



PAYMON ROUHANIFARD
SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent celebrates dramatic drop in student suspensions

Superintendent Rouhanifard applauds principals, teachers, students, and staff for working together to achieve a 53% drop in suspensions in Camden schools

Thursday, August 24, 2017 – Office of the Superintendent, Camden, NJ – Today Camden City School District Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard celebrated the District’s collective effort to reduce excessive student suspensions. Following the introduction of a new student code of conduct and District-wide training and support of staff to keep students in school and learning, Camden schools reduced overall student suspensions by 53 percent last year and achieved a 72 percent reduction in the number of school days missed due to suspension. In total, Camden students gained 6,642 additional instructional days last year that had been lost to suspension in previous school years.

The effort to reduce excessive out of school suspensions was coupled with additional support for staff through trainings in trauma-informed care and restorative approaches to discipline. Finally, additional school staff were introduced to focus exclusively on establishing positive school cultures and identifying and remediating students who showed problematic behaviors in the District’s comprehensive high schools.

In Camden’s comprehensive high schools, student suspensions are down by 89 percent, and amongst elementary and family schools the number of suspensions has fallen by 24 percent. For the District’s youngest students, out of school suspensions have been all but eliminated, thanks to the new Student Rights & Responsibilities Guide, a code of conduct that emphasizes inclusion and restorative approaches over punitive discipline.

This year, the District is offering even more support to schools, placing a Climate and Culture Coordinator in every building tasked with maintaining a positive school environment while introducing alternative consequences that don’t exclude students from the opportunity to learn. In addition, three Behavior Specialists have been hired to work in the District’s highest-needs schools, focused on supporting students. Behavior Specialists will work with families and educators to connect students with the right services as soon as challenging behaviors appear.

“We have to be incredibly mindful of the potential long-term effects of school discipline policies when establishing consequences for our students,” said Superintendent Rouhanifard. “Punitive suspension policies and a lack of positive school culture all contribute to a situation where young men of color are more likely to drop out of school and are suspended at 10 times the rate of their white peers. We are proud of our collective effort to enact new policies and supports to reverse this trend in Camden, and most importantly, to help build more positive school climates. While we are not there yet, the tremendous reduction we’ve seen in out of school suspensions in a single year is a tribute to our staff’s dedication to doing what it takes to ensure students attend and achieve in school each day.”

Innovative educators across the District are now working with school leaders and the administration to introduce new ways to de-escalate situations, provide alternative consequences, and prevent students from acting out. The calming

room at Yorkship School is one example of how staff can provide students in need of additional emotional supports an opportunity to calm down and refocus before going back to learn. The calming room pilot is being expanded, with a dedicated staff member running the program full time this year.

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