

# Correcting the Facts about the One Newark Plan

## A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO 100 EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One Newark is a community-wide agenda to ensure all students are in excellent schools and thriving communities and are on the path to excel in college and 21st century careers. Out of 100 schools in Newark, only about 20 are good. One Newark's commitment is to ensure our children have 100 excellent schools.

The following report was written by the Newark Public Schools' (NPS) Office of Strategy and Innovation to correct the misstatements made by Mark Weber and Bruce D. Baker's "An Empirical Critique of 'One Newark'" and released by the New Jersey Education Policy Forum, a non-affiliated blog run by Professor Baker.

### THE ONE NEWARK PLAN

Making the vision of One Newark a reality has not and will not be easy. The One Newark Plan addresses four core, undeniable challenges:

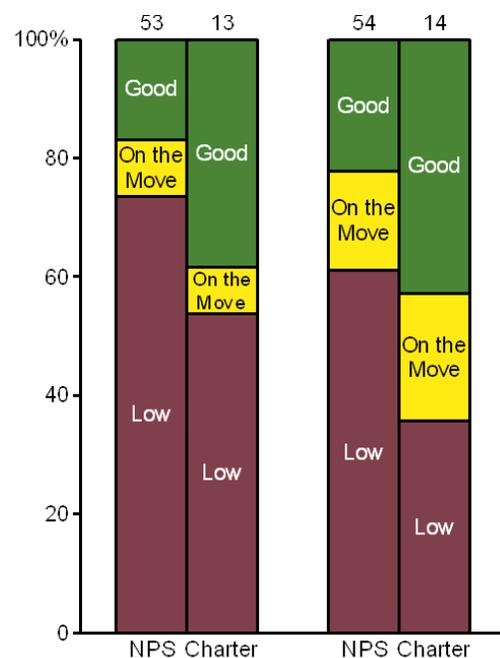
#### CHALLENGE 1: CHRONIC UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT AND LACK OF EQUITY

Excellent schools are the promise, but many – both public charter and district – are seriously under-performing. Despite tremendous past efforts, the number of good, let alone excellent schools is too small.<sup>1, 2</sup>

#### CHALLENGE 2: DECLINING ENROLLMENT

Families want excellent schools and they are "voting with their feet."<sup>3,4</sup> About half of our families are expressing dissatisfaction with NPS and are seeking other options, including charter schools. Right now, approximately 8,000 students are in public charter schools and 10,000 families are on waiting lists.

Graph 1: NPS and Charter K-8 Schools by Performance Group, 2010-11 to 2011-12



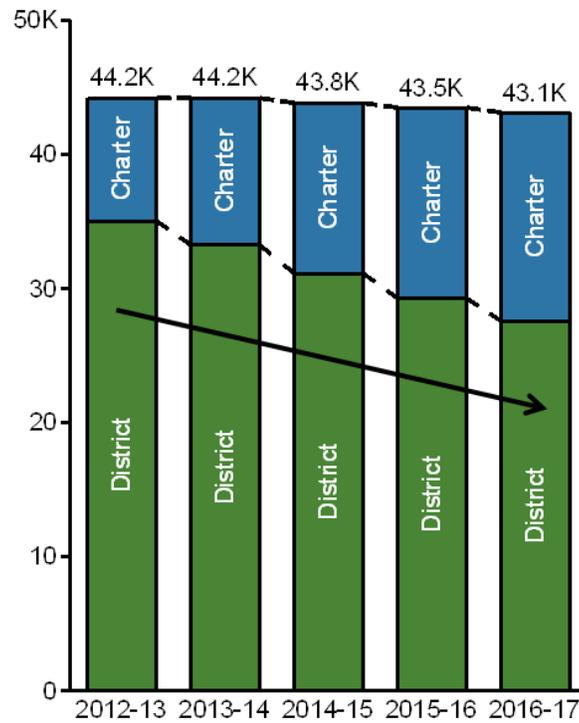
<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Building-a-System-One-Newark-Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Performance Group Definitions based student performance on the NJ ASK: Low – Average LAL Proficiency is below 200, and median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) is below 50. On the Move – Average LAL Proficiency is below 200, but median SGP is above 50 or SGP has improved by 8 points. Good – Average LAL Proficiency is above 200.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Building-a-System-One-Newark-Plan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> This is based on charters that have already been approved growing to scale.

Graph 2: K-12 Students in Newark, 2012-13 to 2016-17



**CHALLENGE 3: DECLINING BUDGET**

When students leave, the funding goes with them. As a result, by school year 2016-2017, 36% (\$249M) of NPS’ general fund will go toward charter school payments (See Graph 3: NPS Budget, 2010-11 to 2016-2017P).<sup>5</sup>

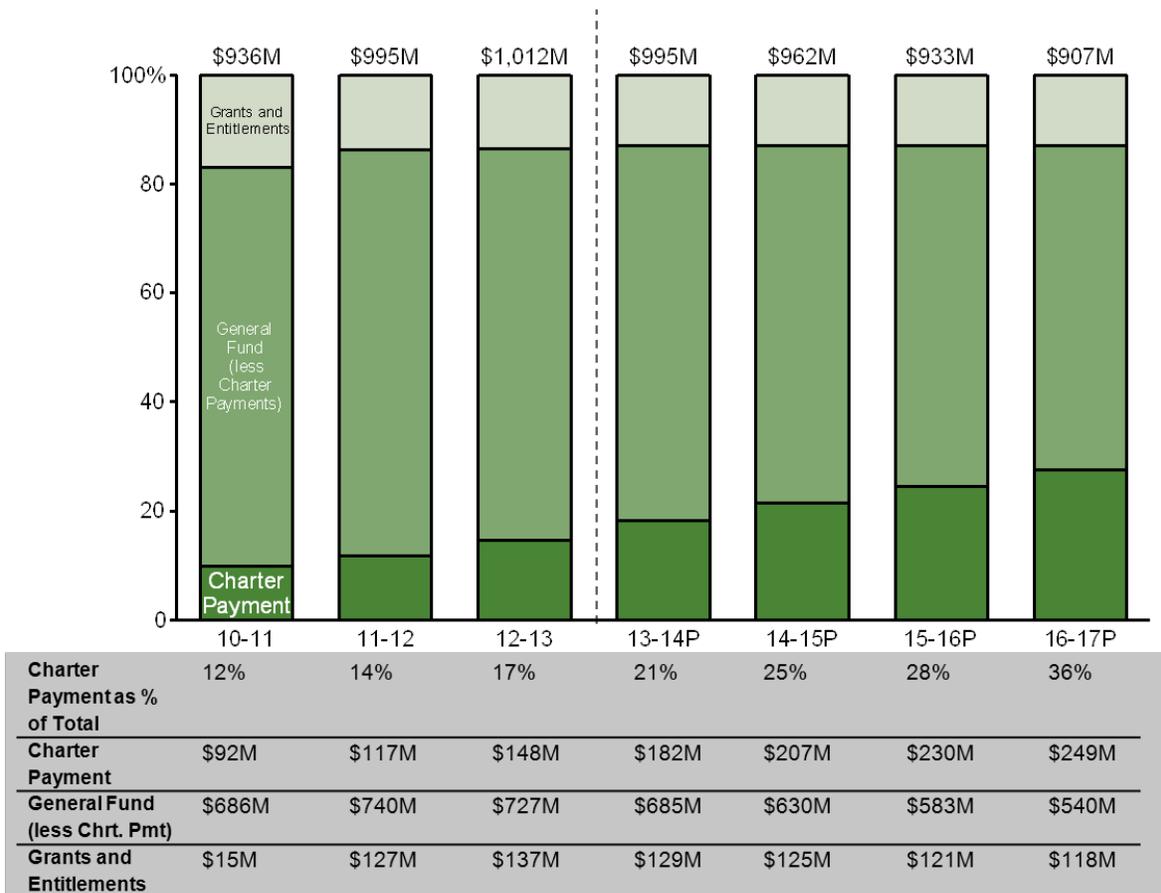
**CHALLENGE 4: UN-LEVEL PLAYING FIELD**

Newark Public Schools must be able to compete with charter schools. Current facilities and labor policies place far too many constraints on the district. This should not lead us to slow the growth of high performing charter schools – it should lead us to advocate for the very conditions that help them succeed.

After decades of inaction, the One Newark Plan advocates for a series of solutions guided by three core principles: Excellence, Equity, and Efficiency. More information about the One Newark Plan can be found at: [onewark.org](http://onewark.org).

<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Building-a-System-One-Newark-Plan.pdf>

Graph 3: NPS Budget, 2010-11 to 2016-17(Projected)



## THE FACTS – REVIEW OF BAKER AND WEBER CONCLUSIONS

### FACT #1: SEVEN QUESTIONS GUIDED THE DEVELOPMENT OF BETTER EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

In their report, Baker and Weber claim that NPS’ rationale for determining which schools to target for closure, renewal, or charter takeover is based only on academic performance and building utilization. However, these were not the only two factors considered by NPS in its decision making process. To achieve the goal of providing better educational opportunities for all students in Newark, seven guiding questions led to the development of the long-term ward plans:<sup>6</sup>

1. **What is the quality of our buildings?** NPS facilities are not 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments. For decades, accumulated wear and under-investments have caused the district’s buildings to steadily deteriorate. It will cost over \$1.3 billion to bring all buildings to 21<sup>st</sup> century standards.
  - How do we ensure we have a plan for every single building?
  - How do we invest money in our best and/or most used facilities?

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Building-a-System-One-Newark-Plan.pdf>

2. **How many early childhood classrooms currently exist?** Similar to the K-8 landscape, families are voting with their feet and choosing other early childhood options. Quality and enrollment trends of early childhood options differ by ward.
  - How do we create conditions for strong oversight, community engagement and management?
  - How do we consolidate sites to ensure quality?
  
3. **How many district K-8 schools do we need based on enrollment trends?** Across public charter and district schools, we serve 43K students. As a result of charter growth – just the ones that have already been approved growing “to scale” – NPS will go from serving 95% of students in school year 2009-2010 to about 60% by school year 2016-2017.
  - How do we bring back and retain students in NPS K-8 schools?
  - How do we work with high performing K-8 charters to align supply and demand?
  
4. **What are the different options available for high school students?** Currently, our students in the greatest need of support are not enrolled in programs to meet their needs. Since 2010-11, over 7,500 students dropped out or disconnected from NPS between the ages of 14 and 21.<sup>7</sup> In addition, all trends indicate that Weequahic, West Side, and Shabazz will continue to decline in enrollment absent bold solutions. During the 2013 High School Admissions Process, only 56 out of 3,009 applicants ranked West Side in their top three choices; 100 out of 3,009 applicants ranked Shabazz in their top three choices; and 104 out of 3,009 applications ranked Weequahic in their top three choices.<sup>8</sup> NPS will lose 2,000 out of 8,000 high school seats by 2016. Weequahic, West Side, and Shabazz were built to serve 1,500 to 2,000 students each. Today, these schools collectively serve approximately 1,500 students.
  - How do we ensure that school offerings in high school are most aligned to student needs – and represent diverse school models?
  
5. **How does the plan preserve history and community?** Schools are historical, community institutions that anchor neighborhoods across the city. NPS is committed to preserving the historical importance of educational institutions.
  - What can be done to acknowledge and preserve our educational institutions, even when there are enrollment and facilities challenges??
  
6. **What will be the impact on neighborhoods?** All neighborhoods should have great schools. Currently many new charter schools are being built downtown, in the Central Ward, leaving some of the poorest wards – primarily the South and West -- with even fewer students in sub-standard buildings. We must invest in excellent schools, including charters, in every ward. Schools are anchors of this community and we must embrace that in our quest for great schools.
  - How do we ensure quality schools in all neighborhoods?
  
7. **Which buildings do we need to divest (e.g., monetize or level)?** In the South, West, and Central wards we currently have too many low quality schools in crumbling buildings and very few good schools; this means we must re-purpose some buildings, convert some schools to other educational institutions, and divest some. Empty buildings cost money to maintain and create other challenges in the community.

<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/One-Newark-Plan-Memo.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://onewark.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/One-Newark-Presentation.pdf>

**FACT #2: SCHOOLS DESIGNATED FOR “CHARTER TAKEOVER” AND “CLOSURE” EXPERIENCE LOW BUILDING UTILIZATION RATES, INDICATING LOW DEMAND FOR SCHOOLS**

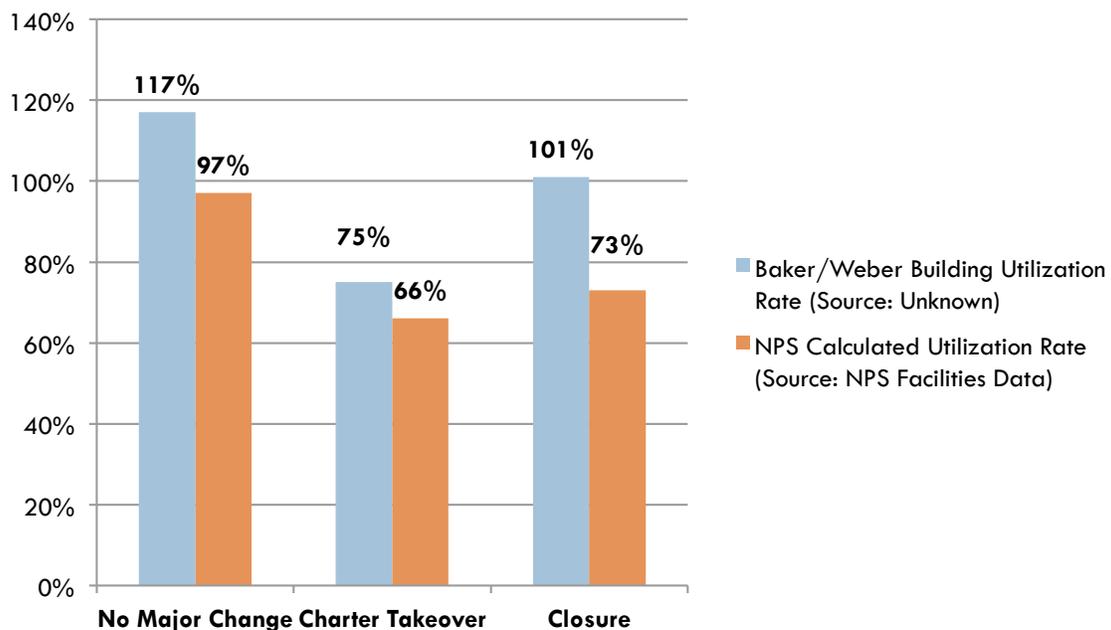
Families want excellent schools and they are “voting with their feet.”

- Across public charter and district schools, we serve 43,000 students.
- As charters continue to grow to scale, based upon their State approved growth plans, NPS will go from serving 95% of students in school year 2009-2010 to about 60% by school year 2016-2017.
- Nearly half of our families are expressing dissatisfaction with NPS and seeking other options.
  - Currently, approximately 8,000 students are in public charter schools and 10,000 families are on waiting lists.
  - In the South ward alone, 40% of families are applying for charter seats.
  - We see a similar phenomenon in non-NPS run early childhood sites
- As a result of families leaving NPS, district schools are increasingly under-enrolled and underutilized.

The Baker and Weber report does recognize that student enrollment trends can be a “legitimate reason to consider reorganizing enrollment across schools.” However, they claim that building utilization is not a significant predictor of whether a school was slated for closure or charter takeover. The source of the data used by the authors is unknown and the data is inconsistent with that collected by NPS.<sup>9</sup>

Graph 4 below shows the inaccurate average utilization rates presented in the report and those most recently calculated by NPS. As shown, the average building utilization rates are much lower than the report claims for those schools slated for closure or charter takeover.

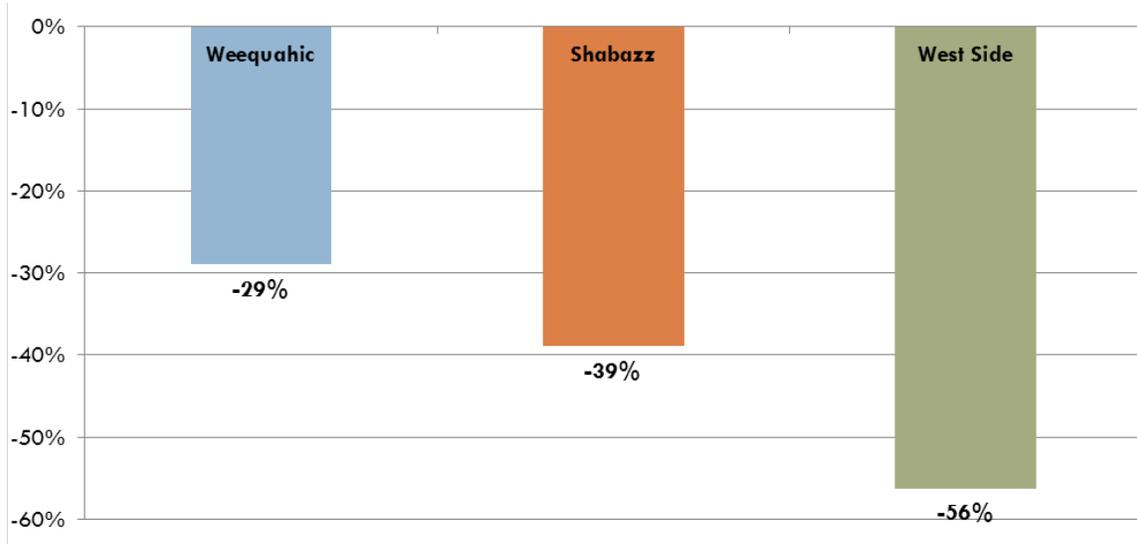
*Graph 4: Building Utilization Rates*



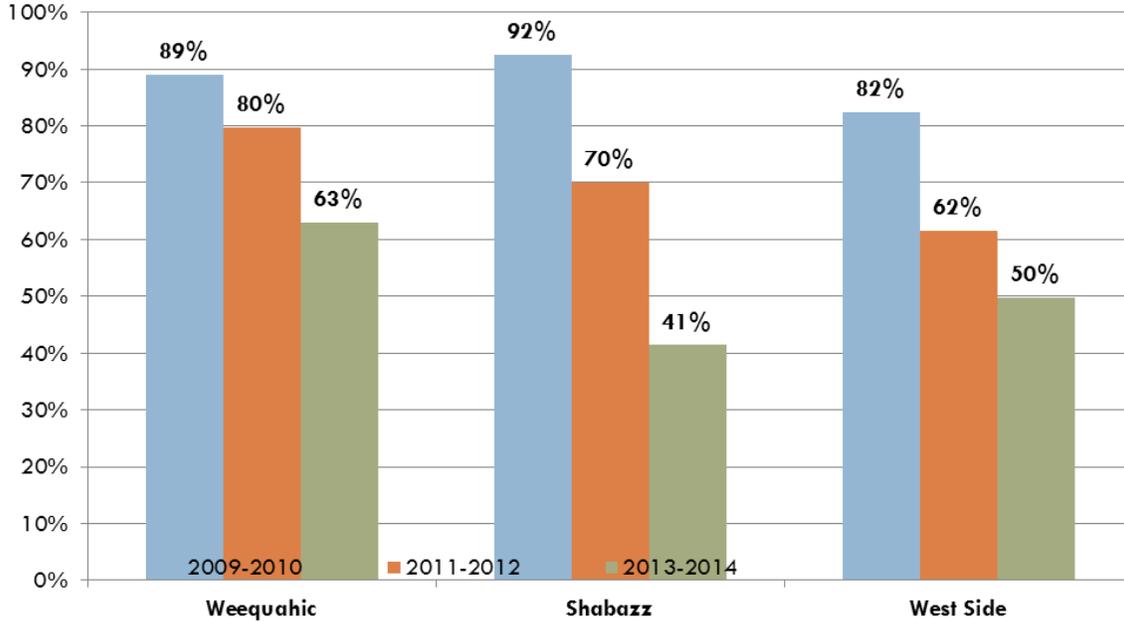
<sup>9</sup> NPS facilities data can be found here: <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/Page/129>

Furthermore, NPS' comprehensive high schools have experienced a significant decline in building utilization rates. Graph 5 describes the decline in enrollment at Weequahic, Shabazz, and West Side from 2009-2010 to 2013-2014 and graph 6 describes the impact on building utilization rates.<sup>10, 11</sup>

**Graph 5: Comprehensive High School Enrollment**



**Graph 6: Comprehensive High School Building Utilization Rates**



<sup>10</sup> Source: NPS Enrollment Data

<sup>11</sup> Sources: NPS Enrollment and Facilities Data

**FACT #3: NPS IS REPLACING FAILING DISTRICT SCHOOLS WITH CHARTERS WHO HAVE AN ACADEMIC TRACK RECORD AND SERVE HIGH NEED STUDENTS BETTER THAN DISTRICT SCHOOLS**

In 2012, Stanford’s nonpartisan Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) released a long awaited and highly cited academic study on the impact of Charter schools both nationally and in the state of New Jersey.<sup>12</sup> The study provides what many consider the most comprehensive analysis on Charter schools ability to improve academic outcomes.

- The CREDO study found that students attending charter schools in Newark perform significantly better than their counterparts in District schools.
- The research finds that Charter school students, as compared to students in District schools, gain an additional seven and a half months of learning in reading and nine months in math per year.
- In fact, the study finds that the majority of Newark charter schools are among the highest performing in the state.

The Baker and Weber report claims that Charter schools such as TEAM Academy and North Star Academy have never served populations similar to those served by District schools and that we cannot expect that “charters will yield better outcomes with those same children.”

- While Charter schools have not always been required to serve a similar percentage of high need students, on average, high need students whom they have served perform significantly better than they have at District schools.
- Table 1 below shows the average LAL (Language Arts Literacy) scale scores for specific subgroups of students. Charter schools, specifically TEAM and North Star, serve these subgroups of students better than their District counterparts.
- Looking ahead, One Newark Enrolls, a system of universal enrollment, preferences students with high needs (e.g., students eligible for free lunch and students with Individualized Educational Plans) to achieve greater equity across the entire system of schools.

*Table 1: Average -2013 LAL Scores by Subgroup<sup>13</sup>*

Population	District Students	Charter Students	TEAM	North Star
Special Education	166	181	180	191
Free Lunch	188	202	201	213
Special Education & Free Lunch	166	181	180	190
Black	184	203	203	217
Hispanic	193	210	202	217

In their report, Baker and Weber produce some thought provoking analyses, utilizing complex statistical modeling techniques. While their models yield information which supports their viewpoints, the authors make some questionable decisions in their research. These decisions may impact some of the conclusions reached.

In figures 6 and 7 of their report Weber and Baker show the difference from the predicted proficiency rate for K-8 schools in LAL and Math respectively. The authors utilize these data to claim that several

<sup>12</sup> Center For Research on Education Outcomes, 2012. The report can be found here: [http://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/nj\\_state\\_report\\_2012\\_FINAL11272012\\_000.pdf](http://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/nj_state_report_2012_FINAL11272012_000.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Data are based on 2012-2013 NJ ASK LAL scores. Students are assigned to a roster based on their October 15, 2012 enrollment.

schools slated for closure have a higher proficiency rates than predicted and that TEAM Academy has a lower proficiency rate than predicted. However, parts of the methodology utilized in this analysis are questionable and the conclusions reached may be inaccurate.

The authors chose to use only one grade of school proficiency data in their prediction model. They use only grade 8 because, as they say, “most NPS elementary schools encompass Pre-K or Kindergarten through Eighth Grade, which makes these the final tests students will take at their school.”

- Using only 8<sup>th</sup> grade data when data is available for grades 3 through 8 provides a far less comprehensive measure.
- In addition, while the 8<sup>th</sup> grade methodology might fit a district where the majority of students spend all or most of their K-8 years in the same school, students in NPS transfer at high rates, upward of 20% in a given year.
- Thus, a student’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade score is not necessarily reflective of multiple years of learning at the same school.

These methodological concerns may be the cause for the authors’ conclusion that TEAM Academy performed below expectations in both Math and LAL. The results of an NPS run model which utilizes average LAL scale scores in grades three through eight as the dependent variables and the percent of English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education, Free Lunch, Black, and Hispanic students as independent variables is seen table 4. The results of a similar model, but for grade 8 only, are seen in table 5.

- As shown in tables 2 and 3 Charter schools, on average, score higher than predicted, whereas District schools, on average, score the same as their prediction.
- In addition, both tables show that TEAM and North Star, have significantly higher average LAL scores than predicted.

**Table 2: Predicted Average LAL Scale Scores vs. Actual Average LAL Scale Scores (Grades 3-8)<sup>14</sup>**

	District School Average	Charter School Average	TEAM	North Star
Predicted Average LAL Scale Score	189	200	196	203
Actual Average LAL Scale Score	189	202	203	216
Difference between Predicted and Actual Average LAL Scale Score	+0	+2	+7	+13

<sup>14</sup> Average LAL scores are based on 2012-2013 NJ ASK scores. Students are assigned to schools based on their October 15, 2012 enrollment.

**Table 3: Predicted Average LAL Scale Scores vs. Actual Average LAL Scale Scores (Grade 8 Only)<sup>15</sup>**

	District School Average	Charter School Average	TEAM	North Star
Predicted Average LAL Scale Score	201	214	207	213
Actual Average LAL Scale Score	201	216	211	224
Difference between Predicted and Actual Average LAL Scale Score	+0	+2	+4	+11

**FACT #4: THE ONE NEWARK PLAN SEEKS TO BREAK UP THE CONCENTRATION OF NEED**

Education is a personal asset that benefits not only the individual, but also families and communities. We know that education is a central determinant of earning capacity. Education promotes civic responsibility and economic opportunity. Yet, after decades, Newark children continue to face unequal access to excellent schools.

In 2010, the Center for Collaborative Change (“The Center”) issued the “Newark Community Needs Assessment”, which captured solutions that have the greatest promise of interrupting a cycle of poverty that currently holds Newark back.<sup>16</sup> The Center highlighted the impact of intergenerational poverty on the concentration of need in certain neighborhoods:

Indices of child and family well-being have shown that Newark is a difficult place to live. In this, the largest city in the second wealthiest state in the nation, 25% of families live in poverty; 25% of individuals lack health insurance; 44% of children are overweight or obese; and 25% of children have asthma. Just over half of Newark students complete high school, nearly half of whom lack basic eighth grade skills. The circumstances prompting these statistics are not unrelated. Decades of disinvestment and isolation from what we call a ‘wellness economy’ has resulted in a weak local market for healthful options and high rates of illness with devastating social and economic consequences. Newark’s low-income residents cannot afford to live in a healthful environment; and the costs of unhealthy living further destabilize families and entrench people in poverty.<sup>17</sup>

The Center’s findings go on to describe the unequal distribution of low performing schools in Newark: The highest proficiencies [on the NJASK grade 2 assessments] are in the West, North, and East Wards, with the Central and South wards showing average or low proficiencies overall. No schools in the South or Central wards saw more than 75% of students performing at or above proficiency [on the NJ ASK grade 8 assessments], and most saw 50-75% performing below proficiency in one subject.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Average LAL scores are based on 2012-2013 NJ ASK scores. Students are assigned to schools based on their October 15, 2012 enrollment.

<sup>16</sup> The report can be found here: <http://newarkchange.org/data-and-reports/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://newarkchange.org/projects/healthyhubs/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://newarkchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/4-Child-and-Family-Well-Being-final.pdf>

This is not a new phenomenon; however, Weber and Baker assert that the One Newark Plan creates a concentration effect. As table 4 describes below, no matter the administration or methodology, the number of good, let alone excellent schools is too small.

- All 12 of the K-8 Newark Public Schools in the South Ward are low quality.
- Only 5% of our students with disabilities graduate with a High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) diploma.
- Currently we see a "chooser effect" where some families "win" and others get "what's left." This concentrates the students in greatest need of support in the most struggling schools.

Students in the greatest need of support (those living in communities struggling with the most dire poverty, those with disabilities, those learning English as a second language, those who are "court involved") should have access to great schools. The One Newark Plan seeks to break the cycle of chronic underachievement and intergenerational poverty by:

- Partnering with high performing charter schools: As described in Table 1, charter schools, specifically TEAM and North Star, serve special education students, students eligible for free lunch students, as well as Black and Hispanic students better than their District counterparts.
- Renewing schools: Research confirms that successful schools, with high levels of student achievement, share the same five characteristics: great school leader; excellent teachers; clear mission and vision; safe building with flexible resources; and engagement with students and families. All Renew schools will hire and retain excellent staff; offer social and emotional supports that ensure students learn; and invest in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments.

**Table 4: School Performance Designations**

Performance Designation	Definition	K-8 School Count
Tier 5: Chronically Failing Schools (NPS, Dr. Janey's Administration)	Students do not achieve basic proficiency.	18
Priority Status (USDOE)	The types of Priority Schools are: 1. Lowest-Performing: Schools with the lowest school-wide proficiency rates in the state. Priority schools in this category have an overall three-year proficiency rate of 31.6% or lower. 2. SIG Recipients: Schools that are part of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program.	14

Focus Status (USDOE)	<p>The types of Focus schools are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low Graduation Rates: High schools with a 2011 graduation rate lower than 75%.</li> <li>2. Largest Within-School Gaps: schools with the largest in-school proficiency gap between the highest-performing subgroup and the combined proficiency of the two lowest-performing subgroups. Schools in this category have a proficiency gap between these subgroups of 43.5 percentage points or higher.</li> <li>3. Lowest Subgroup Performance: schools whose two lowest-performing subgroups rank among the lowest combined proficiency rates in the state. Schools in this category have an overall proficiency rate for these lowest-performing subgroups of 29.2% or lower.</li> </ol>	15
Falling Behind/Low (NPS)	Schools with this designation have an average NJASK scale score below the proficiency rate of 200 and have a median SGP less than 50. They demonstrate low performance and low growth.	38 (SY12-13)

## CONCLUSION

The One Newark Plan is grounded in 3 core principles: Excellence, Equity, and Efficiency.

### EXCELLENCE

All schools, charter and district, will be judged according to the same rigorous scorecard and the results will be available to everyone in our communities. We will continue to grow high-performing schools while ensuring that district schools enjoy the same conditions that allow charters to succeed.

- **Fact: Seven questions guided the development of better educational options for all students.** Making the vision of One Newark a reality has not and will not be easy. We face some undeniable facts about the quality of our buildings, decline in NPS student enrollment, chronic underachievement, and declining revenues – all of which were taken into account throughout the development of the long-term ward plans.
- **Fact: NPS is replacing failing district schools with charters who have an academic track record and serve high need students better than district schools.** Charter schools, specifically TEAM and North Star, serve students better than their District counterparts. For example, the 2012-2013 district school average LAL scale score was 189, compared to TEAM’s 203 and NSA’s 216 scale scores.

### EFFICIENCY

We will ensure that our workforce matches our budget, but will retain our top performing educators who will make our schools excellent and limit the impact of job cuts on our communities. We will not allow empty or dilapidated school buildings to become blight in our communities.

- **Fact: Schools designated for “charter takeover” and “closure” experience low building utilization rates, indicating low demand for schools.** While Baker and Weber recognize that student enrollment trends can be “a legitimate reason to consider reorganizing enrollment across schools,” the authors cite unknown facilities data indicating high utilization rates at charter

takeovers and closing schools. NPS facilities data located on the district's website indicate that charter takeover and closing schools' building utilization rates range from 63% to 73% - in contrast to 75% to 101% source unknown data from Baker and Weber.

## EQUITY

Our students with the greatest challenges – from the poorest homes, with disabilities, English language learners and those involved with the court system – will be served with excellent schools first, not last.

- **Fact: The One Newark Plan seeks to break up the concentration of need.** We know that education is a central determinant of earning capacity. Education promotes civic responsibility and economic opportunity. Yet, after decades, Newark children continue to face unequal access to excellent schools. The One Newark Plan seeks to break this cycle of chronic underachievement and intergenerational poverty by advocating for high-performing charter partners to serve students, rather than advocating for the status quo to remain.