



SUPERINTENDENT'S LISTENING TOUR REPORT

**ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON THE PROGRESS AND
PRIORITIES OF OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Feedback from the many different events from the Superintendent’s Listening Tour has been synthesized by themes, which map to the district’s School Change strategy.

STUDENTS

Our mission is to develop students through academic learning and personality development so that they rise to success in college, career, and life. Throughout our conversations, parents and community members expressed a wide array of ideas and priorities that followed a common theme – putting students first in all that we do. Areas of focus included addressing the needs of disengaged youth, increasing rigor in all grade levels so that students are better prepared for college, and providing behavioral and social-emotional supports for students to help develop strong character. The focus on student needs also aligns with New Haven’s School Change Initiative, which is a student-centered model of reform.

NEEDS OF OUR YOUTH

What We Heard

Common issues that arose in conversations throughout the Listening Tour centered on our disengaged youth, students with mental and behavioral health needs, and those reentering from incarceration. Parents and advocacy groups voiced concerns about substance abuse issues, dropout rates, truancy and trauma supports, calling attention to the obstacles that our students face outside of the classroom. We also heard about the need for more supports for students who are returning to school from incarceration and a need to find behavioral strategies that do not involve suspending or expelling students, but rather offering extra support to help them work through a difficult time and stay on track for graduation. Parents also talked about increased awareness of bullying issues, particularly around social media, and ways to prevent bullying in our youth population. Many parents talked about needing more after-school programs and jobs opportunities for youth (more on that later).

Early Action Steps

- Placing new emphasis on student engagement and truancy by creating a role within the Superintendent’s Office to oversee these issues.
- Created pilot student attendance and engagement clinic with New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court, DCF and others to assist families so their children will attend school regularly

LIFE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

What We Heard

Across the board, we heard calls for deeper student engagement and stronger efforts to make sure our students have the skills and knowledge to succeed in college and the workplace. Parents asked for more focus on character education, with emphasis on developing traits like resilience, self-discipline, and perseverance. Parents want their children to be encouraged to take risks in the classroom, and not be afraid to fail. Students and parents alike wanted to see greater emphasis on making classroom learning feel relevant. They worried that too many kids do not see the connections between what they learn in the classroom and how that is necessary for the rest of their lives. Our business community raised possibilities of apprenticeships and structured employment opportunities so that young people would gain first-hand knowledge of what it takes to succeed in the “real world.”

Early Action Steps

- Investigating capstone programs that are already in place within the district with the purpose of expanding these programs to middle schools district-wide to foster student understanding and appreciation of real-world educational applications
- Begin expanding partnerships with the business community so more employment opportunities are available for our students

Ultimately, our kids need the **investment of a united, diverse community** that can provide a broad range of skills and strategies in order to bolster their rise to the highest pinnacles of achievement in all areas of their lives. Only then will our community also know its greatest success.

EDUCATORS

We aim to manage staff as professionals while attracting, developing, and retaining the highest quality of educators for our district. Overwhelmingly, the parents we spoke with championed our **teachers as one of our greatest strengths** as a school district. The district's commitment to supporting, developing and collaborating with teachers and principals is a central tenet of our nationally recognized School Change Initiative. This is also an area where we have exciting developments happening in our schools and among educators.

RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT

What We Heard

We heard from parents and community members that our teaching staff does not reflect the demographics of our students and we must **improve in recruiting and retaining teachers of color**. We also heard concerns about the mobility and transiency of our teachers, even within the district from one school to another as well as teacher attrition rates, as parents wanted teachers who were invested in their particular building and knew the history of that school and its student population.

Early Action Steps

- Created a new Talent Office to hone recruitment efforts, focusing on finding the best and brightest future teachers who have lived and studied locally, as well as teachers who reflect the diverse backgrounds of our students
- Posted several new positions in January 2014 to reflect the needs of the Talent Office in meeting these goals
- Began exploring different trainings for teachers – and all school staff – on cultural competencies and trauma

EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT

What We Heard

Teachers in New Haven are committed to providing all students with an outstanding education that prepares them for success in college, career and life. There is excitement and optimism around the collaboration that is happening among educators and a strong focus on elevating the teaching profession through development, accountability and leadership opportunities.

In our conversations, we heard candidly about the need to **improve professional development offerings and provide consistent, site-based support** so that our teachers are less likely to move between buildings, thus building a strong, positive rapport among the staff and students at each of our schools. We've also heard that teachers are worried about their preparedness for the new Common Core State Standards and accompanying state tests beginning this spring and thus want more professional development around these topics. And, teachers are seeking more classroom-based guidance on assisting students with social, emotional and behavioral needs.

Early Action Steps

- Continuation of Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Development systems, with additional emphasis on innovative professional development for educators and training for evaluators.

Our work on educator development in our district must now move beyond our teacher evaluation system and extend to a celebration of the individuals and teams who demonstrate exceptionalism, as well as the sharing of these best practices throughout the district. Though our schools can each offer a unique learning environment, all of our schools must provide high-quality development for both students and educators. To address issues of equity, we look at our portfolio of schools system.

PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOLS

Promoting a portfolio of schools requires innovation, strong leadership, and reflection so that each school is organized and supported on its own unique path to success. It also takes buy-in and support from the community. We aim to make every school in New Haven a school that we would all want our kids to attend. That means confronting equity issues, examining how families select schools, and supporting schools that need extra help or resources.

SCHOOL EQUITY

What We Heard

Parents and school staff voiced concerns about school funding disparities and discrepancies in resources between buildings. They noted that technology, in particular, can vary widely and were concerned about the level of support given to our alternative schools and our neighborhood high schools, Hillhouse and Wilbur Cross, in contrast to our magnet schools. They wanted to make sure that any school was a good choice for their child. They asked for uniform academic standards for Early Childhood programs and more art, music, and bilingual programs.

Our discussions also brought positive feedback and suggestions. We heard praise for the district's response to parent concerns about lack of recess in some schools and the need for technology improvements.

Parents, particularly at the high school level, suggested moving to online textbooks and resources to share these materials across the district.

Early Action Steps

- Secured a \$2.7 million technology grant from the State Department of Education in November to work towards improving technology resources throughout the district, including the addition of computers and wireless capabilities at many schools.

- Implemented parent-initiated recess policy this winter with schools submitting their own unique proposals to meet the requirements
- Initiated process of revising school tiering process so some schools are not perceived as “bad” but rather provided with the additional supports they need to achieve their goals
- Directed additional after-school and other resources to schools that need it most

LOTTERY SYSTEM

What We Heard

One of the issues raised most frequently by our parents and families was the negative perception of the magnet school lottery and kindergarten applications. Parents expressed a desire for a more streamlined enrollment process that was more transparent and easier to navigate. We also heard from parents who are concerned about the quality of their neighborhood school and were frustrated by their chances of getting into a magnet school. Many also complained of a lack of communication about the lottery process that left some families at a disadvantage for applying to a magnet or charter school.

Early Action Steps

- Making the enrollment process for 2014-2015 more parent-friendly by hosting one combined application and lottery for magnet, charter and neighborhood schools. Inter-district Magnet School Guide now replaced by the all-inclusive School Choice Guide, featuring every New Haven Public School.
- All schools, not just our magnet schools, hosting open houses this February.
- Hosting **first Citywide Kindergarten Fair** to better communicate the unique options available to parents of young children at all of our Pre-K to Grade 8 buildings. Planned continuation of Kindergarten Canvass and “welcome center” at start of school year.
- Implemented new lottery software that will make the process faster and provide for faster and better communication with families.

Through these new processes and resources, we hope to better highlight what *all* of our schools have to offer, emphasizing our portfolio of excellent schools.

WRAPAROUND SERVICES

One of the hallmarks of the School Change Initiative was bringing our wraparound services into the conversation of how we educate and support kids every day. We aim to continue deepening our partnerships with parents and the community, especially since we heard extensively about the positive impact of these services and the need to expand them in our Listening Tour and Superintendent’s Night Out conversations.

COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION

What We Heard

Parents and community members were vocal about the needs of our students being met after the school day ends and the obstacles that they face in having those needs met. They were concerned mostly about afterschool programs, not just in terms of availability and accessibility, but also in quality. Some parents

wanted more middle school sports offerings. Others discussed a need for greater parent involvement in programming and an increase in funding allocated for existing programs. Additionally, parents wanted more extended day programs at schools to focus on remediation, adult education programs to further their own skills and abilities to support their kids, and bilingual programs to reach a broader sector of our community and increase accessibility.

Community members, particularly those that work with our wrap-around service partners, discussed data sharing, collaboration, sponsoring service learning projects, and offering mentorship opportunities at school sites as a way of having a bigger impact with our students. They wanted to examine truancy protocols and develop strategies through existing partnerships to address truancy issues more effectively. We heard school staff suggest resource and building sharing to host meaningful events amongst several school communities, as well.

Across the board, we heard a desire to deepen our collaboration with those groups and services that provide additional supports and resources for families and students, such as Boost!, social workers, and guidance counselors.

Early Action Steps

- Created afterschool task force, to work with schools, parents, city and community on expanded afterschool options, serving students and neighborhoods
- Encouraged schools and providers to switch to more project-based afterschool activities, to enhance student engagement and challenge students
- Collaborated with city, United Way and providers on new Youth Map to be launched in spring, so that parents and students will have more updated and searchable information
- Collaborated with city, United Way and others on developing a data warehouse that will enable better student tracking across providers and schools and enable more focused student interventions
- Initiated collaboration on mentorship programs with city and community as well as schools
- Expanded Parent University New Haven offerings to serve parents throughout neighborhoods
- Created pilot student attendance and engagement clinic with New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court, DCF and others to assist families so their children will attend school regularly
- Collaborated with city, United Way, Clifford Beers, DCF and others on bringing trauma-focused trainings and initiatives to six Boost! schools, to begin by spring

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY

What We Heard

Parents said they appreciated the speed of updates that they receive on events and school closures through Facebook, Twitter, and our Parent Link automated phone call system. However, we heard concerns about the availability of district information, such as who to contact regarding certain issues or topics, and academic resources to support their child's learning.

Early Action Steps

- Expanded district-wide social media presence on Facebook and Twitter

- Reexamining the usability of the website to make important information more accessible and provide our parents and families with beneficial resources
- Collaborating with Citywide Parent Leadership Team on their new website, www.nhpsparents.net
- Rolled out PowerSchool and Naviance to update parents and guardians on their students' grades, progress, and college and long-term goals

Wraparound services have the capability of reaching our students, families, and stakeholders in unique ways and providing what a traditional, structured school day cannot; however, it should not be a catch-all for anything and everything, but rather a concerted effort to pinpoint how to best meet the needs of students and their families to help them rise. Through this work, we will continue to craft a holistic mission and collaborate with local programs and services so that we work together to best serve our community.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Alongside these four pillars of School Change – students, educators, portfolio of schools, and wrap-around services – the daily operations of the district also come into the conversations about how we serve kids and take further action to improve.

What We Heard

Parents spoke largely on these issues, suggesting a need for a wide range of operational changes, including bus monitors to cut down on behavior issues and a food advisory committee to examine healthy, sustainable options for breakfast and lunch at our schools. Parents, grandparents, and guardians of our students discussed homework help and curriculum resources so that they're better informed when helping their students. They also expressed dismay at the approach that school security sometimes takes towards visitors, feeling that at times it seems antagonistic or unwelcome. A major concern was communication – how important information is transferred in a timely fashion from the district to schools, schools to parents.

Early Action Steps

- Working on additional communication strategies
- Streamlining system for school volunteers and visitors
- Additional training for school security is in development

ONWARD TOGETHER

Throughout the Listening Tour, the common theme that emerged from every conversation was a desire to provide all New Haven Public Schools students with a high-quality education that will empower them to pursue their dreams and achieve success in life. We can unite around that theme. We are making great progress in our schools, but we have a long way to go. And we know we can't do this work alone – it takes a whole community coming together to ensure all kids rise in their education.

We heard the call for more opportunities for direct public, parent, and staff input regarding vision, strategy, and operations of the district and we are committed to finding ways to keep the lines of communication open. We heard the call for strong academics in every classroom, but also for strong supports to meet

students' behavioral, social, emotional, physical and mental health needs so that they can soar in their learning.

Our work certainly does not end here and this report is not the end of the conversation, but rather a beginning of many conversations to come as we work together toward our goal of helping all kids rise to success. In moving forward, it is incredibly important that we continue to have honest discussions among parents, staff, and community members regarding how we can rally together around our children and our schools. We look forward to the work ahead and the promise of a bright future for all New Haven Public School students.

APPENDIX A: CONTRIBUTORS

SUPERINTENDENT'S NIGHT OUT EVENTS

- Columbus Family Academy
- East Rock School
- Edgewood School
- John C. Daniels School
- Lincoln-Bassett School
- Nathan Hale School

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

- Arts Industry Coalition
- Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors
- Citywide Youth Coalition (CWYC)
- “Divine Nine” Sororities & Fraternities
- Early Childhood Council (ECC)
- Food Policy Council
- Grandparents on the Move
- Housing Authority of New Haven
- Greater New Haven Local Interagency Service Teams (LIST)
- Pastor Advisory Group
- YODA (Youth Organization Directors Alliance)
- Juvenile Review Board
- Board of Alders
- Latino ministers and community leaders
- District Wellness Committee
- Regional Leadership Council
- Citywide Parent Leadership Team
- Title I parent leaders group
- NHPS staff at schools and school events

APPENDIX B: LIST OF TOPICS

STUDENTS

- Truancy, dropout rate, and reentry – disengaged youth
- School-based arrests
- Substance abuse issues
- Building relationships
- Mental and behavioral health
 - Trauma supports
 - Personal development
 - Social characterization
 - Peer pressure
 - Bullying
 - Violence
- Building transferable skills and encouraging work experience
- Preparation for computerized testing
- Inclusion of students with special needs in reform conversation
- Attention given to average-performing students relative to high- and low-performing students
- Social media and technology usage

EDUCATORS

- Improve quality of educators at alternative schools
- Social development and engagement training
- Local teacher recruitment (teachers of color)
- Mobility and transiency of teachers, even school-to-school within the district
- Quality professional development

PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOLS

- Improve support and resources at alternative schools
- Uniform management opposite disparate funding
- Feeder high schools
- Recess policies and physical activity
- Academic standards for Early Childhood education
- Art and music programs
- Security
- Bilingual programs
- Online textbooks and resources
- Technology improvements and teaching students how to use it wisely
 - Preparation for computerized testing
- Negative perception of lottery
- Transportation issues

WRAPAROUND

- After school programs
 - Availability
 - Accessibility
 - Quality
 - Funding
 - Parent involvement
 - Middle school sports
- Truancy protocols and community partnerships to develop strategies
- Extended day programs
- Adult education
- Data sharing
- Homebound services

- Transportation lacking to community services
- Funding wraparound programs
- Building on current relationships
- Capitalizing on city and community programs
- Service learning
- Resource and building sharing for event hosting amongst schools
- Mentoring opportunities with students or schools in need
- Parenting programs and supports for young parents
- Health and wellness
 - Breakfast options
 - At-home healthy eating programs
- Title I
- Bilingual programs
- Lack of scholarship opportunities for non-New Haven residences
- Parent advocates at school sites

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

- Bus monitors
- Homework help and curriculum resources for parents, grandparents, and guardians
- Building security approach to parents
- Food advisory committee
- School-parent and district-parent communication