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PRESS RELEASE

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Addressing decades of unequal access to education for Camden’s children, Superintendent Rouhanifard, Mayor Redd, and Council President Moran announce major transformation to improve City schools

With a shared belief that great neighborhood public schools are every child’s basic right, Superintendent Rouhanifard joins Mayor, City Council, and Advisory Board to announce a plan to give every Camden child the best chance to learn and thrive

March 25, 2015 — Office of the Superintendent, Camden, NJ – Reversing decades of inadequate and unequal public education in Camden, Superintendent Rouhanifard today announced a plan to transform the District’s lowest-performing schools. The transformation of five schools will mean thousands of Camden students will have the choice to attend dramatically improved schools as early as this fall.

“Camden’s kids can’t wait any longer for the opportunity to attend a safe, successful, neighborhood public school,” said Rouhanifard. “This announcement marks a new beginning for Camden’s lowest-performing schools. Today we are addressing the systemic problems that for too long have held our students back from their full potential, and taking a bold stand for Camden’s kids.”

“The Superintendent has made a courageous decision that will swiftly and dramatically improve a public education system that has come up short for generations of Camden families,” said Mayor Dana L. Redd. “I believe deeply that today will go down in this City’s history as a moment of true progress. Our families have been clear in voicing their right to a great neighborhood public school. I applaud the Superintendent for listening to Camden residents and responding quickly and decisively to give families the opportunity for a great education they deserve.”

Currently two in five Camden City School District students do not graduate high school, and just one in five students reads, writes, and does math at grade level. By partnering with non-profit education organizations with proven track records of running successful schools, the District is giving families in its most-struggling schools the opportunity to choose a high-quality neighborhood public school that sets their child on a path for success in life.

Along with consistently poor student outcomes, the schools were selected for transformation based on falling or inefficient enrollment and failing facilities. These decisions came after the District's last 18 months of ongoing community engagement, involving 45 community meetings throughout the city involving over 1,000 parents and residents. At these discussions, families, community members, and educators consistently voiced the urgent need to repair failing facilities and make radical changes to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Camden schools.

In addition to these transformative improvements, the District is also continuing to partner with teachers to invest heavily in other district schools in need of more support.

"We believe deeply in the potential of our students and schools, but know we have a long way to go" said Robert Farmer, President of the Camden Education Association. "It is for that reason why I am excited today to confirm that the Superintendent will be partnering with the CEA and NJEA to expand the priority schools program in the coming weeks to more district schools – giving additional resources to students and families where we believe we can see the greatest improvements"

Transformative Improvements

- **Choices for Families.** Families will have the opportunity to attend school in newly transformed schools and benefit from dramatically improved facilities, or they can elect to attend a District school receiving ongoing and intensive support.
- **New high-quality neighborhood schools.** In Fall 2015, the impacted schools will begin the school year under the leadership of renaissance school partners, non-profit organizations chosen by the District because of their proven track records leading schools that prepare all students for success in college and life.
- **Significant building renovations.** The five new schools come with a commitment to dramatically improve dilapidated facilities or construct brand-new facilities, giving students access to 21st-century learning environments they deserve.
- **New Construction.** The schools are also committed and in the process of planning and constructing brand-new, state-of-the-art, facilities in neighborhoods that need them the most.

Ongoing Supports

- **Intensive support to improve District schools.** The vast majority of District schools will continue their intensive improvement plans, as outlined in the [Camden Commitment](#). This includes investing in new technology, intensive support for principals, and weekly 1-on-1 coaching for all teachers.
- **All students being served.** At the five impacted schools, students have the choice to continue their education in their current school building, under new leadership, or attend school in a brand-new facility. The new schools will serve all students, including special education students and English language learners.
- **Full union rights apply** to impacted staff, and all teachers have a guaranteed interview with their school's new leadership team and seniority rights to open District positions.

We're making our biggest changes where students need help the most.

At **Henry L. Bonsall Family School** today, just 9 percent of students can read and do math at grade level, and the facility continues to struggle with ongoing challenges – from desperately needed electrical upgrades to HVAC repairs. In Fall 2015, Bonsall will become Camden Prep Bonsall Elementary, serving all current Bonsall

students entering grades K-4. Students entering grades 5-8 will have the choice to remain at Bonsall with district teachers and staff. Camden Prep will also be finalizing substantial building reconstruction plans that will ensure major improvements to the facility.

Students will also be given the choice to attend R.T. Cream Family School, where the District will continue to provide ongoing and intensive support.

Today **East Camden Middle School** serves 224 students, down 77 percent percent from the 980 students it served in 1997, and faces ongoing facility challenges – from major roof repairs needed to poor ventilation systems. In Fall 2015, the school will become Mastery: East Camden, a new renaissance school serving all East Camden students in grades 6-8. In the coming months, planning and construction will begin to significantly reconstruct the East Camden facility, transforming the building into a world-class school for families.

Students will also be given the choice to attend Catto Community Family School, where the District will continue to provide ongoing and intensive support.

Today at **Francis X. McGraw Elementary School** less than 1 in 5 students can read and do math at grade level, and students and staff work in a small, inefficient building inadequate for great teaching and learning and in need of major roof, heating and cooling repairs. In fall 2015 McGraw will become Mastery: McGraw, a new K-5 renaissance school serving all McGraw students. In the coming months, planning and construction will begin to significantly modernize and reconstruct the building to better serve teachers and students.

Students will also be given the choice to attend Alfred Cramer College Preparatory Lab School, where the District will continue to provide ongoing and intensive support.

Rafael Cordero Molina Elementary School has the lowest number of students reading on grade level in the District (just 10 percent), educates students in an Annex that is over 100 years old and lacks a modern cafeteria, gymnasium, and full play area. In Fall 2015, Molina will become Mastery: Molina, a new, K-8 renaissance school serving all Molina K-8 students. In the coming months, planning and construction will begin to significantly reconstruct the Molina facility and give students access to the first-class building they deserve – with renovations potentially including a new gym, improved common areas for students, and more.

Students will also be given the choice to attend Cooper’s Poynt School, where the District will continue to provide ongoing and intensive support.

Today students at **J.G. Whittier Family School** attend school in a building constructed in 1910, where the main entrance is closed-off and wrapped in caution tape. Recently, the building itself was slated for closure by prior administrations due to poor facility conditions, before ultimately being kept open as a result of an earthquake that significantly damaged another school. In addition, just 1 in 10 Whittier students can read and do math at grade level. This summer, the Whittier building will be retired and all Whittier students will have the choice of moving into the brand-new KIPP-Cooper-Norcross Academy in Lanning Square. Students in grades K-1 and 5-8 will have a guaranteed seat at KIPP-Cooper-Norcross Academy in Lanning Square Revolution Primary or Revolution Middle Schools. Students in grades 2-4 will attend a co-located district school at the KIPP-Cooper-Norcross-Academy facility led by district staff.

Students will also be given the choice to attend Forest Hill Elementary School, where the District will continue to provide ongoing and intensive support.

In addition to the significant facility improvements outlined above, each renaissance school is currently completing plans to build brand new, state-of-the-art school buildings in the neighborhoods that need these new facilities the most.

- **Camden Prep:** Currently finalizing plans to construct a new K-8 21st-century learning facility in the Whitman Park neighborhood. A neighborhood currently without a local elementary school, Whitman Park families will benefit from a brand-new, world-class facility in their own neighborhood for the first time.
- **Mastery Schools of Camden:** Recently received approval from the Camden Redevelopment Agency to build a new K-8 school at the corner of East State Street and River Road. With athletic fields, technology, and community access, this will be a world-class facility for the Cramer Hill community.
- **KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy at Lanning Square:** slated to open this fall, KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy at Lanning Square will be a world-class new school. In partnership with the District, the new facility will be able to offer a new choice to all K-8 students in Lanning Square next year.

“Great neighborhood schools are a foundation of thriving communities, and for too long our City has been held back by a system that has not given our teachers and students the opportunity to be successful,” said Frank Moran, City Council President. “I’ve visited renaissance schools, and seen firsthand the positive impact they have on students’ lives. I am proud that these renaissance schools are partnering with our School District to give every child, regardless of need, the opportunity to attend a great neighborhood school.”

“As a lifelong advocate of our public schools, I believe passionately that a high-quality education is every child’s right,” said Kathryn Blackshear, President of the Camden City School District Advisory Board of Education. “Despite our best efforts, and the efforts of some excellent teachers and school leaders, we’ve struggled for too long to give our students an education that sets them up for success in life. Something needs to change. We are not giving up on our District schools, but by expanding our partnership with renaissance schools we can inject new life into our most struggling schools, build 21st-century learning facilities, and give more of our children the great education they deserve.”

“I’ve lived in Camden my whole life, and want my daughter to be able to go to a great public school near where we live,” said Alicia Rivera, a parent of a student at East Camden Middle School. “We are a close community, full of hard-working folks, and we deserve to send our kids to great schools down the street from where we live – not across town. I am excited that these changes will give families in Camden more great neighborhood public school options.”

“These new schools will give our kids a chance to get excited about learning again,” said Aravia Higgins, a Camden parent and Camden City School District graduate. “I have nieces in a new renaissance school, and we are all so impressed by how much they are learning.”

“By taking tough action now, our students will have the opportunity to attend a high-quality school next year,” Rouhanifard concluded. “At the same time, I know that these changes will raise questions for students, staff, parents, and community members. A new hotline is available starting this afternoon for families, and tomorrow we’ll launch an expansive citywide outreach effort – committing to a conversation with every single impacted family and sharing information about upcoming family meetings to discuss these changes.”

Families with questions or seeking information should visit camden.k12.nj.us/familyinfo or contact familyinfo@camden.k12.nj.us or try the hotline at 856-966-2000 ext. 38755.

The District's transformation plan will take effect June 30, 2015, pending approval by the New Jersey Department of Education. Families can choose for their child to attend another District school instead of staying in the building that will become a renaissance school. Interested families should

About renaissance schools:

In fall 2014, three Renaissance schools opened in Camden. These schools provide new, high-quality neighborhood options for students. Each school is operated by a non-profit organization with a track record of success, and was approved by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Camden Advisory Board of Education, and Superintendent Rouhanifard.

Renaissance schools are different from charter schools in three main ways:

- 1. Neighborhood Schools*
 - o Renaissance schools serve particular neighborhoods; so every student in that neighborhood is guaranteed a seat.*
- 2. High-Quality Facilities*
 - o Renaissance schools are required to build new or significantly renovate buildings; so students who attend renaissance schools benefit from a 21st-century building.*
- 3. Partnership with the District*
 - o Renaissance schools sign a contract with the school district; in Camden, that contract requires amongst other things that every school provides comprehensive social-emotional supports.*

About Camden's renaissance partners:

- Mastery Schools of Camden began serving Camden students in 2014, and just six months later students have achieved more than a year of reading growth in just six months. The non-profit organization already served more than 10,500 students across 14 schools in Philadelphia. Mastery schools have seen an 80 percent decrease in violence after leading district schools, and the number of students who can read and do math on grade level has doubled (with the same students and the same buildings). Mastery Schools of Camden is constructing a new school in East Camden at the intersection of State and River Streets.*
- KIPP began leading schools in Camden after opening highly successful schools in North Jersey. At Revolution Primary in Lanning Square, students have improved over 15% in reading and over 25% in math. By the end of 8th grade, 93 percent of KIPP classes outperform their local districts in reading; 89 percent of classes outperform their local districts in math. More than 88 percent of students are retained from one year to the next, and graduates go on to college at a rate nearly double the national average (82 percent vs. 45 percent for low-income students).*
- Uncommon Schools also leads schools in New Jersey, among other areas. At Camden Prep, nearly all incoming students – 97% – arrived below great level. Now, nearly 75% of students are at or above grade level in reading and math. North Star Academy, an Uncommon school in North Jersey, serves 3500 predominantly low-income and African-American students across 10 campuses. North Star Academy students outperform the State's white students in reading and math, reversing the achievement gap. The school's 3rd and 4th graders were the highest performing elementary school*

students in the state on the NJASK in Math, with 100% proficiency, and 40% of students achieving a perfect score. 96% of 3rd and 4th graders scored proficient or advanced on the NJASK in English Language Arts – representing the 4th highest performance in the State and more than 20 percentage points higher than the statewide proficiency rate of white students (74%).
