

The Next Three Years



**NEWARK
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

SUMMARY OF FIVE COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS

February 23, 2016

Newark Public Schools co-hosted five community meetings — one in each ward — to get input into the three-year strategic plan it is developing. Each meeting was co-hosted by a local community organization — East: Ironbound Community Corp.; West: Newark Fairmont Promise Neighborhood; North: La Casa de Don Pedro; Central: United Way of Essex & West Hudson; and South: Strong Healthy Community Initiative. Community participation ranged from about 60 to 120 per meeting.

Participants spent most of their time in small-group discussions, which were organized around seven key topics, with several initial ideas for action within each topic. At the end of each session, group members were asked to prioritize their options, pretending they had to allocate \$100 among several choices. (We did not do such a prioritization exercise during our first meeting in the East Ward.) They also were asked to complete a survey.

The following presents the preferred ideas on each topic, drawn from the surveys and meeting discussions. Complete notes and ward-level scores are available at www.nps.k12.nj.us/strategic-plan.

Curriculum and Academics

Increase participation in and quality of Pre-K programs

Offer more arts during and after school

Strengthen science, technology, engineering, and math content

Increase focus on humanities (literature, social studies, etc.) and language, including cultural relevance

For example:

- *Teach African-American, African, immigrant, Latin American, and Indigenous history to engage the students in their own ancestry*
- *Reduce class sizes*
- *More vocational ed, especially computer coding*
- *Add entrepreneurship program*
- *Overhaul English as a Second Language*
- *Update science labs*
- *Improve technology: Internet speed, bandwidth, updated computer systems, current software*
- *More reading specialists*
- *Make sure long-term subs know about students' IEPs*
- *Head Start for all*
- *Many questions and concerns about new PARCC test*
- *Back to basics such as penmanship, cursive writing, phonics, home economics*
- *Boost kids' critical thinking skills and prepare teachers and children for Common Core and PARCC*
- *Students are leaving second grade not ready for third grade*
- *Teachers need to work across subjects and grades on whole-school goals*
- *Need state-of-the-art technology to learn in a 21st-century manner*
- *Families need to be more engaged in their children's education if students are going to do well academically*

- *More after-school programming by community-based programs such as boxing, AAU basketball, baseball, chess, karate, ROTC, and Girl Scouts*
- *Return co-op education, mix of classwork and internships*

"The arts and vocational schools should be available to ALL students."

"Infuse STEM in EVERYTHING!"

"Bring back Reading Recovery!"

"Although curriculum and instruction clearly needs to be a higher priority for NPS, testing should not be confused with it. Testing is not instruction. The students are over-tested and do not try, and are very verbal about the fact that they do not try."

Student Supports

Provide more customized social and emotional supports

Customize academic supports for each student to ensure instruction and resources meet their needs

Improve school building security and school culture to make sure students feel safe

For example:

- *Bolster home-school partnerships*
- *Incentives for staff so they are fairly paid*
- *Full-service Child Study Teams*
- *Shift from punishment to rehabilitation*
- *Restorative justice approaches*
- *Guidance counselors, attendance counselors*
- *Reintroduce Truancy Task Force and child study teams*
- *More non-ed services, like school health, dental, and mental health, as well as GED classes for parents*
- *Strong support for community schools. A few asked, Why does South Ward have one and we don't?*
- *More affordable after-school*
- *"More trust, affection, love"*
- *Create Individual Household Plans for families to supplement student IEPs*

"Update the discipline policy. There is no discipline policy for cell phones."

Great Educators

Recognize and retain effective principals and teachers

Ensure qualified principals and teachers in every school and classroom

Develop strong processes for recruiting and supporting principals and teachers

Coach, evaluate, and provide feedback for principals and teachers to help them continuously improve their effectiveness

For example:

- *Better branding/PR to aid recruitment*
- *More Master Teachers and Career Coaches*
- *More certified teachers, fewer subs*
- *Students want teachers to try harder to see their point of view, respect them, pay attention to them, relate to them, support them, and care about them if they fall behind*
- *Teachers are too often disrespected by students; administrators need to support teachers having trouble with students and foster a respectful learning environment*

- *Lots of concerns about substitute teachers. Too many of them. Pay teachers more to teach extra classes instead of using subs. Partner with universities to have student teachers work as subs. Train and incentivize quality subs to become permanent.*
- *Do exit interviews with teachers who are leaving, especially mid-year. Find out why.*
- *Create training programs that foster vertical alignment of the curriculum*
- *Evaluate the training and professional development programs*
- *Recruit within Newark — teachers who know the community*
- *Keep some teachers with some students longer (e.g., when there are learning delays and in elementary school)*
- *If a school doesn't have a qualified teacher in a subject, let students travel to other schools for that subject*
- *Coach teachers, evaluate them, and provide meaningful feedback*

"If NPS allowed teachers and staff to help in making decisions such as curriculum, things would be better. We know our children. We know our schools."

"There should be training for General Ed teachers when they have multiple children with special needs in their classroom. Personal aides should also have training in their children's individual needs."

"Great educators need to know their subject. But to work in an urban area, you also need the right kind of heart."

Community Engagement

Expand partnerships with community organizations and colleges

Conduct regular conversations with parents, grandparents, principals, teachers, students

Ensure that central office and schools regularly engage school staff, families and other community stakeholders about key decisions

Establish structures and supports for working with non-English-speaking communities

Train parents and community members on how to effectively advocate for their children's needs

For example:

- *Make all flyers and materials bilingual*
- *Make sure to translate the guidebook into multiple languages*
- *More timely information*
- *Make information relevant to parents*
- *Too many parents feel uncomfortable talking with administrators*
- *Have better outreach than backpack mail; more use of texting to alert parents to events*
- *Barriers to participation: time, language, frustration with bureaucracy*
- *Work more with community organizations, businesses, and colleges*
- *Businesses should mentor; have adopt-a-child/adopt-a-school programs*
- *Bring back the "snapshot"*
- *Parents especially need training on how to advocate for their kids, particularly special-needs students*
- *Consensus that parent involvement and student achievement go hand in hand*
- *Parents need to feel more welcome in schools*
- *Schools need a more positive culture*
- *Families need educating on how to attend college, how to pay for it, how to apply, etc.*
- *Every school should have parent liaisons*
- *Bring back essay-based work to help teachers understand students' comprehension*
- *International travel program within schools, plus externships with city-based programs and private organizations*

"Get more parents involved with students and the community."

"Train parents how to communicate with students and teachers, and partner together to make education successful."

“Partner with colleges in the area. There is a host of pre-college programs that are funded by the federal government.”

School Planning and Choice

Inform and work with the school community when making decisions about school locations, improving or ending ineffective programs, and use of school buildings

Assess programmatic and educational needs of each ward and the availability of quality school options

Successfully implement “community school” pilot to provide more non-academic supports to South Ward students and families; plan for expansion elsewhere

For example:

- *Lots of questions about charters. Concerns about money drain. Curiosity about what NPS can learn from them.*
- *Create neighborhood preference within choice system*
- *Phase in new schools one grade at a time, like charters*
- *Offer more flexible enrollment options: in person, better web portal*
- *Understand social and emotional reasons why parents choose*
- *Make schools focal point of communities, part of neighborhood rebuilding*
- *Look at re-use of buildings*
- *Keep schools public, don’t privatize the public education system*
- *Impose a moratorium on new schools (for at least three years)*
- *Cut funding for charters to move that money back to traditional district schools*
- *Eliminate One Newark*
- *Stop the co-locations of schools*
- *Re-establish feeder schools so our schools can remain open*
- *Have a public relations campaign to market schools to parents*
- *Can’t have quality choice program without better transportation*

Accountability for Progress

Train families and community to interpret information about district and school performance and progress to help them make informed educational choices, including enrollment

Train district and school staff to analyze and use student learning data to make decisions and improvements

For example:

- *Divided responsibility, from board to principals, impedes decision-making*
- *Create Community School Boards, with grant writers, to help with outreach, problem-solving, funding*
- *Unclear how data is used or if it’s consistent*
- *Provide short reports, but give access to complete data for those who want it*
- *Mandate that teachers respond in timely ways when parents call*
- *Customer service people in enrollment need to be helpful and professional all the time. Inconsistent now.*
- *Add alumni surveys to the data schools collect*
- *Families don’t know what the key data are and what schools are being held accountable for*
- *What voice do volunteers in the community have?*
- *If we disagree with the superintendent, how do we express that and will it be heard?*
- *Need more transparency on data*
- *More community meetings*
- *How should parents interpret special needs test scores? Are they held to the same standards? Should they be?*
- *How is the central office and leadership team held accountable?*
- *Bring in trainers to help the community interpret data at the individual school level*
- *You can’t hold schools accountable if local teams don’t have ownership of schools*
- *Post all public notices and meetings on web site, more transparency*
- *If teachers are accountable for their success, it should be uniform. Use apples-to-apples comparisons – that’s fair.*

- *Focus on the good, not just the bad, when reporting*
- *How do you hold parents accountable?*

“Information needs to be accessible in all forms, including print. Be mindful that not all have internet access.”

“The vague notion of a Turnaround school needs to be defined....The list of Turnaround Schools grows without any regard for performance improvements or a specific plan to achieve a goal and be removed from the list.”

Operations, Budgets, and Governance

Improve school services (janitorial, food, etc.)

Continuously update policies to meet evolving needs of all students and staff, and to align with current operations

Expand training for school district staff and School Advisory Board members on district policies

Allocate school-based funds based on students’ needs, such as more funding for special education students

For example:

- *Make state pay full share*
- *Not enough money is getting to the classroom*
- *Schools need more books and supplies*
- *Change the funding formula*
- *Schools can’t plan ahead because budgets are yearly*
- *NPS needs to do everything in compliance to get and maintain local control*
- *Hold superintendent accountable; parents too*
- *Will programs continue to exist when politics/administrations change?*
- *Simplify budgets, make principals responsible for presenting to community*
- *More budget transparency*
- *Extend security to after school*
- *Improve food quality, make administrators eat what the kids eat*
- *Need full funding to address \$70m deficit*
- *Partnerships to help get healthier food, reduce deficits*
- *Have community stakeholders help school board interview superintendent, other leaders*
- *Return to having budget meetings at each school, add it to school calendars*
- *How much does the free and reduced-price lunch program cost?*

“Strong, committed, sustained school leadership as well as qualified, committed teachers are always key to success. But the systems and supports and resources are also critical.”

“Biggest priority should be to return local control.”

“Local control now and the rest will take care of itself.”

“I am thoroughly convinced that things are going to get better in the future....”

“All are priorities.”

“Newark deserves the best, just like every town in New Jersey.”