



Mayor Baraka Says Students Deserve a Strong Voice in Charting the Future of Newark Schools under Local Control

Student Press Conference Kicks Off a New Chapter as Mayor Baraka responds to questions and A. Robert Gregory, A Former NPS Student, Takes the Helm as Interim Superintendent

[Newark, NJ — February 1, 2018] – This morning, new Interim Superintendent A. Robert Gregory joined Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka, members of the Newark Board of Education, and students at a press conference at Science Park High School. The press conference, run by student reporters and leaders at Science Park, was an opportunity for students ask the Mayor questions about the future of Newark schools. The program also provided an opportunity for Interim Superintendent and Board members to address students. Interim Superintendent Gregory took the helm of New Jersey’s largest school district on Thursday, February 1, 2018, as the State of New Jersey officially returns control of NPS back to Newark after 23 years under state control.

“I look forward to working with the Newark Public Schools and the Newark Community as we move forward into this next phase,” shared Mayor Ras J. Baraka. “I think it is appropriate that we spend the first day of this new chapter speaking with and listening to Newark students, as they are our most important constituency. Our students helped to make this day possible. They spoke out, marched, demonstrated, mobilized their families to demand quality education and that the people of Newark regain the power to determine their own destiny. We must work with them and give them a voice in setting a vision for the future of education in our city.”

Robert Gregory will lead Newark Public Schools as Interim Superintendent during the Superintendent search process, which is expected to be finished in July. Robert Gregory is a third-generation Newarker, as well as an experienced educator and school leader who began his career as a history teacher over 20 years ago with the district. Mr. Gregory most served as the founding principal of American History High School before taking on the role of Assistant and then Deputy Superintendent overseeing all high schools in recent years. The high school graduation rate increased from 68% to over 78% in three years under Mr. Gregory’s leadership and the number of students enrolled in AP and college credit-bearing classes increased significantly.

“I am humbled and honored by the opportunity to serve Newark Public Schools during this historic time,” said incoming Interim Superintendent Gregory. “From my early years attending the Harriet Tubman School in the South Ward to my time as a Principal at American History High School, I know first-hand the important role Newark schools play in the lives of the thousands of young people who attend them. On their behalf, we must move forward with a continued sense

of urgency. I look forward to working closely with the school board, our educators and the Newark community to ensure that we are doing everything we can to continue to improve outcomes for Newark students.”

On Tuesday, December 19, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) approved the transition plan that allows for the Advisory Board to become the official Newark Board of Education on February 1, 2018. The plan, which was presented to the board at a public meeting in December, provides the board the full authority and responsibilities afforded to local school boards on February 1, and includes a detailed timeline and set of milestones to guide the district’s transition over a period of two years. The search for a new superintendent will be headed by a seven person committee made up of school board members and Newark stakeholders. The plan, an accompanying letter from the commissioner, and a presentation shared at the meeting are available at the [NPS website](#).

“This day has been in the making for some time and is long overdue,” shared Marques Aquil Lewis, Chairman of the Newark Board of Education. “The Board has worked very hard to make sure that the district is returned to local control. Now, all decisions rest with us and we are ready, willing and have the capacity to take Newark Public Schools to the next level.”

In addition to the press conference with students at Science Park High School, Interim Superintendent Gregory used his first day to visit familiar locations. He began the day at Harriet Tubman Elementary School in the city’s South Ward where he attended elementary school, greeting students and families and visiting classrooms with the school principal. After the press conference, Mr. Gregory visited American History High School to surprise two employees who recently announced their retirement. While there, Mr. Gregory also held a roundtable with students in a private setting to learn more about their ideas and feedback on what the district can do to better support their success.

“As I begin in this role, my goal is to listen and learn from our students and educators as much as I can,” noted Gregory. “Educators are the backbone of everything that we do here at the Newark Public Schools and as a former high school principal, I also know that students know as well as anyone what needs to be done to help them improve. I believe these collective voices will help us as we work to continue the momentum in the district – and help us move forward together into this next important phase.”

State-appointed Superintendent Christopher Cerf announced in December that he would resign, effective February 1, 2018. Following this announcement, the School Board voted to appoint Deputy Superintendent Robert Gregory to serve as interim Superintendent while a national search is conducted.

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About Newark Public Schools: The Newark Public Schools, serving nearly 36,000 students, is the largest and one of the oldest school systems in New Jersey. The racial and ethnic diversity of the city provides a rich educational experience for pre-kindergarten to secondary school students. To learn more about Newark Public Schools, visit www.nps.k12.nj.us.

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