



New Jersey Department of Education Releases 2010 School Report Cards; Revamping of Data Begins Next Year

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The New Jersey Department of Education today released the 2010 School Report Cards for all traditional public schools and charter schools in the state. The report cards are accountability documents that are intended to enable members of the public to measure the yearly progress of their schools.

To make valid comparisons, the Department compares similar districts, but the Report Cards include spending only on categories shared by all districts. For example, some districts do not have transportation costs, and so no transportation costs are included in per pupil comparison spending. This Departmental policy, which has been evolving over the past 15 years, is currently under review.

Significant costs that are counted by the National Center for Education Statistics are not counted by the Report Card data. These New Jersey costs include \$1.1 billion in transportation spending, \$2.2 billion in benefits and pension payments, \$500 million for food services, and \$700 million in other state and federal funds.

Data on graduation rate has traditionally been self-reported by districts, and the Department has already announced that it will provide new, more accurate state-reviewed data by next year. Any decision to change the way the Department calculates and releases other data will be thoroughly explored before changes are made.

"Transparency and accuracy in providing information about our schools is critical to parents' ability to select the best school for their children's needs," said acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. "We need to do a far better job of providing this service."

The state's annual report cards contain detailed statistical profiles of every school in the areas of school environment, student information, student performance indicators, staff information, and district and charter financial information.

The report cards, established by legislation in 1995, are produced for all elementary and secondary schools, as well as vocational schools, special education schools, charter schools, and Special Services School Districts.

In addition to being a resource for community members to check the progress of their community's schools, the report card contains state-level information that is helpful in providing an overview of education in New Jersey. The information in the report card database is also useful for comparing performance among schools in the state so that parents can evaluate whether to look at other educational options.

The report cards released today are the sixteenth to be produced under the 1995 state law that specifies much of the information to be reported and requires its annual distribution. They also represent the 20th time New Jersey has issued reports on its public schools, since the first report cards were distributed in 1989.

Some items of note in the 2010 report card:

- The criterion for the student/computer ratio has changed this year. This year's count was to include only instructional, multimedia-capable computers that have manufacture dates after July 1, 2006 and that are available for supervised instruction. Very old computers are limited in their ability to prepare students to use 21st century tools and were not to be included in the ratio.
- NJ ASK 3 and 4 that were new last year now show two years of results to compare. The changes to the tests for grades three and four complete the realignment of the state tests with the updated academic standards.
- Graduation via the Special Review Assessment (SRA) has been replaced by graduation via the Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA) process.

The school report card is available on the department's Web site at <http://education.state.nj.us/rc/>

