

THE RAS BARAKA BLUEPRINT

to Achieve Excellence in Newark's Schools



2024 RASBARAKA
for MAYOR



To the People of Newark:

As a long-time educator in Newark and most recently as the Principal of Central High School, I am thoroughly acquainted with the strengths and challenges facing our schools. I have a clear vision of how we can help our children develop their full intellectual and human potential. ALL children, whether in traditional public schools or public charter schools are entitled to the very best education.

The Newark Public Schools and our city government have not worked together in a thoughtful and coordinated way. Using information about our neighborhoods, families, and schools to mobilize and organize, we can work together to lift families out of poverty and support the success of our children. As Mayor, this will be my mission.

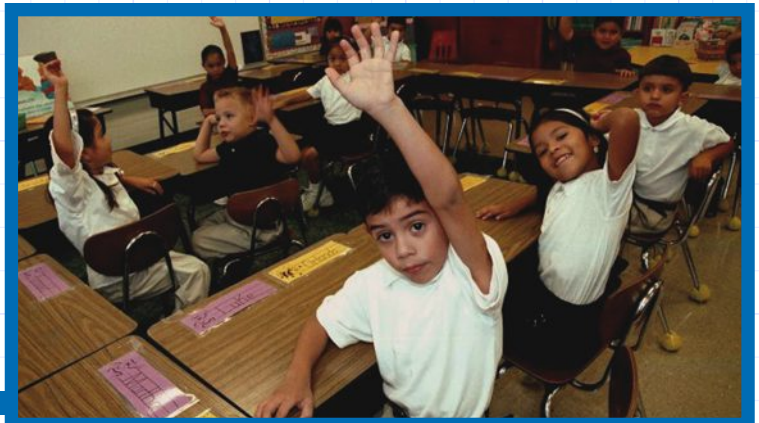
Bringing issues of inequity, including poverty and racism, to the forefront of discussions about student performance is vital because such a focus will refute false assumptions that underlie how education is presently delivered to students in Newark.

This Blueprint to Achieve Excellence in Newark's Schools addresses issues of inequity and offers strategies and solutions that a mayor can implement to create an environment that utilizes all of our resources to uplift children and families in general and to support schools and learning in particular.

Please join me in the movement to mobilize all of our energies, public, private, philanthropic, and parental to transform education in Newark. We are all Newarkers, no matter what schools our children attend. Working together, we will see positive results for all of our children.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ras Baraka". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Ras J. Baraka



A New Vision for Education in Newark

by Ras J. Baraka

There is nothing more important to the future of our city than the development and education of our youngest residents, the children of Newark. My campaign, "Believe in Newark," is based on the principle that the people of Newark, working collectively and in a coordinated way, have the ability to transform our city to ensure that all of our children have the opportunity to succeed.

Newark is a city where poverty and racism still matter. All the evidence tells us that even under these conditions students can still learn and excel. More than two-thirds (70%) of our children grow up in low-income families struggling to meet basic needs. While poverty and racial isolation are highly correlated with low academic achievement, this correlation should not suggest that Newark students have low cognitive abilities or deficits.

Our children are not the problem; the environment we create for them is largely responsible for their academic performance and other outcomes in life. The city of Newark creates and shapes the climate in which children, families and schools succeed or fail.

Children need support, nurturing, and preparation at every stage of life, from birth until the time they enter the world of work. It is our duty as their guardians to provide their caregivers with the opportunity for fostering their development throughout their life course. To fulfill these responsibilities I have created a plan that mobilizes the city's resources, institutions, foundations, community organizations, and community members to create an environment in which children, adults, and our schools will thrive.



The principles of empowerment and collective action are at the core of my proposed strategies for economic development and public safety. These principles are also at the heart of my strategy to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all Newark residents. Working together to develop and implement creative new ways to address the inequities that exist in how our systems deliver services and programs to residents in Newark is paramount to addressing the environmental effects of poverty and racism in our community.

This comprehensive strategy addresses the needs of students, embraces the cultural diversity that children bring to school, and supports school leaders and staff because these factors are integral to increasing student achievement. It is built around an organized systems approach based upon using and capitalizing on the resources that influence and shape the school environment. The strategy is holistic, comprehensive, and *bold* in its approach to galvanizing the assets in Newark to work in the interests of our children, our families, our neighborhoods and our schools.

If all of our children are going to succeed in school we must leverage every resource to uproot the patterns of racial inequality that continue to harm all of our residents, particularly families and children. This Blueprint to Achieve Excellence is a strategic and sustainable plan to integrate communities, schools, and families that creates a model of achievement for our city.

I will be the real “Education Mayor.”

The Mayor of Newark should be a leader in transforming our schools. This is true despite the fact that our schools are presently under state control, not under the authority of either the elected Mayor or an elected Board of Education.

As an educator and as a mayoral candidate, I believe we have an obligation to all of our children, not just a few. *We need excellence in both our traditional public schools and in our charter schools.* We have the opportunity to address achievement gaps and opportunity gaps and watch our children bloom into the leaders, teachers, doctors, lawyers, artists, writers, computer programmers, architects, astronauts, scientists, and engineers who will catapult us into the future.

To enable all of our children to succeed, my administration will organize our city’s institutions, resources, policies, and leaders to develop all of our neighborhoods, support our families, nurture the development of our children and create a climate outside of our schools that helps to transform learning within them. My administration will also be the vehicle for strategic initiatives that utilize all of our systems, institutions, and resources to foster and support change within our schools. We will rebuild the bridges between our schools, our communities, and our families that are vital to our collective well-being and future. Together, we will move Newark students and the community to higher levels of literacy, better academic achievement, and overall health and well-being.



The Role of the Mayor in Educating Our City



The Mayor's Office will provide leadership to support our schools and to ignite a culture of learning in our communities. The Mayor's office should be a catalyst for this in two regards: organizing the systems around schools to support children, families and school change and also pressing the district and schools to move in this direction through research, best practices, and community collaboration. It is my vision to build a system of support that aligns all of the city's departments and brings them together with community organizations, foundations, businesses, and community leaders to design and implement a *comprehensive strategy* to:

- **Mobilize and Coordinate Educational Resources in Newark.**

Support the improvement of our public schools and connect families and children to cultural, academic and governmental services and institutions that foster family stability and improve educational outcomes.

- **Maintain Strong, Safe Neighborhood Schools.**

Stop unnecessary school closings. Insist that any school reorganization provide students and parents with quality schools in their own neighborhoods.

- **Strengthen Pre-School Education and Pre-School Readiness.**

Identify high-needs children before they attend school to provide interventions aimed at decreasing the potential for an achievement gap.

- **Create Community-Based After School and Summer Learning Opportunities.**

Spearhead a city-wide approach to organizing time, money, resources, and people to create community-based out-of-school, after-school, and summer educational opportunities for our children.

- **Support Adult Learning and Universal Literacy.**

Develop partnerships with school-based, family and community literacy programs and adult education programs. Make the opportunity for lifetime learning a reality for Newark residents.

- **Build a Coalition of Traditional Public School and Charter School Parents.**

Establish a committee on comprehensive community education to support shared educational goals in the communities around all of our schools.

- **Fight for Local Control of Our Schools and Fair Funding for Our Children.**

Fight to return control of our schools to the people of Newark. Establish annual citywide community conferences to discuss relevant issues in school reform, identify needs in different schools and neighborhoods, and propose solutions and/or programs for implementation.

- **Include Spanish, Portuguese and Creole Languages in all Initiatives.**

These initiatives will include parent education, school readiness, pre-school, out of school time, English literacy, lifelong learning and other components.

- **Provide incentives for Teachers to Choose Newark and Remain Here.**

Incentives will include housing, financial, professional development and university-based assistance.

Establish the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education

My administration will create the Mayor's Office of Comprehensive Community Education (CCE), which will be the education outreach arm of the Mayor's Office. The creation of CCE will establish a citywide culture of democratic school governance and focus on equity and justice across our city.

CCE staff will be dedicated exclusively to working with city agencies, community organizations, foundations, Newark Public Schools, charter schools, community leaders, residents and community groups to design and implement a comprehensive community education strategy. The Director of this office will coordinate the city's efforts to transform education, creating a city-wide education action council representing all sectors of life in Newark. The action council will recommend policy and programming for young people in the city, and hold regular public forums for the community to discuss issues and identify solutions.



A Community Education Panel will be established in each ward of the city. Consisting of parents, educators, community members, and students representing each ward, each CEP will assess and provide feedback on district reform initiatives and put forward ideas and strategies to improve learning in our schools and neighborhoods.

Community Education Liaisons will serve as the Mayor's representatives in the community and will be the direct link to each CEP. They will be assigned to individual neighborhoods and tasked with building productive, working relationships with community leaders, neighborhood organizations and initiatives, schools and residents. Liaisons will regularly attend community-based meetings, including school events and meetings, to listen and respond to neighborhood concerns that can be addressed through CCE. They will work at the neighborhood level to ensure the inclusion and integration of locally identified needs and strategies. Additionally, the Director and Community Liaisons will routinely participate in education events and activities on behalf of the Mayor to provide resource information and to further coordinate and integrate education efforts across the city.

Support and Partner with Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools

In order for schools to successfully educate our children it is essential that the resources of our city are utilized to advocate for and support educational practices that result in high intellectual performance for all students in all of our schools and classrooms.

All Newark schools are entitled to everything that they need. This includes first class facilities, a rich robust 21st century curriculum, state of the art technology, and dedicated knowledgeable instructors. *There is no reason for charter schools and traditional public schools to be forced to compete for resources.* Those who try to pit parents against one another are doing it for selfish political reasons. All parents deserve accountability and oversight to ensure that their children are truly getting the best education possible.

- Hold public hearings to get ideas from citizens as to how existing school buildings can best serve the needs of specific communities. Enlist the Newark Public Schools, the charter schools, the state and the philanthropic community to meet those needs.
- Initiate discussions aimed at expanding charter school/community relations so that existing charter schools serve as community anchors for the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Initiate open discussion of a school portfolio as an integral part of the city's neighborhood development plan that does not pit parents against each other in competition for existing school facilities.
- Aggressively petition the Governor for full funding for the Newark Public Schools.
- Aggressively petition the Governor for allocation and release of monies for new school construction and major renovations for the Newark Public Schools.
- Initiate discussions aimed at re-purposing shuttered school buildings that are in acceptable physical condition so that they remain live and viable community assets.

Create Global Village Compact

Research on school change makes very clear that all of the following are required in order to achieve and sustain the quality of schools our city needs and our children deserve:

- Inclusion of all stakeholders, including residents and parents.
- Coordination and integration at the school, district, and city levels.
- Planning that is driven by data on the needs of children inside and outside of schools.
- Professional development, curricula, programs and supports that are evidenced to accelerate high intellectual performance for the students we serve.
- Clear roles and commitment to a shared vision and outcomes.

The Newark Global Village School Zone provides a widely accepted and celebrated local model for this type of coordinated strategy and partnership with public schools.

CCE will create a Global Village Compact that brings stakeholders together to advocate for and create a city-wide strategy for providing the best practices research indicates are essential to creating schools where every child learns at their full intellectual potential. This will include a focus on every aspect of educational delivery inside of schools, as well as external supports that enhance learning: instructional strategies, leadership development, school culture and climate, health and social emotional supports, community partnerships in neighborhoods and schools, 21st Century facilities, and culturally responsive programs and practices. The Global Village compact will:

- Partner with Rutgers University to expand the Newark Global Village School Zone strategy city-wide and bring together city agencies, the Newark Public Schools, our local colleges and universities, the Newark Teachers Union, the City Association of Supervisors and Administrators, a diverse group of Newark corporate, non-profit, and philanthropic organizations to develop a systemic approach to improving the quality of our public schools.
- Reactivate the *Council for Higher Education in Newark* to work with our k-12 system to align teaching and learning to college and career goals and to develop professional development and auxiliary learning opportunities for educators that develop their capacity to accelerate student learning.
- Develop, attract and retain excellent teachers through strategic partnerships with:
 - Banks to offer financial incentives such as mortgage rate reductions and “teacher next door” purchase programs for teachers who commit to live and teach in the city for a designated number of years.

- Local universities to provide incentives for teachers-in-training to commit to teaching in Newark, such as tuition credits or tuition reimbursement
- Community organizations and local universities for the development of “grow your own” models for teacher preparation programs that focus on developing a pipeline for Newark residents to become teachers.
- Support shared learning and resources between traditional public schools and charter schools.
- Create a Parent Advocate Network by partnering with local organizations to support parents and help them navigate city systems and educational issues including literacy, family mobility, special education evaluation and placement, counseling, etc.
- Actively engage the Mayor’s office, CCE and each CEP in existing city-wide initiatives designed to integrate systems and resources in order to better utilize resources and target areas of need and/or neighborhoods around our public schools:
 - Strong Healthy Communities Initiative
 - Promise Neighborhoods Initiative
 - Choice Neighborhoods
 - Reading by Third Grade
 - Let’s Move



Make Out-of-School Time More Productive

Children spend 900 hours at school and 7600 hours outside of school during the course of a year. The time children spend at home, in their community, and in neighborhood institutions like churches, libraries, community-based organizations, community development corporations and CBOs is a goldmine of opportunity that has not been fully utilized and supported given the full support it deserves. Additionally, the years a child spends before entering formal schooling are important to their development and learning.

The time children spend outside of school is the time for discovering, nurturing, and unleashing our children’s curiosity, intellect, and talent so they can become more successful in school and in life. All the evidence tell us that children who attend high quality after-school and summer programs have higher achievement and are more excited about learning. The time children spend involved in out-of-school learning also influences their self-perceptions and awareness of their interests, strengths, and needs.

Research tells us that a strong beginning in high quality pre-school is critical to generating an even start for children from communities like ours. Investing in and expanding preschool drastically improves the life trajectories of children. Children who receive a high quality early childhood learning experience are more likely to go on to receive a higher education and earn fifty percent more than those who do not. Because they have a stronger start, these children are less likely to be unemployed, dependent on alcohol and drugs, or be involved in the criminal justice system.

Funding for after-school and pre-school programs alike has been cut. The hardship has hit families and providers alike.

My administration will spearhead a city-wide approach to organizing time, money, resources, and people to create community-based out-of-school after-school and summer learning opportunities for our children.

- Engage the Newark Housing Authority in planning integrated educational initiatives that take place in community centers and that are developed in collaboration with tenant associations and local community organizations and health-care providers.
- Bring together the local universities, the Newark Public Library, and neighborhood organizations to create Peer Study Circles that will bring students together in groups with college interns in our libraries or community organizations to study in peer groups and receive academic support.
- Create a school-to-career pipeline including the Workforce Investment Board, the business community, our universities, and the Newark Public Schools to create programs that prepare students for work in sectors where good paying jobs are expanding through internships, career-awareness workshops, and mock-job fairs.
- Create a mentoring program by bringing the historical commitment of Newarkers and of Black and Latino fraternities and sororities, professional associations, and cultural organizations to our children and communities together with existing mentoring programs to create a city-wide mentoring program for children in middle-school and high school. Engage older and retired citizens to establish stabilizing connections and forge a stronger multi-generational society.
- Bring our public schools and universities together to develop the programming for career training paths beginning as early as middle school and high school and create community based learning opportunities for children that utilize the city, The Newark Museum, and The Newark Public Library System.
- Advocate at the state and federal level for funding for after-school programs.

Strengthen Pre-School Readiness

My administration will promote good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences for all infants and toddlers and support efforts to ensure full enrollment of every pre-school age child.

- Convene all providers of the Early Learning Childhood community (including The Newark Pre-School Council, The Early Childhood Council, Advocates for Children of New Jersey), early-childhood funders in an early education summit to examine barriers to full universal enrollment, identify local best practices, establish regional professional learning networks, share national promising practices, and ensure a transition for all children from pre-school to kindergarten and adequate kindergarten placement for all in neighborhood schools.
- Work with the philanthropic community, Newark Public Schools, and the New Jersey Department of Human Services to establish a comprehensive funding strategy that maintains existing funding streams while identifying opportunities to repurpose state and federal dollars to invest in our youngest learners.
- Create a task force that includes the Newark Museum, the Newark Public Library, Newark Arts Council, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark Public Schools, the philanthropic community, local universities, and city agencies to explore innovative strategies for creating year-round pre-school and enriching learning opportunities.

- Work with community and district providers and the Newark Pre-School Council and Early Childhood Council to support the creation of a learning network where best practices can be shared and aligned across community and school providers from birth to grade three.
- Launch a city-wide campaign to educate and promote use of The New Jersey Temporary Disability Benefits law which provides up to six (6) weeks of Family Leave Insurance benefits to covered individuals to bond with newborn or newly adopted children and to care for sick family members.
- Develop a partnership between Rutgers Medical School (formerly UMDNJ) and Family Success Centers to build capacity for pre-natal care in our communities.
- Work with the pre-school community to expand the reach of the Early Head Start Program to all eligible children and mothers, ensure that Newark is building capacity in community-based organizations, and federal funds are purposed for Newark.

Chart a Pathway to Universal Literacy

Literacy impacts every facet of life in our city. Studies have shown that where there is increased literacy there is increased work production and employment in general. For Newark to grow economically, our neighborhoods to become safer, our families to become healthier, and our children to succeed in school, we must attack the low-levels of literacy that reproduce themselves in our city from generation to generation.

Families in poverty, immigrants struggling to learn a new language, children who have been pushed out of our educational system, and adults in need of skills to get a job or increase their educational attainment will all benefit from a coordinated and comprehensive approach to family literacy services, adult education and community education.

My administration will develop partnerships to implement a comprehensive family and community literacy initiative that will bring together city, community, and school-based family and community literacy programs and adult education programs to create a comprehensive strategy built on data about adults, families, children, and the success of existing programs to meet the following goals:

- Engage parents and community members in adult education and literacy programs.
- Utilize after-school, weekend, and summer times to provide enriching literacy activities for children and families.
- Reach beyond children in the early years to address the needs of families with children in the primary grades and up.
- Develop strategies to focus on fathers, whether from two-parent families or outside of the home, to increase their participation in school.

We will involve health service providers in the campaign to increase literacy. We will work with New Jersey Reach Out and Read, local doctors and community organization to establish a “Newark Reach Out and Read” program where pediatrics practices across our city provide parents with books and literacy counseling from their doctors and nurses during visits to the doctors office.

Enable Lifetime Learning

According to the U.S. Census, less than 13% of Newark residents have an advanced degree. This is a serious problem. The growing job sectors within the region disproportionately employ workers with education and training beyond high-school. To compete in a global economy, our residents, adults and children alike, need access to life-long learning opportunities that continuously develop the skills they need to be relevant in the workforce.

Newark residents, like those across the globe must add technological and computer literacy, cultural literacy, and information literacy to reading, writing, and numeracy as core competencies. Newark's vitality and future depends on an educated workforce.

My administration will develop a broad-based comprehensive approach to adult learning that creates partnerships between businesses, colleges and universities, organized labor and city agencies to provide residents with a variety of 21st century employment skills and dispositions.

- Expand GED and credit recovery programs for adults. Adult Education programs should be dynamic and enable individuals to attain the skills they need in order to become self-sufficient and productive members of the workforce.
- Expand literacy and English as a Second Language classes and make them more convenient and easily accessed.
- Initiate or expand evening and weekend schools and educational programs of the Newark Public Schools, Essex County and other public and proprietary training providers.
- Work with unions to increase certifications in building trades.
- Partner with the construction trades and service industry labor union movement to accept more Newark residents.
- Regularly assess changing demand patterns for technical skills needed by emerging industries to understand their nature, training requirements and job placement initiatives and prepare Newark residents for these industries.

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Fight for Local Control of Schools and Equitable Funding for Newark's Children

We must have local control of our public schools. As the result of the state takeover, the Newark Public Schools District, like Paterson, Camden and Jersey City, is governed and administered by a state-appointed superintendent. And while we have an “Advisory Board” which is directly elected by our residents, our Board, unlike the 603 other school districts, is not empowered by state law to set policy and governance oversight.

The disruptive sweeping school reorganization announced by the State-appointed School Superintendent in December 2013 is a prime example of the consequences of not having local control of our public schools. The reorganization inflicts damage on charter schools as well as traditional public schools. Without local control, the State Appointed Superintendent is able to make decisions without a process that is inclusive of the residents, taxpayers and voters in our city, and can force irrational, ill-conceived “reforms” on our schools and children with impunity.

Newark needs a fully empowered Board of Education directly elected by resident voters to set policy development for quality instruction, effective management and community involvement.

I will lead a full-scale state and federal campaign to return local control. This campaign will include grassroots mobilization, community education, and legal action.

- Support neighborhood schools and neighborhood cohesion by unifying existing efforts to stop the dismantling of public education. Support legal action to force a moratorium on school closures, other unproven reforms and sale of public school buildings.
- Advocate with the elected School Board, community coalitions, and advocacy groups for full-funding of the School Funding Reform Act, implementation of the Amistad Legislation, and funding for repair and renovation of our existing public school buildings and construction of new school buildings.



Appendix:

The Accomplishments of Ras Baraka as Principal of Central High School

Ras Baraka and his staff led Central High School to an increase in the graduation rate from 50% to 80%.

This was an extraordinary increase that was facilitated and supported by the partnerships in the Newark Global Village initiative. The community connections, dialogue, and collaborative input helped to identify and respond to needs in way that addressed the whole child.

With support and buy-in from city-hall this impact could have been increased and magnified through the deployment and coordination of city resources. This would be Ras Baraka's priority as mayor, to ensure that the city's systems are organized around schools to support student well-being, readiness to learn, and academic success.



Here are just a few examples of how Ras Baraka and his staff transformed Central High School:

- Created a school culture that eliminated gang culture and set high expectations for students and staff alike, connected the school with the lives of students, established inclusiveness and interdependence as essential to the success of each individual, and provided the resources necessary to make this culture shift. (partnerships with CBOs, training for staff, enrichment and activities for students, school rituals, creation of youth court).

- Used information about student and teacher needs to drive the strategies and programs implemented. This information was both achievement data, as well as "data" about community needs and observations of teachers in the classrooms.
- Prioritized a focus on the social-emotional needs of students and the connection of those needs to student learning.
- Increased the availability of challenging and interesting courses for students and gave teachers the opportunity to create classes based on their knowledge of the students. This included increased electives, AP courses, and classes in career programs that lead to certifications. And it was done in partnership with local universities to ensure students exposure to college campuses and college level work and provide opportunities for admissions and scholarships to NJIT.
- Provided training for teachers on culturally responsive educational practices.
- Worked with 6 schools that sent students to Central to identify the needs of entering 9th graders and create a bridge program that helped these students transition to high school.
- Supported and included the PTA in the planning and strategies for reform at the school.
- Developed an extended day program that included both additional academic classes and interventions for students who needed them, as well as enrichment activities like yoga, drama and dance, and art.
- Established a school-wide focus on literacy across content areas and provided instruction for all teachers on literacy practices that can be used in all content areas.