

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CONVERSION  
OF EIGHT NEWARK, NEW JERSEY PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS INTO  
RENEW SCHOOLS AS MEASURED BY SCHOOL-WIDE  
STUDENT PASS RATES ON THE LAL AND MATH SECTIONS OF THE NEW  
JERSEY ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE (NJ ASK) TEST**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Alliance for Newark Public Schools was formed in January 2014. Comprised of numerous concerned organizations and individuals, the Alliance's basic goal is to ensure that the children of Newark, New Jersey are provided the best in educational services. The Alliance organizations include: The City Association of Supervisors and Administrators, Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools, Members of the Newark Clergy, The Newark Student Union, Communities United of NJ, Laundry Distribution and Food Service Workers Local 3, Newark Branch - NAACP, Newark Teachers' Association, Newark Teachers' Union, Operating Engineers Local 68, Parents United for Local School Education, People's Organization for Progress, Secondary parent Council and SEIU 617. The Alliance is committed to surfacing and sharing information that will generate meaningful discussion leading to improved educational delivery in the Newark Public Schools. This analysis is an example of that commitment.

Questions regarding the work of the Alliance can be addressed to Mary G. Bennett at the [AllianceforNPS@gmail.com](mailto:AllianceforNPS@gmail.com). Questions concerning this research analysis can be directed to Dr. Leonard P. Pugliese at the same email address.

The Alliance would like to acknowledge the parents and guardians of Newark's students. As the first teachers of children, their role in the development of young people is immeasurable.

The Alliance would also like to acknowledge the unwavering commitment of the administrators, teachers, and other staff members at the Renew Schools and all public schools in Newark, New Jersey. Their love for children is evident as they work tirelessly each day, knowing that through their guidance and support they can, and do, make a difference in the lives of their students.

This analysis is dedicated with much love to the children of Newark, New Jersey.

## **PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS**

On March 19, 2012, at Quitman Street Elementary School, Newark, New Jersey Public Schools Superintendent Cami Anderson stood before the media, political leaders, parents, students, educators and other segments of the Newark community and announced her plans to convert eight Newark, New Jersey public elementary schools into "Renew Schools" for the 2012-2013 school year. She identified the following schools for conversion:

13th Avenue Elementary School  
Camden Elementary School  
Chancellor Avenue Elementary School  
Cleveland Elementary School  
Dayton Street Elementary School  
Quitman Community Elementary School  
Newton Street Elementary School  
Sussex Avenue Elementary School

In making her announcement, Superintendent Anderson cited low student proficiency rates at the eight designated schools. She also announced student proficiency targets for these schools. She stated,

**"Renew schools have a target of 50 percent proficiency rate within two years (*emphasis added*), 75 percent in four years, an increase from the current average of 20 percent."**  
(Eustachewich, 2012)

At the time of her announcement Superintendent Anderson identified two major changes that would be part of the Renew School conversion in each school. First, approximately one hour would be added to the traditional school day. Second, administrators and teachers would have to directly apply for positions in the Renew Schools, and those principals selected would then have significant input regarding the selection of their teachers and other staff members. It was Superintendent Anderson's view that these two major changes, lengthening the school day and giving the principals expanded authority in the selection of staff, would result in a significant increase in student academic achievement.

The eight designated schools now have been operating as Renew Schools for two full school-years, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Therefore, we can now determine whether Superintendent Anderson's "target of 50 percent proficiency rate within two years" has been accomplished. This analysis makes that determination. This analysis also answers another important question, "Have the Newark Renew School conversions improved student academic achievement?"

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE ANALYSIS**

The fact has clearly been established that Newark Superintendent of Schools Cami Anderson has failed at maintaining and developing positive relationships within the Newark community. There is ample documented evidence of this failure on her part. An action taken by the duly elected Newark Public School Advisory Board is just one example of this breakdown in relationships. In April 2013, the Newark Public School Advisory Board took the unprecedented step of unanimously issuing a vote of no confidence in Superintendent Anderson's leadership. The wording in the Advisory Board resolution demonstrated how badly things had deteriorated. The Board resolution read,

“Let it be it resolved, the Newark Board of Education has no confidence in the vision, leadership and direction of the state-appointed superintendent, Cami Anderson.” (Mooney, 2013)

Another dramatic example of her failure to maintain positive relationships with the Newark community is demonstrated by the contents of a recent letter sent by 77 of Newark's Clergy to New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and New Jersey Acting Commissioner of Education David Hespe. In the letter to Christie and Hespe, the Clergy stated,

"There are many well-educated, reasonable minded, and rational individuals, parents, educators and citizens in general in the city of Newark. They all share intense passion for excellence in education; They have come to feel that their input and voice have been repeatedly ignored." The letter goes on to say "Many voices of reason have been denied meaningful input into the decision making process." (Strauss, 2014)

Although the Clergy's letter is indeed dramatic, the Superintendent's failure was probably most succinctly articulated by the Star Ledger Editorial Board. The Star Ledger Editorial Board acknowledged the Superintendent's shortcomings when it wrote,

"...she seems politically tone-deaf, awarding her leadership team pay raises this year, even during layoffs. She didn't distribute a detailed budget to the school board in time for a public hearing, and has alienated too many of her natural allies. She needs to recognize this failure..." (Star Ledger Editorial Board, 2014)

In spite of the above examples of the Superintendent's failures on the human relations level, a final judgment of Superintendent Anderson's superintendency based solely on her failures as summarized by the Star Ledger Editorial Board, would be an incomplete judgment at best. Although the Alliance in no way wishes to minimize her already well documented failures, we proffer that it is important to determine the results of her reform efforts in terms of student outputs, i.e., student academic achievement, before making any final judgment regarding the efficacy of her reforms. Although the Alliance believes that building positive relationships with members of the educational community is a critical competency that must be evaluated when determining a superintendent's overall effectiveness, the Alliance does not lose sight of a major goal of schooling, increasing student academic achievement.

As stated in the PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS, an important question is, "Has the implementation of Renew School conversions improved student academic achievement?" This analysis sought an answer to this question. The reason the Alliance sought an answer to this question is straightforward: conversions of regular Newark Public Schools to Renew Schools has been, and continues to be, a major reform effort imposed by Superintendent Anderson on the Newark community. Indeed, an additional 9 Renew School conversions took place for this school year, 2014-2015. Counting the original 8 schools that were converted in 2012-2013, and Renew School conversions that took place in 2013-2014, 20 Newark Public Schools have now been converted. Considering this past conversion rate, it is likely that additional Renew School conversions will take place next school year, 2015-2016.

One might have imagined that Superintendent Anderson, New Jersey Education Commissioner David Hespe, or perhaps Governor Christie himself, would have seen fit by now to order a fair and objective evaluation of the 2012-2013 conversions. After all, does it make any sense to publicly announce student proficiency targets and then make no effort to see whether those targets have been met? Yet that is exactly what has happened. To date, no evidence exists

that the Superintendent has conducted such an analysis or has any intention of doing so in the future. Accordingly, unless some outside party or entity assumes the oversight responsibilities that rightfully belong to the architect of these conversions, Superintendent Anderson, we will have no way of knowing exactly what effect on our school children her changes are having. Such a situation is intolerable. Therefore, the Alliance has decided to pick up this mantle, conduct an analysis of this matter, and publish its results.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE ANALYSIS**

Each November the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) releases the results of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) test which is given each spring to all New Jersey public school students. The results released by the DOE each November provide data for the prior school year's test. Two of the most widely tested sections on the NJ ASK are the Language Arts Literacy (LAL) section and the Mathematics (MATH) section. Across the entire State of New Jersey, public elementary school students in grades 3 through 8 are tested on the LAL and MATH sections of the NJ ASK.

After students are tested in the spring, and after the DOE releases the test results in the following November, a determination can be made regarding student pass rates on the NJ ASK. Included in the data released by the DOE are data regarding the number and percentage of New Jersey students who fell into each of three proficiency levels on the various sections of the NJ ASK, "Advanced Proficient" (AP), "Proficient" (P), and "Partially Proficient" (PP). Students who are deemed to have "passed" sections of the NJ ASK are those students who fall into either the AP or P categories. Therefore, in a particular school, on a particular section of the NJ ASK, the number of students who were AP plus (+) the number of students who were P equals (=) the number of students in that school who "passed" that particular section of the NJ ASK. Once the total number of students who passed a section of the test is calculated (AP + P), the pass rate as a percentage can be determined by dividing the total number of students who passed the test by the total number of students who took the test (n).

In this analysis, the algorithm utilized to determine the percentage of students who passed the test is provided below. In the algorithm, AP represents the number of students who fell into the "Advanced Proficiency" category, and P represents the number of students who fell into the "Proficient" category.

$$\frac{(AP+P)}{n} = \text{percentage of students who passed the test.}$$

In the attempt to determine the effectiveness of the Renew School conversions in meeting Superintendent Anderson's stated target of 50 percent proficiency rate within two years, this analysis compared the school wide, grades 3 through 8, student pass rates on the LAL and MATH sections of the NJ ASK. The school year prior to conversion, 2011-2012 was used as the base year, and the 2013-2014 school year was used as the comparison year since by the end of

2013-2014 the eight original Renew Schools had been converted to Renew Schools for 2 school years. School year 2011-2012 NJ ASK test data was culled from the DOE Internet link. (DOE, 2012) <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/12/>

School year 2013-2014 test data was culled from the DOE Internet link. (DOE, 2014) <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/14/>

## **RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS**

The Table included on page 8 lists, with respect to each of the eight Renew Schools, (1) the school-wide percentage of students who passed the LAL and MATH portions of the NJ ASK in the base school year 2011-2012, prior to Renew School conversion; and (2) the school-wide percentage of students who passed the LAL and MATH portions of the NJ ASK in school year 2013-2014, after two years of Renew School conversion. Given eight schools and two tests per school, the table shows 16 comparisons. The results are striking.

**Not one of the eight Renew Schools met Superintendent Anderson's target of 50 percent proficiency rate within two years on either the LAL or MATH portion of the NJ ASK.** On each of the 16 measures, the proficiency rate was below 50 percent. In one case, LAL at 13th Avenue School, the pass rate was an abysmal 17.3%, a long way from the Superintendent's 50 percent target. Clearly, by her own measure of success, Anderson's Renew School interventions have failed spectacularly.

**Even more discouraging, in most cases, pass rates have actually decreased. In 13 of the 16 test comparisons, Renew School pass rates are lower than they were prior to becoming Renew Schools.** The Table illustrates this astounding result. The red cells in the Table demonstrate where pass rates decreased, the green cells in the Table demonstrate where pass rates increased. The graphic representation on page 9 presents the data in a bar chart.

**The results of this analysis clearly demonstrate that the Superintendent's Renew School initiative not only falls short of her target, but in fact her conversions have had a profound negative effect on student academic achievement.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Despite the current situation, recovery from the failed Renew Schools reforms is possible, and academic achievement of Newark students can be increased. The findings of this analysis compel the Alliance to make the following recommendations as a roadmap to recovery for the Newark Public Schools.**

1. The expansion of Renew Schools should be halted immediately.
2. A complete research study should be conducted to determine the causes of the failure of the Renew Schools.

3. Support should be solicited from the Regional Assistance Center (RAC) to conduct an academic audit of Renew Schools, and this audit should be expanded to include all Newark Public Schools.
4. The Superintendent should make a city-wide public presentation of state test results including an objective analysis of academic achievement in each Newark Public School.
5. The State Board of Education should direct Commissioner Hesper, in conjunction with the NPS Office of Data and Policy, to conduct a thorough, fair and objective evaluation of all Newark Public Schools from 2011 through 2014, and immediately present the results of that evaluation in a parent friendly document and in a public forum.
6. The Newark Public Schools should implement a “global village” concept (as detailed in the Newark Promise plan and Mayor Baraka’s Blueprint for Education) encompassing a long range plan that is responsive to the needs of students, families, and community.
7. The Governor and Commissioner of Education should return local control to the Newark Board of Education as soon as possible, in order to ensure community input into, and responsibility for, school policies and programs that impact student academic achievement.

It is our hope that the recommendations of this analysis will be implemented and will result in increased student academic achievement, and that true renewal will occur in the Newark Public Schools.

## TABLE

### Elementary School 2011-2012 School Year NJASK\* Scores

vs.

### Elementary Renew School 2013-2014 School Year NJASK\* Scores (School-Wide Percentage of Students Passing)

| School                         | 2011-2012<br>School Year<br>LAL | 2013-2014<br>School Year<br>LAL | 2011-2012<br>School Year<br>MATH | 2013-2014<br>School Year<br>MATH |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| THIRTEENTH<br>AVE              | 18.3%                           | 17.3%                           | 24.3%                            | 20.1%                            |
| CAMDEN<br>STREET               | 23.7%                           | 23.5%                           | 29.4%                            | 27.4%                            |
| CHANCELLOR<br>AVE              | 30.6%                           | 20.7%                           | 47.3%                            | 38.4%                            |
| CLEVELAND                      | 25.3%                           | 21.6%                           | 41.1%                            | 26.6%                            |
| DAYTON ST                      | 16.5%                           | 25.2%                           | 29.5%                            | 35.9%                            |
| NEWTON ST                      | 29.6%                           | 22.0%                           | 38.8%                            | 35.3%                            |
| QUITMAN<br>COMMUNITY<br>SCHOOL | 18.7%                           | 34.0%                           | 31.1%                            | 26.1%                            |
| SUSSEX AVE                     | 36.3%                           | 24.7%                           | 46.8%                            | 46.5%                            |

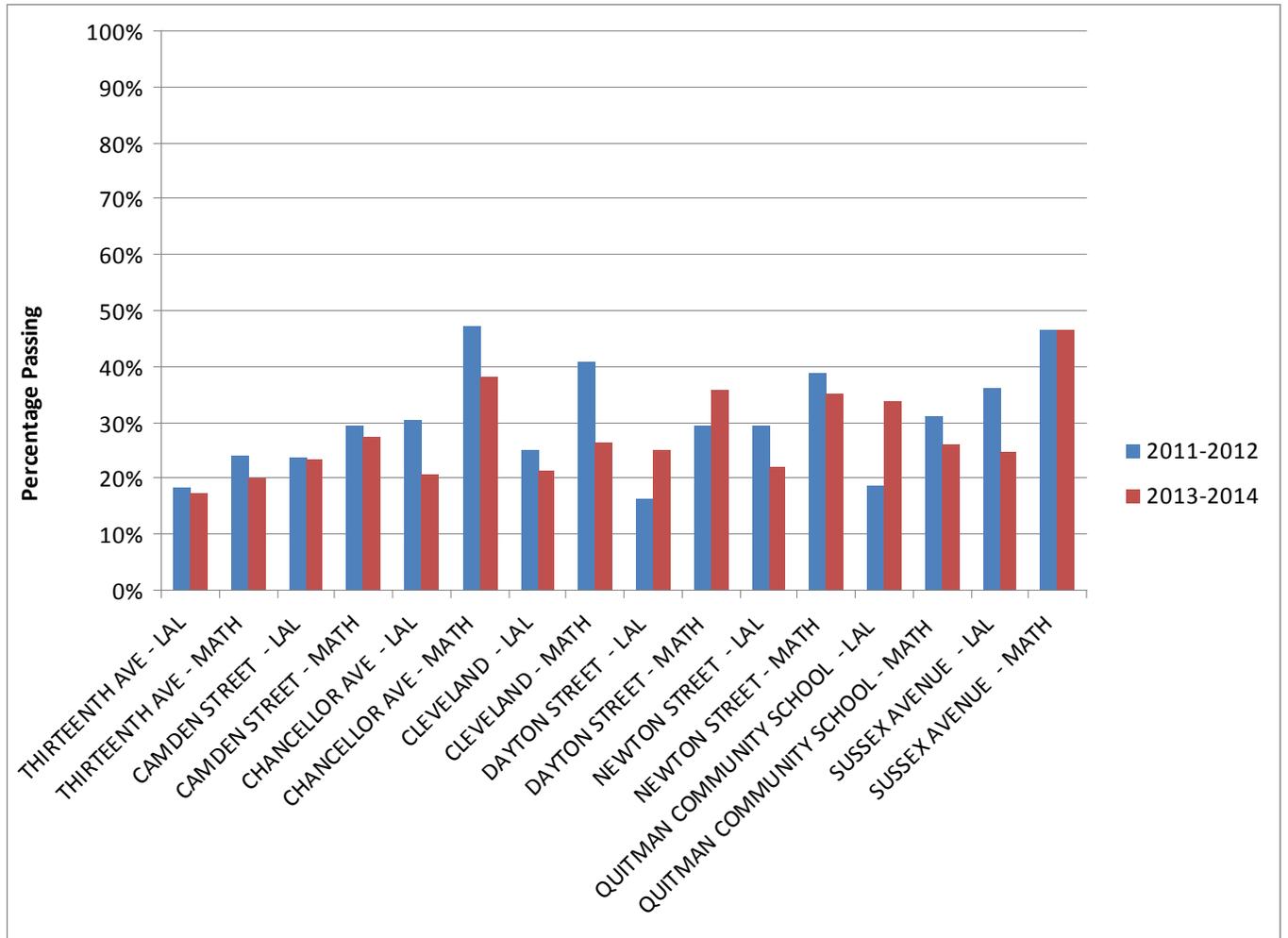
\*Source Data: New Jersey Department of Education

# Elementary School 2011-2012 School Year NJASK\* Scores

vs.

# Elementary RENEW School 2013-2014 School Year NJASK\* Scores

(School-Wide Percentage of Students Passing)



\*Source Data: New Jersey Department of Education

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