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May 1, 2007

Lucille E. Davy
Commissioner of Education
100 River View Plaza
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Davy:

Achieve has completed a Quality Review of the alignment of the *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics* with the American Diploma Project (ADP) Benchmarks. The primary purpose of this review is to ensure that the state's academic standards align the expectations for exiting high school with the expectations for college and work. The ADP Benchmarks to which these New Jersey standards were compared represent the knowledge and skills required for successful entry into credit-bearing college courses and quality jobs. A secondary purpose of this review is to ensure that the New Jersey standards meet the criteria of high quality standards that include rigor, focus, coherence, specificity, clarity, and measurability.

***The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics* present student learning expectations that are intellectually demanding and well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks, with a few minor exceptions in each content area.** If New Jersey students achieve proficiency in the state standards, they will likely be well prepared for both workplace and college success.

Summary of Findings in English Language Arts

- *The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy (NJCCCS) are well aligned to the ADP Benchmarks with minor exceptions.* In general, the New Jersey writing team should be commended for its revisions to the NJCCCS that eliminated minor alignment issues noted by Achieve in an earlier review. For the most part, the New Jersey standards include the important content high school students will need to learn to be prepared for their postsecondary endeavors.

- *The NJCCCS exhibit a number of criteria of high quality standards.* The coherence, specificity, clarity, and measurability of the expectations—important features of high quality standards—have been strengthened, though the standards still lack specificity in one area. In addition, the organization and clarity of the revised draft is much improved. Overall, the standards communicate clearly to the state’s students and teachers.
- *New Jersey should provide greater specificity in regards to writing.* Students will need to write a variety of types of texts to be prepared for college and work. The standards could be further improved if the criteria for effective narrative and persuasive writing were expanded to provide additional specificity for teachers.
- *New Jersey should next develop grade level expectations to help ensure the appropriate level of rigor throughout high school years.* Currently, the standards are written only at the end of Grade 12. The construction of standards that address the expectations at each grade would serve to articulate the increasing level of demand over the four years of high school and help ensure a consistent level of rigor in classrooms across the state.

Summary of Findings in Mathematics

- *The NJCCCS for Mathematics are well aligned to the ADP Benchmarks, with minor exceptions.* In the areas of Number Sense and Numerical Operations; Algebra; Data Interpretation, Statistics, and Probability; and Mathematical Reasoning, the New Jersey Standards are well aligned. Indeed, in some areas they exceed the level of rigor for ALL students in the ADP Benchmarks. In geometry, however, while they are generally aligned, they are still not as explicit about geometric proof as the ADP Benchmarks. New Jersey should further clarify the expectations in this area to provide teachers with a clear and consistent interpretation of the type or level of proof that is expected of students.
- *The NJCCCS for Mathematics exhibit the criteria of high quality standards.* They are clear, specific, coherent, focused, and measurable. Overall, the standards communicate clearly to the state’s students and teachers.
- *New Jersey should next develop model course descriptions to help ensure the appropriate level of rigor throughout high school years.* The state has started down this path by drafting an Algebra II course description and should continue by developing aligned Algebra I and Geometry courses, as well as an integrated course sequence. These course descriptions will articulate the pathways that students must follow in order to achieve the NJCCCS culminating standards by the end of high school. They also will help ensure consistency of courses across the state. In addition, we recommend the inclusion of examples as they can enhance the level of specificity about the level of rigor expected of students.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Achieve commends New Jersey for its efforts to increase the intellectual demand and the alignment of the *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics* with the ADP Benchmarks. We encourage the state to pursue the following next steps:

- New Jersey should develop grade level expectations in English language arts and course level expectations in mathematics. These expectations can provide districts with models for instructional delivery and provide teachers with clear pathways that students must follow in order to achieve the NJCCCS culminating standards by the end of high school. Greater specificity in each content area will ensure greater consistency and rigor across districts in the state.
- The state's postsecondary institutions should reinforce the rigorous standards outlined in the *NJCCCS for Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics* by clarifying how meeting them is essential for success in postsecondary education.

Sincerely,



Michael Cohen

Cc:

The Honorable Jon Corzine
Governor

Arthur F. Ryan
CEO and financial Chairman, Prudential

Susan Cole
President, Montclair State University