

The Next THREE YEARS

STRATEGIC PLAN | 2016-19
Newark Public Schools

This three-year strategic plan reflects the collaboration and hard work of many hundreds of people — teachers, principals, students, and parents who participated in working groups; community-based organization staff, council members, and community members who attended and helped coordinate our ward-based engagement sessions; the Mayor’s Office; the Board of Education; and a citywide Review Committee.

This strategic plan embodies the best ideas from across this community. It builds on areas of previous success and investment and addresses areas where the district has struggled recently. One consistent theme cuts across all the priorities, strategies, and action plans: the importance of quality implementation. Doing what we say we’re going to do.

Newark Public Schools (NPS) has experienced dynamic changes recently, and community members have made it clear that they value stability and improvement over more change. So do we. We believe we can achieve our shared goals by doing the most important things better.

If you are a STUDENT ...

You’ll be exposed to **more challenging classes** that will better prepare you for your choice of colleges and/or careers. Our priorities are **English language arts and mathematics**, where we’ve already upgraded our curriculum and course materials. But the plan now puts additional emphasis on updated **science, social studies, arts, and career and technical education**.

During class time, you can expect **fewer lectures** from your teachers and more **small-group discussions** with your classmates. You’ll have more chances to show what you know, with the teachers asking questions, observing, and providing support. We are making your **learning more relevant**, including lessons focused on the city’s 350 years of history and the state’s Amistad curriculum, which showcases the many contributions of African Americans.



You'll also be doing **a lot more writing** in almost every class. In English and social studies, for example, you'll be asked to write **short and long essays** summarizing and explaining what you have read. In math, you'll need to show your work *and explain how you got the answer*. This is another way for you to show what you know and for your teachers to see where you are ready to move on or where you may need more help.



We'll also be supplementing traditional “book learning” with **more hands-on learning**, where you will be working on projects. In our new **state-of-the art, \$10 million science facility** downtown, students will work side by side with scientists and have access to a large library of online courses. Through our expanded **career-and-technical education (CTE) offerings**, you will be exposed to fast-growing fields in science, technology, engineering, Information Technology, and Health Science. Expanded partnerships with local businesses will provide **internships and summer work experiences**. And in **the arts (fine arts, music, theatre)**, you'll have more opportunities to create, perform, produce, and analyze your work. Our growing use of **instructional technology** (from Chromebooks to Newsela online portals) will help personalize your learning in every subject.

Students who are behind can expect more targeted support from teachers, who will be encouraged to use only programs that have been proven to help students catch up. Through the Newark Opportunity Youth Network, transfer high schools and Acceleration Academies will serve **older students** who have dropped out or are at risk of doing so. **Students with special needs** are more likely to find the services they need here in Newark at an NPS school; networks of schools will help ensure that every neighborhood, if not every school, has the right mix of programs in place to serve

your specialized needs. We will use this same principle to ensure **bilingual students** have access to the full array of supports to which they are entitled. In addition, we'll be adding hundreds of new “seats” and strengthening the quality of our **early childhood** programs to help serve our youngest students.

In order to make sure that our students are prepared for success in the classroom, our strategic plan also envisions changes that will affect every part of your school experience. We'll continue to use restorative practices and similar approaches to **reduce out-of-school suspensions** and rethink how we handle discipline. Teachers and administrators will focus on creating **more caring and welcoming school environments**, where students will be treated with respect and where life skills such as teamwork and hard work will be taught along with math, English, and other academic subjects. We will continue to strengthen and expand our **extracurricular options** such as after-school programs, Summer Plus, the Elementary Sports League, and the Bolden Student Center. And if you live in the South Ward, you and your families will be able to take advantage of our new **community schools initiative**, which will provide stronger academics and many additional non-academic supports such as medical care and counseling.



**If you are
a TEACHER,
PRINCIPAL, or
STAFF MEMBER ...**

Teachers will have more support to help you deliver **high-quality, engaging instruction**. Starting with English language arts and math, we are showing teachers how to shift their teaching practices so that students are doing more of the work – engaging in discussions, listening closely to and building on the comments of classmates, analyzing what they have read, explaining their answers, and writing daily. Teachers’ roles will shift more to launching the topic, actively monitoring the conversations, and intervening to correct any misunderstandings.

The most effective teachers teach this way already. Going forward, we are making major strategic investments in **professional development and curriculum resources** that will help all teachers master these best practices. In the process, you’ll be helping your students reach the higher levels of critical thinking and problem solving required by the state’s new college- and career-ready standards.

Principals also will receive more support to become instructional leaders in their buildings, including assistance in providing **more practical and timely feedback** to their teachers. We’re reducing the number of required formal observations, which will free up administrators to spend more time providing informal support and less time writing reports. We’re creating **new structures for relationship building** among adults within and across schools as well as with the central office, with such activities as a cross-district softball league and a picnic for all staff. Educators also will benefit from more **peer learning** through model classrooms and a growing library of **exemplar instructional resources** such as videos. To further strengthen **peer collaboration**, we will continue to refine the Leadership Institutes for Teacher Teams (LIFTT) and ensure teachers are turn-keying that information back to schools.

Our increased emphasis on the **social and emotional aspects of learning** also will help ensure that our schools are more consistently caring and welcoming. Environments like these are conducive to student learning – and adult professionalism. We are strengthening and expanding our **recruitment pipelines**, while developing more effective **induction programs** for teachers and principals.

Teacher aides and the many non-instructional support staff also will benefit from clearer job descriptions and more regular feedback and support. Your work creates the positive conditions for learning that are so essential. Going forward, we will more systemically establish expectations, monitor performance, and provide the appropriate support for you as well.

**If you are a
PARENT
or FAMILY
MEMBER ...**

Expect your children to be **more engaged, working harder, and learning more.** They'll be doing more problem solving, writing, and analyzing literature and non-fiction readings. Their learning will be more relevant and real-world through our landmark **Students2Science initiative, arts partnerships, and expanded CTE options.** **Students with special needs** will have access to programs close to home in a neighborhood school.

Thanks to the city's popular and growing **community schools strategy,** families in the South Ward and elsewhere in the city have access to a growing range of services as neighborhood schools become more of a 24/7 hub of community supports, including school-based health services, social workers and other mental health professionals, after-school programs, and job-training classes. **Community Engagement Specialists** are empowering families and other community stakeholders with information and resources, while creating a welcoming school culture.



As a parent and community member, you also will have many **more opportunities for involvement.** Participate in our ongoing Community Talks meetings. Join a parent group at your school. Learn how to advocate for your children and take leadership roles in your schools. Help plan the future of CTE and bilingual education in the city. And you will have access to more **useful information:** including an improved website; increased use of social media; and “snapshots” on the performance of schools, central office, and the district.

**If you are a
COMMUNITY
MEMBER ...**

You also will have more **opportunities to participate,** similar to those available for parents and family members. And you'll have access to the same **information,** which will provide clearer and timelier updates on our progress.

As we expand our partnerships, **community-based organizations, higher education institutions, and businesses** will have additional opportunities to partner with NPS, working together with shared expectations to ensure the highest level of support for our students.

Finally, taxpayers and all Newark residents should have growing confidence that our **operations** are more efficient and cost-effective; that we are rethinking how best to provide such key services as **transportation, food service, and procurement;** that our **facilities** are safe, healthy, and serving students and the greater community; and that we are working closely with the **Board of Education** to smooth the transition back to local control.

This three-year plan focuses on four major priorities and 18 targeted strategies, each with specific action steps, key milestones, and indicators of success. Our goals are ambitious but doable. Community members played a key role in developing this plan over the past several months. We look forward to working with all of you to implement it.

Strengthen Academics and Student Supports

STRATEGY 1

Use a consistent, district-wide approach to instruction that helps develop students' college- and career-readiness skills

- a. Train and coach teachers in instructional practices that put students at the center of their learning.
- b. Increase content coaching supports to teachers and instructional leaders in ELA and math.
- c. Provide more opportunities for hands-on learning opportunities that make instruction more rigorous, relevant, and engaging for students.

STRATEGY 2

Ensure all teachers have access to high-quality curriculum and assessment tools

- a. Support educators with detailed lesson plans that demonstrate how to implement our best instructional strategies in ELA.
- b. Provide more instructional support and updated planning tools for educators in math.
- c. Implement data driven practices using a range of formative assessments.
- d. Update resources in science, social studies, and the arts in alignment with new standards.
- e. Develop clear pathways to college readiness through improved course offerings and sequencing in ELA, math, science, social studies, and the arts.

STRATEGY 3

Provide more intensive support for students who need them most

- a. Provide research-based interventions and supports for struggling students.
- b. Improve the quality of services and academic outcomes for special education students.
- c. Increase support for English Language Learners.

STRATEGY 4

Create caring, welcoming schools that support learning

- a. Build school cultures of excellence on a foundation of shared core values.
- b. Strengthen school-based teams as the primary means to ensure success for every student.
- c. Improve attendance.
- d. Significantly reduce the time students spend out of class due to disciplinary issues.

STRATEGY 5

Strengthen Pre-K education

- a. Increase Pre-K enrollment and participation.
- b. Provide comprehensive, high-quality Pre-K programming for children and families.

Ensure Great Talent in Every School and Department

STRATEGY 1 Recruit and select the best educators for NPS

- a. Improve and expand on our most effective current recruitment pipelines.
- b. Create new and innovative recruitment pipelines for high-quality talent.
- c. Develop clear selection criteria to be able to select only those educators who have the strongest desire to work in our schools and an ability to serve our diverse student needs.

STRATEGY 2 Continue to retain our most effective teachers and principals

- a. Provide effective induction and support programs for new teachers.
- b. Build a culture of learning, professionalism, and fun for all educators.
- c. Ensure our educators feel valued and supported.
- d. Maintain the bar for excellence in our classrooms.

STRATEGY 3 Provide accessible and practical feedback and coaching

- a. Reduce formal observation workload.
- b. Increase the amount of informal feedback all educators receive.
- c. Continue to improve the quality of evidence collected and feedback provided.
- d. Provide more time and improved structure for professional collaboration.

STRATEGY 4 Raise the bar for excellence for ALL staff in NPS

- a. Recruit and evaluate all teacher aides.
- b. Evaluate and support non-instructional school-based employees.



STRATEGY 1 Adopt a community schools strategy

- a. Launch the South Ward Community Schools Initiative.
- b. Explore the community schools efforts in other neighborhoods and wards.

STRATEGY 2 Plan with the community

- a. Collaboratively assess school planning needs across wards and neighborhoods.
- b. Focus resources on drop-out prevention and re-engagement at the high school level.
- c. Increase the capacity, availability, and type of English Language Learner (ELL) and bilingual program options.
- d. Increase the capacity and variety of CTE and vocational programming across the city.

STRATEGY 3 Inform and engage families and community members

- a. Support parents and families as partners at each school through organized school-based groups.
- b. Support and develop the Community Engagement Specialist (CES) function at each school.
- c. Increase the frequency of direct parent and community contact.
- d. Provide more and better opportunities for engagement.
- e. Improve the availability of information on school and district websites and calendars and improve school and district marketing materials.

STRATEGY 4 Expand and better use partnerships

- a. Define and set parameters for NPS partners.
- b. Create structures to maintain and nurture community partnerships.
- c. Evaluate existing academic partnerships, and expand those that work best.

STRATEGY 5 Strengthen transparency and accountability

- a. Gather feedback from the community on the specific types of information desired and preferred communication channels (e.g., website, in person, etc.) and improve existing channels.
- b. Re-launch “school snapshots” that provide key information about school performance.
- c. Improve accessibility and quality of information available about the district, including NPS operations and the central office

Provide Efficient Operations, Sustainable Budgets, and Skilled Governance

STRATEGY 1

Assess, invest in, and optimize usage of NPS facilities

- a. Identify and implement remediation strategies to ensure water is safe for all our children.
- b. Invest in capital improvements to deliver critical upgrades for high-need schools.
- c. Assess current building space to find opportunities for more efficient usage.
- d. Explore potential revenue-generating opportunities from our facilities assets.
- e. Develop appropriate policies to allow use of our buildings by external partner organizations supporting NPS families.

STRATEGY 2

Find operational efficiencies while improving service

- a. Reduce unnecessary transportation costs while improving the student experience.
- b. Give principals more insight into school operations while continuing to explore staffing efficiencies.
- c. Build on this year's meal service expansion to continue to improve students' food service.
- d. Upgrade our schools' information technology infrastructure to 21st-century standards.
- e. Improve human resources functions to ensure all employees receive high-quality customer service.
- f. Improve procurement and purchasing.

STRATEGY 3

Provide fair and efficient student funding

- a. Verify residency of all students attending Newark Schools.
- b. Annually review weighted student funding (WSF) model.
- c. Add internal capacity dedicated to finding new opportunities for competitive grant funding.
- d. Ensure our class-size ratios are sustainable.

STRATEGY 4

Support the Board of Education

- a. Continue to build expertise in preparation for gaining and maintaining local control.
- b. Improve structure for district/board relations.