

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## Putting Students First

*Camden City School District's Strategic Plan*

September 2018

Katrina T. McCombs, Acting State Superintendent



# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS

---

*Camden City School District Vision:*

***“All Camden Students will attend a high quality school where they are valued, challenged, and prepared for college and careers that positively impact their community and the world.”***



# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS

---

## Table of Contents

Letter from Acting State Superintendent Katrina T. McCombs .....	p 2
Listen & Learn community feedback .....	p 3
Priority 1: Accelerate student achievement .....	p 4
Priority 2: A great teacher in every classroom .....	p 5
Priority 3: Safe schools built for 21 <sup>st</sup> century success .....	p 6
Priority 4: A District that puts students first .....	p 7
Let's work together to improve Camden schools.....	p 8

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



Dear families, staff, students, and community,

I am dedicated to ensuring every child in our City has the opportunity for a high quality public education. As a graduate of Camden High School, I know the power our public schools have to prepare Camden's young people to realize their potential and thrive in any board room, lecture hall, or institution of power in the world. As a 25 year veteran educator, I also know the obstacles that our students, teachers, and schools can face. It is my job to find new ways to overcome those obstacles and help all students in our City receive a rich and meaningful education that will prepare them for success in college and the modern workplace.

But I cannot do it alone. During my first 60 days as Superintendent, I met with staff, families, students, elected officials, and the community to hear first hand what is working in our District, and what we can do better. The ideas, insights, and concerns shared with me are summarized in this document and helped shape my plan to continue making sustainable improvements to Camden schools that will deliver our students the world class education they deserve.

From aging facilities to a need for further investment in technology, I am committed to finding ways to ensure equity across the City's schools. While we have seen \$336 million investment in our public school buildings since 2013, the reality is many of our oldest District facilities are still operating with aging heating and cooling systems, 100+ year old boilers, and crumbling infrastructure that we have so far not had the resources to address. While we have seen suspensions drop by half in the District since implementing more restorative practices in our schools, the reality is that we have educators struggling to manage classroom disruptions while delivering the differentiated instruction our students need to dramatically improve academic achievement. While we have cut the cost and burden of our Central Office bureaucracy, the reality is that we must do more to create well-run, stable personnel and financial management systems to deliver what our schools and students need on time, every time.

This plan outlines what we can achieve by working together and always putting students first. The goals I commit to here will not be easy to reach, and will not be achieved in a matter of months. However, for Camden City School District to return to stable, sustainable local governance, we first need to address a set of complicated and persistent challenges that cannot be solved by simply doing things as they have always been done. We need new ideas, new partners, and a shared commitment to our students to create the conditions for success that will close the achievement gap and prepare our students to thrive in their community and around the world.

Sincerely,  
Katrina T. McCombs  
Acting State Superintendent

# LISTEN & LEARN

## Community Feedback

500+ educators and residents shared their views on Camden schools

60 Days

15 Meetings

500 Participants

100+ Questions



## What we heard:

- ❖ **Investment in District Facilities:** Parents want new solutions to upgrade District school facilities and maintain all buildings to a high standard
- ❖ **A diverse pipeline of great teachers:** Families value representation and cultural connectivity in the educators staffing their children's schools
- ❖ **Student learning:** Families love our Camden teachers, but note that curriculum has changed since most parents were in school. Families want to see more engagement about what students are learning, and how families can partner with teachers for academic achievement.
- ❖ **Equity in access to technology:** As our world becomes more digital, families reflected on the disparity in access to technology amongst schools in the District, and classrooms within the same school. While we prioritize access to classroom computers and smartboards, ensuring these devices are well maintained across all schools is critical to student learning.
- ❖ **Safe schools, with positive climate and culture:** Parents and the community celebrated recent efforts to reduce suspensions and punitive discipline, but noted the need for more student mentoring and social-emotional supports, as well as more access to after school programs to give students safe, supportive environments in which to learn and grow.
- ❖ **Citywide student activities:** As families choose the best public school for their child, they recognize an opportunity for students from District, charter, and renaissance schools to come together for programs, such as intramural and City-wide athletic, academic, and recreational opportunities.

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## ***Priority 1: Accelerate student achievement***

When the State took over control of the Camden City School District, 23 of 26 of our schools were in the bottom 5% of schools statewide. Today we have come a long way, with double digit growth in our graduation rate, a decline in the number of students dropping out, and steady increases in students' reading and math proficiency. But we need more than just steady progress to close the persistent achievement gap facing Camden students. To accelerate student growth, we will: \_\_\_\_\_

- Create a consistent, high quality pre-k to 3rd grade education to ensure young learners stay on track for academic success
- Offer personalized, self-paced reading and math interventions for all students
- Expand Algebra I to all 8th grade students
- Ensure that all students, including our most vulnerable, meet grade level expectations and are educated in the least restrictive environment
- Increase college and career guidance support; including post-graduation tracking
- Partner with employers to build relevant CTE pathways that produce certified, job-ready graduates
- Staff schools with devoted truancy or attendance officers to improve responsiveness and support families through a case management model

We will measure progress by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Annual rise in graduate rates
- Each year student growth and proficiency will outpace the year before
- At least two-thirds of schools will improve their annual reading and math performance
- Two-thirds of all preK-3rd graders will reach annual benchmarks in reading and math by 2022
- 5% more students in self contained classrooms will join their peers general education for at least part of the school day
- A 10% annual reduction in chronic absenteeism
- 90% of graduates have completed SAT, FAFSA, and secured at least two post-graduation pathways (college or career)
- By June 2019, half of our Career and Technical Education programs will include partnerships with local employers or institutions

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## ***Priority 2: A Great Teacher in Every Classroom***

Accelerating student achievement is only possible with excellent instruction in every classroom, every day. Recruiting and retaining the highest quality educators, school leaders, and support staff is critical to our students' success. we will: \_\_\_\_\_

- Develop robust teacher pipelines through partnerships with colleges and universities
- Diversify our recruitment to ensure talented bilingual educators and teachers of color choose Camden schools as their preferred District
- Provide meaningful professional development in restorative practices and case management
- Offer all teachers instructional training opportunities and 1:1 coaching
- Partner with renaissance and charter schools to share best practices in instruction and to offer City-wide teacher PD opportunities
- Expand the Academic Parent Teacher Team program

We will measure progress by: \_\_\_\_\_

- All school leaders complete at least 30 hours of instructional leadership and climate and culture training
- Introducing a comprehensive staff induction program for all new teachers, complete with mentoring, and training on restorative practices, that sets clear expectations and develops a shared cultural of excellence
- Maintaining a vacancy rate of 3% or less during the school year
- Sustaining an increase in the percentage of bilingual staff members working in our schools
- All school based staff offered annual training on classroom management and school climate and culture
- Implementing a student-to-teacher pipeline pilot in one District high school by Summer 2020
- Adopting the Academic Parent Teacher Team model in 90% of elementary and family schools by Spring 2019
- Launching a diversity hiring plan and new supports when hiring for high-profile district positions

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## Priority 3: Safe schools, built for 21<sup>st</sup> century success

Maintaining safe, clean, comfortable learning environments has been a challenge for the District for the last two decades. As our schools age and the costs of preventative maintenance rise, too many District facilities are letting our students down. To provide all Camden children equal access to a safe, high quality learning environment, we will: \_\_\_\_\_

- Take advantage of energy saving bonds to pay for facilities improvements through energy efficiency cost savings
- Partner with the Mayor and State to explore new ways to fund major capital improvements to our schools
- Create a District Green Team to improve efficiency and sustainability
- Conduct a District-wide technology audit to identify where to invest in more digital learning resources
- Invest in technology training for staff to ensure all CCSD digital assets are used to enhance student learning
- Collaborate with school leaders, parents, and staff to develop a model for school safety that ensures student well being and builds positive school cultures that lead to improved academic results
- Maintain excellent standards of care in building cleanliness, maintenance, and repairs

We will measure success in school buildings by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Securing bonded funding for capital improvements, paid back through cost savings from future energy efficiency and a reduction in emergency repairs spending
- Reporting progress monthly on school facilities and maintenance by Spring 2019
- A 80%+ satisfaction rates from school in the maintenance and facilities work completed in their building

We will measure success in technology by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Reporting out the results of a District-wide technology audit in Spring 2019, with recommended actions to ensure *all* students have access to critical digital learning tools for the 2019/20 school year
- Securing a Verizon Innovative Learning Schools (VILS) grant in 2019, to pilot 1:1 device access and enhanced teacher training on STEM and digital learning in one school

We will measure success in safety by: \_\_\_\_\_

- A 10% reduction in the number of students whose absences are attributable to suspension
- Improved school safety, climate, and culture, as measured by staff, student, and parent surveys

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## ***Priority 4: A District that puts students first***

Our District must put students' success and well-being at the heart of every action we take, every decision we make, and every policy we introduce. This means our obligation is to steward the successful education of every child in our city, regardless of what school they attend. We will achieve this goal by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Working with charter, renaissance, and non-public partners to:
  - Guarantee an easy, fair school enrollment process for all families
  - Increase access to City-wide intramural athletic and enrichment activities for students, regardless of the school they attend
- Develop a corrective action plan for the District business office to ensure:
  - All schools in the City receive critical student funds in a timely, consistent manner;
  - District funds are spent efficiently, and vendors receive timely pay for delivering critical resources and services.
- Provide Central Office staff training in customer service excellence
- Work with parents to ensure all schools have active Parent Advisory Councils that provide input on school improvement plans, and are represented at District-wide Parent Advisory Council meetings
- Work with schools to ensure regular parent programming, and a high standard of service to all parents, community partners, and families
- Partner with corporations, non-profits, and elected officials to bring as many resources as possible into Camden schools to support student learning and enrichment

We will measure success in putting students first by: \_\_\_\_\_

- Report fewer than 5 audit findings for the 18/19 school year, and 0 findings by 2021
- Respond to all staff, family, and vendor communications with 48 hours
- School staff report improved satisfaction with Central Office support and service by Spring 2019
- All schools will have an active Parent Advisory Council by Spring 2019
- Four new corporate and community partnerships to bring additional resources to our schools

# PUTTING <sup>1st</sup> STUDENTS



## *Let's work together to improve Camden schools*

To achieve a high quality education for students across our City, we need the support of families, residents, community leaders, and local employers. Here are some ways you can help Camden schools thrive.

### Students

- Believe in yourself.
- Always ask for help when you need it.
- Get to school on time to eat breakfast.
- Set big goals, and always work hard.

### Staff

- Always put students first.
- Take advantage of free and optional professional development opportunities - in the District and in the community.

### Parents

- Get to know your school's Family and Operations Coordinator, and your child's teachers.
- Join your school's Parent Advisory Council.
- Download the CCSD mobile phone app to stay up to date on school events and news.
- Always ask questions - curriculum has changed since parents were in school, and our staff are here to help equip parents to support student learning at home.
- Aim for perfect attendance. Students who miss just 1 day of school a month are at risk of falling behind.

### Community

- Volunteer in a school as a mentor, after school program assistant, or walking bus aide.
- Donate new or gently used uniforms to any District school (khaki shirts and pants are welcome at every school, in all sizes)

### Local employers

- Adopt a school and hold employee donation drives throughout the year to provide school supplies, extra uniforms, toiletries, and other items the school may need.
- Partner with our Career and Technical Education Program to develop job readiness training, career exposures, or apprenticeships for Camden students.
- Consider funding an after school program, facilities renovation project, or school field trip to supplement students' opportunities to learn and grow.