

# An open letter from public education advocates to New Jersey families and communities:



We write on behalf of New Jersey’s public education stakeholder groups to share our reflections on the challenges our schools and students have encountered in the last year and to offer a vision for how to help our students emerge from this pandemic emotionally strong and academically successful.

The COVID-19 global pandemic affected every aspect of public education in New Jersey. Virtually overnight, our public schools transitioned to educating more than 1.3 million students remotely. We have had success under very trying circumstances, but the tumult of the last 10 months has also made plain the many inequities we still need to address in order to deliver on the constitutional guarantee of a “thorough and efficient system of free public schools” for every New Jersey student in every New Jersey community.

In order to address those inequities and fulfill that promise, we have come together as advocates for students and public education to explore a plan for public education after the pandemic. We have committed ourselves to thoughtful, coherent and honest analysis of the issues and problems we face. We have begun the search for solutions based on research and on the actual experiences of educators, students, parents, boards of education and communities. We did so in the interest of providing policymakers with guidance from educational experts on what is needed now and in the future for our students to grow, learn and thrive.

This has been an intentional and inclusive effort, bringing together educators, administrators, parents and policy-makers for multiple conversations, and we are just beginning! We used a report from the Learning Policy Institute called *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond* authored by Linda Darling-Hammond, Abby Schachner and Adam K. Edgerton as the starting point for our initial discussions. We not only held multiple meetings among the stakeholders, but many of the groups represented are holding meetings with their constituencies to ensure that a broad range of voices, perspectives and New Jersey experiences are included in our work and reflected in our evolving beliefs.

## **From these initial discussions, we share the following beliefs:**

- While New Jersey is known for its great public schools, the challenges of the last 11 months have heightened the need for intervention, particularly in communities where economic, social and equity issues exist.
- Adequate and equitable funding is essential to pursue policies that support all students, communities and families.
- Specific mandates without the resources to meet them are an obstacle to success.

## **Actions we take must be focused on:**

- Building a better future by reimagining a more equitable, inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment;
- Meeting the social-emotional needs of students, educators and families;
- Building systems of shared leadership that include the voices of students, parents, communities, teachers, other staff and administrators;
- Ensuring equitable access to, and participation in, a well-rounded education focused on the needs of the whole child anchored in the nine New Jersey Student Learning Standards;
- Implementing a comprehensive system of assessment that supports the use of quality, formative assessments in our classrooms to enhance learning; and,
- Using systemic analysis of practice-based evidence and research to develop intentional, coherent efforts to achieve long-term goals.

To have a meaningful positive impact on the learning conditions for students, and based upon these beliefs, we recommend that any policy adoption by the state must ensure that there is additional resource support in state budget appropriations for consistent implementation at the local school and district level.

While the Learning Policy Institute report is a useful research-based resource to inform statewide policy consideration, we note that there are New Jersey-grounded resources that can likewise be used to inform policy and support implementation. Examples of these other resources are appended to this letter.

We will continue to work collaboratively with all interested stakeholders to promote state policy and school/district level actions to support growth in student learning.

In solidarity,



**American Federation  
of Teachers New Jersey**



**New Jersey Education  
Association**



**Arts Ed NJ**



**New Jersey Principals and  
Supervisors Association**



**New Jersey Center for  
Teaching and Learning**



**New Jersey School  
Boards Association**



**Education Law Center**



**New Jersey Parent  
Teacher Association**



**Garden State Coalition of  
Schools**



**Save Our Schools New  
Jersey**



**Latino Institute, Inc.**



**Tigris Solutions**



**NAACP New Jersey  
State Conference**



**New Jersey SPAN Parent  
Advocacy Network**



**New Jersey Association of  
School Administrators**



**New Jersey Association of  
School Business Officials**



**New Jersey Work  
Environment  
Council**

## APPENDIX:

Resources from Task Force partners to support the work of building strong Post-Pandemic public schools based on the goals of the task force message

### American Federation of Teachers (AFT) New Jersey

- [A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities](#) – report of National AFT on school reopening

### Arts Ed NJ

- [September Ready Guidance for Arts Education](#) - a comprehensive, 126-page document offering practical guidance for K-12 school administrators and arts educators seeking to provide meaningful arts instruction for students in the COVID and post-COVID environment.
- [Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning](#) Learning - The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL) is dedicated to illuminating the intersection between arts education and social emotional learning to facilitate the embedded, intentional, and sustained application of SEL-informed arts education.
- [Statement of Principles: The Value of Arts Education](#) - The Statement of Principles outlines the eight principles that form the bedrock for quality arts education in New Jersey as agreed to by the New Jersey Association of School Administrators New Jersey Education Association New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association New Jersey School Boards Association New Jersey PTA and Arts Ed NJ
- [Arts Education & Social Emotional Learning Framework](#) - This Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning Framework is designed to illuminate the intersection between arts education and social-emotional learning to allow for the intentional application of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, with the overarching goal of enhancing art education.
- [Arts Ed NJ Professional Learning](#) - A listing of professional learning opportunities supporting the implementation of arts education, curriculum development, culturally relevant arts education, and social emotional learning.
- [Protect Arts Ed Now](#) – Strategies to help school districts make arts education a priority in a post-COVID environment.

### New Jersey Association of School Administrators

- [Vision 2020](#) – a detailed description of NJASA's vision for strong public schools.
- [New Jersey Consortia for Excellence Through Equity](#) – a program which uses an equity lens to help districts discover and implement creative strategies designed for elevating the school and life success of every student.
- [New Jersey CSA Residency Program](#) – support for aspiring educational leaders.
- [New Jersey Leadership Academy](#) - a cohort-based learning opportunity that provides a process for continuous improvement through professional learning that encourages the sharing of expertise across leadership roles and responsibilities tied to the core attributes within the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and the Teacher Leader Model Standards to strengthen leadership skills.
- [SEL Health Series](#) – support for school district leaders as they navigate the challenges of Social-Emotional Learning

### New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning

- [Emerge Strong](#) – This landing page serves to route students, parents, teachers, and administrators to NJCTL's proven online resources that are tailored to help them enhance learning now and prepare to emerge strong from the pandemic.

### New Jersey Education Association

- [Education Recovery Plan](#) – comprehensive NJEA report on school reopening. (August 24, 2020)
- [Healing-Centered Schools](#) – As opposed to “trauma-informed care” which broadly refers to a set of principles that guide and direct how we view the impact of severe harm on young people’s mental, physical and emotional health, “Healing-Centered Engagement” is a healing-centered approach that is holistic involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. (December 1, 2020)
- [NJEA Learning](#) – a comprehensive archive of online professional learning resources to support educators in the pandemic environment and beyond.
- [Priority Schools Initiative](#) – a program to improve instructional practices in addition to working to remove barriers by creating healing communities focused on the needs of the whole student to increase student achievement. (April 28, 2020)
- [Guidance Regarding Reopening School Buildings](#) – A guide to intentionally planning for school success during COVID-19 and beyond with health, safety, student learning, and equity at the forefront from the National Education Association (NEA). (June 11, 2020)
- [Teacher Leader Academy](#) – Teacher leadership offers a paradigm shift that not only allows teachers to support their peers from a nonevaluative position, but also to influence the entire system. Teacher leadership gives educators a voice at the decision-making table on instructional issues at the school and/or district level.

## New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association

- [The Connected Action Roadmap - A Systems Approach to Strengthening Teaching, Leading, and Learning](#) – is a process that empowers PLCs to operate more effectively in schools and leads to improved student learning through the development of a viable curriculum that aligns standards, student learning objectives, instructional design, and assessments. This framework has been endorsed by the major educational organizations in NJ. The NJDOE also supports this vision.
- [NJ Leadership Academy Series 7 - Leading for an Equity Revolution: Learning from Our New Realities](#) – a series of three professional learning sessions, participants will be challenged to develop strategies and actions to leverage what we have learned to build sustainable and equitable learning structures across all schools, prepare for challenges, and maximize new learning structures to meet individual student needs, with a focus on students who have been (traditionally) marginalized.
- [NJEXCEL - NJ Expedited Certification for Educational Leadership](#) – a state-approved, innovative, non-traditional program leading to certification for Supervisor, Principal, Director of School Counseling Services, Teacher-Leader and School Administrator, for those who have a minimum of a master's degree in a related educational field and four years of full-time experience as a teacher and/or educational specialist.
- [New Jersey Teacher Leadership Certification](#) – this FEA program provides certified teachers the opportunity to earn a State-approved teacher leader certification endorsement with eligibility to assume various teacher leader roles in their schools, districts and communities.
- [New Jersey Leaders to Leaders \(NJL2L\)](#) – is the sole State-approved comprehensive mentoring and induction program for new school leaders that provides trained mentors and a range of continuing professional development program and services to support new school leaders in successful completion of the State-required Two-Year Residency for Standard Principal Certification.
- [NJPSA/FEA Professional Learning Catalog of Virtual Events](#) – a list of professional learning opportunities through March includes multiple sessions on equity; culturally responsive practices; social-emotional needs of students, educators, and families; school climate; and student and staff mental health.

## Save Our Schools New Jersey

- [In the Fallout of the Pandemic, Community Schools Show a Way Forward for Education](#) – by Jeannie Oakes, Anna Maier, Julia Daniel for Learning Policy Institute
- [Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools - An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative](#) (Rand Corporation)
- [ROI of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study by Apex and ABC Community School Partnership](#)
- [Coalition for Community Schools: Policy brief highlighting critical findings](#)

## New Jersey School Boards Association

- [Searching for a 'New Normal' in New Jersey's Public Schools: How the Coronavirus Is Changing Education in the Garden State](#) addresses the safe reopening of schools, students' mental health, academic and extracurricular programs, budgetary issues, and preparations for the future. (May 20, 2020)
- [Choosing the Best 'Road Back' for Our Children](#) provides an advocacy agenda for public education during the pandemic, including state and federal funding, assistance in securing personal protective equipment and technology, financial flexibility, and critical changes in law and regulation. (August 31, 2020)
- [Reopening Schools: Online Learning and the Digital Divide](#) looks at the challenges facing school districts in delivering instruction remotely to all students during the pandemic and beyond. (October 23, 2020)
- [Eye on the Future as Districts Monitor Student Mental Health](#) shows how mental health programs are helping students withstand the pandemic. (January 27, 2021)

## New Jersey Work Environment Council

- [National Schools Reopening Guidance: A National Call to Action, The Pandemic v Schools](#)