

## NEWARK SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL



# NEWARK SEPAC ANNUAL REPORT 2019

PARENTS IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

# **Newark SEPAC Annual Report 2019**

## **Parents in Pursuit of Excellence in Special Education**

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## **Newark SEPAC Annual Report 2019**

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## NEWARK SEPAC – A SUMMARY

Comprised of parents and caring professionals, Newark Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) serves parents of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, and others receiving special education services in Newark’s public schools.

“All school districts in New Jersey are required to “ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities” (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2h).

### We Serve the Most Vulnerable Students

The mission of the Newark SEPAC is to serve the Newark NJ School District special education population by engaging parents, gathering data and advocating for policy enforcement and improvements in order to ensure excellence in education for all students:

To provide meaningful input to the Director of Special Education, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Newark Board of Education regarding professional development and parent concerns related to special education;

To promote communication between Newark SEPAC members, local, state and national organizations, councils, and groups;

To promote a network of parents of students with disabilities who receive special education services from NPS and to provide a forum to share information and concerns;

To promote communication and provide programs within the community to encourage understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of all children with disabilities.

### We exist to:

1. Ensure effective, appropriate learning environments for all Newark Board of Education students receiving special education services.
2. Educate and mentor parents to effectively advocate for their child(ren)’s special education needs.
3. Ensure effective inclusion and acceptance of students receiving special education.
4. Enhance family-school partnerships in special education.
5. Facilitate student access to services.

## LOOKING BACK AT THE 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR

- Newark SEPAC hosted 9 monthly workshops with Parents and District Professionals to educate and empower parents to best advocate for the special education needs of their child/ren.
- We hosted Information Tables at 8 local parent workshops throughout the city of Newark and surrounding cities and townships.
- Our 2018 - 2019 School Year Presentations include:
  - o “Effectively Organizing for Systems Change” – Alliance of Private Special Education Schools of NJ

- “Parents Empowered –Advocacy & Systems Change” – SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
  - “Getting to Know Newark SEPAC” – McKinley Elementary School Autism Fair
  - “Effectively Engaging Families of Students with Disabilities: Person-First Language” – Newark Board of Education – Family and Community Engagement committee
  - “Disability’s Rights, Advocacy and Change” – Hearing Loss Association of America”
- Additional Advocacy Efforts:
- Testified before the US Senate to advocate for full funding of IDEA and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA formerly ESSA).
  - Advocated for live (social media) streaming of Newark Board of Education meetings and interactive mobile hosting application
  - Advocated for School Climate Program to foster an inclusive, healthy, and safe school environment for all students (Jenkins & Muhammad, 2018) see <http://bit.ly/SEPACreport>
  - Advocated for District Transition Coordinator role within Newark Board of Education (Jenkins & Muhammad, 2018).

### NEWARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS / RUTGERS UNIVERSITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COLLABORATIVE (“THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM”)

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The NPS/UBHC collaborative is a day program for students, ages 5-17, offered at 183 South Orange Ave, Newark NJ. This vital program serves NPS students who face behavioral or mental health conditions warranting a more intensive level of care than what’s available in district schools. Students referred to this program stay anywhere from 90 days to 6 months depending on the rate stabilization.

After students complete the program, they are reevaluated to determine next steps. At which time, a recommendation is made for a higher or lower level of care which may include in-district placement. The program serves up to 60 students with 7 groups of up to 10 children each. The groups consist of 3 staff 2 BA level and 1 MA level clinician to oversee and support all activities ensuring they are clinically appropriate.

During the day the students’ schedule includes 5 hours milieu therapy and 2 hours education of which NPS teachers administer. In the daily milieu, much of what is taught involves age-appropriate life skills. Group themes are utilized and are based on what the children are experiencing. Themes include friendship, loss, rules and more. The program’s primary focus is “preparation for the students’ next level in school and life.”

During the visit to the NPS/UBHC Collaboration Site, SEPAC leadership was able to interview key staff members including the Program Coordinator. Below is an excerpt of one of our meetings.

SEPAC: What 3 words would you use to describe the program and staff?

Children’s Program Coordinator: “Consistent, Passionate, and Dedicated to the families. We LOVE OUR KIDS”

SEPAC: What are some of the challenges or areas that need improvement?

Children’s Program Staff:

1. students do not receive adequate grade level work during their 2 hours of instruction time with NPS teachers.
2. There is a lack of appropriate transition for students returning to district school settings.

## PARENT FEEDBACK

To assess the effectiveness and quality of special education within Newark Public Schools during the 2018-2019 school year, we asked 642 parents and caregivers to provide feedback regarding their personal experiences. Formal surveys were distributed, and results were calibrated to identify systemic challenges.

Newark SEPAC conducted intensive focus group discussions (FGDs) with 112 participants to engage parents and caregivers to solicit thoughtful, trenchant feedback regarding their experiences during the school year.

To ensure a broad range of views on given subject areas, we asked, “How would you describe your experience with the given subject this school year?”. Parents were encouraged to be honest and open about their concerns. Several key topics were discussed at length and a summary of findings, along with calibrated survey results, are incorporated herein.

Lastly, formal Newark SEPAC recommendations are documented throughout this report for consideration by the Newark Board of Education. Newark SEPAC believes that parent engagement is at the core of a successful school district. Recommendations listed herein echo this sentiment accordingly.

## AREA OF FOCUS – EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL DISTURBANCE CLASSIFICATIONS

### DEFINING EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

Defining “Emotional Disturbance” (ED or EBD) requires that we acknowledge the vagueness of the ED classification under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Nationally, this ambiguity can leave students who are affected by trauma and other serious mental health conditions underserved and overlooked. Moreover, locally, parent and professional feedback suggests that students with an ED classification are simply not being educated or educated enough. In fact, NPS students with ED classifications are often subjected to isolation in segregated classroom settings where the lack of inclusion prevents them from normalizing appropriate behaviors.

*As contained in the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations:*

**Emotional disturbance** means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance (34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4)(i) (2007)):

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

(ii) Emotional disturbance **includes** schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are **socially maladjusted**, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under **paragraph (c)(4)(i)** of this section. (34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4)(i) (2007))

Unfortunately, the definition under Federal Regulations leaves “socially maladjusted” open to interpretation while also neglecting to stipulate criteria to determine eligibility for appropriate services.

### IMPACT ON STUDENTS

In their preliminary findings, Rutgers Law School researchers found that the [ED] classification fails to adequately address the essential needs of students who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences (Maltese, 2017).

### CHILDHOOD SUICIDE A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH ACROSS THE U.S.

The number 2 cause of death among young people ages 10-24 is suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). **On average, 2 New Jerseyans die by suicide each day.**

## Suicide Facts & Figures:

### New Jersey 2019 \*

**On average, one person dies by suicide every 11 hours in the state.**

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**More than six times as many people died by suicide in New Jersey in 2017 than in alcohol related motor vehicle accidents.**

The total deaths to suicide reflect a total of 15,356 years of potential life lost (YPLL) before age 65.

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Suicide cost New Jersey a total of **\$813,656,000** combined lifetime medical and work loss cost in 2010, or an average of **\$1,131,650 per suicide death.**

\*Based on most recent 2017 data from CDC. Learn more at [afsp.org/statistics](http://afsp.org/statistics).

### 14th leading cause of death in New Jersey

**2nd leading**  
cause of death for ages 15-24

**3rd leading**  
cause of death for ages 25-34

**4th leading**  
cause of death for ages 35-54

**10th leading**  
cause of death for ages 55-64

**18th leading**  
cause of death for ages 65 & older

#### Suicide Death Rates

	Number of Deaths by Suicide	Rate per 100,000 Population	State Rank
<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>8.36</b>	<b>49</b>
Nationally	47,173	14.00	

[afsp.org/StateFacts](http://afsp.org/StateFacts)

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, suicide rates among young people, 10 to 24 years of age, have increased by about 10% between 2016 and 2017.

Since being documented in our 2018 report, trauma remains a concern for NPS students who are labeled *EBD*. On a national level, students with ED classifications have experienced higher rates of traumatic



stress. Of 22,766 children/youth treated by Child Mental Health Initiatives, nearly 30% have witnessed a violent crime (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018).

## DROPOUT RATES SOAR FOR STUDENTS CLASSIFIED WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

The National Center for Education Statistics reports alarming rates of students with ED classifications who drop out. They document that 35% of exiting students who dropped out of school in the 2016-17 school year were those with Emotional Disturbance classifications (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). **For many students, without the appropriate therapeutic interventions or positive discipline policies at school, an EBD classification simply means the end of the road.** More than a novel idea, it is an imperative that NPS begins to appropriately serve these students to ensure that they can adequately access their education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – EMOTIONAL / BEHAVIORAL DISTURBANCE

With such a direct relationship between Emotional Disturbance classifications and traumatic stress, our previous recommendation for the **Newark Board of Education to adopt a trauma-informed framework of care** remains a priority. Parent feedback indicates that they are unaware of any programs that may have been implemented to address this issue.

“A trauma-informed school system (K-12) is one in which all teachers, school administrators, staff, students, families, and community members recognize and respond to the behavioral, emotional, relational, and academic impact of traumatic stress on those within the school system” (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018).

One such system is the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) System Framework for Trauma-Informed Schools. NCTSN's system framework distinguishes 10 Core Areas of a trauma-informed system in schools:

1. Identification and Assessment of Traumatic Stress
2. Prevention and Intervention Related to Traumatic Stress
3. Trauma Education and Awareness
4. Partnerships with Students and Families
5. Creation of a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment
6. Cultural Responsiveness
7. Emergency Management / Crisis Response
8. Staff Self-Care and Secondary Traumatic Stress
9. School Discipline Policies and Practices
10. Cross System Collaboration and Community Partnerships

(The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018)

It is of utmost importance to note that an effective trauma-informed system is one that begins with prevention, aims at skills-building even in discipline practices, and concludes with the goal of reintegration into school for impacted students.

Also, according to the NPS Office of Special Education, mental health is not generally included in their scope of work. Instead, mental health services are managed by the Office of Student Support. Consequently, the Office of Special Education's response to our previous report did not address this topic. However, this separation of duties can contribute to disruption in the coordination of educational and therapeutic services for the district's most vulnerable students.

- ▷ **Ensure that district professionals partner with Families and Parent-Led organizations to evaluate and improve district family engagement activities**

AREA OF FOCUS – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Effective family engagement is a cornerstone of positive student outcomes; especially for students receiving special education services. To that end, the Newark Board of Education school system must take a transformative approach to education reform if it wishes to regain parent trust and reestablish a reputation of excellence.

Maintaining an environment that promotes a student-first culture requires effective family engagement. For parents of students with IEPs, this is especially important since effectiveness of IEP implementation cannot be ascertained when families are left disengaged.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

Family Engagement is, “authentic partnership between professionals and family leaders who reflect the diversity of the communities they represent, working together at the systems level to develop and implement better policies and practices” (Paladino, MSA, Hoover, MPH, Dworetzky, MS, & Wells, MSED, 2018).

Family engagement continues to be a challenge within the district for parents of students receiving special education services. In this year’s survey, parents were asked to rate statements to help identify whether parent engagement efforts were effective.

Are parents considered partners in planning their child’s education? Are their voices valued and welcomed?

When presented with the statement, *I am treated as an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child’s Education*, **58% of respondents disagreed.**

Meanwhile, only 37% of respondents agreed with the statement.

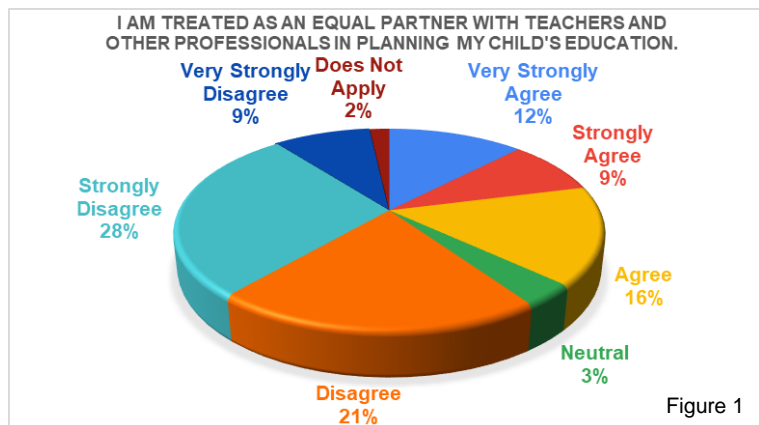


Figure 1

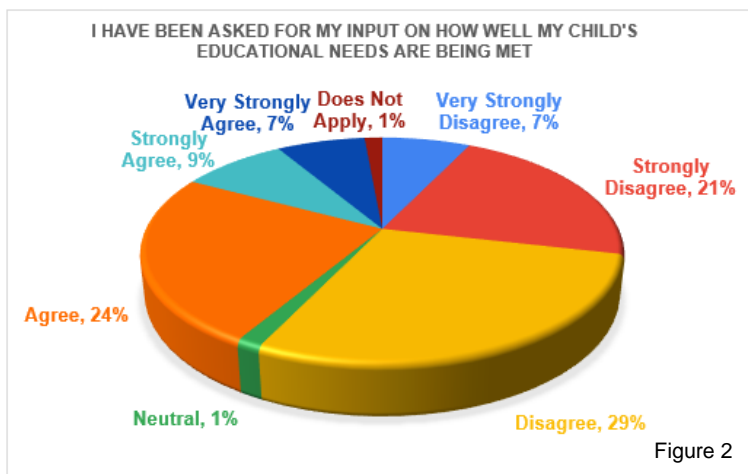


Figure 2

Once education planning leads to implementation, are parents encouraged to provide feedback on progress?

When responding to the statement, *I have been asked for my input on how well my child’s educational needs are being met*, **60% of respondents disagreed.**

However, 37% of respondents agreed to some degree.

## BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

During this year's focus group discussions, Newark SEPAC identified local barriers to family engagement. Four of the most occurring barrier types are 1. Financial Struggles 2. Children with Complex Needs, 3. Unreceptive Professionals and 4. Inaccessibility.

### FINANCIAL STRUGGLES

A major barrier to family engagement in Newark's Public Schools is the struggle many families face with the inadequacy of their finances.

School districts with low levels of poverty often see higher rates of family engagement in school and at home. Perhaps less bound by pressure to make ends meet, families who are less concerned about finances tend to have more availability for school involvement.

Newark Kids Count 2019 reported that 32% of families with children in Newark live below the federal poverty level, after a 12% reduction since 2013 (Advocates for Children of New Jersey, 2019).

*Families with Children Living Below the Poverty Level*

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		% Change 13-17 Number
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Newark	12,851	38	11,964	33	12,994	37	9,715	31	11,322	32	-12
Essex	20,736	21	19,043	19	21,361	22	16,722	18	17,348	17	-16
New Jersey	145,619	14	134,517	13	135,485	13	121,653	12	116,491	11	-20

### CHILDREN WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

Respondents indicate that the mere fact that their children have complex needs, both medically and educationally, can serve as a significant barrier to their ability to remain engaged in their children's education. Providing for needs that are more complex is often a costly and time-consuming effort.

Figure 3

### UNRECEPTIVE PROFESSIONALS

A more distressing barrier to family engagement surfaces when school professionals are unreceptive to family input, or parent voice.

### INACCESSIBILITY

When accommodations are not available for diverse families (including those with students with disabilities), meetings and other school functions lack accessibility.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

To bring sustainable improvements to family engagement, Newark SEPAC believes that four domains must be addressed – Parent Representation, Transparency, Commitment, and Impact.

### PARENT REPRESENTATION

Representation occurs when parent-leaders represent their communities in gauging needs and developing strategies to drive system change. We recommend that the school district establish and maintain appropriate representation throughout the school system. Such representation must adequately reflect the diversity of the community served by the school district (Paladino, MSA, Hoover, MPH, Dworetzky, MS, & Wells, MSEd, 2018).

**Recommendation:**

- ▷ **Strengthen Parent-led & community-based organizational partnerships**
- ▷ **Be sensitive to family needs by holding meetings / functions that accommodate families' schedules to increase participation**
- ▷ **Leverage technology to make important meetings more accessible**
- ▷ **Partner with families to reinforce education through family engagement at home**

**TRANSPARENCY**

Transparency guarantees accessibility to information to ensure full, effective participation of families.

**Recommendation:**

- ▷ **Reserve 2 roles for parents on each structured committee in district**
- ▷ **Ensure family leaders are partners in every step of systems change process – from brainstorming to evaluation**

**COMMITMENT**

Commitment to family engagement is demonstrated by the normalization of the concept and the prioritization of the practice in every school.

**Recommendation:**

- ▷ **Promote Family Engagement as a district core value**
- ▷ **Maintain engagement at every level and area of education system**
- ▷ **Ensure accountability by designating appropriate engagement targets as part of all district leader Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)**

**IMPACT**

To ensure family engagement initiatives are successful, measuring progress to assess impact is vital.

**Recommendation:**

- ▷ **Ensure that district professionals partner with Families and Parent-Led organizations to evaluate and improve district family engagement activities**

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation issued a 2017 report that demonstrates, *How Family, School, and Community Engagement can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform*. Citing over 30 references and exhaustive studies on the subject, they asserted that, "Results revealed that engagement at home was a statistically significant predictor of grades and days missed at school. Students with more engaged parents had higher academic achievement and missed fewer days of school" (Wood, Bauman, Rudo, & Dimock, 2017).

## AREA OF FOCUS – COMMUNICATION

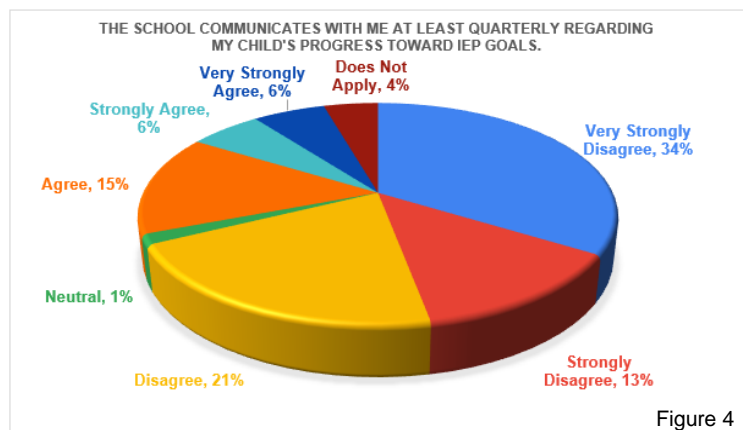
NJAC 6A:14(e) requires that, “With the exception of an IEP for a student [solely] classified as eligible for speech-language services, the IEP shall include, but not be limited to, a statement of how the student’s parents will be regularly informed of their student’s progress toward the annual goals and the extent to which that progress is sufficient to enable the student to achieve the goals by the end of the year. The parents of a student with a disability shall be informed of the progress of their child at least as often as parents of a nondisabled student are informed of their child’s progress.” (NJ State Board of Education).

Effective IEP implementation requires regular communication between school and home regarding student progress toward goals. Absent of such communication, students who struggle to meet goals suffer harm. Moreover, when such commitments are not outlined in the IEP and, worse, are not followed, the school district is out of compliance with State law related to Special Education as outlined in New Jersey’s Administrative Code.

To the statement, *the school communicates with me at least quarterly regarding my child’s progress toward IEP goals*, nearly **70% of respondents disagreed**.

27% of parents agreed with the statement.

We find that School-to-Home communication still **Needs Improvement**.



Parent input on the topic indicates that the method and frequency of school-to-home communication tends to vary greatly from school to school throughout the district.

Newark SEPAC recognizes that such inconsistencies have a greater impact on students receiving special education services. When a child has difficulties in school, regular communication gives parents the opportunity to intervene and provide their insight regarding possible causes and impactful solutions.

**Newark SEPAC finds that Triannual Communication is the minimum acceptable frequency when determining effectiveness of school-to-home communication.** Failure to maintain adequate communication with parents will rob students of critical opportunities to make necessary adjustments (or respond to adjustments made to IEP metrics) during the school year.

Effective school-to-home communication includes detailed progress reports toward IEP goals and notices of any specific concerns about issues that will prevent IEP goal attainment.

When it comes to IEP implementation and school-to-home communication, principal autonomy appears to have a much greater impact than one would expect.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## AREA OF FOCUS – PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

### AN INEFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY CAN ADVERSELY IMPACT STUDENT OUTCOMES

When asked during Focus Group Discussions for feedback on the climate and other factors in their children's schools, nearly 65% of parents and caregivers expressed concerns about insensitivity to student needs and ineffectiveness of parent engagement methods. Some parents report that they are treated as welcomed partners when visiting their child's school while others recount cases where they are commonly met with adversarial stances. Not surprisingly, like feedback on school-to-home communication, focus group discussions reveal that parent experiences with school climate also vary school to school throughout the district. This suggests that principal autonomy, when it comes to school climate and implementation of district policies, wields the power to influence the attitudes and efforts of school staff and administrators in the fulfillment of their duties. When employing a system of principal autonomy, it is critical that the school district provide principal academies, or appropriate leadership development and support for principals, to ensure success.

Under the Obama administration's education reform efforts, much focus was placed on improving the effectiveness of school leaders. **Autonomy in the hands of an under-supported, or otherwise ineffective, school leader can be ruinous.**

### PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY REQUIRES STRONG SUPPORTS

Since a system of principal autonomy is presently employed in Newark Public Schools to some degree, it is important for the district to establish key *guardrails* to better manage consistency for positive student outcomes. While Principal Autonomy can promote innovative approaches to inspiring students to learn, specific core standards must be maintained and enforced at the district level to ensure that a positive school climate and minimum standards of safety and quality are upheld in every district school. Under-supported Principal autonomy should not impede on these standards else it may contribute to deepening the disparities that exist between students of different racial and ethnic groups and socioeconomic statuses.

With principal autonomy in place, striking the right balance of Principal freedoms and District-level guardrails will help eliminate disparities between individual schools and wards in general.

To bolster an effective construct of principal autonomy, "strong, transformational principals as leaders in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools are needed" (Boudreaux, 2017). Citing Cheney et al. (2010), Bourdeaux (2017) documents that system-wide improvements are imperative specifically for leadership development for "principals, superintendents and other education leaders" (p. 10). The Obama administration's educational reform efforts established a framework for "improving school leader effectiveness" (Boudreaux, 2017). It built on the foundation of the ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) of 2009 and reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1964 (Aud, et al., 2010). It established four goals directly concerning effective school leadership. Three, of which, directly impact Newark Public Schools including:

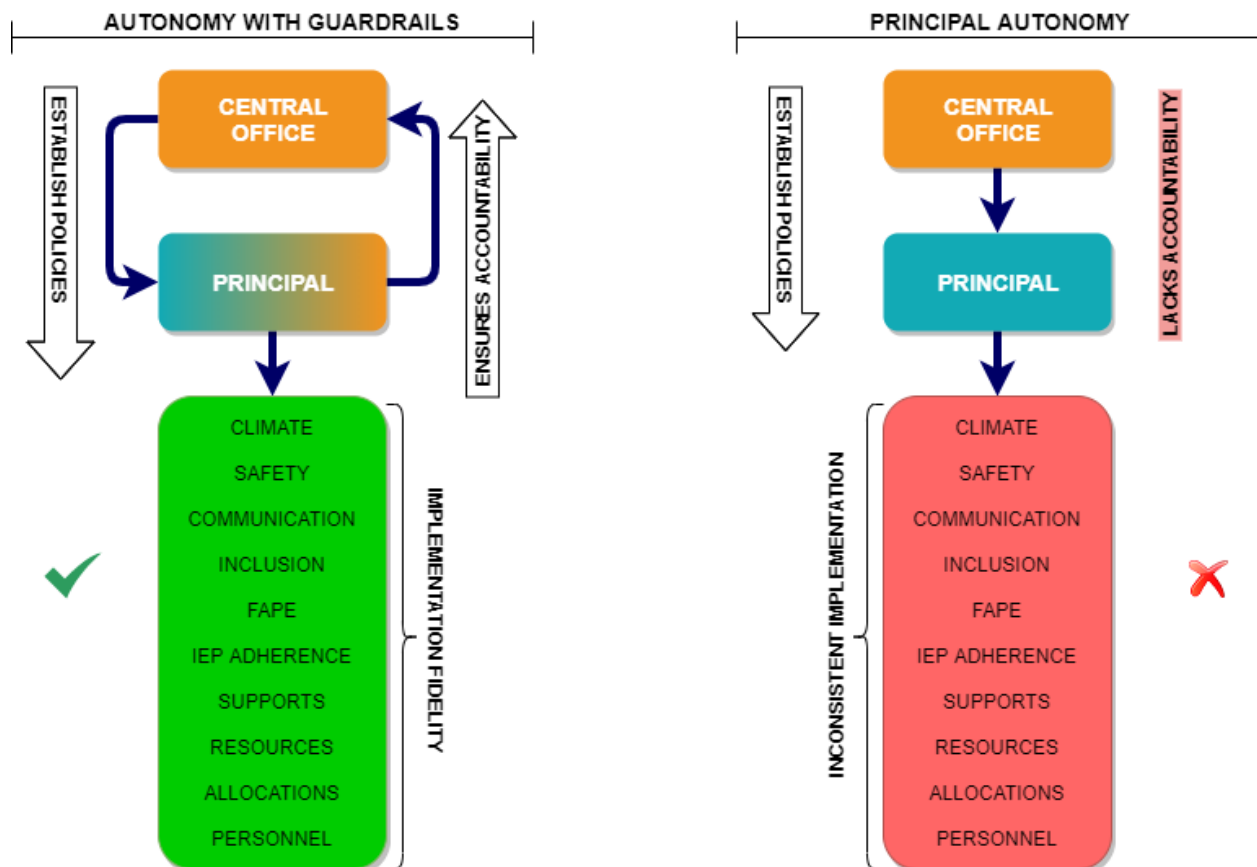
- (1) elevating the profession and focus on recruiting, preparing, developing, and rewarding effective leaders; (2) focusing on leader effectiveness in improving student outcomes; and, (3) strengthening pathways into school leadership positions in high-need schools. (USDE, 2010b, p. 1)

When principals are not empowered to successfully master autonomy, students, families and communities suffer.

“According to Mary Keller Bourdeaux, “Adamson (2012) conducted a doctoral dissertation on principal autonomy in charter, private, and public-school settings” (Boudreaux, 2017). Adamson documented that effective Principal Autonomy inherently contains guardrails (Boudreaux, 2017).

### PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY RISKS INCLUDE INCREASED INEQUITIES

Principal autonomy promises to provide several possible benefits. However, associated risks also exist. As shown in the below graphic, school autonomy can be misinterpreted as school isolation when guidance and procedural controls are not maintained at the district level.



With so many complexities and areas of vulnerability for students receiving special education services, principal autonomy requires centralized controls that are safeguarded by the district. “Thus, institutional and organizational support is critical to an effective climate of change” (Boudreaux, 2017). Decentralizing some level of control to create or enhance principal autonomy can only be deemed successful if it helps the school district effectively achieve its goals.



## RECOMMENDATIONS – PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

In alignment with the three goals extracted from Educational Reform under the Obama administration, Newark SEPAC recommends:

### ELEVATING THE PROFESSION AND FOCUS ON RECRUITING, PREPARING, DEVELOPING, AND REWARDING EFFECTIVE LEADERS

- a. **Enhance school autonomy with community partnerships with Site-Based Management (SBM) teams in each school**
  - i. **SBMs should include:**
    1. **Teachers**
    2. **School Administrators; and**
    3. **Parents**
  - ii. **By developing & promoting strong SBMs, Principals can focus on casting vision for school and managing talent (including recruiting, staff development, and total rewards initiatives for effective teachers)**

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1996; as cited in Sturm & Barcellona, n. d.), Wohlsletter (1994), and Carlos (1993) conclude that:

SBM (1) fosters within the community a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the quality of education through the process of making decisions locally; (2) gives more authority and accountability for results to teachers, administrators, parents, and teachers; (3) motivates improved performance due to the flatter management structure focused on measurable academic achievement; and (4) provides for more efficient use of resources. (p. 3)

- b. **Reward effective Principals**

### LEADER EFFECTIVENESS IN IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

- a. **Expand leadership development opportunities for Principals to promote environment of continuous improvement**
- b. **Identify administrative responsibilities that may be best administered centrally through shared-services**

### STRENGTHENING PATHWAYS INTO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS

- a. **Create incentives and development opportunities to attract effective teachers to assume school leader positions in low-performing or understaffed schools**

## AREA OF FOCUS – RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ADHD

In August 2019, The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) issued the report, *Many Medicaid-Enrolled Children Who Were Treated for ADHD did not Receive Recommended Follow-up Care*. In it, the OIG reported that, “Over 500,000 [US] Medicaid-enrolled children who were newly prescribed an ADHD medication and over 3,500 children who were hospitalized with a primary diagnosis of ADHD did not receive follow-up care within the timeframes outlined in the national quality measures” (Chiedi, 2019, p. 6).

**During OIG’s review period, nearly 60% of Medicaid-enrolled children who were recently issued a prescription for an ADHD medication were not given follow-up care within the timeframe specified**



**by national quality measures.** They report that, “[more] Specifically, 59 percent (516,285 children) did not receive follow-up care with a practitioner within 30 days as outlined in the national quality measures” (Chiedi, 2019).

As a Title I school district, Newark Public Schools serves students who are especially vulnerable to these alarming rates of inattention. During the 2017-2018 school year, over 26,000, **over 73% of all students** in Newark Public Schools received free lunch, an indicator often associated with Medicaid enrollment (due to similar qualifications). As stated in the District Summary, “NPS serves more students with low income than all other districts in the state of New Jersey” (New Jersey Department of Education). According to the CDC, 5.5% of New Jersey’s students were diagnosed with ADHD in 2011 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

When students diagnosed with ADHD do not receive follow-up care, the results can be disastrous. **Failure to properly adjust medication can severely impact a student’s ability to adequately access their education.** Furthermore, it becomes easy to see how such inattention can result in an environment where over-policing and over-disciplining are commonly reported responses to nonconforming behaviors that ADHD or overmedication can produce.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of our recommendations to address school climate, **Newark SEPAC strongly believes that risks associated with ADHD and the lack of follow-up care can be mitigated with effective employment of a wraparound services model in NPS.** Doing so would enable the establishment of key relationships between families, school staff, social workers and therapists to support the whole child to improve student outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

As an organization led by parents who wish to bolster excellence in education for all students in Newark Public Schools, Newark SEPAC works to engage and empower parents of students receiving special education services; providing them tools to effectuate parent advocacy efforts and creating meaningful support communities for families. The Newark Board of Education school district faces a set of complexities unlike many others. However, with the employment of evidenced-based solutions, quality leadership, strong support of schools and principals, and effective family and community engagement, Newark Public Schools can produce positive system change.

To that end, Newark SEPAC remains prepared and willing to assist in implementing, or evaluating, any of the solutions proposed herein.

## NEWARK SEPAC RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Itemized below are the recommendations presented in each area of focus documented within this report.

1. EBD Classifications
  - a. Adopt a trauma-informed framework of care that encompasses (Page 8):
    - i. Identification and Assessment of Traumatic Stress
    - ii. Prevention and Intervention Related to Traumatic Stress
    - iii. Trauma Education and Awareness
    - iv. Partnerships with Students and Families
    - v. Creation of a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment
    - vi. Cultural Responsiveness
    - vii. Emergency Management / Crisis Response
    - viii. Staff Self-Care and Secondary Traumatic Stress

- ix. School Discipline Policies and Practices
    - x. Cross System Collaboration and Community Partnerships
  - b. Ensure that district professionals partner with Families and Parent-Led organizations to evaluate and improve district family engagement activities
- 2. Family Engagement
  - a. Parent Representation
    - i. Strengthen Parent-led & community-based organizational partnerships
    - ii. Be sensitive to family needs by holding meetings / functions that accommodate families' schedules to increase participation
    - iii. Leverage technology to make important meetings more accessible
    - iv. Partner with families to reinforce education through family engagement at home
  - b. Transparency
    - i. Reserve 2 roles for parents on each structured committee in district
    - ii. Ensure family leaders are partners in every step of systems change process – from brainstorming to evaluation
  - c. Commitment
    - i. Promote Family Engagement as a district core value
    - ii. Maintain engagement at every level and area of education system
    - iii. Ensure accountability by designating appropriate engagement targets as part of all district leader Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
  - d. Impact
    - i. Ensure that district professionals partner with Families and Parent-Led organizations to evaluate and improve district family engagement activities
- 3. Principal Autonomy
  - a. Elevating the Professions and Focus on Recruiting, Preparing, Developing, and Rewarding Effective Leaders
    - i. Enhance school autonomy with community partnerships with Site-Based Management (SBM) teams in each school
      - 1. SBMs should include:
        - a. Teachers
        - b. School Administrators; and
        - c. Parents
      - 2. By developing & promoting strong SBMs, Principals can focus on casting vision for school and managing talent (including recruiting, staff development, and total rewards initiatives for effective teachers)
    - ii. Reward effective principals
  - b. Leader Effectiveness in Improving Student Outcomes
    - i. Expand leadership development opportunities for Principals to promote environment of continuous improvement
    - ii. Identify administrative responsibilities that may be best administered centrally through shared-services
  - c. Strengthening Pathways into School Leadership Positions in High-Need Schools
    - i. Create incentives and development opportunities to attract effective teachers to assume school leader positions in low-performing or understaffed schools
- 4. Risks Associated with ADHD
  - a. Partner with community organizations, healthcare and mental healthcare practitioners to provide wraparound services to students and families

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