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PRESS RELEASE

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Superintendent Rouhanifard and School Leaders Share Progress, Announce Engagement for Next Phase of Camden’s School Improvement Plan

Parents and Principals Cite Gains as Superintendent Announces New, Homegrown Leadership Team and Launch of Community Feedback on Next Steps

July 6, 2015 – Office of the Superintendent, Camden, NJ – A year and a half after launching the [Camden Commitment](#), the School District’s strategic plan, Superintendent Rouhanifard today joined Camden school leaders, teachers, parents, and partners to share progress made and announce public feedback opportunities for the next phase of the plan. Rouhanifard also announced a new team of homegrown leaders to continue to drive improvements in District schools.

In the library of Thomas H. Dudley Family School, Superintendent Rouhanifard joined school leaders who described the gains District schools made in the areas highlighted in the Camden Commitment, especially around safety, modern facilities, student support, great teaching and learning, and family engagement. Rouhanifard released the Camden Commitment after receiving input from hundreds of students, educators, and community members during his 100-day Listening Tour.

The parents, educators from District, renaissance, and charter schools, and officials from partner organizations cited the following examples of progress, among others:

- Thanks to a partnership with the Camden County Police Department, our schools and streets are safer, and police officers are reading to students and leading gang-prevention efforts.
- Three new schools are being built, and five other schools are being renovated—these advances are critical in a School District where half of the buildings were constructed before 1928.
- Teachers and principals are receiving coaching on a regular basis throughout the year, more students are in pre-school than ever before, three new schools led by partners with proven track records are now open, and the graduation rate is up 6 percentage points.
- There are more opportunities for parents to engage than ever before, with a new parent survey, new interpretation equipment, new School Information Cards, new social media channels, three new parent centers, and a parent coordinator in every school.
- The Central Office has 50 percent fewer positions, which is leading to greater resources for schools

“Our school leaders, teachers, students, and families should be proud—together, we’re making progress,” said Superintendent Rouhanifard. “But we have more work to do until every Camden student receives the excellent education he or she deserves, and I look forward to working with all of our families and community partners on the next steps we’ll take together.”

“Starting weeks before the 2014-15 school year even began, I received intensive feedback from my coach that helped me better lead my school,” said Tracey Reed-Thompson, the principal of Yorkship Family School. “Leading a school is hard work, but the balance of support and autonomy that the School District is providing is making me more effective with our teachers, our families, and our students.”

“The strong partnership we have with the School District is rare, and we deeply value the open dialogue and shared commitment to helping students get an excellent education,” said Drew Martin, the Executive Director of the KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy. “When adults work together, students benefit, and the brand-new school building on Broadway that will be home to hundreds of youngsters when it opens next month is just one sign of our strong working relationship.”

“From the first high school fair to the new School Information Cards, I’m thrilled about the new opportunities I have to get involved in my children’s education and be a true partner in their success,” said Fatimah Shakir, who has children at H.B. Wilson Family School and Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy. “I frequently see the Superintendent when he’s visiting schools or at different community events—his commitment to engaging parents is real.”

Superintendent Rouhanifard released the Camden Commitment in January 2014 after conducting a 100-day listening tour. In order to drive the type of positive change the School District needs as soon as possible, the strategic plan was intentionally crafted as a short-term document, with public reports on progress every three months. The next phase of the Camden Commitment will maintain the same promises—the areas identified by parents and community members as the most critical priorities—but reset the goals and action steps to reach each promise.

“While family and community members regularly share their appreciation for the gains we’re making in our schools, they also say that we haven’t made enough progress in certain areas, and they’re right,” Rouhanifard said. “In areas like curriculum, restorative justice practices, and enrollment, we have much more work to do, and I look forward to engaging in discussions about those efforts this summer.”

To get feedback on the next strategic plan, the District is launching a survey, which is available on a new webpage—www.camden.k12.nj.us/CamdenCommitment—and will be administered by District officials at community events. In addition, community groups and Advisory Board members will hold town hall-style meetings in the coming weeks in neighborhoods across the City.

At today’s event, the Superintendent also named a new team to lead District schools’ improvement. Katrina McCombs, a Camden native and Camden High School alumna who most recently led the Office of Early Childhood Education, will take over from Deputy Superintendent Sean Gallagher, working with the administration to support all of our District schools from pre-school registration through high school graduation. In addition, Andrew Bell, who served last year as a principal coach, will become the District’s Chief Academic Officer, focused exclusively on teaching and learning. Both Ms. McCombs and Mr. Bell are former principals and have worked in the District since the 1990s.

For images from the event or interviews with Superintendent Rouhanifard, school leaders, or parents, contact Maita Soukup from the Camden City School District Division of Communications at msoukup@camden.k12.nj.us or 856-375-4737.
