

The New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has established state advisory committees to advise the Commission about civil rights issues in their states that are within the Commission's jurisdiction. More specifically, the committees are authorized to receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public officials, and representatives of public and private organizations in response to committee inquiries; forward advice and recommendations to the Commission; and assist the Commission in its public education and outreach efforts. The committees are comprised of state citizens who serve without compensation.

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Report by New Jersey Federal Advisory Committee Finds An “Effective Teachers” Shortage Among the State’s Most Disadvantaged Schools

Committee Calls For Wider Distribution of Quality Instructors Throughout State’s Education System

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights releases its report, “Teacher Quality: A Vital Determinant of Student Achievement.” The report, based on presentations by national, state, and local education experts, concludes that the state is failing to provide effective teachers, critical for student achievement, to those most in need.

In this report, the Committee makes several findings and recommendations. One key finding is that high-quality teaching is critical to student achievement. Schools that are disproportionately poor or minority do not have adequate access to high-quality teachers. The Committee finds that children in high poverty schools are twice as likely as those in more affluent schools to be taught by teachers who neither hold certification nor academic majors in their assigned courses. Moreover, Newark and other heavily minority districts have a “permanent-substitute teacher problem” in which substitutes without college degrees teach for large parts of, and, in some cases, the entire school year.

The Committee offers a number of recommendations to address these challenges, including: asking the state to re-evaluate its certification and licensure practices, and to shift away from existing tenure practices. It encourages the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to create a Teacher

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Promotion and Retention Blue Ribbon Panel—comprised of constituencies such as the New Jersey Educational Association, key district personnel, and NJDOE staff—to investigate and collaborate with districts that suffer teacher shortages and long-term use of substitute teachers.

In addition, the Committee recommends incentivizing high performers to enter the profession, and promoting second career initiatives, apprenticeship programs, and “Grow your Own” pipeline efforts in underperforming districts. It recommends transparency and accountability measures such as implementing data systems that track yearly student performance, issuing annual teacher qualification “report cards,” and notifying parents about under-qualified teachers in the classroom. It also recommends increased professional training, improved working conditions and rewards to effective teachers and administrators.

“We need to bring greater training, transparency and accountability to the process,” said William Stephney, chair of the Advisory Committee. “We must act now because the lives and futures of our children are at stake. The inequity of having less qualified and ineffective teachers in poor and high-minority populated school districts, contributes to a disparate educational impact on too many children in New Jersey. That must change.”

Former chair Leanna Brown noted, “Any panel convened to address educational reform needs to consider these equity issues.”

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