



Envisioning the Future of Newark Public Schools

Excellent Neighborhood Public Schools for All

May 17, 2014



As students, parents, educators, citizens and voters from hardworking families, we know the future of our community depends on excellent public schools. When we come together, we realize our potential and power to overcome barriers to providing equitable and excellent public education. We welcome new partners to join us as we take action for the students, families and educators of Newark.

FOUNDING MEMBERS:

Parents Unified for Local School Education, New Jersey Communities United, NAACP Newark Branch, Newark Teachers Union, Abbott Leadership Institute, Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools, City Association of Superintendents and Administrators, 211 Community Impact, Laundry Distribution and Food Service Workers Local 3, SEIU Local 617, Operating Engineers Local 617, American Federation of Teachers NJ

INTRODUCTION

Exactly 60 years prior to the release of this document, the U.S. Supreme Court issued perhaps its most famous decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The *Brown* decision launched a new era in American public education by ending legalized segregation. Nevertheless, merely eliminating the fiction of “separate but equal” schools did not eliminate the deep injustice within our school system. For six decades, communities of color have had to continue fighting for the same thing the *Brown* plaintiffs were fighting for: equal educational opportunities in public schools.

That fight continues today in Newark, N.J. Our children have still *never* been provided the same opportunities to learn as their peers in surrounding areas. And our public schools, which have been under state control for nearly 20 years, have been continually undermined by a long line of education policymakers. The latest entries on that ignoble list are New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and his appointed Superintendent of Newark Public Schools (NPS), Cami Anderson, who together may present the most serious threat yet to our children’s fundamental right to education.

The actions of Gov. Christie and Superintendent Anderson represent a modern-day version of “separate and unequal” education policy.¹ The governor has repeatedly defied the New Jersey Supreme Court and the state Legislature by denying equitable school funding to Newark’s children.² Both the governor and the superintendent have displayed a shocking lack of respect for the views and concerns of Newark residents, as well as basic democratic principles.³ The superintendent is proposing massive additional layoffs that would be devastating to the already woefully underserved NPS students.⁴ And the One Newark plan—which would close a substantial number of public schools and further shift public resources to private control—would be catastrophic for many Newark students, families and communities. Through these actions, the governor and superintendent have repeatedly treated the people of Newark as second-class citizens. And while their alignment with those who seek to dismantle our public school system and profit from the privatization of our schools has

benefitted them both politically and financially,⁵ their gains have undoubtedly come at the expense of the Newark residents they are supposed to be serving.

Perversely, Superintendent Anderson now repeatedly asserts that her approach to school reform—and the One Newark plan in particular—is directed at addressing the effects of poverty and racism.⁶ Not only does such a claim defy reason, it also represents a flagrant disregard for the ample evidence documenting the effects of her proposed reforms in similar communities of color around the country. Simply put, we already know where this approach leads. The experiences in Chicago, New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York and numerous other cities around the country have made it clear that One Newark will not result in improved educational opportunities for our students. It will, however, limit educational access, undermine educational quality, expand the “school-to-prison pipeline,” weaken community connection to schools, compromise student and community health and safety, destabilize communities, diminish teacher effectiveness and waste community resources.⁷

“I do not agree with the One Newark plan. It is going to hurt the community of Newark and destroy what is working. This idea is not something we should be investing in because it has been proven that it will not work. Cami Anderson needs to stop telling the citizens of Newark that we do not know better. We DO know better—this city is our home.”

To be clear, we fully recognize that change is needed. Our schools absolutely *must* improve. But the Christie/Anderson approach and the One Newark plan are taking us backward. Nevertheless, Superintendent Anderson has asserted that her approach is the only viable way to proceed, recently asking, “What’s the alternative?”⁸

We’re glad she asked.



WHAT NEWARK RESIDENTS REALLY WANT

Our coalition represents thousands of Newark students, parents, teachers, school employees and other community members, and we have engaged countless other residents through surveys, town hall meetings, community forums and door-to-door outreach (quotations collected during this research are interspersed throughout this report). What we have learned through listening to our neighbors about what they value most in their school system is incredibly simple, and yet it stands in stark contrast to the Christie/Anderson plan: They want a high-quality system of neighborhood public schools that is able to serve all of Newark's children and youth.

They want the state to finally repay the longstanding debt it owes to the people of Newark to provide our children with a level playing field.

They want a school system that is guided, first and foremost, by what our students and our communities need, and by what we know works in improving schools, rather than by politics and ideologically driven experiments on our children.

They want a school system that makes parents want to keep their children in NPS schools, and that can attract new families to Newark, rather than what we have currently under state control, which is a system that actively repels families.

They want public resources under public control, subject to public accountability.

And they want a school system that acknowledges that education is a right, not a privilege, and that *all* children deserve a high-quality education within their own community, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, the neighborhood they live in, how engaged their parents are in their lives, and all of the other factors that for too long have been used to predetermine the investment in our children.

In other words, what they want is what other communities across New Jersey, and across the country,

take as a given. Families living in the areas surrounding Newark don't even have to think twice about there being great neighborhood public schools in which they can put their children; it's the baseline standard of quality that they have come to expect. The people of Newark merely want to be able to have the same expectation.

"The state has been in control for 20 years. They have spent millions of dollars on inferior programs and materials that did little but make corporations wealthy. They have failed over and over. It is time to give control back to the city and its true citizens."

Getting to that point is going to require a vastly different approach than what the One Newark plan lays out. Thus, there should be an ***immediate moratorium on implementation of the One Newark plan.***

Second, we need to devote ourselves to implementing the Newark community's vision of excellent neighborhood schools for all. To that end, we have asked hundreds of students, parents, caregivers, teachers, school employees and other community members from around the city for their view of what is included in that vision.

Third, we need to make sure that we have a school district that is structured to be able to support a high-functioning collection of schools. Thus, rather than the disjointed, balkanized system proposed in the One Newark plan, we need a strong, unified system of schools that is well-supported by the central office.

And fourth, NPS desperately needs to rebuild trust with the entire Newark community. Every student, parent and community member is entitled to know what to expect from an NPS education. They should know what the educational goals are for every child; they should know what the key components are of an NPS education; and they should be able to effectively address any deficiencies that arise. Indeed, the entire city—including the business sector, universities,

nonprofit organizations, the faith community and other government agencies—needs to be on the same page as the school district if we are truly going to be able to transform our education system and create the schools our children deserve. In other words, we need a shared vision for Newark’s schools and a plan to achieve it.

THE NEWARK PROMISE

Based on our extensive research and outreach around the city, we have developed **The Newark Promise: Excellent Neighborhood Public Schools for All**, which represents our shared, community-based vision for the educational opportunities that should be avail-

able to every child and youth in Newark. Why do we refer to it as a “promise”? Because we believe that the city of Newark and the state of New Jersey need to make and fulfill a promise to all Newark residents that all our children will be able to receive a high-quality preK-12 education in their neighborhood public schools.⁹ In fact, we believe the Newark Promise should be the primary basis upon which we evaluate our education policymakers (by evaluating whether their actions move us closer to this vision, or move us further away). Thus, we are asking each of our education policymakers to sign on to the Newark Promise, and to make a commitment to the entire city that all their policy decisions will be directed at making this vision a reality for every single one of our children and youth.

THE NEWARK PROMISE: EXCELLENT NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR ALL

All children and youth in Newark have the right to a high-quality preK-12 education in their neighborhood public schools. Such education shall provide all students with a full and equal opportunity to develop their mind, personality and talents; fulfill their potential; achieve their goals; improve the quality of their lives; and graduate from high school qualified for college, a living-wage job and thoughtful, responsible participation as a democratic citizen. Every education policy decision made by Newark city officials, school district officials and individual building administrators shall be directed at ensuring that every child and youth in Newark is provided with these educational opportunities, which shall include, at a minimum, the following:

- Support in addressing the full array of students’ intellectual, social, physical, psychological and emotional needs.
- Safe, clean, comfortable and inviting facilities that are conducive to learning and demonstrate respect for those who go to school and work there.
- High-quality learning conditions in schools, including classes of a size that ensure individualized instruction, full support staffs, up-to-date classroom materials, modern classroom technology and access to healthy food.
- An academically rigorous curriculum that is enriched, well-rounded, engaging and culturally relevant.
- Effective instruction provided by qualified, well-trained and well-supported staff who are given the time and resources necessary to plan their lessons, collaborate with colleagues, receive meaningful professional development, and address each student’s development and particular learning needs.
- High-quality assessments that are aligned with the curriculum, use multiple methods for allowing students to fully demonstrate what they know and can do, and are used to improve the teaching and learning process.
- Developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that are applied fairly, support student learning and positive school climates, minimize student exclusion and the involvement of law enforcement to the greatest extent possible, and use preventive and restorative responses to bullying.
- Timely and effective intervention if students experience academic difficulties or the school is not meeting its obligations.
- Meaningful opportunities for students and their parents and families to participate fully in the educational process and all other school and district decisions that significantly affect their lives and education.



To implement this vision, we are not proposing any silver bullets. Unlike the One Newark plan, we do not suggest that merely restructuring our school system—without addressing the root causes of our underperforming schools—will solve anything. Instead, what we are proposing is a comprehensive, multiyear strategy—based on the best available research—that addresses the major gaps at every systemic level. Each of the action steps below corresponds to an element of the Newark Promise and what it will take to make it a reality for every child in Newark: (1) out-of-school challenges; (2) school buildings; (3) in-school resources; (4) curriculum; (5) instruction; (6) assessment; (7) school climate; (8) public accountability; (9) democratic governance; and (10) funding.

By coming together as a community around this plan, we believe we can create the best urban school district in the country. We believe we can start to undo the harms caused by decades of injustice suffered by the people of Newark. But most importantly, we believe we can finally provide our children with the same chance to live a good life and pursue their dreams as every other child in America.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: *Create partnerships necessary to turn schools into community hubs that take a holistic approach to meeting student and community needs.*

“There should be some things in schools that level the playing field. We can’t go in every home in the city and fix it.”

Many of Newark’s children and youth have to overcome enormous challenges within their homes and communities to even get to school, and many more come to school hungry, with unaddressed medical needs, and suffering the effects of trauma. Yet we provide very little support to our school system in helping to address these needs, and still we expect these students and their schools to perform academically at the same level as students and schools from more affluent communities where such challenges are rare.

Even the NPS students who don’t encounter those challenges are harmed when we structure their educational experiences too narrowly and don’t account for the full array of their developmental needs. Indeed, our youth are often viewed merely as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, rather than acknowledging that every child comes to school with an assortment of intellectual, social, physical, psychological and emotional needs.

It is incumbent on us, as the Newark community, to address these deficiencies. We must reimagine what our schools can be, and we must learn from the many cities across the country that have made significant gains in academic achievement and improved both student and community health and well-being through the creation of “community schools.”¹⁰ Our schools should be community hubs where we can bring together under one roof the services, activities and supports our children and families need, such as:

- Primary medical care, and vision and dental services;
- Early childhood education;
- Before- and after-school programming for students;
- Nutritional services;
- Recreational, cultural and community-based learning opportunities;
- Child care services;
- Academic services like tutoring;
- Job training and placement services
- Continuing education programs;
- Mental health services;
- In-school child care and support for teen parents; and
- Other social services.

“Education should be viewed as a lifelong journey, and schools should be open to the community so that people become and stay more involved.”

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

According to the Coalition for Community Schools:

“A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—all day, every day, evenings and weekends.”

“Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Partners work to achieve these results: Children are ready to enter school; students attend school consistently; students are actively involved in learning and their community; families are increasingly involved with their children’s education; schools are engaged with families and communities; students succeed academically; students are healthy—physically, socially, and emotionally; students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment, and communities are desirable places to live.”

SOURCE: www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx

Fortunately, Newark already has a model that it can build off of: the Newark Global Village School Zone that was launched in the central ward in 2010 but was discontinued in 2012 due to lack of support from district leadership.¹¹ Additionally, the city has a rich network of universities, nonprofit organizations, businesses, city agencies, hospitals, foundations, faith-based organizations and other service providers, which are essential to creating a robust system of community schools. And by absorbing the lessons from other similarly situated communities, Newark can better leverage its resources and produce more cost-effective reforms.¹²

While community schools must ultimately be created through a localized, inclusive process designed to target individual communities’ particular needs, we ask the mayor and City Council to take the initial step of bringing the necessary parties together to begin the strategic planning process. By coming together and pooling our resources and knowledge, we can take a major step toward creating schools that can help our students to thrive, strengthen our families and revitalize our city.

21ST-CENTURY SCHOOL BUILDINGS: *Ensure every school’s physical plant is conducive to learning and demonstrates respect toward students and staff.*

The state of a community’s school buildings says a great deal about how much, or how little, its students are valued. Here in Newark, far too many public school buildings make it evident that the state is not invested in the success of our children.

“We used to feel at one time that schools should be beautiful places; that they should be valued because these were places that held our most precious things—children. What message do you receive as a student when you walk into a building with falling down ceilings, etc.?”

NPS schools were recently described as “among the state’s most neglected, dilapidated, and unfit for student learning.”¹³ Thus, there is an urgent need to make targeted repairs and renovations of many NPS schools. Additionally, through the *Abbott* decision more than 15



years ago, the district was awarded new school buildings that have yet to be constructed. It is time for the state to honor its obligations to the people of Newark by building schools equipped with 21st-century technology that are environmentally friendly, have ample green space for students, and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the education of our children.

HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: *Ensure that every school is appropriately staffed and resourced.*

Not only do Newark students typically bring greater needs with them to schools, the learning environments they encounter are often grossly inadequate to support their education. Indeed, the inequity in resources between NPS schools and many of the schools in surrounding communities is simply unconscionable. All of our students deserve to have the resources they need to learn. Addressing this systemic failure will require a number of steps:

- **Small Class Sizes**—The benefits of small class sizes have been well-documented, especially in communities with large concentrations of high-need students, such as in Newark (including a greater proportion of students living in extreme poverty, students with special needs, English language learners, and youth in the foster care system or who are homeless).¹⁴ Nevertheless, Superintendent Anderson is proposing to lay off up to 30 percent of NPS teachers over the next three years,¹⁵ on top of 129 layoffs of school employees last year.¹⁶ Among many other harms that would cause, the resulting increases in class sizes would be devastating for Newark students. Already, too many students go without the individualized instruction they need. Thus, the district must make it a priority to ensure appropriate student-teacher ratios in all NPS schools.
- **Appropriate Staffing**—For NPS to meet its students' needs, all schools must have a full complement of instructional support staff—including paraprofessionals, counselors, librarians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, literacy and math coaches, special education teachers and English as a second language

teachers—as well as noninstructional personnel, such as custodians, food service workers and security guards.

- **High-Quality Learning Materials**—NPS students shouldn't have to read antiquated textbooks and use obsolete technology while their peers in other communities enjoy up-to-date learning materials.
- **Expansion of High-Quality Preschool Programs for 3- and 4-Year-Olds**—To ensure that more children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, the district should: (a) make a dedicated effort to improve the quality of its preschool programs; and (b) strengthen its community outreach and recruitment efforts to enroll a higher percentage of eligible children.
- **Healthy Food**—Newark has very high rates of childhood obesity, and very low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption by children and youth.¹⁷ This is both a public health issue and an educational issue, because our students need better access to healthy food in schools to be able to maintain their readiness to learn.

NPS should immediately conduct a needs assessment to identify gaps between the current realities in our schools and the standards set out in the Newark Promise. Then we must allocate our resources accordingly, because no child can be expected to learn when they are not provided the essential tools they need.

ENHANCED CURRICULUM: *Provide every student with an academically rigorous curriculum that is enriched, well-rounded, engaging and culturally relevant.*

The foundation for all effective teaching and meaningful learning is a high-quality curriculum. Yet, within too many NPS classrooms, the curriculum has become excessively narrow and disconnected from our students' lives. We have become so focused on transmitting the knowledge purported to make students "college- and career-ready" that we have lost sight of how children and youth learn, and what makes them *want* to learn. Of course, our students need basic skills, but they also need:

- A curriculum that builds on their pre-existing interests, experiences and knowledge;
- A curriculum that makes them active—rather than passive—learners, including project-based learning that makes real-world connections to their lives;
- Group work that allows for collaborative learning and problem solving;
- An age-appropriate and diverse curriculum, including more exposure to disciplines that have been de-emphasized in recent years as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, such as the sciences and world languages;
- Fully integrated arts education;
- A curriculum that addresses their ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and celebrates their culture, history and community;
- Connections to their community and their futures through community service, internships, field-based learning, and academically rigorous Career and Technical Education programs;
- Access to modern technology;
- Access to high-level courses, such as Advanced Placement; and
- Access to recess and physical education.¹⁸

Some NPS schools already do an excellent job of incorporating some, if not all, of these elements. But many do not, and that is contributing to widespread student alienation. Therefore, we call on the district to involve all community stakeholders in assessing where such gaps exist; identifying promising models, both locally and nationally;¹⁹ and developing recommendations for curricular reform.²⁰

Unless we address our curricular deficiencies, we will never be able to sufficiently engage all, or even most, of our students. And even those students who persevere and graduate “college- and career-ready” will not have been prepared to be lifelong learners and critical thinkers. For that level of education, we need a higher level of curriculum—one that is academically rigorous and far more enriching, well-rounded,

engaging and culturally relevant than what many of our students currently receive.

IMPROVED INSTRUCTION: *Enhance NPS’s instructional capacity by offering more meaningful professional development, improving our staffing model and offering additional career advancement opportunities for teachers.*

How do we ensure that all NPS students are receiving high-quality instruction? The answer to that question has several parts, but one significant (and frequently overlooked) factor is that we have to make teaching in NPS schools a desirable career. That requires the creation of conditions that will attract top teachers and administrators to our district, and help to keep them once they are here. Thus, the elements covered above are also critically important to improving instructional quality. Creating better learning opportunities for students also produces better environments for teachers, which are essential to recruiting and retaining talented educators.

Additionally, we must recognize that our goals for our children can only be reached if we provide our teachers with the support and respect they deserve. There is simply no path to high-quality education that includes the demonization, demoralization and de-professionalization of teachers that have become so common in recent years.

“The older, more expensive teachers are being pushed out, and teachers say, ‘Why should I stay and deal with this stress?’”

There are several additional steps that the district should take to enhance instructional quality district-wide. First, NPS needs to prioritize meaningful professional development for all administrators, teachers and other school employees, in alignment with the Newark Promise and the enhanced curriculum. There are significant gaps districtwide with respect to subject matter expertise and pedagogy, as well as addressing students’ social and emotional needs, meeting the full spectrum of needs of English lan-



guage learners and students with disabilities, cultural competence, classroom management, using positive and restorative approaches to school discipline, and trauma-informed education, among others.²¹

To make this professional development meaningful and effective, it must be ongoing, occur inside the school, and be closely tied to the particular needs of students and educators in that school.²² Thus, NPS should bring back the “Teaching and Learning” department, which was disbanded by the superintendent but formerly provided ongoing research-based, job-embedded professional development and on-site support at the school level, across all content areas. Additionally, it should reinstate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which were also eliminated by Superintendent Anderson.

They may, for example, observe each other in the classroom and provide feedback, engage in collaborative planning or problem-solving, analyze student work and student data, or engage in peer-led professional development on topics identified by teachers themselves.²³ Moreover, all NPS schools should be staffed and structured so that teachers have sufficient time for individual lesson planning and collaborative professional development every week, and that new teachers and struggling teachers are able to access intensive assistance, mentoring and training from skilled colleagues.²⁴

NPS should also implement a series of steps to improve school staffing. It should create more equity district-wide by offering a series of incentives designed to attract and retain more experienced teachers and administrators to its “hard-to-staff” schools, including stipends, additional paraprofessionals, smaller class sizes, and increased time for preparation and training.²⁵ Additionally, the district should prioritize the recruitment of teachers and administrators from local neighborhoods. And teachers, students, parents and other community members should be integrally involved in the hiring of principals to ensure that the person chosen will be the right fit for that particular community.²⁶

Finally, the district should expand upon teachers’ career advancement opportunities. NPS’s best teach-

ers should be provided more opportunities to take on increased responsibility and leadership roles—such as mentoring new teachers or helping to develop curricula—and they should be recognized and compensated accordingly.²⁷

The combination of these strategies will not only make NPS a more attractive and rewarding place to work—which will allow the district to attract and retain great teachers—it will create the type of respectful, professional culture that can elevate both individual and collective instructional capacity in every NPS school.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS: *Develop a localized assessment system based on multiple measures of student performance that provides more meaningful information to students, parents and teachers.*

Perhaps the most significant trend in NPS over the last several years has been the increasing overuse and misuse of high-stakes standardized tests. Because of the severe overemphasis on increasing test scores—at the expense of more meaningful school improvement efforts—we have dramatically narrowed and weakened our curriculum in many schools across the district. We are subjecting many of our children to weeks of mindless test preparation and test-taking every year, and are constantly ranking and sorting them on the basis of test scores that are incapable of capturing what they know and can do. It is no wonder that our students are increasingly being turned off to learning.

“The state should stop mandating so many unnecessary tests and let the public school teachers teach.”

Moreover, we are diminishing the teaching profession by making it increasingly test-centric. We are forcing quality educators to waste valuable instructional time on exams that provide little to no information of value in improving the quality of their teaching and students’ learning. And we are basing important decisions about the fate of our schools and our teachers’ jobs on simplistic bubble tests that are incapable of accurately

measuring the abilities of educators.²⁸ In short, we have lost sight of the difference between measuring academic achievement and actually *improving* academic achievement.

Of course, assessing student progress in an ongoing way is critically important. But Newark needs an assessment system that supports teaching and learning and promotes the higher-order skills that parents value and students need: critical thinking, communication, problem solving, research and applied learning. Thus, NPS should develop a comprehensive local performance assessment system that eliminates all extraneous tests currently in use and is:

- Aligned with the principles of the Newark Promise and the enhanced curriculum described above;
- Based on multiple indicators of student learning from a variety of sources at multiple points in time, including student portfolios, teacher observations, tests that include multiple-choice questions and short and longer constructed response items, essays, tasks and projects, laboratory work and presentations;
- Valid and appropriate for a diverse student population, including English language learners and students with disabilities;
- Structured to provide useful and timely diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning; and
- Publicly reported.²⁹

“I want to see students being taught how to think critically in all aspects of their lives.”

Additionally, the district should be active at the state level, advocating for revised testing policies that promote the use of performance assessments while removing requirements for tests that fall short of these standards. We are confident that within the next several years, we can turn around the failed “test-and-punish” approach on which we have become so reliant.

In its place, we can create a far more robust, valid, reliable and fair system that will provide much more useful and meaningful information to parents, students and the entire community.

SAFE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS: *Improve school climate by adopting a new understanding of school safety and eliminating the overuse of harsh disciplinary measures.*

Creating the district our students deserve requires more than simply focusing on academic content. We must also ensure our students have a healthy and safe environment in which to learn. For too long, NPS—like many urban districts—relied on the overly harsh, ineffective and counter-productive zero-tolerance approach to school safety. In the process, we created toxic school climates, impeded student learning and reinforced the “school-to-prison pipeline” by pushing our students—and particularly students of color—out of school.³⁰

To Superintendent Anderson’s credit, she has publicly recognized the devastating impact of this approach and has taken some initial steps to address it.³¹ But to truly dismantle Newark’s school-to-prison pipeline and provide all of our students with the healthy school climates and educational opportunities they deserve, there remains much more to be done.

First, we must shift our understanding of school safety.³² To have truly safe schools, we need to create positive and supportive environments where students can develop strong relationships with teachers, administrators and other school employees.³³ Indeed, we must recognize that the core elements of an effective school safety strategy are not discipline and punishment, but rather stable schools; small class sizes; access to social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors and nurses; availability of wraparound services; an engaging curriculum; and well-trained and well-supported teachers. That is why it so imperative that we take a comprehensive approach to school improvement, and why we must avoid closing schools, raising class sizes, cutting school staff and student support services, and undermining our teaching force, as many recent decisions by Gov. Christie and Superintendent Anderson have either done or threaten to do.



Additionally, NPS must ensure that school discipline is being administered fairly and respectfully in every school across the district. Disciplinary measures that exclude students from school or refer them to law enforcement should be minimized to the greatest extent possible, and the district should be proactive in addressing the disproportionately harsh discipline of students of color, students with disabilities and any other subgroups of students that are overly represented. Additionally, the district should accelerate the implementation of disciplinary alternatives such as restorative justice and train all school staff on the adverse consequences of school exclusion and justice-system involvement, effective classroom management strategies, culturally responsive discipline, creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students,³⁴ and developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive and healthy school climates.

Together, these steps can start to undo the damage caused by NPS's misguided approach to school safety, and begin to create the healthy school climates that promote truly safe and effective schools.

AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY: *Create a more robust and comprehensive system of community-based accountability and support for struggling schools.*

We strongly believe in school accountability, but equally strong is our belief that we must be holding schools accountable for the right things. Our schools are naturally going to focus their energies on whatever our accountability system prioritizes. Thus, it should not be surprising that our current system, which places a heavy emphasis on one type of metric—standardized test scores—has led to a severe de-emphasis on the many other elements of quality education that are important to Newark's students parents, and other community members.

We need a more robust and authentic school accountability system that can drive school improvement efforts and promote greater parent and community involvement in schools. Thus, rather than merely holding schools accountable for student outcomes, district leaders and administrators must also be held responsible for providing high-quality, equitable opportunities

to learn. We must create mechanisms for students, parents and communities to participate more effectively in the school improvement process and hold their local schools accountable. And we need a simple, transparent process to identify any shortcomings in our schools and quickly address them.³⁵

First, we need to provide parents and the broader community with higher-quality information on the performance of our schools. It should be both quantitative and qualitative, and should include data on all of the elements of the Newark Promise, as well as student learning outcomes.³⁶

Second, we need to provide better ways for school stakeholders to help our schools implement the Newark Promise and achieve their full potential. Much like the School Leadership Councils that formerly existed in NPS, every school should have an Excellence and Equity Committee comprised of parents, students, teachers, administrators, school employees and other community members that is empowered to take a more active role in school accountability and improvement efforts. They would monitor the data described above, collect input from school stakeholders (such as through student and parent surveys and open meetings), implement strategies for school improvement, and be provided the means to advise district leadership and influence district policy (much like the Parent Advisory Council that NPS once had). Not only would these committees lead to improved education quality throughout the district, they would also finally provide parents, students, teachers and school employees with more meaningful opportunities to become involved in school improvement efforts.

Third, we need to ensure that every single one of our students is being served appropriately, and that when a problem is identified, there is a mechanism in place to address it. Thus, we propose that all school stakeholders be empowered to enforce the Newark Promise. In other words, if an individual student, parent or school employee—or group of them—believes that his or her school is falling short in one or more areas, he or she could file a complaint to address that deficiency in a timely manner.³⁷

Fourth, there should be an outside review of individual school performance to provide an objective view of their practices.³⁸ We propose creating a School Quality Review System in which qualified teams of experts would periodically visit and observe a school, examine evidence of student and teacher work over the course of time, review the full array of data and other evidence described above, and assess how resources are used and whether students are receiving equitable opportunities. They would perform their own independent analyses and produce publicly available reports on each school. And when they identify a school in need of improvement, they would supplement the school improvement efforts of the school's Equity and Excellence Committee by providing targeted technical assistance, including:

- Identifying a set of research-based improvement strategies already employed within NPS, as well as across the country, that can be adapted by the individual school;
- Designating several high-performing NPS schools as professional development “lab sites” where teams from schools in need of improvement can observe and learn new practices; and
- Providing the technical assistance necessary to help the struggling school develop and implement targeted improvement plans in collaboration with student, parent, school employee and community stakeholders.³⁹

Thus, the community would receive vastly improved information on school performance, our schools would receive the type of robust feedback about their strengths and weaknesses that our current test-based system simply cannot provide, and our school improvement efforts would be far more effective.

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING: *Restore local control of NPS and provide the Newark community with the means and information to participate more effectively in NPS policy decisions.*

It is our firmly held belief that individuals who are significantly affected by decisions should have meaningful involvement in making those decisions. Yet the stakeholders of NPS have been deprived of such involvement by being under state control for nearly 20 years, despite meeting all of the benchmarks for returning the district to local control. Gov. Christie summed up this profoundly undemocratic approach when he said last September, “I don’t care about the community criticism. We run the school district in Newark, not them.”⁴⁰

“After nearly 20 years of occupation, the state has shown it does not have the will or skill to improve the district. The Newark school district must return to local control where people have a vested interest in its success.”

The governor simply needs to return NPS to the people of Newark. Given the damage that state control has already caused, and the additional devastation threatened by the One Newark plan, it is long past time for us, Newark’s people, to be allowed to create a better future for ourselves through locally directed school reform.

Additionally, we must rid our school system of the view that policymaking should be left up to district leadership, most notably exemplified when Superintendent Anderson announced that she and her leadership team would no longer attend public school board meetings because, in her view, the public’s overwhelming opposition to the One Newark plan was “dysfunction” that was “not focused on achieving educational outcomes for students.”⁴¹ The superintendent needs to understand that nobody is more invested in the success of Newark schools than the students, parents, staff and other community members who are in them every day.



So key policy decisions need to be made *by* us and *with* us, not *for* us.

Above, we have outlined a number of strategies for creating more transparent governance and participatory decision-making in NPS, but it can't stop there. Open and inclusive processes must become standard operating procedure throughout the district. Every single significant decision should involve authentic input from those who will be most affected by it. That may seem extreme, given our current practices. But it is precisely because it seems extreme that it is so important, because that reflects how far we have strayed from a truly democratic approach to operating our school system.

SMART, EQUITABLE FUNDING: *Address the district's fiscal challenges and improve school quality through more efficient use of resources and compliance with state law.*

While it is true that NPS currently has a projected budget deficit of \$36 million, were it not for the state's mismanagement of the school district, it would be enjoying a significant budget surplus. For example, for the 2014-15 school year, NPS will lose \$200 million from its budget because of payments to charter schools.⁴² Additionally, NPS will be underfunded by \$113 million during the 2014-15 school year, relative to what is required under the School Funding Reform Act.⁴³ Thus, simply by adopting a more appropriate policy with regard to charter schools and complying with state law, the district would have ample resources to implement the action steps described above.

**"Newark has to stand together.
We need to fight for local control.
Enough is enough."**

In other words, to implement the Newark Promise, we will unquestionably have to make better use of the resources we have. And because of the state's longstanding failure to provide every student with what they need to succeed, we will also have to supplement our existing resources. Thus, we recommend the following five-part process for moving forward:

1. NPS should immediately take action in implementing all of the action steps described above that can be achieved without additional resources.

2. The mayor and City Council should commission a costing-out study of the additional resources required to implement the Newark Promise, based on the action steps described above.
3. Opportunities to reallocate existing resources should be identified through: (a) an analysis of fiscal inefficiencies within the city and school budgets, including the overspending on charter schools; (b) eliminating the employee without placement (EWP) pool, and immediately place those individuals into budgeted positions within the Newark public schools; (c) putting an immediate halt on the hiring of consultants; and (d) eliminating other school budget items that conflict with the Newark Promise.
4. Collaborate and empower institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, community based organizations and foundations to augment quality services that would assist in reducing the existing costs to Newark public schools.
5. At the state level, we must return to New Jersey's traditional focus on fairness and equity in school funding, and NPS must be provided the resources it is owed by the state under the School Funding Reform Act. Additionally, our city officials should play an active role at the state level in helping to address the governor's misplaced budgetary priorities, which have created much of the financial strain that Newark and other urban areas around the state are experiencing.

In contrast to the state's current approach, which is to enact severe budget cuts that will create irreparable harm to our children, we believe that through better and more efficient use of our community resources, we can both solidify the district's fiscal future and support the school improvement efforts our children deserve.

CONCLUSION

We do not suggest that implementing this vision will be easy. On the contrary, it will require a massive, community-wide effort, and there will still undoubtedly be setbacks along the way. But we know that together we can make the Newark Promise a reality—and in so doing, we can fulfill the promise of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and put our children on equal footing with their peers around the country.

ENDNOTES

1. See also Julia Sass Rubin, "Op-Ed: New Jersey Public Schools—Separate, Unequal, and Unfair" (10/3/13) NJ Spotlight, at <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/13/10/02/op-ed-nj-public-schools-separate-unequal-and-unfair>.
2. See, e.g., John Mooney, "Motion Filed in State's Top Court Challenges Christie Over School Aid" (3/28/14) NJ Spotlight, at <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/14/03/27/motion-filed-in-state-s-top-court-challenges-christie-over-school-aid>; and Press Release, "Legislature Must Reject Governor Christie's Proposed FY15 School Aid Budget" (3/18/14) Education Law Center, at <http://www.edlawcenter.org/news/archives/school-funding/legislature-must-reject-governor-christies-proposed-fy15-school-aid-budget.html>.
3. "Outrage: Cami Anderson to Newark: 'Who Cares What You Think?'" (2/25/14), at <http://jerseyjazzman.blogspot.com/2014/02/outrage-cami-anderson-to-newark-who.html>; and Jeannette Rundquist, "Christie to Newark: We Run the School District" (9/5/13) Star-Ledger, at http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2013/09/christie_to_newark_we_run_the_school_district.html.
4. Mark Mueller, "Newark Schools Chief Warns of Massive Teacher Layoffs; and Wants Pink Slips Tied to Performance" (2/25/14), Star-Ledger, at <http://www.nj.com/education/2014/02/newark-schools-chief-warns-of-massive-teacher-layoffs-wants-pink-slips-pegged-to-performance.html>.
5. Both Gov. Christie and Superintendent Anderson have achieved national attention for Anderson's "reform" efforts. See, e.g., Leslie Brody, "Amid Controversy, Schools Chief Sees a Doable Job in Newark" (5/2/14) Wall Street Journal; and Charles Sahn, "Christie Tackles School Reform" (4/6/13) NY Post. The governor's positions have also endeared him to wealthy right-wing donors in advance of his expected presidential run, and the superintendent has received sizable bonuses from the state for meeting performance targets. John Mooney, "Against Backdrop of Contention, State Releases Anderson's Bonus Payments" (4/29/14) NJ Spotlight. See also Journey for Justice Alliance, *Death by a Thousand Cuts: Racism, School Closures, and Public School Sabotage* (May 2014).
6. See, e.g., Cami Anderson, "Poverty, Politics, Racism, and School Reform" (2/5/14) Huffington Post, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cami-anderson/poverty-politics-racism-school-reform_b_4730880.html?ncid=twetlnkushpmg0000023.
7. Journey for Justice Alliance, *supra* note 5.
8. Leslie Brody, *supra* note 5.
9. In structuring the results of our research, the Newark Promise has relied heavily on the Student Bill of Rights included in *The Philadelphia Community Education Plan: Excellent Schools for All Children* (Dec. 2012), by the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS).
10. Journey for Justice Alliance, *supra* note 5.
11. Diane Ravitch, "Pedro Noguera Explains the Demise of Newark's Global Village" (12/3/12), at <http://dianeravitch.net/2012/12/03/pedro-noguera-explains-the-demise-of-newarks-global-village>.
12. Martin J. Blank, et al., *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success* (Nov. 2010), Coalition for Community Schools, at <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/assetmanager/finance-paper.pdf>.
13. Education Law Center, "Top 20 Worst Newark School Buildings" (12/3/13), at <http://www.edlawcenter.org/news/archives/school-facilities/top-20-worst-newark-school-buildings.html>.
14. Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* (2013), pg. 242, Random House.
15. Mark Mueller, *supra* note 4.
16. Associated Press, "Newark Lays Off More Than 100 School Employees" (3/1/13), at <http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2013/03/newark-lays-off-more-than-100.html>.
17. New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, at <http://www.njhealthykids.org/communities/newark>.
18. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 27-28.
19. See, e.g., School Redesign Network at Stanford University and Justice Matters, *High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color* (2007), at http://srn-leads.org/resources/publications/pdf/hse/hse_report.pdf; Marisa Saunders and Christopher A. Chrisman, *Linking Learning to the 21st Century: Preparing All Students for College, Career, and Civic Participation* (4/7/11), at <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/linking-learning>; Jeanie Oakes and Marisa Saunders, *Multiple Pathways: Bringing School to Life* (July 2009), UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access; and writings of Lisa Delpit, Pedro Noguera and Gloria Ladson-Billings.
20. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 28.
21. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 28-29.
22. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, *Straight Talk on Teaching Quality: Six Game-Changing Ideas and What to Do About Them* (Dec. 2011), at 18-19. See also Michael Fullan, *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole School Reform* (2011), Centre for Strategic Education.
23. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 28-29; and Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, *supra* note 21.
24. *Id.*; PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 28-29; and Forum for Education and Democracy, *Effective Teachers, High Achievers: Investing in a Teaching Profession*, at http://forumforeducation.org/sites/default/files/u48/Teaching_Brief_1009_v1.pdf, at 5.
25. *Id.*; PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 29; and American Federation of Teachers, "Hard-to-Staff Schools," at <http://aft.org/issues/teaching/hardtostaff/index.cfm>.
26. *Id.*; and PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 29.
27. *Id.*; and Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, *supra* note 22, at 3-4.
28. See, e.g., Committee on Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Public Education (Michael Hout and Stuart W. Elliott, editors), *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education* (2011), National Research Council; Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (2010), New York: Basic Books; Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (2010), New York: Teachers College Press; Advancement Project, *Test, Punish, and Push Out: How "Zero Tolerance" and High-Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (March 2010), at 13, 28; and Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner, *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools* (2007), Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
29. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 30-31; Linda Darling-Hammond and Frank Adamson, *Beyond Basic Skills: The Role of Performance Assessments in Achieving 21st Century Standards of Learning* (2010), Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education; Forum on Educational Accountability, *Assessment and Accountability for Improving Schools and Learning: Principles and Recommendations for Federal Law and State and Local Systems* (Aug. 2007); and Forum for Education and Democracy, *Beyond Standardized Tests: Investing in a Culture of Learning* (2009), at 3, at http://www.forumforeducation.org/sites/default/files/u48/Learning_Brief_1209_v1.pdf.
30. *Id.*
31. See, e.g., PRNewswire, "'Zero Tolerance for Zero Tolerance Policies': Newark Public Schools and Newark Police Department Launch Historic Initiative with the International Institute for Restorative Practices to End the School to Prison Pipeline" (8/19/13) at <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/zero-tolerance-for-zero-tolerance-policies-newark-public-schools-and-newark-police-department-launch-historic-initiative-with-the-international-institute-for-restorative-practices-to-end-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-220170981.html>.
32. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 33-34.
33. See, e.g., Matthew P. Steinberg et al., *Student and Teacher Safety in Chicago Public Schools: The Roles of Community Context and School Social Organization* (May 2011), Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.
34. Advancement Project, Alliance for Educational Justice and Gay-Straight Alliance Network, *Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Why Zero Tolerance is Not the Solution to Bullying*, 14-15 (June 2012), at http://gsanetwork.org/files/aboutus/APJ-005_D5-FINALsmall.pdf.
35. The accountability system described here relies heavily on the system proposed by PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 31-32.
36. For example, the types of data and evidence that should be easily accessible include: class size ranges and averages; access to art, music, world languages and physical education programs; availability of after-school programs; facility quality and features; other community resources offered within the school; parent and student perspectives (through surveys); availability of advanced curricula; teacher and principal experience and qualifications; teacher and principal turnover; access to social workers, school psychologists, guidance counselors and nurses; access to staffed school libraries; school discipline data and methods; evidence of student and parent involvement; student attendance; graduation rates; and assessment results.
37. The complaint system should involve multiple levels, though most complaints could be handled through nonadversarial processes by individual school administrators or the Excellence and Equity committees. However, there should also be a process involving district-level bodies or even impartial arbiters to address concerns that go unresolved or are more serious or systemic in nature.
38. See, e.g., *School Accountability: A Broader, Bolder Approach* (June 2009), a Report of the Accountability Committee of the "Broader Bolder Approach to Education" Campaign; Forum for Education and Democracy, *Creating a National Culture of Learning: The Forum for Education & Democracy's Recommendations for the Reauthorization of ESEA*, at 8, at http://www.forumforeducation.org/sites/default/files/u48/FED_Short_Paper_on_ESEA.pdf; and Gary Ratner and Monty Neill, *Integrating 'Helping Schools Improve' with 'Accountability' Under ESEA: The Key Role for Qualitative, as Well as Quantitative, Evaluations and the Use of 'Inspectorates'* (Working Paper No. 2, Dec. 15, 2009), at <http://www.fairtest.org/k-12/accountability>.
39. PCAPS, *supra* note 9, at 32-33.
40. Jeannette Rundquist, *supra* note 3.
41. *Supra* note 3.
42. Newark Public Schools, *Realizing 100 Excellent Schools: A Look into the 2014-15 NPS Budget*, at http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/cms/lib7/NJ01001467/Centricity/Domain/1/Budget%20Hearing_FY1415_v.final.pdf.
43. Interview with Stan Karp, Education Law Center (5/9/14).

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