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January 9, 2018

Dear Parents and Families,

Our school district was recently notified by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) that Gordon Parks Academy has been identified as a school in need of Comprehensive support and improvement.

Expectations for a high-quality education are outlined in the federal education law, the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, and in New Jersey's corresponding state plan, which was developed in collaboration with parents, educators and broader community members throughout New Jersey. This state plan describes how the NJDOE must identify schools most in need of improvement and then work with the district to support schools so that each and every child can learn and thrive in the school community.

New Jersey holds all of its schools to a high standard of performance so that your child, and every child, receives the best education available. Our district and school educators and administrators remain committed to working with all of you in our community to help all of our students achieve success both inside and outside of the classroom.

In the coming months, we will work as a community to look in-depth at the academic results of our students. Together with the input we gather from our educators and families, we will build a plan with specific student goals, action steps and timelines for improvement. This gives us a critical opportunity to utilize the resources we have at school, at home and within our community to address the needs of our students along with the needs of our educators and families who support them.

The NJDOE remains committed to supporting our school community as we improve outcomes for our students. Specifically, the NJDOE will support us as we work with parents, families, teachers, and community groups to identify our needs. This partnership will help determine important strategies for improvement, and together we can create plans to improve.

Included with this letter is a one-page overview of New Jersey's process for identifying a school for improvement; this information may help answer some of your immediate questions.

I encourage you to learn more about the *Every Student Succeeds Act* by visiting the NJDOE's website at www.state.nj.us/education/ESSA; in addition, the NJDOE homepage www.state.nj.us/education provides links to other useful education information in the state of New Jersey.

You have my commitment and the commitment of all East Orange educators that the improvement status of these schools will provide an opportunity for us as a community to define our expectations for our students and provide your child with the best opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed.

Thank you for your continued support as we take additional steps to make positive changes in your child's education.

Your Partner in Education,


Dr. Kevin R. West

Superintendent of Schools

“Developing Leaders One Student at a Time”



New Jersey Department of Education Supports for Districts and Schools

As a state agency, we are committed to clarifying, aligning and simplifying differentiated tools, training and supports for all our schools and districts, particularly those with the greatest needs.

Theory of Action

Across New Jersey, we share a common vision that each and every student has access to the high-quality education he/she deserves. Under state and federal law, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has a responsibility to identify schools and districts that need intensified supports so they may better serve their students and provide them the opportunity to thrive.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act*, which replaced *No Child Left Behind*, provided New Jersey the flexibility and opportunity to improve its accountability and support systems to better assist schools and districts in serving their students' unique needs. The NJDOE is focusing on building upon our many successes in the following ways:

- Clarifying how the accountability system is meant to assist the NJDOE and districts to identify schools and districts in need of support;
- Aligning all accountability systems (state, local, federal) and goals to provide a cohesive set of student and educator supports; and
- Simplifying and streamlining existing accountability and support systems by reducing unnecessary burdens.

Support Model for Districts and Schools

To align various supports, the NJDOE has created three levels of support, with Level I being provided to all districts and Levels II and III supporting comprehensive and targeted schools.

Level I Supports: Districts Determine Their Support to Schools



Level II Supports: Coordinated Through the Office of Strategic Alignment, Program Offices and County Offices



Districts with one or two targeted schools

Level III Supports: Coordinated by the Comprehensive Support Network



Districts with at least one comprehensive school OR Three or more targeted schools

Types of Support the NJDOE Makes Available to Districts

The NJDOE's Comprehensive Support Network, formerly known as the Regional Achievement Centers (RAC), will continue to support districts with previously identified Focus and Priority schools for the remainder of this school year to maintain the continuity of supports for students. Moving forward, the Comprehensive Support Network, Office of Strategic Alignment, NJDOE program offices (i.e. Office of School Innovation, Office of Student Support Services, etc.) and County Offices of Education will work cooperatively and collaboratively to coordinate supports. Examples of these supports are provided below:

Types of Support	Level I	Level II	Level III
Online access to tools, training and timelines through the District Support Portal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leadership coaching	No	Yes	Yes
Regional convenings to provide in-person support	No	Yes	Yes
Access to Annual School Planning Tool	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access to the Annual School Planning Process to build school plans	Yes	Yes	Yes
Training modules on the five components of the Annual School Planning Process	Yes	Yes	Yes
Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) team support through the Annual School Planning Process	No	No	Yes
Support from the Office of Strategic Alignment, program offices and County Offices of Education throughout the Annual School Planning Process	Yes	Yes	No
Onsite support for school and district personnel on evidence-based interventions and instructional practices	No	No	Yes

New Jersey Annual School Planning Process

We recognize that schools in need of improvement were, in the past, inundated with different plans and needs assessments. To align and simplify your planning process, we have developed a model for annual planning. The development of the New Jersey Annual School Planning Process includes a five-step process with one simplified and aligned needs assessment, as well as an annual planning tool. The tool will replace the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Title I Schoolwide Plan (SWP) for the 2018-19 school year.

Components of the Annual School Planning Process

The five key elements of the Annual School Planning Process include (See Figure 1):

1. Data Analysis;
2. Needs Assessment;
3. Root Cause Analysis;
4. Annual School Plan; and
5. Implement and Monitor Progress.

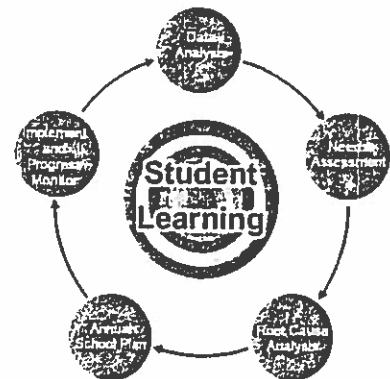


Figure 1: Annual School Planning Process