

Keeping Our Promise To The Children Of Camden

Governor Christie Is Leading With Decisive, Bipartisan Action To Bring Accountability To Persistently Failing Public Schools And Ensure Every Child Receives The High-Quality Education They Deserve

Acting on Governor Christie's firmly held belief that every New Jersey child has a right to a high-quality education, the Christie Administration is taking decisive action in Camden to fix a broken system and ensure that no child is left in a failing school. With the bipartisan support of leadership in the City of Camden and education advocates across New Jersey, the Christie Administration has filed the necessary paperwork to take the lead in bringing accountability to the management of the Camden School District.

Once approved, the Christie Administration, through a new state-appointed superintendent and leadership team, in coordination with local and community leaders, will be taking direct oversight in implementing the necessary reforms of the school district to start delivering better results for Camden students and their families.

A NECESSARY STEP TO PUT CHILDREN FIRST

While there are many talented and dedicated education professionals in Camden, Governor Christie firmly believes the best interests of students must be the state's highest priority. Despite increased public funding and support, student achievement in Camden is the lowest in the state, and in many cases, getting worse over time.

- Nearly 90 percent of Camden's schools, 23 out of 26, are in the bottom 5 percent performance-wise in all of New Jersey, including the three lowest performing schools in the state.
- Camden's four-year graduation rate was only 49% in 2012 – 37 points below the New Jersey average – and decreased from 57% in 2011.
- Camden's standardized testing scores in math and English drastically underperform the state average:
 - New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK): Less than 20 percent of Camden students are proficient in language arts literacy – 46.9 percent lower than the state average; only 30% of students are proficient in math - 44.9 percentage points lower than the state average.
 - High School Statewide Assessments (HSPA): Only 28 percent of Camden students are proficient in math – 51.3 percent lower than state average; only 61.7 percent of Camden students are proficient in language arts literacy – approximately 30 points below the state average.
- As bad as the situation seems, the reality could be even worse. Insufficient teacher evaluations make it impossible to truly assess the situation, and self-evaluations by the district have proven to be drastically out-of-touch with the facts on the ground.

The problem is not a lack of funding, as Camden is receiving over \$279.5 million in this year's budget, an increase of \$3.6 million from last year.

- During the 2011-12 school year, Camden spent \$23,709 per student, compared to the statewide average of \$18,045.
- Additionally, the teacher/student ratio during those years was 9.3 to 1, which was the lowest statewide of the largest 106 school districts in the state.

The system is broken, and a top-to-bottom evaluation completed by the Department in August 2012 found that the problems are incapable of fixing themselves. It's clear that additional state involvement is necessary to truly address these problems and get these schools back on the right track.

TAKING DECISIVE ACTION TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

Governor Christie does not take this decision lightly, and as such his administration through the Department of Education has developed a concise and comprehensive outline of the next steps in this process to guide the days, months and years ahead.

Immediate Action:

Applying lessons from past state interventions, Governor Christie and the Administration, working in coordination with local and community leaders, are today taking specific, immediate actions to ensure a smooth transition:

- The Department of Education has dispatched several staff members including fiscal monitors and transition guides for key areas to work with the Camden School district central office.
- The transitional leadership team will immediately launch a 90-day review of district practices in the areas of academics, talent, school performance and operations.

The state will also engage local leaders to build awareness and support. These efforts will include organizing tours of high-performing district and charter schools in low-income areas as examples of the possibilities for change in Camden.

Reorganization And Reform:

The Christie Administration will be prepared to move aggressively once the state's intervention plan has been approved to improve overall performance of the School District and the academic experience for Camden students from Day 1, which will include:

- **Leadership.** Following an extensive, nationwide search over the next several months, Governor Christie will appoint a new School Superintendent who will take office on Day 1 of formal state intervention. The Governor will also appoint three additional members to the advisory school board.
- **Curriculum.** The district lacks approved and aligned curricula in all 9 subject areas. The state will take immediate action to ensure that all teachers have approved curricula aligned to state standards and supported with comprehensive professional development for all teachers.
- **Talent.** Today, a significant number of teaching vacancies exist in Camden, many of which are filled with a rotation of substitute teachers. The state will conduct a needs assessment over the next several months and launch a search process to make sure that every child has a great teacher in front of the classroom shortly after intervention takes place.
- **Resources.** Immediately upon state intervention, the state will ensure that every child has the books, instructional materials, and technology necessary for a high-quality education, many of which are currently not reaching the classroom.

Providing Students With More Options While Building A Stronger School District:

In the months following the formal state intervention, the district leadership team will work school by school to ensure that every child in Camden has the choice of a high-quality educational option, and will focus extensive resources to build capacity in Camden's central office to ensure the district can continue this success long after state intervention ends.

- The new District leadership team will implement individual school improvement plans to target turnaround strategies to the needs of individual schools and students.
- A three-year strategic plan will be developed to maximize the district budget through a public review of expenditures and space utilization.
- The District will seek to increase the choices available to students while holding all schools accountable for results, building on the Christie Administration's track record of closing 8 underperforming charter schools in the past three years.

The ultimate goal of this process is to improve outcomes for Camden students by providing families with greater opportunities to an array of quality educational options. Governor Christie firmly believes that New Jersey has a moral obligation to provide

every child with access to a high-quality education, and that the state simply cannot continue to sit on the sidelines as this fundamental promise goes unfulfilled for so many children in Camden.