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Governor Christie Names Paymon Rouhanifard Superintendent of Camden Public Schools

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Proven Track Record Of Helping Students And Bold, Innovative Leadership Will Bring Real Change For Camden's Students

Trenton, NJ – Acting on his belief that every child in every corner of New Jersey deserves a high-quality education, Governor Chris Christie today announced the selection of Paymon Rouhanifard as the first State Superintendent of the Camden School District. The selection of Paymon, formerly of the Newark and New York City public school systems, builds on the progress the District has seen over the last few months, including improvements in curriculum, staffing, student health and safety, and academic readiness. The State Board must now review and approve Rouhanifard's selection.

"Every child in New Jersey, regardless of zip code, deserves access to a high-quality education, and I'm confident Paymon Rouhanifard is the right person to make this goal a reality," said Governor Christie. "Paymon has a proven track record of improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of students in Newark and New York City, and brings innovative leadership that Camden needs moving forward. He has shown a deep commitment to working with parents and teachers to put students at the center of all decisions. Under his leadership, I know Camden's schools will improve on the progress of these last few months."

"If what we care most about is that every child in Camden has access to a great school, then the path ahead of us is clear," said Rouhanifard. "While it will not be easy, and will require the support of the entire Camden community, we can and will put every child on a path to success. I'm ready to get to work."

Rouhanifard was selected from more than 100 applicants through a national search process conducted by New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner Chris Cerf with Ray and Associates. The process built on the search conducted by the Camden School District last winter, and began with the semi-finalists that the district selected at the time. The process was then expanded to additional candidates through a national recruiting effort.

"This job requires a vision that completely rethinks how the district operates, with a track record of executing innovative and complex change to improve outcomes for students – and Paymon excels in both of those areas," said Commissioner Cerf. "We have a unique opportunity to build on the partnership of the State, Mayor, and community to make real change for Camden's children, and I am honored to have Paymon lead that effort."

"Having spent some time with Paymon, I'm inspired by his passion for our children and his commitment to making sure that our students have the same opportunities as every other child in this state, and he has my full support," said Camden Mayor Dana Redd. "The State has shown over the past two months that their commitment to our District is real, and I look forward to our continued partnership for our schools."

"The State has already made some changes that have been long overdue in our District," said Advisory Board President Kathryn Blackshear. "I am committed to working with our new Superintendent, Paymon, as he sets forth his vision to improve educational outcomes for all of our students."

Rouhanifard currently serves as the Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer for Newark Public Schools, New Jersey's largest school district serving more than 35,000 students. In this role, Rouhanifard oversees five offices related to planning, policy and innovation and led the effort to develop a district-wide school choice system that includes all district and charter schools in one application system, ultimately expanding the access to schools that are the best fit for each child in Newark.

Previously, Rouhanifard served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Office of Portfolio Management at the New York City Department of Education, the nation's largest school district serving more than 1.1 million students. In New York City, Rouhanifard expanded student access to the 1,700 city schools by opening new district and charter schools, changing enrollment policies and zoning/admissions criteria, and phasing out and restarting low-performing schools. An independent report by MDRC found that this strategy increased high school graduation rates for all students, with the largest impact on low-income and minority students in the city.

Rouhanifard began his career as a 6th grade teacher at PS 192 in West Harlem, New York, as part of Teach For America. After graduating with a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Rouhanifard deferred a position in the private sector to teach in New York City.

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Rouhanifard was born in Iran, where his family fled when he was a young child. Leaving everything behind, they lived in refugee camps in neighboring countries and Europe before moving to the United States, where Rouhanifard entered first grade as an English Language Learner. His family instilled in him a deep passion and commitment to public education as the path for all children, regardless of life circumstance, to have the opportunity to be successful in college and career.

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March 25, 2013

Governor Christie: We cannot fail these children any longer. When I finally came to the point of making this decision sitting in my office in Trenton and I just said to myself after sitting in a meeting with the Commissioner and a number of members of my staff who were taking me through the pros and cons, after they left me I was sitting in the office by myself and I said two things to myself in making this decision, one enough is enough. Enough waiting, enough excuses, enough of the blame game, enough. And secondly, that this is why I believe people gave me the chance to do this job. Not to take on the little things, but take on the big challenges. When you take on big challenges, you run the risk of failing. But life is not a dress rehearsal everybody. We don't get another shot at this. Not just of having a job like this but of trying to mold a community and I don't want to look back on my time as Governor and say that I should have done something differently. I should have acted more aggressively, I should have done more for the people and the children in particular of this city. There will be some who will be critical. There will be some who will throw stones. An old story for me everybody, I'm happy to take them. The fact is that what no one will be able to say about the people assembled behind this podium and many others in this room who are willing to take this endeavor with us, they will not be able to say that we didn't act. And I believe that failure to act in this instance is a greater sin than any other mistake than we could make.

Press Contact:
Michael Drewniak
Colin Reed
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000