

# New Jersey Department of Education/Newark Board of Education

## TRANSITION TO LOCAL CONTROL REPORT

### OVERVIEW

As the transition work in Newark continues, the implementation of the Transition Plan required that the District and the State (Highly Skilled Professional) stay focused on the many activities and timelines that relate to the withdrawal of State intervention. While much rests on the District's progress toward implementing the transition plan, as measured by the Accountability Scorecard, the real work is ensuring that all expectations for all five QSAC areas (Governance, Instruction & Program, Personnel, Fiscal Management, and Operations) are satisfied.

In July 2018, the Successor Superintendent, Roger Leon, started his administration as the new leader in Newark. With all the priorities that he had, he set the implementation of the Transition Plan as one of those priorities. Meeting with the HSP, he communicated how he wanted to roll out the importance of the Plan and made it extremely clear that he was the point person for this important task. Following were planned:

- Training session with all central office heads and any other designated staff person from various offices at which each left with a PowerPoint and a copy of the Accountability Scorecard
- Large blow-ups of the Accountability Scorecard for each office
- Presentation at Board meetings and Board retreats
- Updates at Executive Staff meetings
- Updates at Governance Committee meetings
- Updates at Central Office Staff Meetings and at Principals meetings

The District and the Highly Skilled Professional must meet the expectations in the Transition Plan through the indicators in the Accountability Scorecard and also the many actions required as referenced throughout the entire plan. Throughout this period, all processes and actions were documented and placed in binders for ready reference and/or maintained on file on the HSP's district computer. Where appropriate, necessary signatures of attendees were made available and also placed in binder. Since February of 2018, the HSP has met with Executive Staff and Department heads to advise on actions needed in order to ensure the implementation of the plan and kept focused on the plan by the HSP. Once the CAO was appointed (Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy), a meeting was held where documents were submitted and discussions held on how to expedite the request for additional documentation, conference calls or site visits, as needed.

This organization and ongoing gathering of data were most important for the work of the Comprehensive Accountability Office (CAO) as numerous documents and data had to be submitted or reviewed during the review period.

## FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Classification of the District

As is stated in the Transition Plan, **“State law provides that a referendum on the classification of the board as Type I (appointed) or Type II (elected) be held within one year of meeting the performance criteria for Governance.”** The public question was prepared and was submitted for inclusion on the general election ballot for November 6, 2018. Prior to the referendum, there was a flurry of articles, flyers, etc. by various entities; *Newark Patch.com (November 1, 2018)*, *Chalkbeat.org (November 7, 2018)*, *Newark Trust for Education (provided flyers and an informational meeting that was held on October 15, 2018 at Science Park High School)*, *TAP into Newark.net (November 6, 2018)*, and *Newark Board of Education Newsletters*. Newark voters overwhelmingly opted for Type II board (elected) with 78.7% (2,739) votes.

The Newark Board of Education created a pathway to civic engagement in its attempt to educate students in what it means to be an engaged citizen in their local community. The district’s partner in this work was The Citizens Campaign. Nearly 500 students registered to vote and thousands participated in *Civics in the Classroom* with more than 3,000 students taking part in a mock vote on the Newark referendum on education. This initiative was the brainchild of Superintendent Leon who “saw this as an opportunity to educate students in civic engagement; through voter registration and education, classroom civics and student voting.” Students were registered with the assistance of the Rutgers Newark Campus of the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group. This was the first time that the Newark Board of Education had engaged students on this level of civic engagement.

### State Engagement with the District During the Transition

As is mentioned on page 12 of the Transition Plan, the role of the Highly Skilled Professional (HSP) most definitely evolved during the second six-month period. Whereas the first five months dealt with the issues of capacity building of the Board, the many training sessions in Ethics, Personnel, Finance, Superintendent’s Evaluation, Board Roles, Board/Superintendent Relationships, etc., this period was more of the implementation stage, where observations of the Board by the HSP were recorded in an attempt to document that they all had been trained on was now practiced. The HSP continued to attend Governance, Legal, Personnel, Finance, and Program and Instruction Committee meetings (these five were given top priority) and occasionally attended Operations and Community Engagement. By attending the meetings, the HSP was able to be involved in discussions, advise, serve as a resource and assist Board members in decision-making.

During this period, it is duly noted that having an appointed Superintendent made a big difference in how the HSP was received. Support from the Superintendent was quite evident and he included the HSP in his Executive Staff meetings, Superintendent’s meetings with principals, strategic planning sessions, budget reviews, etc.

### Initiatives to Aid in Transparency and Accessibility

The Successor Superintendent has demonstrated that he is one who practices collaboration. He has a standing appointment with the Mayor where he can engage in dialogue with him on district concerns, updates on initiatives, and his vision for the District. Both of them attend strategic meetings as a team and are frequently on panels representing the City and the Board of Education.

While the Transition Plan calls for at least one public forum focusing on the Accountability Scorecard, leading up to the review by the Comprehensive Accountability Office(CAO), there have been several opportunities to communicate and disseminate to the public updates on the Transition Plan and accomplishments to date. Presentations have been made at the Business Board meetings, Board Retreats, Governance meetings, and there has been coverage by the media. Additional sessions have occurred with central office staff and district principals and department heads and at the Abbott Leadership Institute. Upon receipt of the findings from the CAO, time will be scheduled to present to the public, the results of the first CAO report.

## **GOVERNANCE**

### Training for Board of Education and Senior Administrators

To date, the District is in compliance with necessary training and board members are up to date on the mandated training with New Jersey School Boards. On file in the HSP's office are individual profiles for each board member listing all courses completed. Training for board members is something that must be ongoing for sustainability. As new members come on board, the sequence of training starts for them. The District must ensure that these new board members receive new board member induction in the following areas:

- Governance
- School Ethics
- Budget and Finance
- Facilities Oversight
- Personnel (Conflict of Interest and nepotism policy)
- Instruction and Program (Equivalency waiver)

In the District's attempt to ensure that Board members continue to practice good boardsmanship in committee and public meetings, the HSP continues to attend the majority of committee meetings, board business and public meetings. Much growth can be noted as members have grown immensely in the manner in which they come prepared, participate, and add to the discussion of agenda items. There is clearly a distinction between what occurs in business meetings versus public meetings. The HSP also periodically reviews the tapes of meetings to determine what might be a necessary growth opportunity, either one-to-one or as a total board.

Two visits to an urban and suburban districts' board meetings were organized. One was to Irvington, New Jersey and the second to Millburn, New Jersey. These visits were planned to allow Board members to meet with fellow board members, ask questions, share experiences and observe the two districts' board meetings. This experience allowed Board members to compare how they conduct their meetings to other districts and allowed for rich conversations.

### Strategic Planning Expectations

Expectations that the District implements the current three-year strategic plan ending 2018-19 is being met. Every department in the District must demonstrate through its documentation of meetings, trainings, actions, etc. that it is addressing the indicators in the existing strategic plan. Executive staff reports out at the Superintendent's Conference, communicating progress toward the implementation of

priorities and key milestones. The Superintendent shares at selected business board meetings to the Board the “touchpoints” as he refers to the documentation of actions.

The District is on track to have a one-year Strategic Plan for school year 2019-20 (NPS CLARITY 2020) with its ultimate goal to have a ten-year plan (The Next Decade 2020-2030). Newark has partnered with CREED Strategies to support the strategic planning process and district transformation needs. As is stated in the program work plan “a customized strategic planning process aligned with the NPS vision ... including protocols to guide the strategic planning process, data collection instruments, agendas and activities, and meeting materials will be needs addressed by the organization.” The process has been a very transparent one with initial sessions beginning with school principals, central office administration, and Board members. CREED has facilitated external stakeholder strategic planning conversations, meetings, work sessions, roundtables and community meetings, and district-wide student conference, in partnership with district leadership.

As a part of the NPS Clarity 2020 Strategic Planning process, community conversations were convened according to the feeder patterns of the comprehensive high schools. These meetings were held to engage parents, community members, Newark Board of Education (NBOE) staff, and students within each feeder pattern in the strategic planning process. At each meeting, participants were provided with an overview of the NPS Clarity 2020 vision and the strategic planning activities that occurred leading up to the community conversations. Participants engaged in data analysis to identify root causes underlying attendance and academic achievement data and worked in groups to identify strategies to address the identified root causes. This process was designed to mirror processes that occurred at roundtable meetings with central office executive leadership, principals, and external partners in key areas. 225 parents, students, community members, and NBOE staff attended these meetings. Each meeting was held from 6 pm to 8 pm and was facilitated by a NBOE Assistant Superintendent as well as a representative of CREED Strategies.

### Budget Development

Several leadership team meetings occurred prior to budget presentations to district and central office staff. This team was again comprised of the individuals, both programmatic and academic, who were knowledgeable in their areas of expertise. Before any information was rolled out, the systems were tested to ensure that there were no glitches for the users. The Finance Committee was updated on processes and kept informed any necessary changes. The committee, which was composed of new members, was informed of the following relevant topics:

- Sources of Funds
- Spending Analysis and Budget Allocations for both Central offices and Schools
- Overview of Weighted Student Funding Formula

The Finance department continued its best practices throughout the year:

- Weighted Student Formula for equitable allocation of funds, including a Floor Plan of positions that all schools were to include in budget
- Use of a consistent Budget Development Tool (District-wide My Budget File)
- Assignment of finance customer support personnel
- Consistent Use of Fund Accounting (GAAP)

- Fiscal Forecasting (3 times a year)
- Professional development for Finance staff that lead to certifications and growth
- Timely monthly reporting of district financial statements as required by the State of NJ

## Enrollment

The Board and District adhere to all requirements and expectations around student enrollment described in the plan. Newark Enrolls continues to be the primary vehicle for ensuring equity, access, and accountability for all students attending schools operated by public education providers. As is stated in the Transition Plan, the District continues to uphold current policies governing enrollment to ensure continuity for families for this school year and is continuing with its implementation for SY 2019-20. There has not been a change to the process. There has been a change in its name. The universal enrollment system initially was called One Newark but changed in 2016 to Newark Enrolls.

After collecting feedback from families, students, educators, and community leaders on how to make the enrollment process better, on-going improvements were made (Newark Enrolls 2017-2018):

- Created an easier to used application for families to complete on-line
- Improved sibling matching to ensure siblings are place in the same school, whenever possible
- Increased priority for geographic preference to ensure that all children from within the neighborhood have access to nearby schools first, before students from outside the neighborhood.

The District had conversations and negotiations with the Charters on compliance issues relating to adherence to their agreed upon State approved enrollment figures, protection of student data, and enrollment of special needs students and bilingual students. The participating Charter Schools are:

- Achieve Community Charter School
- Great Oaks Charter School
- KIPP Charter Schools
- Marion P. Thomas Charter School
- M.E.T.S Charter School
- Newark Educators' Community School
- North Star Academy Charter School
- People's Preparatory Charter School
- Philip's Academy Charter School
- Roseville Community Charter School
- University Heights Charter School

A valuable component of the Enrollment process is the Family Support Center coordinators. These coordinators ensure that the enrollment process operates within highest levels of operation and customer service to families of Newark, develop and implement goals for enrollment process including customer service satisfaction, and serve as a liaison between the center and community agencies seeking to form partnerships and provide additional services to the families of Newark. They also engage all of Newark's

students and families in the enrollment process and ensure that all Newark students have a school placement:

- **Newark Enrolls Application** - Families seeking a school for their child for the upcoming school year must submit an enrollment application within the time period allotted. Coordinators assist families with guidance around school choices and completing application which is then processed and submitted in Salesforce.
- **Transfer Requests** - Coordinators process requests based on transfer criteria and provide families with on the spot match letters. Safety transfer requests are investigated by these coordinators in collaboration with school administration and Office of Student Supports.
- **Residency Verification** - New students from the non-participating charter schools must provide proof of residency to NBOE and meet with a coordinator to provide documentation. Coordinator updates information in Salesforce and provide parents with print out of visit.

### **INSTRUCTION & PROGRAM**

The Program and Instruction Board Committee has been updated by a corresponding Assistant Superintendent each month on the implementation of curriculum in the schools for which they are responsible. At these sessions, data has been presented to demonstrate the performance of students in the various leadership teams. All four Assistant Superintendents are aware of the expectations of the Superintendent as it relates to collecting, analyzing, and using the data to review the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction and each is a strong instructional leader who provides training and mentoring for their principals. Presented at the committee meetings are reading inventory data, interim assessments, other district/school assessment data results, and school attendance data. Each Assistant Superintendent has identified challenges in their schools and craft their monthly meetings with principals to address and eradicate.

Both ELA and Math departments have also presented to the committee, carefully sharing test data, curriculum materials, and instructional strategies. On the District's website one can find a wealth of resources, strategies, professional development opportunities, and instructional tools for use by teachers and principals. Under the leadership of the Deputy Superintendent, the curriculum departments have been focused on the needs of the district and have planned for curriculum writing, creation of district assessments, identification of new curriculum, and strong summer programs. It is the intent of the Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent that there be a strong overhaul of the Program and Instruction (Teaching and Learning) Department.

The improvement of student attendance has been a top priority for the Superintendent. Data is shared each month with school principals, board members, and at Board Business Meetings. Schools have developed their own strategies to improve attendance and as a result of school and district initiatives which include the assignment of attendance counselors, the 86% average yearly attendance for 2018-19 is presently above 90% for 2019-20!

### **FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS**

Principals completed their budgets, using My Budget File, and then were scheduled for individual budget reviews during the month of February. At these reviews, principals defended their requests before a panel

of Budget and Finance staff, Superintendent, Chief of Staff, Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Human Resource Services, Highly Skilled Professional and other department heads. This process included:

- Roster reviews where each position was checked for certification, program and position codes and either matched to an individual's name or indicated as "vacant".
- Projected enrollment for 2019-20 (identification of where a new class might be added or a reduction of a class).
- Review of District Floor Plan and confirmation that all positions were placed in each school's budget (ensured equity and alignment to district's goals).
- Review of other expense accounts, including extra-curricular programs.
- Special request for funds beyond school allocations.

This process had not been scheduled since 2007 and provided for complete transparency and gave all administrative staff members the opportunity to ensure that each school's budget allowed for and met the requirements for a thorough and efficient education.

A review of the NJQSAC District Performance Review – SY 2016-17 completed by the District team indicates that the District is in compliance in 2018-2019 with:

- Indicator 1: Monthly Board Secretary's report is completed and reconciled without exceptions and is completed within 30 days of the month's end and submitted to the Board within 60 days.
- Indicator 2: The district follows a standard operating procedures manual for business functions which includes a system of internal controls to prevent the over-expenditure of line item accounts and to safeguard assets from theft and fraud.
- Indicator 3: At least monthly, the district prepares and analyzes fiscal year cash flow management for all funds to ensure that payments can be made on a prompt basis and to ensure that reimbursement requests for federal grant awards are submitted in a timely manner for the actual amount of incurred expenditures.
- Indicator 4: The district has filed the annual audit of Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and other data by the due date.
- Indicator 5: The district received an unqualified opinion on the annual audit and satisfies most conditions listed under this indicator.
- Indicator 6: The district manages NCLB, IDEA, ABBR and other entitlements and discretionary grants as required.
- Indicator 7: The district provides proper oversight and accounting of capital projects and Referendum and other Fund 30 capital projects.
- Indicator 8: The district implements, reviews and revises as needed, projects that are consistent with the approved Long Range Facilities Plan and has received county office approval for emergent projects.
- Indicator 9: Annual health and safety reviews have been conducted in each building using the *Evaluation of School Buildings Checklist Report*.
- Indicator 10: The Board has annually approved by resolution, the district Statement of Assurance document as reflected in the minutes.

## **PERSONNEL:**

The Transition Plan does not address specific terms and conditions for the return of this QSAC domain. The District has an approved Personnel Transition Plan which must be implemented that was approved on August 21, 2017. The Human Resource Services team meets on an ongoing basis to plan and identify activities that support implementation of the Personnel Transition Plan. The Acting Executive Director of Human Resources leverages her bi-weekly check-ins with team leaders to monitor implementation of the plan, including the leaders of the Staffing and Recruitment, Labor Relations, Educator Effectiveness and Employee Services teams. The Executive Director of Educator Effectiveness submits regular reports to principals and assistant superintendents to ensure all teachers are on track to receive required observations and evaluations. This includes reporting on total progress toward completion and identifying to school and district leadership targeted teachers in need of additional observations.

In an attempt to build board member capacity, the Personnel Transition Plan recommends the following training topics for Board members:

- Confidentiality, closed session, other ethics topics related to personnel
- Collective negotiations
- Hiring – legal requirements, Civil Service Act, guidelines
- Compensation and benefits
- Certification and benefits
- Certification and mentoring
- Renewals and non-disciplinary transfers, tenure/seniority
- Reduction in force (RIF)
- Discipline, performance management (i.e. tenure charges, terminations)

The HSP has met with the Executive Director of Human Resources about the need for the scheduling of this training. These areas should be a priority for the upcoming five months and summer.

Respectfully submitted,

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