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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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August 9, 2012

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Interim Superintendent
Camden City Public School District
201 North Front Street
Camden, NJ 08102

Ms. Kathryn Blackshear
President
Camden City Board of Education
201 North Front Street, 8th Floor
Camden, NJ 08102

Dear Mr. Mills and Ms. Blackshear:

Attached is the final report of the in-depth evaluation, conducted as part of the QSAC regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:30-5.3.). As you are aware, the team undertook a comprehensive review of the functioning of the school district in 2012. Their review included interviews with staff and administrators, school visits, a public hearing and a community survey.

The evaluation team did not recommend that Camden's placement on the performance continuum change provided that the district act on the following five goals. I agree with the review team and have accepted their recommendations. Those five recommendations are:

1. The Board must conduct a national search for a superintendent with prior success in reforming an urban school district with persistently low student achievement.
2. The Board and district must establish a strong and collaborative relationship with the Executive Director of the Regional Achievement Center for Camden's region and begin immediately to implement the turnaround principles outlined in the state's waiver application from No Child Left Behind, approved by the US Department of Education in February, 2012.

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3. The district must undertake a comprehensive audit of its personnel practices – including its policies and procedures to recruit, retain, induct, support, evaluate and grant tenure.
4. The Board and district must successfully conclude their review of the applications for Renaissance schools.
5. The Board must invest considerable time in developing itself as a functioning governance structure that adheres to ethical and regulatory guidelines, provides for effective and appropriate stakeholder engagement, and refrains from micro-management of the district.

As the report details, the Camden City Public School District needs fundamental and transformational reform if it is to provide the children of Camden with a high-quality education and the opportunity to graduate from high school ready for college and career. The district is far from this goal, and both the district and the New Jersey Department of Education have an obligation to make whatever changes are necessary to address these problems. While the in-depth evaluation team recognized that many individuals in Camden are working tirelessly to serve the city's children, they also determined that the district was lacking fundamental structures to support the schools.

While these findings may not surprise some, the extent of the problem is readily apparent and evidenced in the extraordinarily low measures of student outcomes – from statewide assessments to college readiness scores and graduation rates. In 2011, for instance, the district-wide graduation rate was just over 56%, with only 38% of graduates demonstrating proficiency on both sections of HSPA. Based on the findings from this in-depth evaluation, the Department would be justified in taking significant action to improve student outcomes in the district.

However, as the evaluation team recognized, a unique set of circumstances in Camden present the opportunity for the district to radically transform itself and address the systemic issues identified in this report. The district has an opportunity to hire a transformative superintendent that will set the district on a new path. The dedicated support of expert educators as part of the Regional Achievement Center will provide unprecedented support to Camden schools. The new opportunity afforded by the Urban Hope Act will allow the district to attract proven leaders from across the state and country to help in the work of creating new school options.

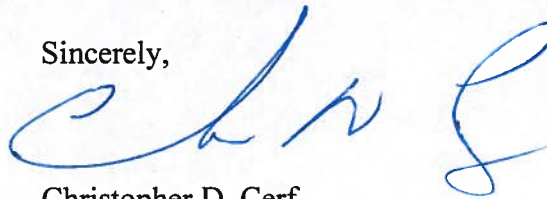
Because of this confluence of opportunities, as a measured first step, the Department will focus on supporting the district in addressing these five areas, while monitoring district and school improvement and determining if more serious action is necessary. Specifically, the Department will support the Camden Board of Education through the State Monitor to collaboratively select a national search firm to conduct the Superintendent search. In addition, the Department will increase the staffing in the Office of the School Monitor to include Highly Skilled Professionals that will provide technical assistance to implement these recommendations.

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The extent to which the district seizes this opportunity to make change will signal to the Department of Education and to the residents of Camden whether or not the district is serious in its desire to reform the district and improve student outcomes. What is needed are not incremental steps but a radical new approach to leadership, staffing, and district management. It is the Department's expectation that the Board, district administrators, and school personnel will make every effort to assist in the implementation of these recommendations.

I urge you to read the report closely. The details provided by the team's observations about a lack of effective instructional practices, the obstacles faced by building administrators in their daily work, and the analysis of student achievement outcomes are stunning and must compel us to act without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cerf', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christopher D. Cerf
Commissioner

CDC/be
c: David Hespe
Senior Staff
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David Hardy



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Camden City Public Schools

In-Depth QSAC Evaluation

Pursuant to the requirements of N.J.A.C. 6A:30, the Camden City Public School District has undergone Review II of the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) district performance review (DPR). Based on that performance review and the district not satisfying at least 80% of the indicators in the areas of instruction and program, personnel, governance, operations, and fiscal management, an in-depth evaluation was completed. [N.J.A.C. 6A:30-5:3.]

New Jersey Department of Education
Trenton, NJ 08625

August 2012

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Abbreviations

ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
AHSA	Alternative High School Assessment
Camden	Camden City Public School District
DPR	District Performance Review
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
EVVRS	Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System
G&T	Gifted & Talented
IDE	In-Depth Evaluation
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004
NJCCCS	New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards
NJDOE	New Jersey Department of Education
NJQSAC	New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum
PD	Professional Development
SFSF	State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, under ARRA
SIG	School Improvement Grant
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
Title I	Title I, Part A (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies)

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Background

The Camden City Public Schools is a comprehensive community public school district that serves students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade from the city of Camden. Historically, during the last four decades, the Camden City Public School District has experienced inconsistent leadership in the areas of fiscal competency, student achievement, and facilities maintenance. The school district has failed to meet monitoring standards despite technical assistance and follow up by county and state personnel.

Specifically in the early 1980's, the district underwent "Cycle 2, Level 1" monitoring by which state certification was denied based on failure of seventeen (17) indicators, including planning, curriculum implementation, student attendance, dropout prevention, building inspections, substandard classrooms, staff certification, staff attendance, basic skills, bilingual, special education plans, student test scores in grades three (3), six (6) and nine (9); desegregation and affirmative action plans.

In the late 1980's, "Level II" monitoring occurred in the district. An external team subsequently conducted a review of the district and subsequently issued a monitoring report covering governance and management, student achievement, attendance, educational programs, facilities and finance with 127 directives. A corrective action plan developed by the district was monitored quarterly by the county office staff. Although, during the 1980's, some progress was accomplished by the district, by the mid-1990's, the Camden City Public School District once again failed state monitoring for daily pupil attendance, teacher professional improvement plans, and student achievement outcomes.

In the late 1990's, technical assistance again was provided and a corrective action plan was subsequently developed by the district and monitored by the county office. As a result of the Abbott v. Burke decisions, continuing through the 1990's and 2000's, the Abbott Division, via the Office of School Improvement, has provided facilitators and technical assistance for the staff of the Camden City School District. In addition, financial and personnel resources have been provided through the Title I office using the Collaborative Assessment Planning for Achievement (CAPA) process.

In 2003, when Bonsall Family School, Camden High School, and East Camden High School were identified as three of the seven "persistently dangerous" high schools in New Jersey, assistance was provided via the local police department, county prosecutors, and county education office and the Department of Education in Trenton in an attempt to provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

In July 2007, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) issued an evaluation of Camden City Public Schools pursuant to the requirements of the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC), N.J.A.C. 6A:30 et seq. At that time, the district was placed on a continuum in each of the areas evaluated in the district performance review (DPR): instruction and program, personnel, governance, operations, and fiscal management.

Following the QSAC Review I evaluation, the district developed improvement plans. Staff from the Camden County Office of Education conducted an interim review of the district's progress toward addressing the deficiencies found in the QSAC Review I for results of the interim review. The interim review was a review of documents only, unlike the more comprehensive initial evaluation completed in 2007.

In accordance with the requirements of the N.J.A.C. 6A:30, Camden underwent another full QSAC review in 2012 (QSAC Review II). Based on this performance review, the district failed to satisfy at least 80% of the indicators in the areas of instruction and program, personnel, governance, operations, and fiscal management. The Superintendent requested a reconsideration of the 2012 score, providing additional evidence supporting proficiency in particular areas in the QSAC indicators. The outcome of this reconsideration and documentation provided by the district resulted in a small improvement Camden's performance in both Instruction and Program and Personnel, although both indicators remain at an extremely low level. Listed in Table One below are the 2007 QSAC Review I placement, 2010 interim review placement, 2012 QSAC Review II placement, and 2012 QSAC Review II Reconsideration scores.

Table One: Camden City Public Schools QSAC Scores

DPR Areas	QSAC Review I (2007)	Interim Review (2010)	QSAC Review II (2012)	QSAC Review II Reconsideration (2012)
Instruction & Program	6%	13%	7%	9%
Personnel	5%	36%	9%	19%
Governance	11%	11%	33%	33%
Operations	39%	53%	47%	47%
Fiscal Management	31%	73%	79%	79%

Between the QSAC Review I and QSAC Review II placement, there was notable improvement to the District's performance in fiscal management attributed largely to the leadership and expertise of the State Monitor assigned to the district in 2007. Aside from this, Camden demonstrated small increases in the remaining four DPR areas over the time period. Thus, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:30-5.3, an In-Depth Evaluation (IDE) of all of the key components was conducted.

In-Depth Evaluation Process

Starting on February 14, 2012, an IDE team, comprised of individuals from the New Jersey Department of Education, spent two and a half weeks in the school district extensively reviewing documents, conducting school visits, and interviewing central office administration, district supervisors and support staff, school administrators, counselors, teachers, and students. Additionally, documents regarding the District and QSAC that are housed within the NJDOE were reviewed.

The Instruction and Program team, comprised of over 15 individuals from various NJDOE county offices, including the Camden County Office of Education, visited all 27 schools in the district. The team members conducted interviews with various school administrators, literacy and math coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, support staff, and students.

Another team of NJDOE staff evaluated Camden in two QSAC DPR areas - Personnel and Operations. They visited 14 schools in the district and conducted interviews with various central office administrators and school-based staff. They held a total of 103 interviews and reviewed 39 documents.

The Governance team interviewed the Superintendent of Schools, Deputy Superintendent, the State Monitor, and all but one of the District Board of Education members. (One board member was not available.) Interviews for Fiscal Management were conducted with the State Monitor, School Business Administrator, Interim Purchasing Agent, and Facilities Director.

The team also held a community forum, which lasted approximately two and a half hours, to gather input from community stakeholders on their perceptions of the Camden School District related to particular QSAC DPR areas. A survey was conducted of the attendees to gather this information and general community commentary.

The IDE team identified a number of critical needs in each of the five DPR areas that hinder the district's capacity to effectively deliver educational services for its students in a safe and secure environment. The major findings are highlighted in the sections that follow. The findings from the monitoring visit discussed in this report are aligned with the indicators from the in the 2010-2011 DPR. In addition, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14(4-6), recommendations are provided for the school district to use in developing and implementing a QSAC district improvement plan.

Findings

1. The Camden City Public School District Must Substantially Improve Educational Effectiveness and Efficiency

The Camden City Public School District has had a consistent trend of low student performance over time. This trend has existed for over a decade and persisted through the most recently published state test results. It pervades every performance metric, at every school, in all grades and subjects. And it is apparent irrespective of whether Camden is compared to the state, similar schools or districts, or the students within the same student demographic subgroup.

1.1 Performance on Statewide Assessments

As required under the federal law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), New Jersey has a statewide testing program for students in grades 3 – 8 in language arts literacy (LAL) and math (Math) entitled the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK). This assessment is given on grade level toward the end of the year, typically in May. High school students are also tested in language arts literacy and math once during high school, typically in the spring of their eleventh grade year. This assessment is entitled the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Students who are not successful on HSPA in either section on their first attempt have the opportunity to retake the assessment in their twelfth grade year in the fall and/or spring semesters. If a student is not successful in any of the three test administrations of HSPA, he/she can attempt to demonstrate proficiency on the Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA) or appeal to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to demonstrate that they have met state standards via other methods.

New Jersey recently sought and was awarded some flexibility in implementing NCLB from the United States Department of Education (ED). In the accountability framework established under NJDOE's agreement with ED, NJDOE evaluated the performance of all schools using a three-year average based on NJASK and HSPA from the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 school years. Using this methodology, nearly all of Camden's schools have NJASK/HSPA proficiency rates that rank at the very bottom of the state.

Overall, twenty-three of Camden's twenty-six eligible schools are within the Priority category established in the accountability framework. This category is comprised of the seventy-five lowest-performing schools in the state. With twenty-three of the lowest seventy-five performing schools in the state located in Camden, Camden comprises a significant share of New Jersey's lowest performing schools. Put differently, while Camden's schools make up roughly 1% of all schools in the state, they account for 33% of the lowest-performing schools across the state.

Though the State's assessments have changed over time – thus making direct proficiency rate comparisons inappropriate for certain years – we can measure how Camden schools perform in each year relative to other schools around the state. Using this methodology, Camden has ranked at the bottom of the state on year-end assessments for far longer than the past three years. During the 2001-02 school year, Camden High School had HSPA proficiency rates that ranked it as the 8th worst high school in the state in both LAL and Math. Nine years later, during the 2010-11 school year, the school's HSPA LAL proficiency ranked as the 7th worst in the state, of schools with published data. The school's Math proficiency rate during the 2010-11 year ranked as the 4th worst in the state and was so low that privacy statutes required NJDOE to suppress it from publication.

A pattern of stagnant performance exists throughout the district, not just at Camden High School. Nineteen of the district's currently-open schools have ranked in the bottom 5% of statewide LAL performance for at least five years during the seven year period spanning 2004-05 to 2010-11; thirteen schools have done so in Math proficiency. If anything, performance on state assessments has decreased in both subjects over this time frame. Over the past seven years, eighteen of Camden's priority schools have declined in LAL performance relative to other schools across the state, while twenty-two declined in Math.

These levels of performance are also apparent when looking only at the most recently published assessments, as illustrated in the Table Two below. For instance, while 66.6% of students around the state passed the LAL portion of the NJASK test in the 2010-11 school year, just 19.6% of Camden students did so.

Table Two: 2010-11 Proficiency Rates, Camden vs. State

		NJASK		HSPA	
		LAL	Math	LAL	Math
Camden District		19.6%	28.0%	51.1%	25.9%
State Average		66.6%	75.5%	90.7%	82.2%
Percentage Difference	Point	-46.9	-47.5	-39.6	-56.3

Additionally, individual student subgroups often perform lower than these school-wide averages would suggest. In Veterans Memorial Middle School, for instance, a total of 235 Special Education and 101 Limited English Proficient students have been eligible to take the NJASK exam over the past three years. Collectively, these students have had a proficiency rate of just 3.9% over this time period, averaged across LAL and Math.

The figures below also display the proficiency rate for all districts in similar economic circumstances as Camden, so-called District Factor Groups (DFG). DFG groups are based on a series of community-wide socio-economic indicators drawn from United States Census Data. Camden is classified as part of DFG A, the lowest socio-economic groups in the state. As shown in Figures One and Two, Camden has underperformed the DFG A average every year during this time period, with proficiency gaps increasing over

time. In both subjects during the 2010-11 school year, DFG A districts had proficiency rates that were double those in Camden. Note that some of the State's NJASK tests have changed over time, resulting in declines in LAL and Math proficiency across the state. The dotted lines in the figures denote years in which these exams changed.

Figure One: Historical Language Arts Literacy Proficiency

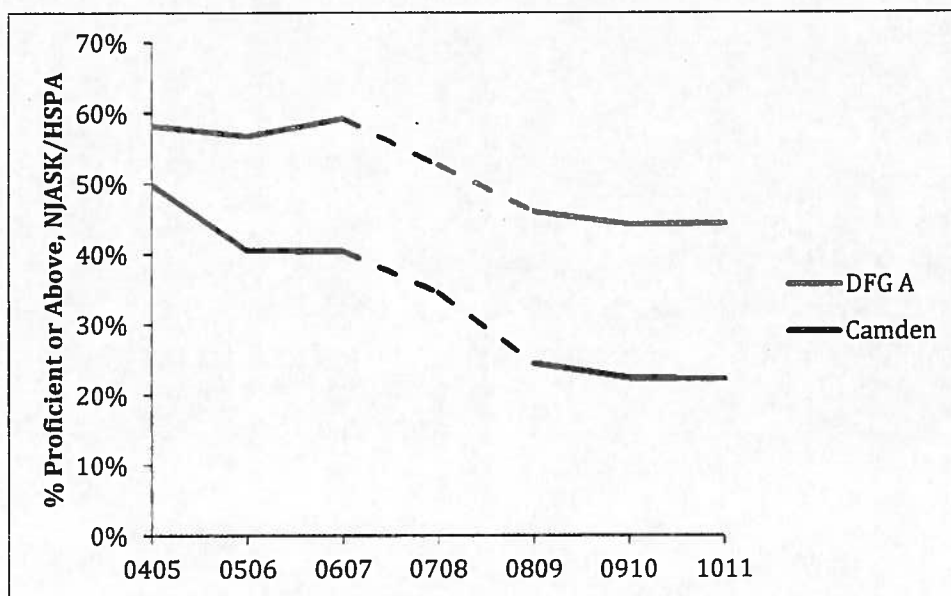
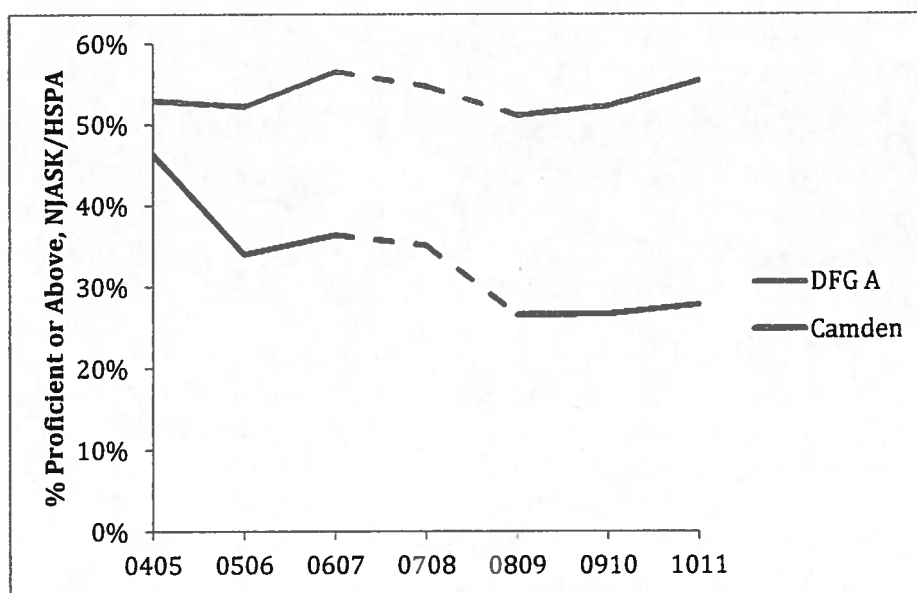


Figure Two: Historical Math Proficiency



1.2 Student Progress

For all schools, the rate of progress made by students is an important indicator of the impact that schools have on individual students in addition to his/her proficiency outcomes. For school districts that serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the rate of progress takes on additional significance, as it is capable of measuring how a student progressed in any given year versus the skills that the student demonstrated at the beginning of the year. Scholars and educators alike call for the use of measures of student progress in part because these measures are neutral to such 'starting gate inequalities.'

As required under New Jersey's receipt of federal Recovery Act moneys, the New Jersey adopted metrics of student growth in recent years and has begun to measure student progress over time using Student Growth Percentiles (SGP). SGP measures the academic growth of particular students from year to year, comparing each student to a group of their academic peers, i.e., to students with similar testing histories over time. These individual student SGP scores can then be aggregated to become measures of school-wide growth.

Across the state, 5.8% of eligible schools (n = 102) have 'low' levels of overall academic growth, based on 2011 growth scores. Yet 33% of eligible schools in Camden (eight out of twenty-four) have 'low' growth based on this data. And every single currently open, eligible Camden school exhibits 'low' academic growth in at least one subgroup or grade based on SGP from the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 assessments.

The State always looks at proficiency rates and academic growth together to see if schools and districts are placing students on a trajectory towards college and career readiness. This data shows that, in addition to low proficiency rates over the last ten years, all schools in the district are growing student achievement for at least some student populations at lower rates than other schools around the state, even when compared to students with similar academic histories.

1.3 Dropout and Graduation

For the first time in 2011, New Jersey calculated graduation rates according to the federally mandated "Four-year, Adjusted Cohort, Graduation Rate" in NCLB. This method tracks the outcomes of the freshmen cohort that entered high school in 2007. Camden's 2011 graduation rate was just 56.9%, and the state's overall rate of 83.2% was nearly 50% higher.

These graduation rates are even lower when looking only at individual Camden schools. For instance, Camden High School's graduation rate was 44.7%, the 6th lowest out of more than 380 high schools in the state.

This student-level data also allows for tracking of the specific pathway by which each student graduated by cross referencing the list of high school graduates across the assessment file data. Of the 446 Camden graduates reported in 2011, just 106 students

(23.8%) were verified as having passed both HSPA LAL and Math sections on their first attempt. After two additional attempts to pass the HSPA during the senior year, only an additional 63 graduates passed, resulting in 37.9% of graduates who passed HSPA. Thus, most students who graduate from Camden did not demonstrate proficiency on the State's 11th grade assessment.

Of the many students who fail to graduate within 4 years, 33.4% of them dropped out of school entirely, while another 16.5% were still enrolled by 'off-track' on course completion. That most students do not complete their education in Camden is also apparent from the fact that student enrollment steadily decreases by grade. During the 2010-11 year, there were 1,205 students enrolled in 1st grade, but only 457 enrolled in 12th grade. This dramatic decrease in enrollment in the later grades is higher than several other urban districts, and has persisted over time.

1.4 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

New Jersey has consistently published SAT data as part of the Annual School Report card for many years, with particular attention to levels of SAT participation and performance over time. Analyzing such data is particularly challenging in Camden. As mentioned above, dropout and attrition are significant factors in the district. As a result, by the time students become eligible to take the SAT, enrollment in that particular student cohort has declined significantly.

During the 2010-11 school year, just 51% of the remaining senior class took the SAT exam. On average, test-takers scored roughly 134 to 154 points below the state mean, depending on the subject. While 43.2% of test-takers across the state scored at levels indicating college-readiness as determined by the College Board, less than 1% in Camden did so. Further, Camden's college-readiness rates are down from a marginally higher 3.7% in the 2005-06 school year. Over the past six years, a total of just fifty-five students in Camden have scored at college-ready levels, out of 1,536 test-takers and 2,851 students in the senior class during this time period.

This lack of demonstrated college readiness on the SAT is even more pronounced when looking at individual schools. At the district's open-enrollment schools – Met East, Woodrow Wilson, and Camden High School – just one student out of 131 test-takers scored at college-ready levels during the 2010-11 school year and a total of just nine students have done so out of 985 test-takers and 2,260 seniors enrolled since 2005-06.

Though Brimm Medical Arts High School has HSPA and graduation rates that meet or exceed state averages, the school's SAT data shows that it has a long way to go to fully prepare students for college and career. Not a single test-taker during the 2010-11 school year scored at levels indicating college-readiness, while average scores on the Verbal, Mathematics, and Writing sections were 90-100 points below the state average. In addition, over the past several years, Brimm Medical's performance has declined in both average SAT scores and rates of college readiness.

Table Three: 2010-11 SAT Data

District	Verbal Mean	Math Mean	Writing Mean	% Meeting College Benchmark
Camden City	358	363	357	0.9%
DFG A	399	420	397	10.7%
State	493	517	496	43.2%

1.5 Advanced Placement (AP)

The State also routinely publishes AP performance and participation rates over time as part of the Annual School Report Card. During the 2009-10 school year, just fifty-three students of the 1,041 students in the junior and senior classes (5%) took at least one AP exam. The College Board equates a score of a 3 to a 'C' in a college-level course. Just three exams (3.8%) received a score of 3 or higher, a rate that is marginally down from 5.2% during the 2005-06 school year. During the five-year period spanning the 2005-06 to 2009-10 school years, only sixty-one exams received a score of 3 or higher, out of 5,160 students enrolled in the eleventh or twelfth grade during this time.

Additionally, the overwhelming majority of the Camden students who take AP exams are enrolled in the city's selective-admissions schools. During the five years spanning 2005-06 to 2009-10, just seventy-four students at Camden High School, Woodrow Wilson HS, and Met East HS took at least one AP exam, out of 4,178 juniors and seniors enrolled during his time period. Out of the ninety-six exams taken, only eight received passing score of 3 or higher.

Though the district's selective-admissions schools account for the majority of AP exams taken, they again perform much lower than their HSPA and graduation rates would otherwise suggest. Students in Brimm Medical and Creative & Performing Arts took 399 exams in the five-year period spanning 2005-06 to 2009-10, yet just 53 exams (13.3%) received a passing score of a 3 or higher. The College Board equates a score of a 5 to an 'A' in a college-level course. Just 1.8% of exams received this score over the time period.

2. The Camden City Public School District needs to provide more effective and consistent leadership

While members of the in-depth evaluation team and personnel from NJDOE can name individuals within the district that are demonstrating high degrees of professionalism and success within their individual roles, the administration of the Camden City Public

School district as a whole exhibits a lack of leadership, mismanagement, an absence of policies and procedures for even routine actions, and rampant turnover in job assignments.

2.1 Leadership and management is inconsistent and not sufficiently effective

There has been an absence of effective leadership and management at the top that has precluded the delivery of consistently high-quality educational and support services throughout the district. Leadership and a governing vision are crucial to the functioning of any organization as it establishes roles and responsibilities for each individual within a larger unified system that is coordinated around achieving common expectations. Instead, interviewees and respondents frequently described an administration and a Board of Education (BOE) that needs to establish a meaningful vision for Camden schools, shared by stakeholders and infused in the every day actions of the staff of Camden City Public Schools. Instead, the administration and BOE is viewed as lacking established roles, responsibilities, and routines. Thus, individuals within the central office often are functioning to fulfill their own self-defined or perceived role that is at times at odds or uncoordinated with others in central office.

While there is some evidence that central office administrators convene meetings amongst themselves and also with school building administrators, most commonly these meetings take the form of information dissemination about compliance activities rather than as opportunities to coordinate and align functions. This lack of coordination amongst central office departments and divisions hampers even the most basic of district functions. A tangible example of the lack of coordination between school buildings, purchasing, procurement, and the business office is the provision of school supplies. In-depth evaluators found schools without textbooks, other schools with an abundance of textbooks and laptops for each teacher, pallets of textbooks and materials that were still shrink-wrapped in March, and new computer equipment that had yet to be unpacked.

The absence of effective leadership has resulted in school building administrators acting largely in isolation and without supervision. Thus, rather than Camden functioning as a whole, the school district is more commonly viewed as a compilation of individual schools. For instance, interviewees reported that central office staff, such as supervisors, had not visited or monitored them to provide curricular or programmatic guidance. Additionally, staff and faculty hiring is fragmented and lacks proactive leadership. For instance, although student teachers are present in Camden schools as part of their pre-service education program, no systemic attempts are made to retain them for fulltime employment despite the presences of vacancies.

Central office staff is also too often not sufficiently prepared for their roles. Many of the key staff positions are filled with individuals who do not have experience in public school settings. For example, prior to the assignment of a fiscal monitor to the district, the inefficient administration of district finances resulted in the considerable loss of district

funds and their return to the federal government and still others may eventually need to be repaid by the district.

2.2 The Camden City Board of Education needs to better execute its duties

School boards across New Jersey are able to exercise a direct authority over school districts by establishing a vision for the district, hiring and evaluating the superintendent of the district, and overseeing the formation of the school district's annual budget. The Camden BOE has not fully met these obligations.

As mentioned above, the BOE has failed to collaboratively establish a vision for the school system amongst all stakeholders that drives and shapes system-wide behaviors. As a result, the BOE has not established clear priorities for itself and is not acting in a coordinated fashion. For instance, BOE members are provided materials ahead of meetings and are invited to submit requests for additional information prior to the meetings so that actions on specific items can be taken. Few BOE members, however, exercise their role in this way. BOE members also routinely ask central office staff for new documentation or data that are not then substantively used in discussion or decision-making.

The instrument used to evaluate the performance of the superintendent has not been regularly reviewed and thus does not reflect priorities and expectations of the BOE. Furthermore, not all members of the BOE have participated in the process. Additionally, BOE members have not fully participated in the oversight of the formation of the district's budget. Although a budget calendar has been formed, the district and BOE is regularly off-schedule. Thus, a key opportunity to ensure that the district is funding its efforts effectively, aligned with goals and objectives, and also providing for community-wide input into the process is missed.

Furthermore, the BOE is widely perceived to be acting outside of its prescribed roles in several ways. First, BOE members often engage in an investigatory fashion when presented with a concern by a community member or a discipline charge. Thus, rather than bringing the matter to the superintendent's attention as required, BOE members will investigate and sometimes even question school staff members. In other cases, BOE members have not provided the superintendent with reasonable notice to respond to the concerns and instead present the concerns first at public BOE meetings.

2.3 School building administrators are regularly rotated amongst schools

As evidenced by assignment dates in BOE minutes, documentation provided to NJDOE, and interviews with building administrators, it is apparent that building administrators are routinely rotated from school to school. Many times, these assignments occur immediately before or after the beginning of the school year, but some occur during the year as well. Specifically, of the twenty-five principals audited, five serve as "Acting"

principals and six were reassigned mid-year. The highest mobility for principals occurred in the past two school years.

While many of these reassignments are defended as predicated on the need to put better-regarded principals – who are demonstrating some success in their current assignments – in higher-need buildings, some of the reassigned principals voice concerns that they do not possess the appropriate skill set for their new assignment. For instance, one administrator who was assigned to a bilingual school expressed dismay that he did not have any experience working with bilingual students. A principal who was reassigned to a school with a greater than 40% special education student population felt that not having a special education background was a hindrance.

As important as the match between the skill set of the building administrator and the needs of the building is the ability of the principal to generate a vision for school improvement in the school, establish a consistent staff evaluation schedule, and conduct evaluations, provide for professional development needs, and develop an esprit de corps which is fundamental to addressing student educational, social, and emotional needs. It is evident that the haphazard and capricious system of reassigning building principals undercuts all of these efforts.

2.4 The district has not effectively implemented improvement plans

As noted above, NJDOE and others have been actively engaged in working to assist the district to develop and implement monitoring plans for decades. Such activities have included school improvement planning directed under NCLB in the form of CAPA reports and plans, county office monitoring in the form of QSAC, and District Improvement Plans, considerable NJDOE program specific resources, and assistance from others such as training from the New Jersey School Boards Association. Very little of these invested additional resources have shown measurable benefits to-date. The notable exception is NJDOE's assignment of a Fiscal Monitor to the district. The monitor's impact is keenly felt and significantly apparent in the district's improvement in the Fiscal Management section of QSAC.

Additionally, the district does not participate in 'standing' or regular meetings amongst colleagues from other districts that are typically arenas for sharing information, learning about promising practices, and discussing upcoming initiatives. For instance, the district demonstrates poor attendance at county-level curriculum coordinator consortium meetings where, for example, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards is discussed, or at either the county-level superintendent roundtables or business administrator roundtables. The impact of this lack of participation in the regular outreach programs of NJDOE is that the district is further isolated from the larger community of educators across the state.

3. The Camden City Public School District needs to better provide an effective educational program

3.1 Curriculum guides do not structure the delivery of instruction to students

Camden City Public Schools and the BOE have not adopted or implemented district-wide curricula in any of the nine state-specified subject areas, resulting in a lack of defined or measured set of high expectations for student learning in all grade levels. Thus, a culture of low academic aspirations permeates the district as teaching staff do not formulate learning objectives that are consistent with state standards and appropriate for the subject and grade levels that they teach. Instead, they draw from their personal experience with individual classrooms resulting in the delivery of content that is often significantly less rigorous than statewide expectations.

While curriculum guides for math and language arts literacy exist, they are not routinely accessible to teachers. They are not often found in classrooms, but rather in school offices or locked closets. Additionally, a consistent process to develop and monitor instruction that is aligned with the curriculum and state standards does not exist. In some buildings, lesson plans are reviewed and in others they are not. Also, many approved lesson plans were observed to have learning objectives that read more like the agenda for the class period than as objectives for student learning.

Instructional strategies vary throughout the district. Observations of classrooms in all grade levels indicate that instruction is most often teacher led and focused on simple rote strategies, such as questions with one-word answers. For example, in many kindergarten classrooms, there was little evidence of teaching skills within a meaningful context using primary sources of “hands-on” materials or examples of children engaged in rich discussions following a story.

3.2 Instruction is fragmented by the school-level adoption of a myriad of programs

In the absence of central office leadership with regard to the implementation of state standards, provision of a district-wide curriculum, or professional development related to instructional practices, schools have made independent instructional program adoption decisions, with inconsistent implementation, fragmented professional development programs, and a lack of attention to determining their effectiveness. Thus, the schools in Camden have adopted or are ‘piloting’ a myriad of vendor-driven programs without coordination across curricular areas. Furthermore, the adoption of these programs has also occurred without concern for a student’s natural progression from grade level to grade level, i.e., a student may begin the primary grades with one instructional approach and then progress to a different school using a different instructional approach. From a detailed observation of the district’s central office organization chart, it is also apparent

that schools within such 'feeder' patterns are not reporting to the same senior staff member, complicating efforts at coordination at best.

Effective staff development programs, with monitored attendance, designed to improve staff's professional performance and address the needs of all students, have not been effectively conducted. The types of professional development described during the interviews in the school buildings indicated that the professional development of staff varies greatly among the buildings and it was not clear that all required training of staff is conducted. Such fragmentation exists as the vendor associated with the adopted instructional program most often provides the professional development. Thus, a staff development plan is not developed from an assessment of the needs of either the teachers or students in the building, is not based on success of prior professional development efforts, and is not focused on culturally-responsive teaching and the needs of diverse learners as appropriate.

An additional prevailing concern expressed in interviews and verified during the field visits is that achievement data is not consistently used throughout the district to drive either instruction or professional development. Aside from H.B. Wilson, Whittier Elementary School and Camden High School, Camden schools have not analyzed student academic and non-academic data to address teacher professional development and student needs.

Professional growth opportunities for building administrators are also not tailored to address current and emerging issues in curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve teaching and learning. The required Professional Growth Plans have not been submitted to the New Jersey Association of School Administrators for peer review. No evidence was presented to demonstrate that alternate route teachers receive required intensive, four-week mentoring, that professional development of novice teachers is sustained, or that mentor teachers receive specialized training in how to effectively mentor.

As noted above, because building administrators are frequently reassigned from one building to the next, the implementation of each instructional program is often severely compromised, as the administrator who selected and championed the program is no longer leading the building, and/or the new administrator may favor another model. Also, as central office processes for purchasing and procuring instructional materials are not routine and efficient, materials related to program implementation often are not provided until well into the school year. Finally, even when materials are provided, they are not necessarily provided in alternative languages. For instance, Learnia is being implemented at Pyne Poynt middle school, a bilingual school, but is not translated into Spanish. So while the instruction occurs in Spanish, the assessment of student learning associated with that instruction occurs in English.

3.3 School staffing is haphazard and inconsistent

The staffing of the schools in Camden City Public Schools appears to occur in a haphazard and inconsistent way. School administrators report that they are often not involved in the decisions over which staff are assigned to their buildings and that staffing decisions are made primarily at the central office. It is also not apparent, with the high rate of mobility among administrators in the district, that specific areas of need and personnel shortages are analyzed when making transfers among schools within the district. Instead, staff members are transferred with no apparent sustainable staffing plan. Many times this results in shortages of administrative support staff for the principals. In addition, there was no indication that the district identifies leadership and staffing issues unique to its lowest performing schools. Instead, the perception is that changes in staffing occur to resolve issues with staff at the originating school.

Some classes are taught by a succession of substitutes in the case of the long-term absence of the regular teacher or during an actual employment vacancy. Hence, the lack of documentation demonstrating that the district has a consistent practice of hiring certified, long-term replacements for such classes or quickly filling teacher vacancies is particularly troubling. Furthermore, district personnel did not demonstrate knowledge that the service of an individual with a substitute credential could be extended from twenty to forty days upon request to the Executive County Superintendent nor did they know that teachers with standard certificates could substitute for 60 days. The mismanagement of these vacancies has resulted in a constant churn of substitutes in many classes, a practice that inhibits student achievement.

3.4 The district must better provide appropriate student support services

Camden City Public Schools is failing to provide student support services that are either appropriate to individual students or required by state and/or federal regulations. For example, in the elementary schools that the team visited, it was apparent that the guidance counselors are used for many purposes other than their main responsibility of implementing a coordinated guidance-counseling program, such as conducting discipline investigations and planning health-related educational programs, i.e., hygiene or alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse prevention programs. Staff that are supposed to be available to teachers to assist with developing strategies and/or supports for non-special education students to enable them to be successful in general education settings are instead assigned to child study teams, specific to special education students. Thus, regular classroom teachers are lacking support.

Additionally, the needs of Spanish-speaking families are not sufficiently addressed. The superintendent as well as building staff reported that the district has failed to attract individuals who can effectively conduct outreach or advocate on behalf of such students. For example, one school community liaison that is charged with such outreach does not speak Spanish. In other instances, Spanish-speaking personnel are not available to assist during child study team evaluations. Furthermore, in addition to instructional materials

not being available in Spanish, the district is not providing effective professional development to general education teachers on how to work with English Language Learners.

Training for principals, teachers and support staff in identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect is not consistently conducted in all schools or evaluated by the district. Interviewees demonstrate evidence of the lack of consistent implementation of the district's policies and procedures by each describing a different procedure for reporting such incidents. Violence and vandalism reporting is inconsistent across schools. School staff have a minimal understanding of what to report and how to report it. As a consequence, the district is not accurately reporting such incidents to NJDOE.

Recommendations

The preceding pages describe a district in crisis – a district that has during the last decade failed to serve its mission of educating students. As outlined in detail, student level outcomes must improve; leadership in the district has been weak, intermittent and fragmented; and the district needs to implement a coherent educational program.

In sum, there is ample evidence to support a state-led intervention in Camden. However, Camden is also presented with a confluence of opportunities at this point in time: the ability to hire a new superintendent, an alignment of federal and state accountability systems, coupled with new state-level resources that can be dedicated to support Camden schools, and evidence of some progress in the district's fiscal management processes.

Thus, the next six to eight months will be crucial in determining whether the state should exercise the full range of its authorities in the form of partial or full interventions. Failure to execute on the recommendations below will leave the state with no choice but to more aggressively intervene.

As detailed below, this report recommends:

1. Conduct a national superintendent search and hire an individual of demonstrated skill and experience in turning around a failing school district;
2. Cooperate fully with the Executive Director of the Regional Achievement Center in the implementation of the eight turnaround principles (detailed below) in the district's twenty-three priority schools;
3. Undertake a comprehensive overhaul of the district's personnel practices;
4. Continue to support an application for Renaissance Schools under the Urban Hope Act and assume a supportive environment for existing and future charter schools;
5. Develop a long-term plan for board development and new member induction;
6. Expand the role of the State Monitor's office in Camden to add personnel who can assist the State Monitor, the Executive Director of the Regional Achievement Center, and the Board of Education with the implementation of these recommendations.

While the five QSAC District Performance Reviews (DPRs) are comprised of specific indicators that monitor a school district's functioning in Program and Instruction, Operations, Fiscal Management, Governance, and Personnel, this report has instead focused on global shortcomings of the Camden City Public School District drawn from an analysis of deficiencies across the five DPRs. This report has detailed, for instance, that the district lacks a coherent vision, fully effective leadership, a centralized curriculum aligned to New Jersey Standards, a coherent staffing plan with schedules for staff evaluation, and policies and procedures to govern interactions between schools and central administration for purchasing materials, seeking student supports, and data reporting.

As a result of the most recent QSAC review, the district was required to submit indicator specific improvement plans. Those district improvement plans will now be reviewed in light of the findings presented in this report and may require revision. The district is also required to submit an improvement plan, addressing, among other, things the improvement of the instructional program. The formation of that plan will be assisted by NJDOE personnel and must address the recommendations below. Progress in each of these areas will be closely monitored. Failure to make significant demonstrated progress could result in more rigorous engagement with the District, including the possibility of a partial intervention (pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14(3-7) or full state intervention (pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A: 7A-15a-d).

1. Conduct a successful search for a transformative superintendent

The district has for far too long been without a functioning central office. While some entrepreneurial school building administrators have managed to partially insulate their schools from the dysfunction of central office, the management of the schools is fragmented, inefficient, and personality-driven.

The Board of Education must begin immediately to hire a transformative leader as superintendent. NJDOE will support the district in this process to attract a person whom both the state and the Board agree has a demonstrated capacity and expertise in urban school leadership.

An initial priority of the new administration must be to establish a coherent organizational chart of central office staff that is focused on students. For instance, the reporting relationships from schools to central office ought to encourage and facilitate collaboration amongst schools in feeder patterns so that a student experiences coherency in educational programs and support services as he or she progresses from elementary to middle to high school.

2. Faithfully implement the eight turnaround principles

As mentioned above, twenty-three of Camden schools are labeled as Priority schools under NJDOE's ESEA Flexibility agreement with the United States Department of Education (ED). Thus, a pressing priority for the district is to work with the NJDOE's Executive Director of the Regional Achievement Center to begin the implementation of ED's turnaround principles, including assisting on the implementation of the model curriculum and formative assessments and the development of school improvement plans specific to each school's Quality School Review findings.

Priority schools, under the direction of NJDOE, are required to implement ED's turnaround principles. The turnaround principles are research-based strategies for improving student outcomes and include the following:

1. **School Leadership:** Ensuring that every school is led by a principal who has the ability to lead the turnaround effort;
2. **School Climate and Culture:** Establishing an environment in every school conducive to learning and a culture of high expectations;
3. **Instruction:** Ensuring that teachers utilize research-based, effective instruction to meet the needs of all students;
4. **Standards-Aligned Curriculum, Assessment and Intervention System:** Ensuring teachers have the foundational documents and instructional materials needed to teach to the rigorous college and career ready standards, including student learning objectives keyed to standards and unit assessments;
5. **Use of Time:** Redesigning time to better meet student needs and increase teacher collaboration focused on improving teaching and learning;
6. **Use of Data:** Ensuring school-wide use of data focused on improving teaching and learning, as well as climate and culture;
7. **Staffing Practices:** Developing the skills to better recruit, retain, and develop effective teachers; and
8. **Family and Community Engagement:** Increasing academically focused family and community engagement.

NJDOE will be staffing a Regional Achievement Center (RAC) that will focus almost exclusively on Camden City Public Schools. The Center will be comprised of an Executive Director for Regional Achievement who will lead the school improvement efforts and build capacity within the school district. The RAC will also be staffed with Turnaround Coaches who will work with a limited number of individual schools in an intensive fashion to improve capacity for instructional leadership. Other staff at the RAC will include specialists in elementary and secondary literacy, math, English-language learners, climate and culture, personnel/staffing, and the use of data.

Although the RACs will focus on the schools as the main unit of change, significant collaboration and communication with the administration of Camden will be essential to the implementation of the turnaround principles and to ensuring that capacity is built to sustain improvement. In particular, such collaboration will include staffing the administration and faculty of school buildings effectively.

Both the administration and the Camden Board of Education must commit themselves to working with the Executive Director of the RAC and the State Monitor in order to support their schools in the implementation of the turnaround principles.

3. Comprehensively reform the district's personnel practices

The district, in response to federal requirements, prepared and published a document describing the district's teacher and principal evaluation system.¹ The document outlined protocols for teacher evaluations, specifically stating that tenured teachers would be observed and evaluated not less than twice a year and non-tenured teachers would be observed and evaluated not less than four times a year. In conducting its analysis, the in-depth QSAC evaluation team was struck by how little management of staff was occurring in the schools, inclusive of a lack of adherence to the published evaluation protocols. Attributed partially to the frequent reassignment of principals from school to school, staff members were either not being evaluated or were evaluated less frequently than required. Little to no staff development – specific to individual teacher needs and predicated on feedback from observations – is being conducted in Camden schools.

Additionally, in the same document, the district reported that in SY2009-2010, of the 1,354 teachers employed in the district, 99.3% of the teachers were meeting the district's criteria for acceptable performance (i.e., 1,345 of the 1,354 teachers employed). The district also reported that only nine teachers in the entire district were not "Highly Qualified" as required by NCLB. Similarly, 33 of 34 principals in the district met the criteria for acceptable performance.

As noted earlier in the findings, Camden has exhibited uneven practices in hiring and placing educators throughout their schools. High mobility, both voluntary and involuntary, of teachers and principals across the district leads to instability within school buildings. In concert with the mobility of its educators, Camden's inability to strategically and proactively fill teaching vacancies often results in a revolving door of substitutes.

Given the dramatic mismatch between student outcomes and performance evaluations, the data collected through the in-depth interviews, and the district's Personnel QSAC scores, the district should undergo a comprehensive audit and retooling of its personnel practices, including its policies and procedures to recruit, induct, evaluate, develop, retain, and separate educators. This audit will be assisted by personnel from both the Regional Achievement Center and the State Monitor's office.

4. Develop a vision for all of Camden's children

All children who live in Camden deserve an educational and support program that meets their individual needs, so that they graduate from high school prepared for college and career. In the years to come, a large majority of the children in Camden will be educated within the Camden City Public School district, but some families will choose other

¹ <http://www.camden.k12.nj.us/pdf/Teacher%20and%20Principal%20Evaluation%20Survey%20Data-2011.pdf>

schooling environments, such as charter schools, Renaissance Schools, or other schools in the inter-district choice program. They are not competing entities, but rather they are parts of a richly diverse community of public school options.

While the Camden City Public Schools and Board of Education may not have any 'direct' authority over these entities, the district and the BOE should work to facilitate their success. We are encouraged that the district is aggressively pursuing plans to submit an application for Renaissance Schools in the upcoming weeks, and we will be tracking progress closely. The district also should undertake a comprehensive review of facility usage given its declining enrollment to determine if it has the capacity to host quality alternative schools.

5. Establish an effective governance structure

The Camden Board of Education must commit itself, both as individuals and as an entity, to representing the interests of the Camden community. As is clear from the in-depth review and the indicator-by-indicator findings in the Governance portion of QSAC, the Board has not yet done so. Instead, board members too often appear to represent parochial interests, engage in micro-management, and fail to perform many of their governance responsibilities.

Much has been written about the role that local boards of education must play in governing school districts. To sum up this literature succinctly: "School boards govern; superintendents manage."² Camden is not dissimilar to other large urban school districts in that the district itself is a primary employer of the residents of the city. The fact that employees are neighbors, friends, and/or family members complicates the governing relationship between the Board, administration, and schools.

Instead, the Board needs to develop its role along the lines prescribed by Donald McAdams:

The board has the responsibility to establish core beliefs, create the vision, set goals, formulate a theory of action for change, direct and participate in the development of policies, approve policies, allocate resources, oversee policy implementation and the effectiveness of management systems, mediate between the district and the public, and look far into the future.³

As emphasized by McAdams, in governing the district, the Board must cede day-to-day management to the superintendent and behave in accordance with the ethical and regulatory guidelines established by the state. It must establish a culture of adult

² McAdams, Donald R. (2006). What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, p. 9.

³ Ibid.

responsibility for the delivery of a successful educational and student support programs without engaging in micro-level activities.

In anticipation of the November 2012 elections and the addition of new members to the Camden Board of Education, a long term board development plan needs to be established so that the Board can effectively govern the district, serve as stewards of the community's trust, and improve the life outcomes for all children in Camden.

6. Expand the office of the State Monitor

It is evident that the impact of the State Monitor in Camden is beginning to be felt. Progress on Fiscal QSAC indicators are evidence of such impact. In the next few months, the Fiscal Monitor should undertake a review of Camden's expenditures and surplus to ensure that moneys are being used effectively and efficiently to support student achievement. Such a review should include, but not be limited to, an analysis of contracts and staff and program effectiveness; student and staff attendance and substitute teacher usage; and the ratio of staff and teachers to students in staffing patterns.

Additionally, in the next several months, NJDOE will appoint highly skilled professionals, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14(c)(2), to provide technical assistance to the district in fulfilling the recommendations established in this report.