said no, no Mr. Christie. The mistake was the amount of time you decided to spend on this. She said I don't know what other teachers thought about you but I think you're pretty smart and you can do a lot better., and if you don't you're going to get used to seeing that grade in my class.

Fast forward everybody. That was fourth, fifth grade. I don't remember what year that was a long time ago.

Fast forward to 2009 after I was elected governor. I got a letter from Texas at my home with a return address on it that I didn't recognize with a last name in the return address that I didn't recognize. I opened the letter and I started to read it, and the letter said dear Governor-elect Christie. You may not remember me, but I was your fifth grade teacher, and I wonder if the young man I saw on television being elected Governor of New Jersey was really that smart mouthed kid who was in my fifth grade class, and she remembered the year and I still don't remember what it was. She said I think it was and if it was I hope you write me back, and she said and if you do I hope you remember how incredibly proud I felt to be sitting in my living room watching you on TV knowing that you had been my student.

It's teachers like that who make us the kind of people who can achieve great things, and I can imagine that there are folks in this audience who have stories very similar to that. We need to reinvigorate that type of interaction in classrooms all across the state.

Because learning doesn't happen in conference rooms populated by federal functionaries.

Learning happens in classrooms, sparked by teachers like Mrs. Manachin whose passion and high expectations for their students motivate and inspire kids to learn and to excel.

And you know where else learning happens? Learning happens at home, when parents sit at the kitchen table to motivate their children and help them achieve the very best of their potential.

And so, where that's where learning should occur, in the classroom and in the home, that's where we must focus our attention -- in every New Jersey classroom and in the homes of the parents of our children, and that's why I believe that's where higher standards can actually be developed.

We do not want to be the first generation in our Nation's history to leave our children less equipped and less prepared to build for themselves and their children a nation stronger and more prosperous than the one our parents gave to us.

We owe our children the educational foundation they need to thrive, not just to survive.

And as I mentioned earlier, New Jersey has been a national leader in setting standards for the education of our children. We always have been. We've been a leader also in evaluating whether students are meeting those standards or not.

Governor Kean in the 1980s, Governor Whitman in the '90s established standards and testing to meet the demands of those times. In each case, those efforts produced results.

More recently, in 2010, New Jersey agreed to participate in the federal Common Core State Standard Initiative.

It's now been five years since Common Core was adopted. And the truth is that it's simply not working. It has brought confusion and frustration to parents. I've heard it every day. It's brought distance between our teachers and the communities where they work, and instead of solving problems in our classrooms, it is creating morale problems in those classrooms and at home. And when we aren't getting the job done for our children, we need to do something different.

So under Commissioner Hesse's leadership, I am asking the Department of Education to convene teams of New Jersey educators and parents to conduct a point-by-point review of New Jersey's previous state standards and to consider recommending changes that make our standards higher and New Jersey based.

This review will be completed by the end of 2015.

This educator and parent review of the standards must address what I view as the most important questions facing us:

Do the current standards reflect New Jersey's real and distinct needs?

Do they measure up to previous New Jersey standards?

And do they reflect the expectations of New Jersey's colleges, universities, and employers?

Finally, will they help to close the persistent and profound achievement gap between students in our state?

While all this is going on, we're continuing work as we do it now, work as usual.

In addition, our review teams also must answer more specific questions about curriculum choices and instructional practices.

I can guarantee you, this process will be comprehensive and it will be transparent.

And as this effort unfolds, Commissioner Hesse will give members of the community not directly involved in the review the opportunity to offer their ideas as well.

He will broaden the work and try to make sure that the public's understanding of how New Jersey's educational system works and what we intend to accomplish through this effort is complete.

Now this will in no way affect our efforts to continue effective testing and measurements of our students through the PARCC test. We must continue to review and improve that test based on results, not based upon fear and rumor and speculation, but results. I'm not going to permit New Jersey to risk losing vital federal education funds because some would prefer to let the perfect get in the way of the good. We must test our children because federal law requires it and because it is the only way to objectively judge our progress. Bringing educational standards home to New Jersey does nothing, nothing to change those obligations, and the PARCC test will continue as we continue to review and hope to improve it based upon the first set of results that we get back in.

We also must continue with our teacher evaluation initiative through our Teach NJ Tenure reform statute. On this we will be unyielding. No one should stand for anything less than an excellent teacher in every classroom—not parents, not other teachers, administrators or our students. Accountability in every classroom must be one of the pillars of our New Jersey based higher standards.

We all want to do everything we can to make certain that our students are equipped with the knowledge and the skills they will need to thrive in rapidly changing workplaces in a rapidly changing world.

And we all want to provide to our students an education based on standards that the people who know them best have developed and implemented with energy and passion, and an eye toward the future.

That is the purpose of my actions today.

Thirty-five years ago, when I walked into that football stadium at Livingston High School, I shook the principal's hand, and I received my diploma, I could have no way of knowing that someday I would have the honor of twice being elected by my fellow New Jerseyans as governor of the state where I was born and raised.

But what I did know that day was this: I knew that the education I had been provided helped make me ready to pursue my hopes and my dreams for whatever my future might be.

That is something all children, when they make that same walk across their stage in their high school deserve to know.

So today, I ask for your help in achieving this ambitious and worthy goal for the future success of our students and for our state.

We have to reject federal control of New Jersey's education. We need to return it to the parents and students who will ultimately have the most at stake, and to their teachers who will help them make that walk across that stage. We need to take it out of the cubicles of Washington, DC where it has been placed by this administration and we need to return it to the neighborhoods of New Jersey.

That new era in our state can begin through our efforts, so let's make sure that our standards, whatever they turn out to be, set the bar high, so our children can reach even higher, and let us not give in, let us not give in to the rank fear and speculation that is stoked by those who do not have, who do not have the true, true interests of our children at heart, but ulterior motives hidden behind gauzy nice sounding slogans that neither acknowledge the truth of the disparity of education in our state today, nor are based in any fact other than the fact that they want to preserve their own personal self-interest. Education is an emotional issue, and it's one that all of us should have a stake in, and I assume that's why all of you are here today. That's why I'm here today, and I appreciate you taking the time to listen, and for so many of you in this audience I look forward to working with you to make sure that when we look into the eyes of the parents and the children that we live with, that we work with, for some of us that we represent and are responsible for, that we can honestly say that we've done all we can to provide them with the best possible education that our taxpayer money can buy and that the spirit of our parents and teachers can help to spark and create.

Thank you all very much for coming today. I appreciate it.

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