



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For Immediate Release

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New Jersey Department of Education Recognizes Lighthouse Award Recipients

Trenton, NJ – Today the New Jersey Department of Education announced nine school districts and charter schools have been selected as recipients of the 2025-2026 Lighthouse Awards for demonstrating measurable progress toward equitable outcomes and educational improvement. The districts were recognized at today's meeting of the New Jersey State Board of Education.

“New Jersey’s school districts are strongest when they learn from one another,” **said Dr. Lily Laux, Commissioner of Education.** “That is why recognition programs like this are so important: they highlight innovative practices that expand opportunities for students across our state. By showcasing these efforts, we enable other districts to replicate effective approaches and strengthen the education we provide to all students.”

“The Lighthouse Awards are one way we can highlight the positive work happening across New Jersey as districts expand access to advanced coursework, strengthen pathways to college, and build a more diverse educator workforce,” **said Kathy Goldenberg, President of the New Jersey State Board of Education.** “We are proud to celebrate these districts for leading the way, and for inspiring others to follow.”

The NJDOE’s selections of the 2025-2026 Lighthouse Awards were based on demonstrated improvement in one or more of the following areas:

- **Expanding access to AP/IB programs** — Expanding student access to Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) programs, which are accepted by many colleges and universities as qualifying for course credit or placement in higher-level courses.
- **Improving participation in dual enrollment** — Increasing participation in programs where school districts have an agreement that allows high school students to take courses and earn credit with a specific college or university.
- **Teacher workforce diversity** — Strengthening efforts to recruit and retain a highly qualified, diverse educator workforce that reflects the diversity of the students in New Jersey classrooms. Research has shown that a diverse educator workforce benefits all students, as teachers of color foster positive perceptions among students, which helps prepare them for success in a global economy.

Examples of progress range from the Hamilton Township School District, which covered AP exam fees for all students and held “Potentially AP” assemblies to demystify the AP process for students and families, to the Paterson Charter School for Science and Technology, where focused guidance from educators and the removal of financial barriers led to the number of Hispanic/Latino students participating in dual

enrollment increasing from 0% in 2021-2022 to 36% two years later, and participation among African American students increasing from 0% to 29.3% in the same timeframe.

2025-2026 Lighthouse Awardees

County	District/Charter	Category
Bergen	Emerson Public Schools	Expanding Access to AP/IB Enrollment
Bergen	Saddle Brook Public Schools	Expanding Access to Dual Enrollment
Cape May	Lower Cape May Regional School District	Expanding Access to AP/IB Enrollment
Cumberland	Vineland Public Schools	Diversifying the Teacher Workforce
Hunterdon	South Hunterdon Regional School District	Expanding Access to AP/IB Enrollment
Mercer	Hamilton Township School District	Expanding Access to AP/IB Enrollment
Passaic	Paterson Charter School for Science & Technology	Expanding Access to Dual Enrollment
Salem	Penns Grove Carney’s Point Regional District	Expanding Access to Dual Enrollment
Salem	Salem City School District	Expanding Access to AP/IB Enrollment

The New Jersey Department of Education launched the Lighthouse Award in 2017 to recognize the advancements made by New Jersey’s school districts and charter schools. Additional information about each program is available on the Department’s [Lighthouse Awards webpage](#).

To see how your local school and school district provides access to opportunities such as dual enrollment and AP/IB coursework or to see information about school and district staff and other indicators of student achievement and school climate, see the 2024-2025 [School Performance Reports](#).

