



**Overview of the District**

Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size):	151
Number of Schools:	47
Number of Students:	29,288
Number of Teachers:	3,264
Annual Budget:	\$590.7 million

**Superintendent:** Dr. Charles T. Epps, Jr., has served as state district superintendent since 2000. Previously, he served as the district’s associate superintendent for Community and Support Services. Since joining the district in 1967, Dr. Epps has served as a teacher, supervisor, principal, and director of funded programs.

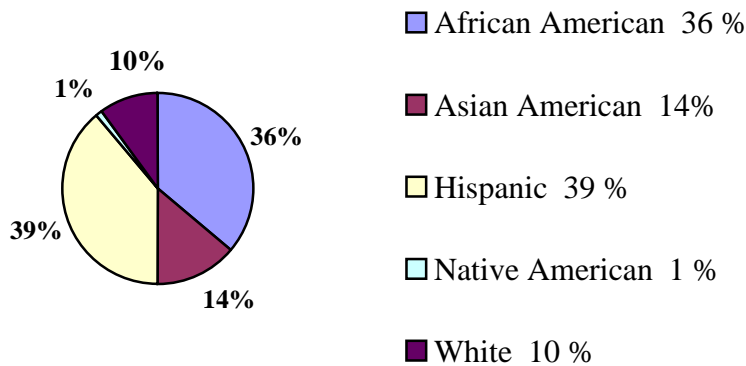
**Governance:** Nine-member elected board, serving three-year terms.

**Teachers Unions:** Jersey City Education Association  
New Jersey Education Association

**Student Characteristics**

Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Lunch:	71 %
Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners:	8 %

**Student Demographics**



## **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

### **Consistent High Performance while Reducing Achievement Gaps across Ethnic Groups**

- ✓ In 2005, Jersey City Public Schools outperformed other New Jersey districts serving student populations with similar income levels in six out of six areas (elementary, middle and high school reading and math), using The Broad Prize methodology.
- ✓ In 2005, Jersey City's low-income students outperformed low-income students in other New Jersey districts in six out of six areas.
- ✓ Jersey City has reduced achievement gaps for Hispanic students when compared to their white counterparts in elementary, middle and high school reading and math. For example, the Hispanic achievement gap closed 14 percentage points in math at the elementary school level and 7 percentage points in reading at the middle school level.
- ✓ Jersey City is also closing the Hispanic achievement gap at a faster rate than the state in all six areas.
- ✓ Jersey City has reduced achievement gaps for African-American students when compared to their white counterparts in elementary, middle and high school reading and math. For example, between 2002 and 2005, the African-American achievement gap closed 15 percentage points in math at the elementary level and 8 percentage points in reading at the middle school level.
- ✓ Jersey City is closing the African-American achievement gap at a faster rate than the state in five of six areas.

## **RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES**

### **Curriculum and Academic Goals**

- ✓ Traditionally, Jersey City developed and revised its curriculum every five years. However, since the introduction of the 2004 New Jersey state standards, Jersey City has accelerated this schedule. Immediately after new standards come from the state, students receive a curriculum that is tightly aligned to the new state standards.
- ✓ In developing and revising its curriculum, Jersey City compensates teachers for participating on a committee with district supervisors to construct standards-based grade-level competencies that are woven into the curriculum.

- ✓ The district provides teachers with curriculum guides and corresponding assessments for grades 3 through 12 to ensure everyone knows exactly what is to be taught and learned. Alignment between grades begins with a careful review of grade-level expectations tracking backwards from grade 12 down to pre-kindergarten to eliminate skill gaps or repeating of instruction.
- ✓ District coaches and outside consultants work with teachers to implement curriculum expectations through month-by-month planning guides. The district also engages in a state-sponsored walk-through model to evaluate curriculum implementation in low-performing schools.
- ✓ The district has invested considerable time training school leaders in every aspect of the curriculum, since those leaders are expected to engage in planning school professional development, review instruction and lesson plans and monitor curriculum implementation on a regular basis. All principals are required to attend a nine-part training series to make sure they understand the curriculum and deliver a uniform message across all schools. As an extension of this training, principals participate in curriculum roundtables that provide further opportunities for learning how to manage the curriculum at the school level.
- ✓ To ensure the subjects of social studies and science are properly covered in the elementary grades, the district combined social studies and science standards into “Think Blocks” that integrate social studies, science and literacy instructional activities into one lesson that is in sync with the literacy standards and content expectations.
- ✓ The superintendent and his cabinet develop a two-year operational plan for the district, based on an intensive review of performance data. Principals then develop a school plan with specific objectives tied to the district’s goals.

<b>Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building</b>
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- ✓ Jersey City develops internal recruits to be principals and supervisors through the ECLIPSE (Educational and Collaborative Leadership Institute for Principals and Supervisors Extraordinaire) program. In its sixth year, the program focuses on the national ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards for school administrators. Candidates must submit an application packet that includes recommendations, a project-based essay submission and a mentoring plan before acceptance into the program. The program accepts between 40 and 60 candidates each year and provides ongoing training for 37 weeks.

- ✓ Prospective principal candidates go through an initial screening interview with a committee of senior staff, representatives from both the administrator and teachers unions and parents. Highly recommended candidates are then asked, during a follow-up interview with the superintendent and senior staff, to perform an in-box activity, such as developing a corrective action plan. The superintendent, with input from various stakeholders, makes the final placement decision.
- ✓ Principal support is provided through formal and informal channels. New principals are assigned two mentors – one from the state and one from the district – to assist them in making a smooth transition into the principalship. While mentors represent a more formal channel, principals also call on senior staff or their colleagues to lend support or share best practices.
- ✓ New teachers go through six days of in-service based on a thematic framework for teaching and learning. Following their induction, the district provides follow-up training and support through monthly thematic workshops.
- ✓ Jersey City continues to develop teachers through a number of professional development offerings, which take place after school, on Saturdays and during the summer. As a result of a recent contractual agreement with the union, schools also hold before-school professional development time from 8:00–8:30 a.m. across the district.
- ✓ Professional development and support also comes from organizations such as the AUSSIE (Australian and United States Services in Education) group, which works with teachers to implement research-based mathematics and literacy strategies through on-site coaching. Teachers across schools receive training in LL Teach and Kagan to use discovery-based learning strategies and create cooperative learning environments.

### **Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements**

- ✓ Jersey City Public Schools became a state takeover district in 1989. Then in 1998, following the *Abbott v. Burke* decision, the state developed a strategic plan for whole school reform. One of the key pieces of the reform effort was to bring special education into regular education programming and create true inclusion classrooms. Under the instructional model that was developed, inclusion teachers co-teach in regular education classrooms and receive joint professional development that equips teachers with the content knowledge and instructional strategies to meet the needs of every child.
- ✓ Guided by the Whole School Reform movement, Jersey City has instituted a number of initiatives to increase achievement for all students. The district has recently focused on a number of literacy initiatives, including the 100 Book Challenge, Reading Recovery, Project RAISE (Reading Assistance in Special Education), Breakthrough to Literacy for kindergartners and classroom libraries. Additionally, the district focuses extensively on real-life problem-based learning and individualizing instruction based on student performance data.

- ✓ In addition to literacy initiatives, Jersey City has created a variety of instructional programs to support the needs of their diverse English Language Learner (ELL) students. The district offers transitional, dual-language (Spanish-English), port-of-entry classes for overage students, and classroom pull-out opportunities to support students for native languages such as Urdu, Arabic and Hindi. Incoming students are assessed at the district's multilingual center before they are placed in these programs.
- ✓ The district has also extended ELL services to parents through a three-year literacy program offered during school hours for two periods a day.
- ✓ Jersey City has reconfigured its high schools by creating career magnets and has for the last three years extended the nationally ranked McNair Academic High School model to the other high school campuses. This fall, the district restructured three schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress into two gender-specific K-5 academies and one transitional junior high campus.
- ✓ To prepare students for college and the workforce, the district is focusing on numerous programs to create multiple opportunities and interest for high school students. These programs include increasing access to honors and AP courses, an International Baccalaureate school and a United Nations school that sponsors internships in China, Japan and England. All high school students are required to apply for college and complete a community project. Every graduating senior is eligible for a free two-year college education through the district-funded "Opportunity Knocks 2" scholarship program.

<b>Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data</b>
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- ✓ Jersey City monitors student progress through the analysis of state assessment data from the ASK (Assessment of Skills and Knowledge), GEPA (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment) and HSPA (High School Proficiency Assessment). Data from these assessments is stored in the district's data warehouse and extracted into a web-based tool. School data teams have been trained to use this tool and have learned how to analyze data to make instructional adjustments.
- ✓ In response to the *Abbott* requirement of having at least two benchmark assessments per year, the district recently developed quarterly performance-based culminating activities and projects for grades 3 through 8. These assessments were developed by the curriculum committees to monitor student progress with the new curriculum.
- ✓ In addition to the benchmark assessments, the district uses Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills), Running Records and TerraNova for the early grades. Skill acquisition in mathematics is monitored through the use of Everyday Math unit assessments, LL Teach modules and district-wide chapter tests.

- ✓ The district routinely monitors classroom instruction through the use of walk-throughs. Using a rubric, a central office team observes classroom instruction and prepares a formal summary of their visit, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The team also informally debriefs the principals and teachers following the visit to give them more immediate feedback.
- ✓ Additional classroom monitoring takes place through the district's Project CoNect model for real-life problem-based learning. Using Project CoNect, principals conduct daily walk-throughs looking for specific evidence of practice. Some schools have taken this one step further by conducting "project gallery walks" where different grade-level teacher teams visit classrooms using a research-based rubric on quality teaching and student work.
- ✓ Jersey City monitors teacher and principal performance using Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, customized to the teacher evaluation level and the principal evaluation level. This tool is used to create a narrative of observations and recommendations conducted annually by an associate superintendent. In addition to this formal evaluation, principals develop a two-year operating plan, which is monitored by the district. Principals are also informally monitored during their annual face-to-face performance review meeting called the "State of the School," when they present to the superintendent and other senior staff.
- ✓ Non-tenured teachers are evaluated three times a year, while tenured teachers are evaluated annually. However, before these formal evaluations, teachers receive three support-activity visits so they know what is expected and can have feedback and support before the formal evaluation.

### **Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments**

- ✓ For struggling schools, Jersey City negotiated with the state to use a research-based collaborative intervention model called CAPA (Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement), similar to the approach used by the State of Kentucky. The model calls on district- and state-level experts to perform a week-long review of those schools struggling to meet Adequate Yearly Progress. The subsequent report from the review is based on nine indicators and outlines areas needing improvement. The review team then works with the school principal and teachers in prioritizing their needs into a guided action plan. Success of the plan is monitored at both the school and district level, using data to determine the rate of improvement for each of the interventions described in the plan.
- ✓ Teachers in need of improvement are often referred to additional workshops and professional development to target their skill deficiencies. Coaches and specialists also help struggling teachers by modeling teaching techniques and providing team-teaching opportunities. The district's teacher support programs, called the Teacher Academy and Teacher Support Institute, are also available to teachers seeking assistance with instruction.

- ✓ Jersey City requires that all schools provide two hours of extended-day programming twice a week for those students who are struggling academically and whose parents consent to the additional learning time. Like the normal day, extended day programs and materials provided to students are required by the district to be connected to the curriculum.
- ✓ Jersey City offers a variety of targeted interventions to meet the unique needs of students. Based on graduation data, the district offers intervention programs for both eighth- and ninth-graders to help retain and transition these students into high school. For example, a “Freshman Academy” divides freshmen into small cohorts that stay together during all of their classes within existing comprehensive high schools. The district has also created an alternative setting for overage students called the “Twilight program” with smaller classes sizes (12 students per one adult) and flexible schedules that allow students who are at risk of not graduating to work at their own pace.
- ✓ Jersey City is proactive in creating interventions for struggling students. The district has created Pupil Assistance Committees, generally staffed by a counselor, a teacher and a special education teacher, which work to find comprehensive solutions for students based on academic and social/emotional needs that can be used as interventions before students are referred for special services.

<b>Influential Factors</b>
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- ✓ Jersey City is one of 31 districts in New Jersey to be designated an *Abbott* district. The designation stems from a series of cases in the New Jersey Supreme Court brought to protect the education of students in the poorest districts across the state. As an *Abbott* district, Jersey City receives state funds, or “parity aid,” to equal the funding in some of the wealthier districts within the state. Jersey City, which became a state takeover district in 1989, became an *Abbott* district in 1998.
- ✓ Jersey City has enjoyed stable leadership for six years under the superintendency of Dr. Charles T. Epps, Jr. Dr. Epps grew up in Jersey City and rose up through district ranks as an educator and administrator before taking on the superintendency.
- ✓ While Jersey City has an elected board of nine members, the board is limited in its powers in certain areas due to Jersey City being a state takeover district. However, the superintendent invites the board to participate in many of the decisions affecting the district, and in response, the board has developed a number of committees to address need areas.
- ✓ Jersey City has developed a number of relationships with local organizations working within the community. One particularly strong relationship is with Jersey City’s International Institute, which serves the needs of recent immigrants who are seeking refuge. Together, the district and the agency won a grant from the state to develop a number of classroom services like language assistance to meet the needs of the incoming immigrant children and families.