As Toms River Regional Schools begins a 2017-2018 school year that includes several exciting new initiatives, this informational booklet provides a snapshot of the district’s history and evolution, illuminating how future plans for our students, schools, and community build on accomplishments over the past several years.
PROLOGUE: BIG COMMUNITY, SMALL TOWN FEEL

To understand where Toms River Regional Schools is going, we need to look at where it has been.

Since 1891, when the first five students received their diplomas, to its current state as the largest suburban school district in New Jersey, the school system has always maintained a focus on students and provided a high quality education in a safe and caring environment. Previous administrations worked with the regional community-- Beachwood, Pine Beach, South Toms River, and Toms River-- to create new facilities as the population grew and update programs to meet social and learning needs. The township itself is inseparable from its schools, with generations of families proudly staking their claim as products of the system, even as their particular school allegiances vary.

In the spirit of maintaining that strong tradition, the Board of Education commissioned the independent firm of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates to issue a community needs survey in 2013 as part a comprehensive search for a new superintendent who could provide transformational leadership. At that time the district faced several challenges including public trust and crucial budget decisions.
Making matters more challenging was the fact that Toms River had the dubious distinction of being the town and district most affected by Superstorm Sandy in 2012, with the hurricane damaging homes, businesses, roads, and school facilities. The $2.2 billion in tax ratable losses endured by Toms River represented half of the impact on the entire state.

The survey was conducted through eight community meetings as well as online, and polled administrators, community members, students, teachers, parents, and support staff. Results revealed ten major concerns including 1) special services, 2) facilities upgrades, 3) a superintendent who puts students first, 4) perceptions of favoritism, 5) recruiting and retaining the best teachers, 6) restoring public trust, 7) student achievement, 8) technology upgrades, 9) equality of resources, and 10) transparent fiscal reporting. The volume and depth of responses proved that Toms River is a connected and engaged community that cares deeply about its children, schools, tradition, economy, and future. Survey results represented the voice of the community, which was the catalyst driving the Board’s mission, long-term and short-term goals, vision, and search for a superintendent.

The Board approved the hiring of David Healy as Toms River Regional Superintendent of Schools in March of 2014. The Board, Mr. Healy, the district administrative team, families, community members, town hall, and dozens of businesses and organizations have been working together to reinvigorate and restore the district’s educational opportunities and reputation while honoring and expanding upon its storied tradition. New goals were co-developed, focusing on targeted financing, curriculum, technology, support services, and facilities. A spirit of collaboration took hold and the Toms River Regional Schools community went to work.

From left to right: Business Administrator William Doering; Director of 6-12 Curriculum Norma DeNoia; Assistant Superintendent Dr. Marc Natanganara; Assistant Superintendent Debra McKenna; Superintendent David Healy; Director of K-5 Curriculum Cara DiMeco; Assistant Superintendent John Coleman; and Director of Funded Programs/District Test Coordinator Dr. Estee Mailot.
**Kindergarten: A Full Day's Work**

Research by the National Education Association shows that full-day kindergarten produces long-term educational gains: it better prepares five-year-olds for a longer school day setting; offers social, emotional, and intellectual benefits; and produces greater reading and math gains than those in half-day classes.

It’s no wonder then why one of the initial and primary goals charged to the superintendent by the Board was the implementation of full-day kindergarten in each of its elementary schools. At the time, Toms River Regional was among only 19% of school districts throughout NJ that did not have a full-day program. Following more than a year of intense planning, in 2015-2016 the district began offering a comprehensive full-day kindergarten, and that initiative has grown leaps and bounds in the past two years.

The new program is not simply an extension of the school day. It includes research-based practices that redefine learning. New tables can be joined and rotated to form various sized clusters. Furniture and centers placement are carefully structured. Curriculum materials have been developed by multiple stakeholders, with learning activities centered around play. The daily schedule was revised to consider the longer day for our youngest gradeschoolers. The increase in quality instruction is being used to create independent learners who interact well socially, make good decisions, and engage in activities tailored to individual learning styles and needs.

Register your child for kindergarten at trschools.com/registration/Kindergarten
Thanks to a partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education, kindergarten teachers engaged in professional development with colleagues from districts across the state focused on innovative instructional and assessment strategies for primary classrooms. Dr. Vincent Costanza, the director for the NJDOE’s Office of Primary Education, visited the district on several occasions to meet with staff and observe full-day kindergarten classrooms. Dr. Costanza also presented to the public at the June 2016 Board of Education meeting, sharing research about early childhood learning and expressing satisfaction with and respect for the district’s implementation.

Program assessments conducted these past two years show evidence of tremendous growth in both literacy and mathematics. New science standards will be a major focus in 2017-2018. Teachers have communicated their excitement regarding the students’ unprecedented growth, and families continue to provide meaningful and positive feedback, enabling our program to improve each year.

Better still, implementation was achieved with no additional impact to taxpayers. Classes were strategically consolidated, no additional staff was hired, and everything was accomplished within the budget.

When first grade comes calling, our students are more prepared emotionally and socially for the full school day.
1ST TIME EVER

Full-day kindergarten was a major “first,” but it is far from the only one in recent years. Each year the district has pioneered new and prestigious programs through competitive grant applications, the resourcefulness of its teachers, students, parents, administration, and the support of community partners.

Strong principals and other administrators are a key element of successful schools. So is developing teacher leaders. As part of a huge increase in professional learning opportunities for staff, teachers ran the district’s first Elementary Centers Expo in the first two summers for over a hundred peers.

Out of nearly 1,000 applications from across the U.S., parts of Mexico and Canada, Steelcase Education selected TRRS as one of only 15 winners in 2017, awarding High School North a renovation worth $65k that transformed one of its classrooms into an Active Learning Center. Just how prestigious is the ALC award? The district’s 2017 Steelcase-selected contemporaries include Notre Dame and the University of Massachusetts.

Jersey Shore Makerfest has been a grand experiment in community involvement and education. Begun in 2015, it has drawn nearly 200 makers-- corporations, non-profits, and individuals-- and over 8000 attendees to our arena and High School North the past two Octobers. The emphasis at Makerfest is on engagement for all ages and interests, and experiences have ranged from robots and drones to quilting and flower arranging. Sponsors like the Grunin Foundation allow us to make the festival free. It returns this year on October 14, 2017, bigger than ever.

The National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest named TRRS one of 75 nationwide winners of its NEA Big Read, a month-long community-wide read of an award-winning book. The district selected the post-apocalyptic novel Station Eleven in order to explore its plethora of academic themes and its relation to the impact of Superstorm Sandy. The program will take place throughout October 2017 and has already begun to engage and inspire all of Toms River.
IT TAKES 2 TO MAKE A THING GO RIGHT

Partnerships are a key way to help our district meet its mission and engage the community. Nothing is accomplished in a vacuum, but much is accomplished with the support of Toms River businesses, foundations, associations, agencies, and municipal leaders. The 2016-2017 school year further solidified a number of invaluable community allies, and also introduced partnerships that will help ensure the district’s long-term financial success, positively and directly impact our students, and heighten our capacity to provide exceptional special services.

Sponsorship

In 2016 the Toms River-based Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation sponsored the Elevate Toms River Principals’ Innovation Challenge. So impressed with each school’s submission for innovative projects, the foundation decided to fund them all, providing approximately $10k to each of our 18 schools for a total of more than $182k. This partnership advanced even further later that year when the Grunin Foundation sponsored the hiring of a full-time district grant writer. The result? More than $700k in grant funding during 2016-2017, and a sustainable path toward revenue in the years to come.

The Hirair and Anna Hovnanian Foundation has provided $255,000 to create a Real Estate Incubator at High School South’s Business Academy and an Anatomy & Physiology Lab at High School East’s STEAM Academy. Edele Hovnanian, who heads the family foundation, is a local philanthropist who values real-life experience and career readiness, both of which are emphasized in the Academy programs. Just as valuable will be the direct engagement of Ms. Hovnanian’s professional network with our students, including potential mentorships to internships.
A **cohort of local specialists** have exponentially improved our special education services. Consultants for reading and dyslexia, deaf education, augmentative communication, autism, and speech pathology have provided services direct to students and for educators as well.

**Monmouth University** hosts a grant-supported program that offers professional development in the field of autism. Through our partnership with Monmouth for this program, special and general education education teachers and paraprofessionals have been provided a unique opportunity to learn new evolving methods for in-class management. A deeper understanding of autism and its associated behaviors will continue to positively affect instructor and student performance while maximizing the district’s inclusionary practices.

The district is working with **Ocean County College** on the potential development of a community-wide autism-based lecture and workshop series. We’re collaborating with OCC to help identify community needs and raise the level of services for autism.

Joy Forrest is the district’s Director of Special Education.

For more information about our Special Education Parent Advisory Group, visit: trschools.com/curriculum/SEPAG

With the help of Mr. Cox and Ms. Waller, students at South Toms River Elementary honored Autism Awareness Month in April 2017 by coloring puzzle pieces as part of a tree to show autism awareness is growing in our schools.
3–PEAT OF FINANCIAL EXCELLENCE

Inherent to fiscal responsibility is strong and accurate financial reporting. For a school district intent on restoring public trust through transparency, financial reporting holds additional weight, and this is an area where Toms River Schools has truly shined over the past three years.

In fact, 2016-2017 marked the third straight year that the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) has awarded the district its Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting. The independently audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) tracks every cent that passes through the district. Each year the district’s CAFR undergoes a rigorous review and evaluation process which includes the completion of a 36-page checklist of financial statement reporting requirements and indicators. The COE is “the gold standard in financial reporting” and, in addition to being an honor, serves to improve the school district’s bond rating.

Other fiscal achievements

• In 2015-2016, 4th lowest in the state among 101 large districts in total spending per pupil
• As of 2017-2018, $31 million under adequacy, meaning the district spends $31 million less than the Department of Education expects it to based on its cost formula
• In 2016-2017, 10th lowest in the state among 101 districts for administrative costs per pupil
• NJ Department of Education’s Taxpayers Guide to Spending recognizes district costs as far lower than state averages in areas of fiscal responsibility.
• District efforts resulted in the full cancellation of a $5 million community disaster loan received after Superstorm Sandy.
• Clean audits-- meaning unqualified audit opinions-- with minimal recommendations over last five years
The traditional school year is comprised of fall, winter, and spring, but summer has become a crucial month for many students. What is often cut when funding is less available is summer programming, an unfortunate reality for students who can experience learning loss over those 10 weeks and working parents who may have difficulty finding opportunities for their children.

District staff have worked to meet this need through alternative funding. In 2016, TRRS applied for and received a $100,000 grant from the NJ Department of Education to host a summer maker camp that included Title I basic skills eligible intermediate students. The six-week program held at High School North generated accolades from students, parents, partners, and state representatives. It was so influential that HSN was named a “School of TechXcellence” by District Admin magazine, HP, and Intel. The district earned another $100K grant from the NJDOE to host a summer arts-integration pilot program at Pine Beach Elementary for Title I basic skills eligible students in the summer of 2017. During a July 2017 board meeting, a parent called it the “best program ever” for the impact it had on her son.

The district offers summer “extended school year” programs for students with learning disabilities, as well as robotics camps and other opportunities, proving that year-round education is a priority.
Professional development opportunities are available throughout the school year with designated PD days, but summer offers an additional, flexible, and-- for many-- optimal time to continue the ongoing process of learning. Since 2014, PD offerings have more than quadrupled in volume, with high attendance rates and positive feedback. Even in summer months, evenings, and on weekends, our educators have utilized training to improve instructional techniques and increase student achievement.

Our professional development mirrors the curriculum. It is not lecture-based, but hands-on and collaborative, providing teachers, administrators, and support staff opportunities to lead, turnkey methods to colleagues, and experiment. In 2017, summer sessions helped train teachers, supervisors, and curriculum directors on Learner-Activated, Technology-Infused Classrooms (LATIC), a teaching philosophy that will be piloted in 2017-2018.

The 2013 community survey revealed a need to recruit and retain the best educational professionals. Of the 483 new team members hired since 2014, nearly 95% have been from Ocean County, and training and retention is a high priority. Our capacity to train and develop our staff is expanding each year, in large part because it happens throughout the year. Consequently, educational leaders have emerged, and of the 112 promotions since 2014, 111 come from Ocean County, with 100 from right here in Toms River. NJDOE evaluations-- based on a combination of teacher goals, student performance, and in-class observations-- recognize 99% of our teachers as effective or highly effective. When you have the best staff in the state, keeping them is a critical goal!

All three Teachers of the Year at the intermediate level in 2017 are from the Science Department. Left to right: Dr. Sylvia Piznik (Intermediate East); Mrs. Susan George-Horn (South); and Mrs. Toni Hirschfeld (North) have been able to advance and impart their educational philosophy through professional development opportunities where they can learn and turnkey methods to colleagues.

For a complete list of our 2016-2017 Teachers of the Year, visit: http://www.trschools.com/news/toy
Technology plays an integral role in our daily lives. In schools, academic needs come first, with tech being just one of the tools to improve teaching and learning. It also plays a vital role in the effective operation of the district. Not long ago, Toms River Regional Schools was behind the curve, which is why technology became and continues to be an essential Board and district goal. Getting up to speed not only involved budgeting for infrastructure upgrades, but identifying and implementing technology that teachers and students could and would use to genuinely impact their academic experience.

Student FBLA Historian Erica Fischer, President Olivia Valenta, and Vice President Pearl Bengali competed on behalf of Toms River Regional Schools with more than 200 teams in 12 weeks across the state of NJ in the Team Titan competition sponsored by Junior Achievement of NJ. The regional round of the virtual competition was held at Munich Re in Princeton, NJ. The girls competed very well, coming in 7th for our region.
5 THOUSAND (CONT)

How far the district has come is evident both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the past three years, more than five thousand Chromebooks have been integrated into our schools. Investments in technology platform initiatives have improved operational efficiency by eliminating wasteful and redundant practices. A special services student information system has streamlined the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process by providing a platform whereby our educators ensure that our most vulnerable students are receiving the appropriate programs and services in a timely fashion. Curriculum and assessments have been digitized and are more accessible. Online field trips and distance learning are becoming a reality. Staff and students collaborate in the cloud 24/7. Toms River is seen as a leader across the state and beyond in the areas of STEAM and tech integration, and our staff is in demand to present sessions at conferences and workshops.

Toms River North won Stockton’s Computer Programming Competition. Seniors Kate Kennelly, Joe Signorelli, and Matt Signorelli placed 1st out of 44 teams.

Tech Boom

- Purchased 5,000 Chromebooks
- Created a wireless network with over 950 access points
- Mounted a digital projector in every core subject K-12 classroom
- Created and maintain 18,000 Google Apps for Education accounts
- Upgraded available Internet bandwidth 1,500% (100Mb to 1.5Gb)
- Upgraded all district network equipment
- Created over 18 makerspaces
- Started competitive robotics teams at all three high schools
- Increased tech-based professional learning opportunities for staff by hundreds of hours
6 DEGREES OF RENOVATION

One of the challenges for a district with more than a century of history, 23 facilities (18 schools and five outbuildings) across 53 square miles, and years of financial challenges is the maintenance of its physical resources.

The 2013 community needs survey highlighted among other things the deterioration of our aging facilities as an area of major concern. Reflecting an ongoing priority of the Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools, the Board in 2015 authorized the hiring of an outside consultant to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive facilities assessment, which revealed $160 million in necessary renovations and repairs. Despite its fiscal challenges, the Board, superintendent, and school business administrator initiated a plan to address maintenance and repair concerns made evident in the assessment, a plan that acknowledges both the physical needs and various funding source options that least impact our taxpayers.

Recommendations yielded from the facilities assessment have identified priority projects that, when complete, will produce a system of schools that are higher functioning, safer, more comfortable, more cost-efficient, and which boast model classrooms and labs.

**Safety and security:** Increased security cameras, boiler replacements, the identification and elimination of potential environmental hazards, refined school check-in procedures, and buzz-in systems are just a handful of implemented measures that are producing safer, healthier, and more secure buildings.

**Classroom comfort:** HVAC units have been upgraded at multiple schools. An ongoing carpet replacement plan has made for an easier-to-clean and more appealing classroom environment. Heeding the call of our teachers, efforts have increased to upgrade classroom furniture with more flexible and mobile options to help individualize learning and foster collaboration.
High School South: Part of the original Toms River High School and first constructed in the 1930s, the HSS athletic grandstand was demolished due to deterioration, significant safety concerns, and limited seating capacity in 2015. It was replaced with a modern, more accommodating, and larger capacity athletic structure. Then, in 2016, thanks to support from the Toms River South Alumni Association and local nonprofit Homes For All, Inc., the entranceway to High School South was repaved and renamed Gaiter Way to honor a storied Toms River family. Beginning in the 1920s with the children of Wilfred and Ernestine, the Gaiter family continues to embody integrity, pride, character, determination, and goodwill, and their accomplishments-- in the face of hardships and discrimination, no less-- across generations deserved to be acknowledged.

Stabilization: A now fully-occupied district corporate center at 1144 Hooper Avenue has increased enterprise funds, as have the expansion of the use of the Arena and the John Bennett Athletic Complex (a.k.a. "the Bubble").

Energy efficiency: The district employs an Energy Education Specialist, whose main purpose is to ensure that our Energy Education Plan is operating as intended. Thanks to a tip from high school science teacher Christine Girtain, we earned $180k in rebates from the Environmental Protection Agency to replace old buses with more energy-efficient 2017 vehicles. We’re registered with Sustainable New Jersey for Schools and boast our own district Green Team, earning several grants as a result. Each school building produces solar energy. Our energy efficiency plans help modernize our buildings in a practical, environmentally-friendly way, and go hand-in-hand with ...

Cost savings: Our Energy Education Program has yielded $4.7 million in savings since 2012. We’ve instituted a propane bus initiative to limit our carbon footprint while reducing costs on fuel and staff overtime related to additional work hours for warming up buses. We are in the final stages of developing the Energy Savings Improvement Program (ESIP), a state-approved program that allows energy savings to fund capital projects, producing a net zero cost to the benefit of our taxpayers. Of the $160 million identified in facilities improvements, ESIP-eligible projects account for $17-$20 million. Careful and targeted planning and committed efforts have led to substantial improvements already, and district officials are optimistic that an upcoming referendum will allow us to address the complete list of priority projects in a fiscally-responsible manner.
7 UP

Toms River Regional Schools continues to move up in rankings and repute, evidenced recently by seven key awards and accomplishments that lay the groundwork for 2017-2018 and beyond. These unprecedented achievements are an affirmation of our efforts to fulfill a student-focused mission.

- The NJDOE designated Toms River Regional Schools a "High-performing District" in 2017 based on major improvements in its annual Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) review.
- High School East was named a National School of Character in 2017 for meeting Character.org’s Framework for School Success, becoming just the seventh NJ high school to earn the designation in 20 years.
- District Administration magazine, HP, and Intel recognized High School North as a School of TechXcellence after hosting the district’s grant-funded summer maker camp. Only 19 schools and districts across 14 states earned the honor in 2017.
- In 2015 TRRS was selected as one of 17 districts statewide to be part of the second cohort of innovateNJ, a state-supported community of educators committed to improving student-learning opportunities.
- In its annual list of the top high schools in the nation, U.S. News and World Report named Toms River High School North a top five high school in Ocean and Monmouth counties for 2017.
- In New Jersey Monthly Magazine’s annual school rankings, High School South rose more than 60 spots in 2017.
- The Greater Toms River Chamber of Commerce named Toms River Regional Schools 2017’s Distinguished Organization of the Year from hundreds of worthy organizations that comprise the largest suburban community in the state.
8 DAYS A WEEK

A stagnant curriculum--especially at the elementary level--helped partially explain why the state’s QSAC review in 2014 was unable to recognize the district as “high performing.” But following three years of concentrated efforts to revamp curriculum, we earned that proud designation in 2017. This prior deficiency is now a strength, and our district’s youngest learners are the beneficiaries.

Our reputation as an innovator is based on our ability to develop and implement curricula that meets evolving standards and sparks authentic learning for students. The 2016-2017 school year advanced a four-year plan of curricular reform that encourages student voice and choice, active learning, collaboration, that seamlessly integrates technology, and that fosters a lifelong love of learning across all levels of instruction. Authentic experiences transition school from a chore to an inspired, anticipated destination, a place students want to be eight days a week.

- **Online Learning Platforms** have supported tech integration, providing students a more flexible, personalized learning experience. Programs like Achieve 3000, Read180 MobyMax, iReady, and IXL have improved student performance while, at the same time, tracking growth.
- **Freshman Academies** are a curricular initiative that paved the way for the upcoming Career Academies. Fostering an easier transition from middle school to high school, the freshman academies provide individual support for students, inspire collaboration and team-building, and help forge an academic and personal identity during what is arguably the most pivotal time in a child’s academic journey.

- **Online Learning Platforms** have supported tech integration, providing students a more flexible, personalized learning experience. Programs like Achieve 3000, Read180 MobyMax, iReady, and IXL have improved student performance while, at the same time, tracking growth.
- **Freshman Academies** are a curricular initiative that paved the way for the upcoming Career Academies. Fostering an easier transition from middle school to high school, the freshman academies provide individual support for students, inspire collaboration and team-building, and help forge an academic and personal identity during what is arguably the most pivotal time in a child’s academic journey.
With collaboration among intermediate and elementary-level teachers, the district adopted Next Generation Science Standards a year ahead of the state’s mandate.

A student-centered philosophy has laid the foundation for district curriculum. Problem-based learning (PBL), "productive struggle," and learner-activated technology-infused classrooms (LATIC) have enabled students to take control of their learning experience while also being provided the resources and support to do so.

**Curriculum in action**

TRRS high school students, through the Waksman Student Scholar Program, had their molecular biology research and DNA sequences published, a district first.

Through the use of district curriculum maps and seeking out creative opportunities to plan cross-disciplinary lessons, elementary teachers have moved full STEAM ahead at all grade levels. Buildings have been able to redesign available space to create innovative STEAM “labs” that classes can visit to engage in activities that not only reflect exploration of the various disciplines, but also provide them with experience using diverse tools as well as a platform to discover additional areas of interest. In some schools, central spaces such as media centers and tech labs extend out to school grounds in the form of learning gardens.
SUPPLEMENT: EXTRACURRICULAR EFFORTS

Toms River Regional Schools understands the importance of a well-rounded education that includes enriching opportunities outside of the classroom. To that end we encourage our students to participate in any one of our 53 total secondary specialized clubs, our full range of athletic programs, volunteer organizations, theater, band, and media. Extracurricular activities enable our students to pursue their passions, improve self-esteem, develop skills in teamwork, indulge in self-expression, and just plain have fun.

School plays at all grade levels exhibit an extraordinary array of student talent both on stage and behind the scenes, and have garnered praise for their professional quality. Thirty high school and 12 intermediate sports programs extend teachable moments, create lifelong memories, produce college student-athletes, develop future leaders, and churn out famous professional alumni. Intramural sports are hosted each season. Club competitions have brought numerous awards for Toms River participants. No significant community event takes places without sizable contributions from our school bands and student volunteers. More than half of our nearly 16,000 students take advantage of sports and other extracurricular programs.

In addition to expanding education and fostering student growth, extracurricular activities enable the district to honor its lineage and build on traditions it holds dear. The annual North versus South football matchup is more than a game-- it's just one example of a community event that bonds Toms River and transcends school allegiances. Other big games, community events, competitions, and performances bring residents and families together to celebrate current successes with an opportunity to reflect on past glories.

For high school and intermediate sports schedules, visit: http://www.trschools.com/sports/schedules
The learning process that begins in kindergarten seamlessly extends to high school, with the ultimate goal being to prepare students for the challenging world that awaits. The advent of three Career Academies is the culmination of multiple efforts in recent years. The Board fully supported and encouraged the superintendent and his team’s vision to move toward an academy structure and establish itself as a highly competitive district.

In 2017-2018, each high school will host one Career Academy, a school within a school with specialized curricula and experiences. Each Academy is further divided into three strands, several of which are new to the state. The academies offer a pathway of courses to prepare students for tomorrow’s jobs and experiences to feed into advanced college programs.
The Arts Academy (High School North), STEAM Academy (East), and Business Academy (South) will help students adapt to the ever-changing landscape of future careers through diverse learning styles, engagement, and technology. Lending support to our academies is a host of community partners including the Jay & Linda Grunin Foundation, the Greater Toms River Chamber of Commerce, Ocean County College, NAVAIR, Downtown Toms River, the Hovnanian Foundation, RJWBarnabas, and many more.

The academies provide opportunities for every Toms River Regional Schools student through new course offerings, innovative teacher practices, and upgraded classroom spaces. All students have the opportunity to take academy courses regardless of whether or not they are enrolled, and the rigor and specialization of coursework inherently and positively affects everyone, from K-12.

This is just the beginning. The district’s long-term goal is to implement all three academies at every high school. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in pending grant funding and corporate sponsorships seeks to support this goal, as well as increase opportunities at the elementary and secondary levels. In the meantime, Toms River Regional Schools students enter the 2017-2018 school year more equipped than ever to succeed. The district has come a long way, and it presses to go further still so its students can do the same.
EPILOGUE: CULTURE, COMMUNITY & CONTINUATION

What does this all mean? The growth of Toms River Regional Schools has positively impacted student performance and engagement, school culture, and the entire community. If students aren’t in school, they aren’t learning. Our initiatives have established an environment where students and staff want to be at school, which is reflected in a 95% faculty attendance rate. **Chronic absenteeism-- students missing 10% (18 days) or more of the school year-- has gone down across the district by a total of 384 students, a decrease of nearly 17% from 2013-2014 to 2016-2017. Meanwhile, suspension rates have steadily dropped at all high schools for three years straight, a total decrease of 6.1%. Dropout rates (1.1%) remain lower than the state average, and there has been a modest but steady decline in Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reports Systems (EVVRS) incidents.**

![Graphs of AP Participation and Chronic Absences](image)

More engagement has led to better performance and increased college and career readiness. Even as advanced placement (AP) participation at our high schools has risen by 157 students (31%) in the past five years, scores have remained strong with the percentage of students scoring 3 or higher holding around 66%. And Toms River AP students score nearly 6% higher than students across the globe (65.8% for the three high schools in 2017 vs 60.3% globally).
Our current graduation rate of 92.3% represents an increase of 1.6% since 2013 and also exceeds the state average by more than 10%. The lifelong love of learning our dedicated teachers are working to impart with revamped curriculum and student-centered activities is manifesting itself. Data reports from school guidance directors reveal the percentage of our graduates pursuing post secondary studies has increased 5.5% over the past four years (79.3% in July 2014 vs 83.9% in July 2017).

The impact of this growth goes well beyond our classrooms. As Toms River Regional Schools cements its identity as an innovative and excellent school district, Toms River itself becomes exponentially more attractive to families and businesses. Property values increase, storefronts become more in demand, and visiting tourists are inspired to become full-time residents. The business community has taken notice. In its announcement that TRRS has been named 2017’s Distinguished Organization of the Year, the Greater Toms River Chamber of Commerce described the award as such:

"This honor is bestowed upon individuals and/or organizations which have shown community concern and demonstrated outstanding, unselfish service in single or multiple fields in the civic, social, legal, cultural, religious, educational, governmental, health, athletic or business life of the Greater Toms River area."

As impressive as prior years have been, the district operates by a mantra often spoken by our superintendent and echoed by our Board: “The best is yet to be.” Toms River Regional School District has weathered storms both literal and figurative to get where it is today, but hard work, resilience, and teamwork have forged an outlook that is sunny by any measure.