



PAYMON ROUHANIFARD
SUPERINTENDENT

PRESS RELEASE

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A New Round of Results Shows District Aware of and Making Progress Against Steep Challenges

New State test brings new baseline; meanwhile, State review shows accuracy and progress as District makes gains on its school improvement plan

Thursday, December 17, 2015 – Office of the Superintendent, Camden, NJ – Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard and Deputy Superintendent Katrina McCombs today released the District’s school-by-school results on the first administration of PARCC, the new State test for grades 3-11.

The release of PARCC results comes days after the release of results on the State’s evaluation of the District—QSAC—and the [first progress report](#) for [Phase Two of the Camden Commitment](#), both of which showed signs of progress.

Students took PARCC in Spring 2015 after the State introduced the more challenging test—set to new, higher standards—that focused on the types of skills that students need to develop in order to succeed after high school. Students’ scores fall into one of five levels with Level 4 and Level 5 representing proficiency.

Because the scores are from an entirely new test, PARCC results cannot be compared to results on NJ ASK or HSPA, the old state tests. Instead, these results (attached) establish a new baseline.

While the takeaways are not new, the results are still sobering. Six percent of District students in grades 3-8 are proficient in English language arts and four percent are proficient in math, scores that fall much lower than the grade-level ranges for the State and other New Jersey cities, following historical trends:

| Range of Proficient Students in Grades 3-8, English Language Arts | |
|--|---------------|
| Camden | 5-7 percent |
| Trenton | 10-17 percent |
| Newark | 17-28 percent |
| State | 44-52 percent |

| Range of Proficient Students in Grades 3-8, Math | |
|---|---------------|
| Camden | 3-6 percent |
| Trenton | 4-14 percent |
| Newark | 17-22 percent |

| | |
|-------|---------------|
| State | 24-45 percent |
|-------|---------------|

High school results varied widely; some smaller District high schools performed close to the statewide proficiency rate, though the overall District proficiency rate remained well below the State’s rate:

| Range of Proficient Students in High School, English Language Arts | |
|---|---------------|
| Camden | 5-8 percent |
| Trenton | 12-20 percent |
| Newark | 19-28 percent |
| State | 37-41 percent |

| Range of Proficient Students in High School, Mathematics | |
|---|---------------|
| Camden | 1-3 percent |
| Trenton | 0-7 percent |
| Newark | 5-18 percent |
| State | 23-36 percent |

The District does have relative bright spots. On the English language arts exam, Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy’s middle school students achieved 18 percent proficiency, three times the District’s proficiency rate. On the math exam, Cramer College Preparatory Lab School and Henry C. Sharp Elementary School both achieved nine percent proficiency, more than twice the District’s proficiency rate. Results from Octavius V. Catto Community Family School—the District’s highest-performing family school, based on [School Information Cards](#)—were in the top five District schools in both ELA and math.

At the high school level, in terms of achieving the scores necessary on PARCC to meet graduation requirements—Level 4 or above on ELA in 9th or 10th grade, and Level 3 or above in 11th grade—Dr. Charles E. Brimm Medical Arts High School dramatically exceeded the State’s rate in grade 11, with 93 percent of students meeting the Level 3 or above benchmark, compared to the State’s rate of 65 percent.

At 14 percent in ELA, the only renaissance school that had test-taking grades—Mastery North Camden—had the second-highest proficiency among District and renaissance schools. In math, Mastery North Camden had six percent proficient, above the District’s rate of four percent. Mastery North Camden had the highest proficiency levels in the District in 4th and 5th grade reading and 5th grade math.

“The results released today will further inform our ongoing efforts to dramatically improve teaching and learning,” said Superintendent Rouhanifard. “These results matter, but they’re not all that matters. We view this information as another piece of a broader picture that shows a clear need for improvement. All of the hard-working staff across the District are committed to that improvement, and as we pursue the plan laid out in the Camden Commitment we expect to see progress on this measure and many others.”

Meanwhile, Superintendent Rouhanifard and Board President Kathryn Blackshear announced at Tuesday night’s Board meeting that the District is making progress, according to the most recent findings by county and state evaluators on the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC).

All New Jersey school districts are comprehensively evaluated through QSAC every three years. The review focuses on five categories: fiscal management, governance, instruction and program, operations, and

personnel. Each district conducts a self-evaluation, and then a team of educators spends several days in the district reviewing materials, visiting schools, and interviewing staff members.

When the District last went through QSAC in 2012, there was significant variation between the self-evaluation and the State’s reviews. For instance, the District gave itself a 100 percent rating on personnel, and the State initially gave the District a nine percent rating. During the most recent review, however, the scores were much more closely aligned.

In fiscal management, instruction and program, and personnel, the District’s self-evaluation exactly mirrored the County’s review. The County representatives’ score in governance was twice as high as the District’s—66 to 33 percent, respectively—after the District received credit for updating and completing its policy manual. The District’s score in operations was five points lower than the State’s score (45 to 40 percent) because the implementation of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) reporting deadlines was not consistently aligned with statute.

“We have a long way still to go, but we cannot know where we are on that road to improvement until we have an accurate understanding of where we stand,” said Superintendent Rouhanifard. “I’m proud of the alignment between our review and the county’s review, just as I’m proud of the gains we’ve made in the last three months through Phase Two of the Camden Commitment. I’m grateful for the hard-working students, staff, and families who have made these gains possible, and I look forward to building on this early signs of success.”

The District Tuesday night also released [the first quarterly progress report](#) for Phase Two of the Camden Commitment, which was published in September. Beyond the QSAC results, the progress report highlights gains made in technology, instruction, and family engagement, including a new \$250,000 State grant to strengthen partnerships between families and schools.

The advances cited in the report came after the conclusion of the QSAC review in June, meaning the District is building on its progress. Developments such as the new math and literacy curriculum, the new Student Rights and Responsibilities guide, the refined HIB policies and procedures, the updated comprehensive counseling plan, the staff development cycle, and the updated strategic plan itself all came after the end of the formal QSAC review.

“We need to know where we are before we can figure out where we need to go,” said Board President Kathryn Blackshear. “Now we know, and now we can and now we will move forward.”

To make sure all school communities are informed of the PARCC results, Superintendent Rouhanifard and Deputy Superintendent McCombs met with principals Tuesday in advance of school leaders reviewing the results with their educators earlier this afternoon. McCombs held an optional town hall for school-based staff earlier today, and Rouhanifard and she will meet with families and with students in the days ahead, starting tomorrow.

The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent will stress that the PARCC results are a helpful resource to better understand and build on strengths in schools and across certain grades. By themselves, these results will not be used as a graduation requirement for students or an evaluation for teachers or schools. These results will be analyzed as one of many measures to gauge progress and achievement.

Today and tomorrow, all students who took the PARCC exam will receive a Score Report to review and bring home to their family. Community School Coordinators have been trained on the family-friendly overviews and will be able to provide assistance to families in the days and weeks ahead.

“These results tell us where we are, not where we are going or where the limit is on where we can go,” said Deputy Superintendent McCombs. “Through new curriculum, intensive coaching, greater focus on literacy and math skill-building, and a number of other steps, our schools are on the path to improve the quality of education they provide their students.”

As part of the Camden Commitment, all District teachers receive weekly coaching on strengthening their instruction, and the new teachers’ contract allows for more hours of group professional development each year. Principals are receiving intensive coaching, too, and have also visited other schools in Camden to learn about best practices they can adapt and use for their own students and staff.

The New Jersey Department of Education is expected to release PARCC participation rates in January.

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