



New Jersey School Boards Association

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President's Report Donald Webster, Jr.

Good morning. It's hard to believe that 2016 is coming to an end. Certainly, nobody can say that the past year has been uneventful.

Like many of you, I find myself turning attention to the future and what it will mean for our schools and our students. Admittedly, I do so with some concern, but also with a great deal of confidence.

In many respects, we can get a glimpse of the future right now by looking at our classrooms. The youngsters who started kindergarten this year were born in 2011. A sizable portion of these children will likely live to see the year 2100.

Stop and think about that for a moment: we are helping to shape the future for children who will live into the 22nd century! For those of us who spent most of our lives in the 20th century—and that includes just about everyone in this room—that thought is both humbling and inspiring.

It should erase any doubt about the importance of what we do as education leaders.

As we go forward, let me assure that our Association—your Association—is committed to helping you fulfill your responsibilities and to advance the academic achievement of all students.

An example is NJSBA's firm commitment to STEAM education—that is, science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics. It's critical, because most new jobs created in the 21st future will require a background in science, technology and related areas.

In March 2017, NJSBA will be submitting a resolution to the National School Boards Association, calling for federal support of integrative STEAM education. The resolution urges Congress, the president and the U.S. Department of Education to provide resources to help local school districts advance STEAM education.

As Dr. Feinsod will report in his presentation, NJSBA has also entered into an innovative partnership with the U.S. Army to advance STEAM education. We saw evidence of the effectiveness of that partnership at Workshop 2016 with the STEAM Tank competition. If you had the opportunity to visit the iSTEAM Command Center on the Exhibit Floor, I am sure that you were impressed, as I was, with the intelligence and the creativity of the students who participated in the competition. And we are going to seek to expand that program in the coming year.

NJSBA has also taken the lead in helping school districts embrace financially and environmentally sustainable practices. Our collaboration with The College of New Jersey has helped build the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program, which includes over 500 schools in all 21 counties. It is exceeding all our expectations.

Of course, we cannot move forward without a solid financial foundation.

As someone who spent his career in accounting and finance, I am pleased to report that, last month, the Board of Directors accepted the Association's annual independent financial report for 2015-2016. The auditor issued an "unqualified"—that is, a clean—opinion on our financial statements, and found no deficiencies in NJSBA's internal financial controls.

The results affirmed what I know to be true: the Association is operating smoothly and efficiently. The audit, by the way, is posted on our website under the "About" tab.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the work of NJSBA's finance department staff and our Audit Committee.

Of course, behind our strong school boards association are the 5,000 local school board members who give generously of their time, their talent and their expertise.

Each year, since 2004, NJSBA has recognized a board member who embodies all that is best about local school governance. This year's New Jersey School Board Member of the Year is Sheli Dansky.

Sheli has been an advocate for quality public education for 26 years as a member of the River Edge Board of Education. But her vision for excellent public schools extends far beyond the borders of River Edge. It is embodied by her leadership of the Bergen County School Boards Association and her participation in our state association through her membership on the Special Education Committee and as a group leader at the New Board Member Orientation programs.

Before I leave the podium, I would like to thank another important group of people—Dr. Larry Feinsod and the NJSBA staff. Their service and commitment to the local governance of public education is unparalleled. They work very hard for you every day.

We are grateful to them, and to you, the members of our state's local boards of education. Together, we will shape a positive future for the children in our classrooms.