

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM

Presented by: BergenLEADS Class of 2011

June 14, 2011

Bergen Community College

On June 14, 2011 BergenLEADS held a forum on the Future of Public Education. The BergenLEADS Class of 2011 was tasked to explore improvements by redesigning the way schools in Bergen County conduct the business of education. Important to note are some factors governing the development of the project:

1. The overall quality of public education in Bergen County is excellent.
2. The cost of a public education in Bergen County is amongst the highest in the nation.
3. Teacher compensation will not be included in the scope of the project.

Based on the above, the thrust of the project was increased efficiencies in the education system, resulting in a lower cost per pupil while maintaining or, as presented in some areas, improving on the quality of learning.

As part of the research, a voluntary on line survey of Bergen County residents was created to gauge the knowledge and opinions of those living in our county. 134 residents responded. 49% (a large percentage) always vote in school board elections suggesting the majority are of respondents are engaged. 75% thought that property taxes are too high. Ironically, 60% of the respondents did not know what percentage of their property taxes are funneled in the education system.

The class divided into four teams, each focusing on a different area of the educational system. The areas were groups were identified as Operational Efficiencies, Technology, Special Education and Administrative Consolidation. Highlights of each follow:

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

- Energy- using creative financing including grants, bonds, federal and state incentives
- Purchasing – develop a more efficient and effective state purchasing process
- Outsourcing – services and or departments in non-core areas
- Legislative Reform – streamline legislation with operational input before enactment
- Working Together- collaboration, consortiums, shared services

Recommendations

- Require educational systems to participate in above existing operational efficiencies
- Increased input by educational personnel in state regulations

TECHNOLOGICAL EFFICIENCIES

- New Jersey is only one of four states without any statewide online educational initiative
- Virtual schools- allow for remote learning
 - Lower overhead
 - Broader range of courses
- College/ High School Partnerships
 - Community College Dual enrollment allowing for college credit while in high school
 - Regular school year as well as summer programs
- Distance learning between remote locations
 - Allows for shared costs, teachers
 - Broader range of courses
- New Jersey Virtual School (NJVS.org) has educated 14,000+ students since 2002
 - Not available state wide- only Monmouth County

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Regional Cooperatives – Special Education cooperatives are now voluntary, should be mandatory
 - Increased communication/collaboration
 - Streamlining, increased accountability
 - Reducing need for private placements
 - Elimination of Duplication/Waste
- State standardization of placement process- avoidance of law suits
- Standardization of curriculum between schools, school districts, state
- Optimization of resources & economies of scale
 - Experts
 - Training/Staff Development
 - Purchasing
 - Transportation
 - Facilities

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSOLIDATION

Current Bergen County profile:

- 73 public school districts in Bergen County
- 219 administrators- Superintendants, Curriculum and Business Administrators
 - Does not include administrative and support staff
- Bergen County has second highest property taxes in the nation
- 67% (two thirds) of Bergen County property taxes go to education
 - 44% of education dollars are spent on classroom instruction
 - 56% of education dollars are spent on indirect and administrative costs

- Cost per pupil is \$18,432 (new state formula which includes transportation, debt service, pension and benefits)

Recommendations to reduce excessive administrative costs

- Bulk Purchasing
- Elimination of non-operating school districts
- Move school district elections to November
- Create fair methods for apportioning costs in regionalized school districts
- Mandatory consolidation of school districts with favorable characteristics

The time invested and work done by the teams was extensive. The recommendations were thoughtful and conservative in recognition of the exceptional quality of public education within Bergen County as well as the human tendency to resist change. All groups succeeded in proposing a wealth of reforms which would yield significant savings without sacrificing the quality of education that Bergen County enjoys. Finally, the informed members of BergenLEADS Class of 2011 are all in agreement: something must be done now to reel in our ever climbing property taxes and the Bergen County public education system is a ripe place to start.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As part of our project, much research was conducted. Many individuals gave generously of their time and knowledge in the development of this project. BergenLEADS Class of 2011 is grateful to all who contributed to the success of our forum. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals with particularity:

- ❖ John Belanus - Director of Operations, Eastern Christian School Association
- ❖ John Boreman - Bergen County School Business Admin.
- ❖ Dr. Edward Broderick - Superintendent of Schools, Westhampton Beach, NY (retired)
- ❖ Sheila Brogan – Member, Ridgewood School Board
- ❖ Neil and Ellen Brower – residents of Old Tappan
- ❖ Gene Calderon - Technology Chair, Glen Rock Board of Education
- ❖ Steven Cea - Business Administrator, Paramus Public Schools
- ❖ Joseph Coppola - New Jersey Education Association
- ❖ Thomas DeMiao – Principal, Pascack Valley High School
- ❖ Maura DeNicola – Bergen County Freeholder
- ❖ Thomas Dykhouse - Executive Director and Head of School, Eastern Christian School Association
- ❖ Dan Fishbein – Superintendent, Ridgewood School District
- ❖ Gene Focarelli - Supervisor of Buildings & Grounds, Bergen Technical & Vocational Schools & Special Services
- ❖ Dr. Adam Fried – Superintendent, Harrington Park School District
- ❖ Robert M. Gilmartin - Executive County Superintendent, Bergen/Passaic

- ❖ Dr. Kathy Giordanella - Director of Special Education, Paramus Public Schools
- ❖ Mike Hunken - Director of Facilities, Englewood
- ❖ Dr. James Jacobson - St. Peter's College Education Department
- ❖ Dr. Howard Lerner - Superintendent, Bergen County Special Services/Technical School Districts
- ❖ Ms. Maureen Kerne - Director, Bergen County Region V Special Education
- ❖ Bernadette McPherson – Bergen County Freeholder
- ❖ Terry Moe - Stanford University/Liberating Learning.Org
- ❖ John Mooney - NJ Spotlight
- ❖ Dr. Dominic J. Novelli - CCPO, QPA, Purchasing Agent, County of Bergen
- ❖ Steven Pasternak - Bergen County Supervisor of Child Study
- ❖ Ed Pittarelli - Dean of Virtual Studies, Bergen Community College
- ❖ Ilan Plawker - Bergen County representative on NJ State Board of Education
- ❖ Dr. Mark Porto - Superintendent, Hasbrouck Heights School District
- ❖ Alan C. Reiffe - Business Administrator/Board Secretary, Wyckoff School District
- ❖ Sharon Rosario - Bergen County Education Program Dev. Specialist
- ❖ Dr. G. Jeremiah Ryan - President, Bergen Community College
- ❖ Cathleen Smith – Newark high school teacher and Bergen County resident
- ❖ Cathy Smith - Paramus Pre-K teacher and Paramus resident
- ❖ Al Vega - IT Manager, Secaucus Board of Ed
- ❖ Robert Valenti - Wood Ridge Board of Education
- ❖ Eleanor Watkins - North Carolina Technology Specialist
- ❖ Dr. William Weiss - Executive Director, Passaic County Elks Cerebral Palsy Treatment Center
- ❖ Robert Wright - Park Ridge Business Administrator