

Education

Context

The New Haven Public Schools face a moment of transition, challenge, and possibility. Presently there is system-wide instability because of two short-lived Superintendents, a severe and recurring deficit, inadequate numbers of personnel, and dramatic inequity among schools. State Department of Education School Performance Indicators privilege external standardized assessments over high-quality teacher-created performance assessments, presenting a challenge to authentic learning. Yet the opportunity for new leadership and the current initiative to create a “Whole Child Framework” point in a positive direction. The Elicker administration can build confidence in the New Haven Public Schools and renew faith in public education; draw from existing knowledge, resources, and relationships, inside and outside the district, to advise and inform; and secure the resources and partnerships needed to serve our children’s complex needs. Efforts should begin with what is most achievable and directly impactful for the greatest number of families while laying a stable foundation for continual progress toward the full promise of public education.

First 100 Days

Recommendation 1: Declare 2020 the Year of the Whole Child in New Haven.

The education of children begins with recognition of the inherent assets and strengths that students and families bring to our school communities. In turn, it is the community’s responsibility to ensure that children’s holistic needs—physical, cognitive, cultural, social, and psychological—are understood



and met through instructional practices grounded in research-based child development theory. Given the challenges created by long-term systemic inequity, we must marshal new resources in order to eliminate barriers to learning, and we must reject practices that reproduce educational inequities. This process begins with a declaration of intent.

Recommendation 2: Establish guiding principles for appointments to the Board of Education and the New Haven Early Childhood Council.

The Mayor has significant influence over the direction of these key bodies via appointments. To ensure that appointments are made with integrity and transparency, it is necessary to create guidelines that are aligned with recommendations of the National Association of School Boards and the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.

Recommendation 3: Nurture a collaborative working relationship between the Mayor and the Interim Superintendent, and between the New Haven Public Schools and City Hall.

A well-functioning school system relies on key decision-makers developing positive relationships that are grounded in understanding of and respect for one another's distinct statutory roles and responsibilities. Although the City Charter provides for the Mayor to be a member of the Board of Education, this dynamic is an outlier in school boards around the country and for good reason: because it leads to hyperpoliticization. Our new Mayor can avoid this trap by maintaining an overall focus on children and by recognizing that district educators are charged with educating and that the role of the City is to bring resources to support education.

chronic absenteeism, and improve graduation rates. As an initial priority, identify resources to enhance and expand the district's inquiry-based early learning initiative. In addition, identify short-term and long-term strategies to develop and improve:

- Teaching in alignment with children's developmental needs;
- Understanding of racism and implicit bias among students and educators;
- Culturally affirming and historically truthful curriculum and teaching;
- Access to foreign-language, arts, health, and physical education;
- Social and emotional learning and restorative practices for students and educators;
- Support for students navigating trauma and mental health challenges;
- Understanding and use of authentic performance assessment while de-centering the use of corporate-created standardized tests; and
- Ethical practices, from LGBTQ+ and cultural sensitivity to treatment of food waste.

Recommendation 3: Improve problem-solving, transparency, and inclusive decision-making.

School district operations are notoriously opaque. Educators, parents, and students report that concerns are routinely left unresolved and that they are shut out of decision-making. To facilitate the most basic need—obtaining answers to questions and resolving problems—the district can establish a “No Wrong Door” policy that invites the community to approach any school or district office for assistance related to the school system. A chart detailing the process for resolving questions and concerns can be posted prominently at every school and on the district website. In addition, an expanded Board of Education Teaching and

Two Years

Recommendation 1: Ensure a transition to a stable, community-supported Superintendent.

The district requires a formal transition to stable, permanent leadership, selected via an inclusive process driven by authentic community input. The new leadership should be committed to a community-supported purpose, set of values, and vision for public education.

Recommendation 2: Develop a shared analysis and long-term plan to educate the whole child and address barriers to learning.

Under the direction of the Superintendent, establish an understanding of how current curriculum and teaching practices align with child development and prioritize strategies for improvement that increase learning time, decrease

Learning Committee could facilitate educator, staff, and community participation in policy development, as well as advance analysis and planning around educating the whole child.

Recommendation 4: Establish fiscal stability and direct resources to staffing.

Services to children cannot be enhanced without new revenue sources and ethical fiscal governance. Conduct a “forensic” audit of the Board of Education to establish a baseline understanding of how dollars have been spent to date. Implement a district Procurement Policy to support responsible stewardship of dollars going forward. Develop a plan to secure increased public and private dollars. As new resources are identified, direct them to ensure adequate staffing—including substitutes, teachers, teaching assistants, counselors, social workers, tutors, library media specialists, nurses, food service workers, and building maintenance workers—as well as improved staff wellness and working conditions, including living wage compensation and support for teaching assistants’ pathways to certification.

Recommendation 5: Cultivate a citywide learning community.

Expand the citywide “Big Read” to include a common read on a tough subject such as race, with books tiered to different age levels, and invite the community to weigh in on the book selections.

Longer Term

Recommendation 1: Align vocational and technical education with local growth sectors and a sustainable future.

Our schools have an essential role to play in facilitating diverse career options for students. In addition to college preparation, students must have access to and preparation for technical careers in areas of growth within the local economy and in

green technologies. The City can partner with local community colleges to make their vocational courses more accessible to high school students through the dual college credit program and to encourage courses tied directly to local career opportunities and green jobs. Partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, government, and local professionals can facilitate internship placements, which can be promoted to students and families via enhanced school career days. Using these initiatives to create a comprehensive long-term plan geared toward more intentional, integrated local workforce development would ideally provide every high school student with the opportunity to establish, before graduation, industry-recognized credentials and a supported pathway to a sustainable, fulfilling career.

Recommendation 2: Deliver reliable educational programming outside the traditional school day, after school and over the summer.

Learning does not stop when school is dismissed, and our City can support a more integrated network of programs to support children and working families outside of school hours. The City should identify resources to expand high-quality after-school programs implemented by the district and community partners at district schools with no consistent after-school programs. Via coordination with Elderly Services, there could be collaboration with seniors who can offer services and programs.

Recommendation 3: Invest in early education, from birth through preschool.

All children deserve equitable access to high-quality early-learning experiences. This begins with support for the expansion of high-quality home-based childcare businesses and advocacy for an increase in the subsidies available to families for these and other early childcare programs. In collaboration with the Early Childhood Council, the City administration can streamline access to current public preschool

offerings with a universal application and develop long-term strategies to provide all children with access to high-quality preschool programs.

Recommendation 4: Increase the number of African-American, Latinx, Spanish-speaking, and New Haven-resident educators.

Student learning is enhanced by educators who understand students' lived experiences, and significant efforts must be made to recruit and retain them. As an initial step, the City can develop partnerships with university teacher preparation programs, such as a pipeline with effective mentoring for talented high school juniors and seniors to study education, and a university-based local alternative route to certification, to transition professionals from other fields into teaching. In addition, the City should research potential incentives, including a homebuyers' program, tax incentives for teachers residing in New Haven, and a hiring preference for New Haven residents and Spanish speakers, as the foundation for a long-term plan to diversify the faculty.

Recommendation 5: Broaden and enhance bilingual and dual-language programs and supports for immigrant students.

A majority of New Haven Public Schools students are Latinx, but current bilingual and dual-language offerings are inadequate to meet student needs. Establishing a comprehensive K-8 bilingual program at a neighborhood school in the Hill would support its high number of immigrant families, as well as provide additional bilingual staff and enhanced support services for immigrant students. At the same time, dual-language learning provides an opportunity for all children. The City should host a community forum on how to support and improve bilingual education and bilingualism across the City and use this input as the basis for longer-term planning.

Recommendation 6: Develop student, parent, and guardian advocacy skills and knowledge of child development.

Progress in our schools and school district should be driven by those most directly affected. In recent years, the district and the City implemented with mixed results a range of initiatives to empower student leaders and educate parents and guardians on a range of topics. To understand this history and establish constructive structures and programs going forward, we need to study current and former programs and models, including how schools seek to engage families and empower student leaders. Another useful step would be to conduct a survey of students and families to establish the types of programming that will best elicit families' engagement, nurture authentic student leadership, deepen understanding of child development, and equip parents and guardians for constructive advocacy.

Recommendation 7: Expand student, family, and educator services and supports through community and City partnerships.

While New Haven is rich in human and organizational resources to support the education of young people and their families, many of these resources go untapped. The City should create a collaborative plan for expanding community partnerships, volunteers, and mentoring, as well as for enhancing collaboration between the New Haven Public Schools, City programs, and community agencies that serve children. It should survey school leadership to find out what volunteers and supplies are needed and share these needs centrally on the City website. It should support the development and promotion of Get Connected New Haven, an online database of available services, as well as identify and seek to fill service gaps. It should also consider creating a partnership for volunteer and mentorship matching

that could include connecting seniors with youth; the goal would be to identify a supportive mentor for every student in our community.

Recommendation 8: Establish new revenue sources toward full, stable funding.

Public education is chronically underfunded, presenting a perennial challenge to the delivery of high-quality education for every child. Actions to take: Improve the City's grant-seeking capacity for programs that serve children by reviewing available private and government grant programs and aggressively seeking new funding. Initiate planning on a statewide campaign for full funding for public education in Connecticut based on an updated, independent cost study. Ensure that education is at the top of our state lobbying agenda and build a coalition of cities and towns with similar needs.

Recommendation 9: Achieve equity in resources and overall quality among schools.

Inequitable and inadequate resources among district schools constitute a long-standing challenge, as is the perception that the school district has higher- and lower-quality schools. All

district schools should be sufficiently resourced, and every school should be the kind of place that all parents and guardians would be happy to send their own children. Actions to take: Study equity models that provide sufficient educational resources in other districts. Host a community forum to gather input on pathways to greater equity: both can inform a long-term strategy of sufficient resources for all. Prioritize new services and supports for the least-resourced schools, including reducing elementary and middle-school class sizes in select schools with the highest needs.

Recommendation 10: Realize a racially integrated school district.

Despite pockets of integration, our district remains racially segregated, which is a disservice to all children and the City writ large. The process of integrating our schools begins with research and community input. Actions to take: Collaborate with the current District Equity Team to implement its District Racial Equity Policy and implementation plan. To inform the next steps, study redistricting models and possibilities implemented across the country, and host a community forum to gather initial input on approaches and options.



Photo: Sarah Miller