

Chapter 12 – Conclusion

Our Work Is Incomplete

Over a period of two years, the NJSBA Task Force on Student Achievement researched and discussed the myriad factors affecting the achievement of New Jersey students. The final report includes recommendations to address challenges of preparing all students for 21st century post-secondary education or careers. But there is still much work to be done.

The Impact of Implicit Bias

The list of factors that impact student achievement is long, but an overarching challenge facing every school board member and educator concerns equity and excellence and the need to confront implicit biases. For example, evidence suggests that racial bias plays a role in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education programs and disparities in administration of school discipline.

As a first step in learning about implicit biases, the Task Force encourages all those who play a role in educating New Jersey youth to take one or more of the Implicit Association Tests posted on the Project Implicit © section of Harvard University’s website at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>.

Project Implicit is a non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition—that is, thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control. The goal of the organization is to educate the public about hidden biases and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the Internet.

“About Us,” *Project Implicit*, 2011. Accessed March 16, 2017 at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/aboutus.html>.

The project’s website provides further information about the concept of implicit bias.

People don’t always say what’s on their minds. One reason is that they are unwilling. For example, someone might report smoking a pack of cigarettes per day because they are embarrassed to admit that they smoke two. Another reason is that they are unable. A smoker might truly believe that she smokes a pack a day, or might not keep track at all. The difference between being unwilling and unable is the difference between purposely hiding something from someone and unknowingly hiding something from yourself.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude that you did not know about. For example, you may believe that women and men should be equally associated with science, but your automatic associations could show that you (like many others) associate men with science more than you associate women with science.

“Overview,” *Project Implicit*, 2011. Accessed March 16, 2017 at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>.

Continue the Work

The Task Force on Student Achievement has fulfilled its charge through extensive study and deliberation and the publication of this Final Report. While the Task Force report is complete, however, the New Jersey School Boards Association's work must continue.

An ongoing focus on all subjects related to student achievement is at the core of NJSBA's mission. Therefore, the Task Force believes that this report should be referred to the NJSBA Standards and Assessment Committee (a standing committee of the Association) for its consideration as it studies factors related to the provision of education to our state's public school students and measurement of academic achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
Chapter 12 – **Our Work Is Incomplete**

For Local School Board Members

79. Become familiar with the concept of “implicit bias” and its impact on decisions affecting students’ educational opportunities.

For the New Jersey School Boards Association

80. Continue proactive efforts to identify and address the many factors that impact student learning.
81. Adopt new language for the *Manual of Policies and Positions on Education*, as recommended in Chapter 11 of this report, which reflects its mission to advance the achievement of all students.
82. Continue to partner with the New Jersey Department of Education, state-level education organizations and New Jersey colleges and universities to address all of the challenges of student achievement. Special attention should be directed to the obstacles of “equity and excellence” with the goal of providing the best educational opportunities to the children of New Jersey, regardless of family background or place of residence.
83. Refer *The Final Report of the Task Force on Student Achievement* to the Association’s standing Standards and Assessment Committee for its consideration as it addresses issues related to educational standards and the measurement of students’ academic progress.