



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: *Hearing from the Community*





In Spring 2016, Newark Public Schools (NPS), in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education and the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS) began an engagement effort in 5 schools to learn more about how to launch the South Ward Community Schools Initiative (SWCSI) to better support children, families and school communities.

During this time, we spoke with more than 750 community stakeholders through individual and group meetings, small group discussions, and large community events. We met with students, parents, teachers, school leaders, community organizations, service providers, clergy members, and more. In addition, more than 200 parents and teachers participated in school-based focus groups, sharing their feedback on what factors should be prioritized when designing and implementing community schools.

As we build sustainable community partnerships to improve access to vital programs and services for students and their families, we wanted to know what Newark families in the South Ward consider to be the most important issues in their neighborhoods; challenges when it comes to supporting children and families; and what ways we can work together to make their school communities stronger.



WHAT WE DID

We engaged in a mission to collect public input through all five (5) schools:

- ▲ BRICK Avon Academy
- ▲ Belmont Runyon Elementary School
- ▲ Louise A Spencer School
- ▲ BRICK Peshine Avenue School
- ▲ Malcolm X Shabazz High School



We listened to the feedback provided by as many stakeholders as possible to inform decisions. To achieve this, we:

- * Partnered with the National Center for Community Schools to guide our needs assessment effort at all five (5) South Ward schools
- * Began our needs assessment by hosting 22 group discussions with parents, school leaders, teachers, students, social workers, guidance counselors, school nurses, policy experts, concerned citizens, service providers, and community officials
- * Engaged more than 110 school educators in dialogue about community schools
- * Met with more than two dozen different service providers and public sector programs to learn how to bring sustainable services and programs to community schools in Newark
- * Joined school teams, community advocates, and service providers on tours of other successful community schools in the region to meet with stakeholders about their benefits and challenges



THIS IS SOME OF WHAT WE HEARD

- * Principals, teachers, parents and students at all five schools are hopeful that the community schools strategy can provide needed resources at their sites.
- * SWCSI schools have existing partnerships with community resources but those partnerships are not always known to teachers, parents and students, and are not coordinated with one another or integrated with the schools' core instructional programs. Many schools lost various kinds of valued partnerships for financial reasons.
- * Students reported feeling unsafe in some buildings and on their way to/from school.
- * Students in these schools have faced serious trauma at home and in their neighborhoods. Staff and parents report the need for teachers to learn about trauma-informed practices that they can incorporate into their day-to-day classroom experiences.
- * Many children do not have access to basic medical care, including vision and dental services.
- * Family engagement is a challenge at all five schools (to varying degrees). However, the district Family Liaisons are generally considered a huge asset upon which to build.
- * Chronic absence (students missing 10% or more of school) rates are high in all five schools and partnerships should be developed to better support children and families to get to school and stay in school.

People shared their perspectives on the challenges facing children and families and the role that schools can and should play to address the critical needs of children. We also heard about the effects of school budget cuts on the capacity of schools and organizations to offer high quality instruction and aligned, enriching programs. More importantly, we heard that people believe community schools is the sustainable answer for Newark children, families and communities, and that they present opportunities to strengthen neighborhoods long-term. We heard about the value of community-based supports and the need to expand them and sustain them long-term. We heard that Newarkers want to be a part of the effort to improve the living and learning conditions of our children. We heard that we collectively believe in every Newark child, and his/her ability to grow up safe, healthy and academically successful.

WHAT WE LEARNED: KEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL THEMES

The responses provided by the majority of community stakeholders fit into

Seven Key Themes

essential for each community school in Newark:

- (1)** Well-prepared, effective and supportive teachers in every school and every classroom
- (2)** Integrated wraparound academic, social/emotional, and health supports so students stay focus and on track
- (3)** Positive discipline policies to keep students learning and our schools safe
- (4)** Community of supportive, engaged, and empowered adults invested in student and school success
- (5)** Quality education from preschool through high school so every child is ready for the next step of their education
- (6)** Equitable resources so low-income students can be equipped with the supports they need to thrive
- (7)** Expanded learning time including afterschool programs, internships and community service

WHAT'S NEW IN THE 2016-17 SCHOOL YEAR

These essential services and supports have helped our five (5) community schools begin the process towards building a sustainable model to address student and family need. Each school will provide students with:

- * A high expectation for learning, with well-supported teachers and an instructional program that integrates services and supports
- * Lead agency partnerships and community school coordination to connect children and families to services, resources, and supports
- * Integrated student data to help guide and accelerate student learning
- * School capacity to address the health needs of students, especially mental health services to address students suffering from trauma
- * Expanded learning time and student enrichment activities that reinforce what students are learning in the classroom
- * A strong, community of caring, supportive adults who promote long-term student success for every child





WHAT WE LEARNED: STRENGTHEN CITY SUPPORT FOR NEWARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A driving force behind the community schools initiative in Newark is the strong support of Mayor Ras J Baraka and the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education. Mayor Baraka and his Administration are dedicated to aligning City services and resources through the Newark Children's Cabinet, which aims to enhance and build upon the supports and services already committed in our schools. We heard from students, parents, teachers, principals, and community members that they are lacking access to critical services – many of which the City can provide.

Newarkers are asking how the City can better support schools, and they view the community school strategy as a means to improve access to programs and services. During our engagement process, we learned that concerned residents of Newark have significant concerns about the need for more school-based services. People believe community schools can help play a role in:

- ▲ Helping students and family members access mental health services
- ▲ Improving health services and programs for children
- ▲ Ensuring that all learners, regardless of ability or disability, have access to quality supports
- ▲ Offering adult education and job training programs
- ▲ Supporting trauma-informed initiatives at schools

WHAT WE LEARNED: EMPOWER PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members want to know how to play a part in community schools, and how community school coordinators would work with families. We shared that school leaders, families, and community members are expected to make decisions together about the priorities in the community school plan and their participation is critical to a successful community school implementation.

Based on this, community members required that every community school have a full-time, dedicated community school coordinator who is trained to work with existing parent/school including parent organizations, faith-based and community-based organizations, and other service groups that exist across the city. They also recommended that community school coordinators receive training on family engagement and community organizing, and partner with the District's Office of Community Engagement on their work. The National Center for Community School will work with Newark stakeholders to design a training "boot camp" that will support professional development for community school coordinators throughout the school year.

Additionally, it was important to many attendees that parents have a strong voice and are seen as leaders in their homes, communities, and schools. Community advocates want a parent leadership training to help parents learn how to support, monitor and advocate for their children collaboratively with school leadership. This will afford parents the ability to be equipped to navigate the complexities of school systems and environments, and receive information they need to make informed decisions for their children and fully engage as partners in their school communities.

Finally, it was important to community members that there is a school-based community school site team that includes parents, teachers, students and members of the community. This body serves as governing body to assess family need, identify school priorities, and determine how partnerships are established and resources are deployed. This team, which is led by the school's community school coordinator, gives teachers, families and community members the opportunity to shape and design their school to respond to the needs of their children and families. Every parent and teacher has the access and opportunity to fully engage in this school-based leadership team.

Community engagement is a priority for both the District and the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education, as they are critical vehicles to empowering parents and community members long-term, and ensure that our community schools are sustainable.

WHAT'S NEXT

Through this extensive school-based community engagement process, we've heard what matters to our schools most of all, and have started a long journey towards building sustainable community schools that meet the unique needs our students and families over the next three (3) years. Service needs identified during the community outreach process are being used to inform and guide the community schools needs assessment and strategic planning process. We are also using community feedback as we develop trainings for community school coordinators and begin working with City agencies, convening stakeholders, and engaging community organizations.

By implementing a community school strategy, we will address how the City can better support schools, families, and educators to reduce barriers to learning, and how the District can work with the City and individual schools to empower parents and community members to meaningfully engage with schools. Newark Public Schools will also address how we align and provide services with partnerships that directly meet the needs of students and families in Newark.



To learn more or get involved, contact:

The Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education at (973) 733-6400

Newark Public Schools at (973) 733-3333

Thank You

Thank you to the many parents, teachers, students, service providers, public officials and community members who hosted and participated in meetings and events over the past six months. Our special thanks to the staff of the Office of Mayor Ras J Baraka, and the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education, who was an essential partner during our first of many engagement efforts. Newark community feedback and input has been invaluable as it has helped shape the direction of Newark's community schools initiative. Thank all of the community-based organizations and community advocates who participated in or helped organize the activities described in this report. We value your feedback a great deal and look forward to collaborating again as we establish the community schools strategy in Newark!

