

DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.  
10TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,  
RESPONSE AND COMMUNICATIONS  
RANKING MEMBER  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT  
AND MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH,  
TAX AND CAPITAL ACCESS

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-3010

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
103 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3010  
(202) 225-3436

DISTRICT OFFICES  
LEROY SMITH PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING  
60 NELSON PLACE  
14TH FLOOR  
NEWARK, NJ 07102  
(973) 645-3213

253 MARTIN LUTHER KING DRIVE  
JERSEY CITY, NJ 07305  
(201) 369-0392

February 27, 2014

Cami Anderson  
State District Superintendent  
Newark Public Schools  
2 Cedar Street  
Room 1003  
Newark, NJ 07102

Dear Superintendent Anderson:

I write to express my concerns with the One Newark Plan for improving Newark Public Schools. I commend the vision of One Newark to ensure that “all students in Newark are in excellent schools, in thriving communities, and are on the path to excel in college and 21<sup>st</sup> century careers.” However, I am deeply troubled by the actions that will take place in the plan and question whether One Newark will truly help realize this vision for **all** students in the Newark Public School system.

My greatest concern is that this plan seems to only grow charter schools; significant efforts to strengthen the district’s traditional public schools are noticeably absent. One can not discount the work that high performing charter schools in Newark continue to do to educate the lucky minority of students who win a lottery to these schools. However, given the fact that a majority of students still attend the district’s traditional public schools, any effort to strengthen outcomes for **all** students **must** include strengthening traditional public schools. To justify the charter launches, One Newark highlights the decline in enrollment of district schools. Further, it discusses the number of low quality district schools and the percentage of families who apply to charter schools. I respectfully disagree with this reasoning. The 10,000 student long waiting list is not a beckoning call to grow charter schools. As One Newark mentions, “it is undeniable that families want excellent schools for all of their kids – regardless of school type.” This waiting list is a clarion call to strengthen **all** of the schools in Newark.

To better understand the impact One Newark will have on my constituents, I would appreciate responses to the following questions:

- As you know, charter schools were created to serve as incubators for traditional public schools, not to outright replace them. The unprecedented relationship you have built with the charter school operators in Newark offers a great opportunity to collaborate and replicate their success in traditional public schools. What efforts are you making to collaborate with high performing charter schools to replicate their success in the district’s

traditional public schools? Are any efforts underway to provide the district's traditional public schools with similar freedoms and the flexibility to innovate as seen in charter schools?

- The One Newark plan praises the work that charter schools have done, noting that charter students in Newark gain an additional seven-and-a-half months of learning in reading and nine months in math compared to their Newark Public Schools peers. And, in describing the equity component of the One Newark plan, it is written that students with the greatest challenges will be served with excellent schools first, not last. To this end, what efforts will take place to ensure that the high needs students in Newark Public Schools will be served by the highly acclaimed charter schools, first?
- Again, One Newark identifies equity as a major tenant of its vision. Yet, through this plan, children in some neighborhood schools will be kicked out of their school with only the chance of a lottery win to gain acceptance into the high performing charter school that will take over their current school. If not accepted, the students are at risk of being redirected to a school with outcomes similar to the school they are being removed from, with the added inconvenience of a more distant – in some cases dangerous – commute. Why are students not guaranteed admission to the charter school replacing their local school in cases where the charter school is the student's top choice? Additionally, what arrangements will be made to ensure the safe and affordable transportation of students who are forced to travel across town to school due to the closing of their local school?
- The growth of charter schools will only continue the trend of low enrollment in Newark Public Schools. What efforts will take place to strengthen the traditional district public schools so that these schools will be among the choice of excellent schools for families in Newark? A longer school day is one change noted within the plan for "renew" schools to strengthen academic achievement. If the current school day has failed students, what changes will a longer day bring? What innovative, new practices will be implemented?

I look forward to hearing from you and continuing to look for ways that we can work together to do what's best for all students within the Newark Public School system.

Sincerely,



Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress