



- Home
- Newsroom
- Media
- Administration
- NJ's Priorities
- Contact Us

- Press Releases
- Public Addresses
- Executive Orders
- Press Kit
- Reports

Home > Newsroom > Press Releases > 2012 > New Jersey Leads the Way with Call for Statewide Accountability System to Turn Around Failing Schools

# New Jersey Leads the Way with Call for Statewide Accountability System to Turn Around Failing Schools

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### New Jersey Leads the Way with Call for Statewide Accountability System to Turn Around Failing Schools

**Trenton, NJ** – Governor Christie today announced that the Obama Administration has approved the state’s New Jersey’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver application for its bold and aggressive education reforms. The approval again demonstrates that Governor Christie’s education reforms are not only comprehensive and ambitious in aiming to turn around failing schools and deliver a quality education to every student, but are part of a national, bipartisan reform movement being pursued by the Obama Administration and states around the country.

“We are once again proving that New Jersey is leading the way on the issues that matter most to our children’s future and our shared future as a state and nation. The Obama Administration’s approval of our education reform agenda contained in this application confirms that our bold, common sense, and bipartisan reforms are right for New Jersey and shared by the President and Secretary Duncan’s educational vision for the country,” said Governor Christie. “This is not about Democrats or Republicans - it is about pursuing an agenda in the best interest of our children whose educational needs are not being met, and those who are getting a decent education but deserve a great one.”

The Christie Administration’s NCLB application, submitted in November, is part of a broader effort to reform the state’s overlapping and contradictory accountability systems and a comprehensive education reform agenda to increase academic standards, the effectiveness and talent of educators, and accountability for results in the classroom. Implementing the reforms outlined in the waiver makes New Jersey a leader in developing a new and more meaningful

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accountability system to better identify troubled schools, diagnose the causes of their struggles, and target our resources to improve the lowest-performing schools.

Governor Christie has advocated for four specific, bipartisan pieces of legislation that are needed to achieve the education reform goals agreed upon by the Christie and Obama Administrations in the NCLB waiver application. This package of bills, one of which has been enacted, goes hand in hand with the accountability system reforms in the waiver to fix failing schools and will result in greater school choice for students in underperforming districts, a system to identify and reward effective teachers, and supports for teachers who are not getting results for children.

“As we implement a new accountability system to more effectively assess, identify and intervene in troubled schools, we must also take the next steps to enact legislation to ensure our students have the most talented, effective teachers in classrooms and hurdles to innovation and creativity are removed. There is no single solution to turn around chronically failing schools or close the achievement gap. So, it is critical that the Legislature join me, standing alongside President Obama and Secretary Duncan, in providing the comprehensive set of tools needed to give every children in every part of our state the opportunity and hope that only comes with a quality education,” concluded Governor Christie.

Among other changes through this waiver, New Jersey schools will no longer be subject to antiquated NCLB accountability provisions and sanctions required for not making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). Instead, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) will implement a fairer and more nuanced accountability system beginning in September 2012 that measures schools based on both growth and absolute attainment, and that focuses state resources on drastically improving those schools that are persistently failing and/or have large achievement gaps.

“During the past year, I heard from countless educators that the flaws of NCLB limited their ability to identify and improve areas of need in their schools. In partnership with educators across the state, we developed a new accountability system that will measure schools in part on what matters most – how much growth they make in a given year,” said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. “In doing so, we will give unprecedented freedom to those schools that are doing well to continue to achieve without state or federal intervention. We will also be able to identify the 15 percent of schools that need the most help and make sure we target our resources to turning them around.”

Over the course of October and November, the NJDOE received input and suggestions from hundreds of educators and others across the state on the application. On November 14, New Jersey was one of 11 states to apply for a waiver in the first round of applications. Since the NJDOE submitted its original application, the Department worked with the US Department of Education to clarify details of the application to make sure that the state holds all schools to a high bar while targeting resources to those schools that need the most support. A final version of the application can be found at the following link: <http://www.nj.gov/education/grants/nclb/waiver/>

As part of the waiver application, the Christie Administration outlined plans to act on three principles shared with the Obama Administration, including: 1) College and career ready expectations for all students; 2) State-developed

differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; and 3) Supporting effective instruction and leadership.

In developing a new accountability system, the Department of Education will create three tiers of schools, which will be identified using both growth and absolute proficiency. These schools will be identified during the summer, and interventions will begin in the 2012-13 school year:

1. **Priority Schools:** The Department will identify the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools across the state using proficiency, growth, and graduation rates. Any non-Title I school that would otherwise meet the same criteria will also be designated as a Priority School.
2. **Focus Schools:** The Department will identify at least 10 percent of Title I schools as Focus Schools. These schools will be selected from Title I schools that are not categorized as Priority Schools and will be identified based upon achievement gaps between subgroups and low performance or graduation rates among particular subgroups. Any non-Title I school that would otherwise meet the same criteria will also be designated as a Focus School.
3. **Reward Schools:** The Department will identify Reward Schools based on high proficiency levels or high levels of growth, including progress toward closing achievement gaps. This will allow for a range of schools from across the state to attain Reward status, regardless of their absolute starting point.

Through the development of 7 new Regional Achievement Centers, the Department will create customized interventions to turnaround Priority and Focus Schools, based on their individual needs. Among others, these interventions include a focus on improving instruction, using data to drive decision making, and expanding learning time. The Department will also develop financial bonuses for Reward Schools as well as opportunities to share best practices across the state.

In addition, the Department will completely redevelop its school Report Cards to share with schools significant information on their performance. These public reports will help schools and districts identify areas of strength and weakness, and will allow parents to see true performance levels at their child's schools.

"This next generation accountability system finds the right balance between holding all schools responsible for high levels of performance, while providing the flexibility from bureaucratic intervention that too often prevents them from succeeding," continued Acting Commissioner Cerf. "We will now continue to work with our educators to implement this new system next year and to make sure that every child in New Jersey graduates from high school ready for college and career."

**Press Contact:**

Michael Drewniak  
Kevin Roberts  
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor  
PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000