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August 9, 2016

TO: Chief School Administrators
School Leaders

ROUTE TO: All District Principals, Assistant/Vice Principals, and Teaching Staff Members

FROM: Peter Shulman, Deputy Commissioner
Division of Talent and Performance

SUBJECT: AchieveNJ Back-to-School Update

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I. Listening and Learning to Continually Improve

AchieveNJ, New Jersey's educator evaluation and support system, has been used throughout the state for the past three years. In that time, districts have been better able to identify their best educators and those who need more support. The quality of discourse around teaching and learning has improved, and the use of classroom data to improve instruction has increased significantly in this time. As with any new initiative, however, there is a learning process for everyone concerned, and the Department of Education has gathered a great deal of information from educators across the state about some of the challenges and concerns surrounding AchieveNJ and its quality implementation. In response to this feedback, the Department proposed a series of enhancements to current evaluation rules to the State Board of Education in [May 2016](#) with some additional minor amendments proposed in [July 2016](#). Through these proposed changes¹ the Department seeks to clarify, align and simplify some of the state's evaluation requirements.

II. More Flexibility in Evaluation

Beginning in 2016-17, proposed changes to some of the rules in AchieveNJ will provide increased local flexibility allowing teachers, principals and district leaders to take more

¹ Proposed changes are pending adoption by the State Board of Education; anticipated in late 2016.

ownership of their evaluation systems and engage in high-impact best practices that lead to improvements in student achievement. The Department has communicated these changes broadly over the past several months, including at superintendent round table meetings and regional presentations where we spoke to about 800 educators from over 300 districts. If you did not have a chance to hear from us in person, please refer to the [regional presentation](#) and the [AchieveNJ in 2016 and Beyond](#) documents for detailed information regarding the changes in minimum requirements for teacher observations; options for highly effective teacher evaluations; alignment of deadlines for Professional Development Plans (PDP), Corrective Action Plans (CAP) and Student Growth Objectives (SGO); administrator SGO training; principal evaluation requirements; and more.

III. More Resources for Educator and School District Support

To better assist districts in improving the quality of their educator evaluation and support systems, and to help districts make decisions regarding 2016-17 changes to AchieveNJ, the Department has released an [Implementation Quality Toolkit](#). This toolkit is a result of the collaboration between the Office of Evaluation and many New Jersey school districts and educators over the past year. It is organized in a five-spoke framework through which educators can find tools and guidance, including those related to improving observation accuracy and post-observation conferences, SGO data collection, and options for evaluating highly effective teachers.

IV. Continued Flexibility for 2016-17

Over the past three years through the waiver and equivalency process, the Department has granted evaluation flexibility for districts with demonstrated capacity issues or the desire to innovate. For many districts with equivalencies for conducting fewer observations, the Department's regulatory changes will remove the need to apply for such flexibility. However, we continue to encourage districts to contact the Department with innovative suggestions that may lead to improvements in local evaluation systems.

For those districts wishing to continue using the Marshall rubric for teacher evaluation, and in cases where the equivalency granted for the use of this practice instrument expires this year, please submit an [equivalency form](#) to your county office by August 29, 2016. Your equivalency application should state what deviation is intended from the state-required minimums of observation length and announced observations with pre-conference. For districts that wish to modify recommended implementation procedures of the Marshall practice instrument, please contact the Office of Evaluation at educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us or call (609) 777-3788.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the students of New Jersey and we wish you much success for the upcoming school year.

PS/KB/CB/AV/

c: Members, State Board of Education
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