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Sincerely,

Educational Testing Service  
Rosedale Road  
Princeton, NJ 08541

**NJ Spotlight - Profile: A Hispanic Mentor for All Students Across New Jersey**

[Paula Saha](http://www.njspotlight.com/profiles/psaha/) | October 29, 2014

**Ivonne Díaz-Claisse’s encounter with her own mentor, and her passion for reaching students, are changing young lives across the state**

**Who she is:** Founder and president of HISPA, or Hispanics Inspiring Students’ Performance and Achievement, a national institution that finds, organizes, and coaches Hispanic and Latino professionals to speak in schools and act as mentors and role models.

**Where she’s coming from:** Díaz-Claisse grew up in Puerto Rico with a passion for mathematics. While in college in Puerto Rico, she found a role model in a professor who had also grown up in Puerto Rico and who had just earned a Ph.D. in the subject at an American school.

“It was seeing him, someone from Puerto Rico who had gone to the United States, that made me realize -- hmm, maybe I can achieve that,” she said.

Today, Díaz-Claisse holds a masters in engineering in operations research from Cornell University, a masters in mathematics from the University of Maryland, and a Ph.D. in mathematics from Arizona State University.

**An aha! moment:** While working in data analysis for AT&T, Díaz-Claisse was very active in the company’s Hispanic Employee Resource Group, an organization of Latino professionals who worked for AT&T and supported their members’ professional development.

She recalls being invited to speak to students at middle schools in Red Bank and Newark, seeing the changing demographics of those communities and “realizing that I could really be an example to them.”

In Newark, she remembers one young girl who watched her attentively through her talk, and lingered after. “Now that I met you,” Diaz-Classe recalls her saying, “I know that I will pursue a Ph.D. as well. I am very, very passionate about chemistry.

“I had kids wanting my autograph and all I did was tell my story,” she said. “I thought about all the people I know. If all of us do this together, we can really make a difference.”

**Building a network:** Díaz-Claisse recalls another moment that further clarified her vision. She was speaking at a conference of Employee Resource Groups hosted by Microsoft and looked out into the audience to see hundreds of Latinos who were working in technology. “With the connections I had there, we could easily have 10,000 people speaking at schools. That was the vision.”

So a few years ago, Díaz-Claisse made the decision to leave AT&T to devote herself to HISPA full time.

**Why her work matters:** “When you look at public schools in the United States, 25 percent (of students) are of Latino heritage,” she said. “This work is so urgent. It has to be done now. It is very critical for the future of this country that more and more children choose highly skilled professions … not only for the Latino community, it’s for the future of this nation.”

**New Jersey and beyond:** HISPA works with school districts across the state, including Elizabeth, New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, and Red Bank. In most cases, schools reach out to HISPA and then the organization finds sponsors to fund the work. The agreement with schools is to do six visits over the course of a year, with two different speakers at each visit. Speakers range from sitting mayors to Princeton professors to employees of major corporations.

“We have professionals who are first-generation, second-generation, third-generation Latinos. You’re trying to make sure the kids are identifying themselves with the people coming into the school.” HISPA also hosts annual youth empowerment conferences and has recently expanded to San Antonio, TX, and New York City.

**Her pitch for math:** “There is no engineering without math; there is no chemistry without math; there is no architecture without math. Medicine, space exploration, there is nothing that doesn’t have math … even deciding the route of a school bus in the morning. It’s everywhere.”

**Personal:** Díaz-Claisse lives in Skillman, NJ with her husband and two children, 11 and 14.

**Times of Trenton - 'We have to do better' - Trenton school officials seek reversal of low test score trend**

By [**Jenna Pizzi | Times of Trenton**](http://connect.nj.com/user/jpizzi/posts.html) The Times, Trenton, [**Follow on Twitter**](https://twitter.com/JennaPizzi)   
on October 27, 2014 at 8:05 PM, updated October 27, 2014 at 8:23 PM

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[**TRENTON**](http://www.nj.com/trenton) – In an effort to change the trajectory of mostly stagnant, low test scores, Trenton Superintendent Francisco Duran and his staff are working on a new academic framework for students.

“We have to do better,” said Kendra Johnson, the district’s chief academic officer.

Johnson and her staff presented an overview of performance during the district’s annual report to the school board Monday night highlighting the results of the 2013-2014 academic year’s NJASK and HSPA scores.

For students from third to eighth grades, achievement has remained stagnant over the last five years. Last school year, the district had 26.9 percent of third graders ranked as proficient or above in language arts. That proficiency stayed in the low 20 percent range for grades four through seven. In eighth grade, 42.2 percent were ranked as proficient or higher in language arts and literacy.

Math scores hovered between 44 and 32 percent proficient in the 2013-2014 school year for grades three through six. For grades seven and eight, scores sank to 20 and 25 percent, respectively.

In the HSPA test given to 11th graders, there was a 71 percent proficiency in language arts and a 39 percent proficiency in math. There has been an improvement in language arts in the last four years, said Edward Ward, supervisor of instructional technology and accountability.

Johnson said her team is crafting a response by gathering information from teachers in high achieving schools in the district about their best practices and proven methods while also examining what works throughout the state and country.

Those suggestions will be complied into a three-year academic plan set to be presented to the school board for approval by the end of the calendar year. Johnson said a committee will be formed to work on the plan.

“We all come together,” Johnson said. “Because every one I’ve come across since I’ve been in Trenton is committed to having the data tell the real story.”

The school board was also briefed on the number of violent incidents in the district last year, including a 68 percent increase in student assaults on other students. That number rose from 347 incidents in the 2012-2013 school year to 582 in the 2013-2014 year.

Duran said the incidents are mostly students who are repeatedly involved in fights with others, causing a spike in numbers. The district reported that one student was responsible for more than 30 incidents.

Roy Wilson, assistant superintendent in the office of school support, said the district will be keeping a closer eye on data about violent incidents in the school during this school year to try to change those trends as they occur. He added that the district is also focusing on character education with students.

“In order for children to be less violent they have to be able to respect and know each other,” Wilson said.

Duran said the schools have also implemented a specific focus on problem children to better address the deep rooted causes to their violent behavior.

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# **NJ Spotlight -** **Newark Teachers Union Takes Its Grievances to State Assembly Committee**

[John Mooney](http://www.njspotlight.com/profiles/jmooney/) | October 29, 2014

**Representative tells education panel that Superintendent Cami Anderson has not followed state rules for teacher evaluations**

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With the landmark teachers contract in Newark in its third and final year, prospects are not promising for such amicable agreement on the next contract.

The Newark Teachers Union has stepped up its complaints about how state-appointed Superintendent Cami Anderson has implemented the existing contract, taking its case to the Legislature this week and contending that she has failed to comply with state law pertaining to teacher evaluations.

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[NJDoE Letter on Arbitrator’s Decision](http://www.njspotlight.com/assets/14/1028/2212)

But Anderson and state officials are hardly backing down from their push to remove low-performing teachers through legal channels, with the Christie administration this week contesting a state arbitrator’s recent decision rejecting the first of what could be dozens of tenure charges brought against teachers in the district.

Anderson has about 20 tenure cases pending before state arbitrators. But she has also put about 300 other teachers on notice that they need to improve, after at least one year of sub-standard evaluations, or potentially face similar fates.

All this comes as the current contract – which featured performance bonuses of up to $12,500 for high-performing teachers -- winds down. New contract talks have yet to begin, officials on both sides say.

The issue came up anew this week, when one of the top officers of the NTU testified at an Assembly education committee hearing on Monday regarding teacher preparation and induction.

Repeating long-running claims, NTU operations director John Abeigon, an increasingly prominent voice in the union, told the committee that Anderson had violated a number of fundamental requirements in the state’s new teacher tenure and evaluation law.

Among them are mandates for multiple observations and conferences between supervisors and teachers, as well as development of improvement plans for those not receiving satisfactory ratings.

“That process has been ignored in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school year,” Abeigon told the committee. “Cami Anderson, on top of a self-declared deficit of $100 million, now seeks to pour millions more in taxpayer money into teacher arbitration hearings and certainly appeals that could have been avoided if she simply followed the law.”

Abeigon presented the committee with a spreadsheet listing nearly 60 teachers who he said have been brought up on tenure or other disciplinary measures without full compliance with the law, with violations ranging from failure to complete evaluations to lack of support.

The union leader found a sympathetic ear from the Democrats on the committee, several of whom have already pressed Anderson with little success to come before the Legislature to discuss her controversial “One Newark” reorganization plan.

‘We’re pretty familiar with the position that Newark teachers as well as parents have taken regarding Superintendent Anderson’s plans for the district,” said state Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-Essex), himself a former Newark school employee.

“I’m pleased you came to testify today, as many of the legislators have not seen the distress and disruption that has taken place in Newark.”

But the legislators also acknowledged there is little they can do beyond bringing the issues to light.

“I am very, very concerned about what it going on in Newark,” said state Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan (D-Middlesex), the committee’s chairman. “The divisiveness is beyond comprehension. I don’t know what we can do legislatively, but it’s an awful situation.”

Anderson did not testify, nor were representatives of her administration invited, but a district spokesperson later denied that any regulations or law had been violated, saying the union had not filed specific grievances in the cases cited and that the union had refused several invitations to meet to work out any differences.

An internal review process had seen about 100 teachers appealing their evaluations, said Vanessa Rodriguez, the district’s chief talent officer, with only a half-dozen of those evaluations being reversed.

‘We have accurately implemented the contract and have been in alignment with the letter of the law,” Rodriguez said.

The process is nonetheless seeing its day in court, or at least before state-appointed arbitrators, and the district is awaiting those rulings. A decision released last week came in against the district, finding that Anderson had sought to use two years of unsatisfactory evaluations against a teacher when the state law only went into full effect a year ago.

But the Christie administration stood by Anderson in a letter to her chief counsel this week, saying that while the law had been in effect for a year, there was nothing to preclude the use of evaluations from two years ago in bringing tenure charges.