



**The Business Coalition for Educational Excellence**

at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce

[www.bcee.org](http://www.bcee.org)  
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# Getting Down to the Business of Learning

★ A Position Paper

*This position paper  
can be found at  
The Business Coalition for  
Educational Excellence  
website ([www.bcee.org](http://www.bcee.org)).*

**April, 2001**



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## ★ An Executive Summary of the Position Paper:

### Getting Down to the Business of Learning

The Business Coalition for Educational Excellence (BCEE) is a grassroots association of New Jersey business people, educators and policy makers. This document derives from the strategic plan we developed following the 1999 National Education Summit and states our position on issues related to New Jersey's standards-based education system.

#### ★ Standards and Assessments

All New Jersey students should receive the educational, parental and community support they need to achieve New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. Therefore, we advocate for a standards-based public school education system that provides every student with academically rigorous, technology rich, relevant learning experiences.

Academic standards should be clear and specific and provide unequivocal direction to educators and parents about what students need to know and be able to do. The upcoming standards review should allow a variety of education stakeholders to determine the best compromise between the need for increased clarity and discretion in local implementation.

New Jersey should provide high quality statewide assessments that prove themselves against best in class, nationally and globally, with regular and timely mandated reviews. We believe that New Jersey's academic assessment system requires more development before it can provide important, reliable data. Once these tests are capable of generating meaningful information that guides districts in their continuous efforts to improve student achievement, the state may wish to consider testing more frequently with shorter assessment and with a wider variety of instruments.

We are concerned that having full-fledged standards, curriculum frameworks and paper and pencil assessments in every subject may be stretching the capacity of schools to educate students with sufficient depth in critical



## Executive Summary

(continued)

fields like language arts, mathematics and science. Priority may need to be given to some subjects because of their increasing importance to all adults.

We support the revision of the Cross Content Workforce Readiness Skills so that the vague concept of 'infusion throughout all academic teaching and learning' is reinforced by clearly delineated workforce readiness skills within each curricular area. Once this is accomplished, the Cross Content Workforce Readiness Skills should be reconceptualized under the heading of 'Technical, Applied, and Integrated Skills.' These revised skills should define what all students should know and be able to do in two areas: computer/informational technologies and technology education.

### ★ Teacher Quality

A growing body of research indicates that teacher quality is more critical than formerly assumed. To ensure that every student achieves high standards, teachers need to be prepared for the challenges that are generated when the educational bar is raised. We advocate for a system that creates and maintains the highest quality teacher corps while rewarding individual performance.

The state needs to develop and disseminate data about the quality of New Jersey's teachers. In addition, all professional development programs should improve the ability of a teacher to help all students reach high academic standards. We advocate for the creation of stable sources of high quality professional development. We strongly recommend providing significant financial and other incentives to teachers who become certified to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

Standards that define what all incoming teachers need to know and be able to do should be established. School districts and schools of education should jointly adopt these standards, and agree upon ways in which feedback between institutions can catalyze continuous improvement.

We advocate for higher cut-off scores on the teacher entrance examination and for increased quality control in teacher education programs. We recom-

mend that schools of education strive to achieve and maintain accreditation to a system of quality standards like the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

### ★ Accountability

Investments in costly assessment systems are wasteful if parallel accountability systems are not in place. Accountability systems that do not include continuous improvement mechanisms become punitive exercises. Accountability systems must include timely data disseminated in formats that make sense to the public, parents, and educators.

Accountability systems must also be based on relevant comparisons and disaggregated for population mobility and other factors. Student performance in individual schools should be compared to student performance in similar schools, and benchmarked against the best in the state. However, longitudinal tracking of student performance is impossible since New Jersey does not have a system of unique student identification numbers. We recommend the immediate implementation of a system of student tracking. We will support the introduction of a user-friendly accountability system similar to that used in Texas (Just for the Kids).

High-achieving organizations motivate performance through a system of incentives and rewards. Disinvesting in poorly performing schools to encourage improvement is questionable practice. While it may be more difficult, finding ways to involve all education stakeholders in systemic reform ensures that all students, including those without educationally savvy parents, will have the opportunity to learn.

### ★ Conclusion

Consumer demand is constantly challenging business to continuously improve its product and services. We now challenge education stakeholders - teachers and school administrators, elected officials, parents, and students - to join us in accomplishing these powerful objectives, so that, working together, we can help every student achieve at the highest levels.



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## Getting Down to the Business of Learning

### ★ Introduction

The Business Coalition for Education Excellence (BCEE) is a grassroots association of New Jersey business people, educators and policy makers who support a strong, continuously improving standards-based public school system. BCEE members contribute individually and collectively to help all of New Jersey's children access educational opportunities that will help them prepare for productive adult lives.

In collaboration with educators, we have developed a collective agenda and worked to achieve the goals we crafted together. Through our joint efforts, we created Tech Corps New Jersey, School Counts!, Educators in the Workplace, and the Technology Challenge. We helped establish the Educational Technology Training Centers, conducted two New Jersey Education Summits and contributed to the development of education policy related to workforce readiness. Individually, we have created and supported programs like the Merck Institute for Science Education, Verizon Access New Jersey Program, Johnson & Johnson's MidAtlantic Regional F.I.R.S.T. Robotics Competition, and the recent benchmarking study of New Jersey's standards and assessment system, commissioned by The Prudential Foundation.

This document derives from the strategic plan we developed following the 1999 National Education Summit. It states our position on issues related to the evolution of New Jersey's standards-based education system. Our position relies on our collective experiences in education reform – and on our business expertise in systems implementation, accountability and continuous improvement, and on recruiting, hiring and retaining a talented workforce.



## Section One Standards and Assessments

### ★ Our Position

*We strongly believe that all New Jersey students should receive the educational, parental and community support they need to achieve New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. We will continue to support — collectively and individually — programs and initiatives that create and strengthen learning opportunities for New Jersey's children.*

*We recommend that New Jersey's standards be made clear and specific in the fundamental areas of learning – Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, World Languages, Fine/Performing Arts, and Health/Physical Education. All curricula should be infused with the Cross Content Workplace Readiness Skills.*

*The assessment system in New Jersey should be restructured to yield meaningful data that contribute to a process of continuous educational improvement. As part of a legislative mandate, standards and assessments should be routinely benchmarked to ensure that they reflect new expectations and understanding about student learning.*

*Finally, we suggest that the current review, and all future reviews, of standards and assessments include a broad array of education stakeholders, including representatives from New Jersey businesses.*

Curriculum standards should be rigorous and represent a level of performance that will allow students to prepare for continuing education and productive adult lives. Standards should also be clear and specific so they provide unequivocal direction to educators and parents about what students should learn. Standards must also allow local districts to have some discretion in appropriate local implementation.

Recent reports have indicated that some of New Jersey's standards may need to be revised to create clear direction for educators in their classroom instruction. The upcoming review process should allow a variety of education stakeholders to determine the best compromise between the need for increased clarity and local interpretation, while ensuring that the standards accurately detail what students should accomplish in an excellent K-12 educational program.

In business, performance standards need to be continuously assessed and benchmarked to ensure they reflect customer expectations and state-of-the-art business practices. We believe that New Jersey's Academic Standards should be benchmarked on a continuing basis against standards from other states and nations

that are consistently judged best in their field, as part of the legislatively-mandated standards review process. Also,

to ensure that graduates from the K-12 educational system are prepared for the global economy, business representatives with appropriate content matter expertise should serve as volunteers within the standards review committees.

New Jersey's assessment system has been the subject of considerable discussion since its adoption. Many organizations and individuals have commented on the state's tests in a variety of areas, including the grading of the instruments, the quality of test questions, the length of the tests, and the frequency with which they are administered.

The frequency and duration of any statewide assessment should be determined by the need for data, the ability of the assessment to promote continuous improvement, and research findings regarding

★ **Standards should be clear and specific so they provide unequivocal direction to educators and parents about what students should learn.**



# Section One Standards and Assessments

effective statewide assessment practices. A critical component in determining the frequency of statewide assessments is the capacity of the system to generate consistently high quality test instruments that measure higher order cognitive skills that are worth 'teaching to,' since it is inevitable that mandated assessments will modify classroom routines.

The single most important purpose of any assessment system is to generate the information that will allow

**★ The frequency and duration of any test should be determined by the need for data, the ability of the assessment to promote continuous improvement, research findings regarding state-wide testing, and the ability of the system to deliver quality tests that measure higher order cognitive skills.**

students, schools, school districts and the state to improve. There is some confusion over what information the GEPA and ESPA offer to schools and districts. The Department of Education should communicate very clearly to school districts and administrators what type of

data are generated from its current assessments and how school districts can obtain that data.

An independent review of the state's assessments in Language Arts and Mathematics indicates that they are high quality tests and are academically rigorous. However, it is our observation that New Jersey's system of assessments requires more development before it can provide important, reliable data. Once these tests are capable of generating meaningful information that guides districts in their continuous efforts to improve student achievement, the state may wish to consider testing more frequently with shorter assessment and with a wider variety of instruments.

To ensure that the best possible assessments are developed, the Department of Education should incorporate a more inclusive audience of educational practitioners, content matter specialists, and business volunteers in the assessment development process. Like standards, assessments should be benchmarked against tests from other states and countries that are best in class. An external, unbiased evaluation of New Jersey's statewide assessments by an appropriate organization should be routinely accomplished and driven by legislative mandate.

The Cross Content Workforce Readiness Skills should be restructured such that the vague concept of 'infusion throughout all academic teaching and learning' is reinforced by clearly delineated workforce readiness skills within each curricular area.

Specifically, critical thinking skills (relevant applications of learning), use of computer technology (Internet and computer application use), career awareness, self-management, and safety principles should be included within the standards and indicators for each academic area. This should not be presented as additional content matter, but as a way to reinforce and apply material already delineated by the standard.

Once this is accomplished, the Cross Content Workforce Readiness Skills should be reconceptualized under the heading of 'Technical, Applied, and Integrated Skills.' These revised

**★ The Cross Content Workforce Readiness Skills should be clearly delineated within each curricular area.**

workforce readiness skills should define what all students should know and be able to do in two areas: computer/information technologies and technology education.

The need for technological literacy cannot be underestimated, and it is imperative that the workforce of



# Section One Standards and Assessments

tomorrow be prepared to deal with the technologies that will define their world.

While computer and Internet technologies will play an important role in society, so will many other technologies -- as history proves. New Jersey is one of the last states to consider inclusion of technology education in its mandates for student learning. Far more inclusive than informational technologies, technology education, or the study of the designed world, can prepare students for careers in engineering, high-tech manufacturing, materials science, and architecture.

These new workforce readiness guidelines of 'Technical, Applied and Integrated Skills' should be culled from available national standards in Information/Computer Technology and Technology Education, but with a strict focus on supporting relevant application of learning in other curricular areas, as appropriate. These new standards should also be developed

**★ We are concerned that full-fledged standards, frameworks, and paper and pencil assessments in every subject may be stretching the capacity of schools to educate students with sufficient depth in critical fields like language arts, mathematics and science.**

around a realistic approach to the system's ability to expand current delivery mechanisms, available and predicted resources, and in a manner that will ensure sustainable development and high-quality student outcomes.

These newly-defined 'Technical, Applied and Integrated Skills' should be reinforced by district-administered authentic assess-

ments similar to, and as rigorous as, those developed for the Fine/Performing Arts, Health/Physical Education, and World Language curriculum areas.

And similarly, 'Technical, Applied and Integrated Skills' should be mandated for all students under a specified high school graduation credit requirement.

Our final observation relates to the allocation of time, resources and student attention divided among seven curricular areas and the technical/applied/integrated skills in workforce readiness. Business leaders have learned that it is difficult for any organization to be consistently excellent in a boundless array of products or services. We are concerned that having full-fledged standards, curriculum frameworks and paper and pencil assessments in every subject may be stretching the capacity of schools to educate students with sufficient depth in critical fields like language arts, science and mathematics.

**★ We believe that all students need to have a well-rounded education to prepare them for their adult lives. But within that education, priority may need to be given to some subjects because of their increasing importance to all adults.**

We recommend that the standards review process include an examination of the need for standards, curriculum frameworks, and statewide paper and pencil assessments in all of the content matter areas. We believe that all students need to have a well-rounded education to prepare them for successful adult lives. But within that education, priority may need to be given to some subjects because of their increasing importance to all adults.



## Section Two Teacher Quality

### ★ Our Position

*We recognize that New Jersey's teachers may need further professional development to teach to, and assess student performance against, the state's evolving standards. We recommend that school districts design professional development activities for teachers in alignment with the standards established by New Jersey's Professional Teaching Standards Board. We also support creating a system of salary incentives or bonuses that encourages New Jersey's teachers to become certified to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.*

*To prepare incoming teachers for the changing classroom, we endorse the establishment of standards that define what all incoming teachers need to know and be able to do. We advocate for increased communication between public school districts and the universities that prepare their workforce, as well as a seamless integration of teacher preparation services delivered by the schools of education and schools of sciences and humanities within universities and colleges.*

**★ To insure that every student achieves high standards, teachers need to be prepared for the challenges that are generated when the educational bar is raised.**

student achieves high standards, teachers need to be prepared for the challenges that are generated when the educational bar is raised.

Few would dispute that the quality of the teacher is an important factor in student achievement. A growing body of research indicates that teacher quality is more critical than formerly assumed. To ensure that every

The state needs to develop and disseminate data about the quality of New Jersey's corps of teachers. Widely-referenced studies indicate that a deep understanding of content matter is critical to good teaching, yet many school districts allow individuals to teach in areas that are not within their specialty area, particularly in the fields of science and mathematics. While limited data are available, some estimates suggest that as many as 37% of New Jersey's teachers are teaching out of field (as defined by their college major).\*

**★ The educational system needs to increase its investment in teacher training. All professional development should be strictly aligned with academic standards and be able to improve a teacher's ability to help all students reach high academic standards.**

Every profession requires continuous professional development and training. For incumbent teachers, a recently enacted mandate requires them to obtain 100 hours of professional development every five years. New Jersey's Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) has worked and continues to work to maintain the integrity of the professional development system. The 12 standards established by the PTSB define quality teacher training; these standards are further reinforced with review boards at the county level, with planning committees at the district level, and with written professional improvement plans for individual teachers.

The educational system needs to increase its investment in teacher professional development, raise the quality of knowledge and skills offered in professional development, the amount of time provided to teachers for skill development, and ensure that professional development content and skills are strictly aligned with state academic standards.\* All professional development programs should improve the ability of a teacher to help all students reach high



## Section Two Teacher Quality

academic standards. Professional development should be expanded to include mandates and service delivery systems for school personnel (superintendents, principals, and instructional supervisors), as well as school leadership (board officials).

New Jersey does not have a program that recognizes and rewards teachers seeking 'master teacher' status. To encourage exceptional classroom performance, it is advisable to expand the goals of the teacher professional development system so that it

**★ We strongly recommend providing significant financial and other incentives to teachers who become certified to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.**

aims to increase the number of New Jersey teachers certified to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Any teacher committed to excellence can participate in the rigorous 200-500 hour experience and become

'certified' to the high standards promulgated by the NBPTS.

Many states have started to offer significant incentives for teachers who become certified to the NBPTS, including annual pay increases or bonuses of several thousand dollars for successful candidates. California offers a \$10,000 bonus to teachers who achieve certification to the NBPTS. In North Carolina, the state covers the cost of registration to the program (\$2,300), provides three days release time, and awards a minimum 12% pay increase to certified teachers. New Jersey offers no incentive to teachers to participate in the process. Only 38 of New Jersey's 93,102 teachers are certified to the NBPTS, compared to 2,400 of North Carolina's 83,000 teachers. We recommend providing significant financial and other incentives to teachers who become certified to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. If New Jersey were to offer significant incentives to teachers who achieved NBPTS certification, this might also encourage a more rigorous approach to fulfilling the 100-hour continuing education mandate.

Even more complex challenges exist in reforming pre-service education. While anecdotal, significant numbers of K-12 school administrators responsible for hiring new teachers report their dissatisfaction with the caliber of student graduating from the state's schools of education.

It is imperative that the caliber of teachers entering the profession is maintained at the highest

levels, and that individuals who become teachers are supported in a solid induction (apprenticeship) program. This will demand increased communication between the K-12 school districts and the schools of education in New Jersey's colleges and universities. Standards that define what all incoming teachers should know and be able to do should be established. There are national standards that can serve as benchmarks for this effort or that can be modified to fit New Jersey's unique situation. School districts and schools of education should jointly adopt these standards, and agree upon ways in which feedback between institutions can catalyze continuous improvement at multiple points along the continuum established by the standards.

The standards established for incoming teachers should be clearly aligned with the state's academic standards and should encourage schools of education to prepare teacher candidates to deliver high quality academic content in a standards-based system that focuses on student achievement.

This will require that institutions of higher education establish internal mechanisms that correlate knowledge between the schools/colleges of education (which are usually responsible for teaching how to teach) and the schools/colleges of arts and sciences (which are usually responsible for teaching academic

**★ Standards that define what all incoming teachers should know and be able to do should be established and adopted by K-12 school districts and teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities.**



## Section Two Teacher Quality

content that teachers need). This correlation of knowledge should be reflected in practice, stimulating coordination between curricular content and pedagogical practice that results in higher education faculty members using the best teaching techniques to impart subject area content to prospective teachers.

As with everything else, teacher candidates should learn content matter that is aligned with state and national standards in the field.

If excellent teaching practice is infused throughout the teacher preparation experience delivered by all college faculty, the burden on the schools of education to deliver pedagogical skills to target populations within the current 30-credit limit can be leveraged against the experiential learning teacher candidates have already received. The concept of learning through infusion can also be applied to the use of computer and other educational technologies.

**★ Standards for admission into teacher preparation programs and for final entry into the profession need to be maintained at the highest levels.**

incoming teachers take a test in content knowledge (Praxis II), but the state's cutoff scores — particularly in certain sciences — are among the lowest in the nation. The state should consider increasing the Praxis II cutoff scores by a substantial margin, especially since incoming teachers are offered the second highest average starting salary in the nation (at 26% above the national average and 5% above the average salary offered for an equivalent entry-level professional position in industry). \* These standards should apply to teacher candidates coming from traditional four-year institutions as well as individuals in the 'alternate route' programs.

Standards for admission into teacher preparation programs, as well as requirements for final determination of entry into the profession, need to be at the highest levels.

New Jersey requires that all

A recent report from the American Council on Education concluded that quality controls in teacher education programs are insufficient. The Council suggests that teacher education programs lack regular and reliable internal assessments, and too few submit to external evaluations. To ensure continuing improvement, teacher preparation programs should strive to achieve and maintain accreditation to a system of quality standards like NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education).

**★ To ensure continuous improvement, teacher preparation programs should strive to achieve and maintain accreditation to a system of quality standards like NCATE.**

In short, the methodologies that can be used to deliver vibrant academic content in a standards-based educational system must weave throughout the teacher preparation and teacher professional development experience. The concepts and philosophies that support standards-based education and continuous improvement against benchmarks must be presented to teachers in an unbroken continuum that emphasizes individual and team performance against stated goals and objectives.

Finally, workforce projections indicate that a significant teacher shortage, particularly in the fields of mathematics and science, will build within the next few years as incumbent teachers age and retire. The state needs to evaluate whether teacher recruitment and retention programs currently in place are adequate to the task, particularly if attempts are made to raise the bar in terms of admissions into teacher preparation programs.

\*From the National Alliance of Business, *'Invest in Teaching'*



## Section Three Accountability

### ★ Our Position

*We support the implementation of an accountability system that allows schools to improve continuously, and one that broadly involves all education stakeholders in its development and deployment. To achieve this, the state must create new data tracking mechanisms that allow comparisons between similar, best practice school systems.*

*Business has learned that one of the best ways to motivate performance is through a system of rewards and incentives. Therefore, we believe that accountability systems should encourage better performance in all public schools, not create punitive systems for disinvestment in the most poorly performing classrooms.*

Investments in costly assessment systems are wasteful if parallel accountability systems are not in place. Accountability systems that do not include continuous improvement mechanisms become punitive rather than positive exercises.

Accountability systems must include timely data dissemination in formats that make sense to the public, parents, and educators.

**★ New Jersey needs a statewide student identification system.**

Accountability systems must also be fair, that is, based on relevant comparisons. Student performance in individual schools should be compared to student performance in other schools with similar socio-economic characteristics, based on a number of variables. This will help schools to take the first step in continuous improvement -- doing as well as or better than their peers. Over time, rates of improvement can increase, until districts achieve student performance results that are the equivalent of best in state.

Student performance data should be disaggregated for mobility factors so that education stakeholders can evaluate the performance of students who have been in the district for a significant period of time against the performance of students who have been within the district for only a short period of time. Data disaggregated in this fashion will also permit school districts to respond to the needs of transient students, most typically found in urban areas where mobility rates are the highest.

**★ Disinvesting in poorly performing schools is questionable practice.**

Longitudinal tracking of student performance data can only be accomplished through a statewide system of unique student identification numbers. New Jersey does not have such a system. Therefore, comparative analysis among schools that can define best practice, reflective self-assessment within districts that can drive curriculum selection and teacher training, and measurement of improvement over time become difficult statistical problems. The Department of Education should implement a student identification system as quickly as possible.

Once the student tracking system is in place, a more user-friendly data-reporting system can be established. High-quality models are in existence already, most notably in Texas, where the 'Just for the Kids' program has been catalyzing continuous improvement practices for the last several years.

High-achieving organizations motivate performance through a system of incentives and rewards. Disinvesting in poorly performing schools to encourage improvement is questionable practice. While it may be more difficult, finding ways to involve all education stakeholders in systemic reform ensures that all students, including those without educationally savvy parents, will have the opportunity to learn.



## Section Four Staying the Course

### ★ Our Conclusion

We believe that this is a particularly important time for the American system of public education. A confluence of public, federal, and state pressures has brought education to the forefront of the national agenda. As we enter another revolution, one that will bring more sweeping reform than any industrial revolution of the past, we will see fundamental changes in the way people work, live, and learn. The chasm between those who have knowledge and skills, and those who don't, will widen and deepen.

Therefore, we will continue to advocate for a standards-based public school education system that provides every student with academically rigorous, technology rich, relevant learning experiences. We will continue to advocate for high quality statewide academic assessments that prove themselves against best in class, nationally and globally. We will continue to advocate for a system that creates and maintains the best teacher corps in the nation and rewards individual performance. We will continue to advocate for accountability mechanisms that are fair and in which information is used to drive continuous improvement.

We will use our individual and collective influence to help define and catalyze the educational reform process so that every student achieves his or her potential and is not condemned to a lifetime of underemployment. We will continue to invest in the public school system as taxpayers and through corporate philanthropy in ways that suit our individual organizational objectives. We commit to aligning our individual funding priorities to support a standards-based educational system.

We will continue to provide support for the programs that arose as a result of the first and second Business-Education Summit, namely, School Counts!, Tech Corps New Jersey, The Technology Challenge, and Educators in the Workplace. We commit to individually supporting these, and other school-based programs and projects that meet our corporate philanthropic objectives.

- ★ We commit to launching new initiatives that support the implied agenda outlined in this position paper.
- ★ We will become activists for appropriate use of statewide tests and dissemination of effective and timely data. We will monitor the efficacy of the statewide standards and assessment system and its ability to drive continuous improvement.
- ★ We will become actively involved in the Core Curriculum Content Standards revision process.
- ★ We will advocate for the inclusion of workforce readiness skills directly into academic standards.
- ★ We will advocate for standards in Computer/ Information Technologies and Technology Education.
- ★ We will advocate for the establishment of a statewide student identification system and provide human and financial support to ensure the introduction of the 'Just for the Kids' model of data dissemination for New Jersey.
- ★ We will advocate for and support local and statewide efforts to provide stable sources of high quality professional development.
- ★ We will lobby for and support financial incentives for teachers who become certified to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
- ★ We will seek to acknowledge schools of education that achieve and maintain accreditation to a nationally recognized quality standards system.
- ★ We will provide resources to help K-12 educators and schools of education develop and adopt a set of standards that define what all incoming teachers should know and be able to do, and a feedback system that encourages better communications between 'producer' and 'consumer.'

Consumer demand is constantly challenging business to continuously improve its products and services. We now challenge education stakeholders – teachers and school administrators, elected officials, parents, and students – to join us in accomplishing these powerful objectives, so that, working together, we can help every student achieve at the highest levels.