

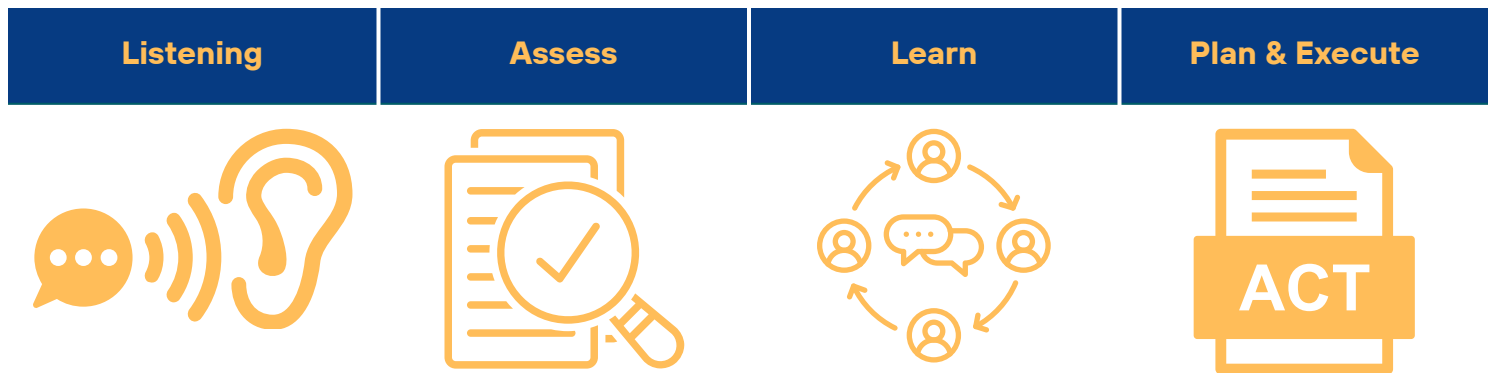
# ELEVATING EXCELLENCE: ABOVE & BEYOND

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST 100 DAYS

June 2024



## Overview



*Presented herein are the comprehensive findings of a 100-day listening and learning tour conducted by Dr. Thomas McBryde Jr., superintendent of Hackensack Public Schools. The tour aimed to gather insights from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. Through a series of meetings, focus groups, and surveys, the superintendent sought to understand the diverse perspectives and pressing issues facing the school district. The outcomes of this initiative provide a nuanced understanding of the current educational landscape in Hackensack, highlight areas for improvement, and outline actionable strategies for enhancing the quality of education and fostering a collaborative school community.*

## Superintendent's Message

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**Dr. Thomas McBryde, Jr.**

*"Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year."*

W.E.B. Dubois

Since I began serving in Hackensack Public Schools, I have come to admire a community with a strong sense of pride and commitment to inclusivity, togetherness, and cultural diversity. Our team is bold and focused on ensuring every scholar has the opportunity to achieve at high levels and has their social and emotional needs met. We consistently challenge ourselves to be innovative, raise expectations, and work collaboratively. This challenge is being welcomed, priming our community for transformation and excellence.

During my first 100 days as Superintendent of Hackensack Public Schools, it has become clear that our success will rely on our team's clarity of mission and vision, strategic direction, strong relationships, effective communication, collaboration, innovation, and commitment to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn and thrive.

Over the past few months, I have spent time listening, learning, assessing, and planning. I am grateful for the generosity of students, staff, families, caregivers, business leaders, and community partners in meetings, sharing invaluable insights, feedback, resources, and ideas for our path forward. Teamwork is our source of strength. Our conversations serve as a catalyst for the work we will do together to Elevate Excellence: Above and Beyond.

Going above and beyond charges our teams to surpass standard expectations and provide exceptional learning experiences and support for all stakeholders. Our commitment requires us to deepen our dedication to equity and inclusion by ensuring that every student – regardless of background or circumstance – has equitable access to a high-quality education. Striving for academic excellence through a rigorous curriculum, innovative teaching methods, and personalized learning opportunities tailored to diverse student needs is our aim. Supporting educators with professional development, mentorship, and resources empowers them to excel in their roles and continually improve their practice. Strong family and community engagement further enriches the educational experience, fostering partnerships and collaboration to support student learning and well-being. Holistic student support, including social, emotional, and physical well-being, is prioritized alongside academic achievement to ensure that students thrive personally and academically. Finally, data-informed decision-making processes are utilized to continuously monitor and evaluate educational programs, identifying areas for improvement and guiding strategic planning to uphold our commitment to excellence, equity, and continuous improvement.

This report provides an overview of the learnings and discoveries during my first 100 days leading the district. There are many valuable elements in our community. Already, we have accomplished much with the collective building of our comprehensive science-based literacy program, the initiation of our data-driven culture, and the expansion of our SEL programs and initiatives. We remain proud of the continued investments within our school buildings and

communities through our building and facilities plan, equity audit, the renaissance of our CTE program, extension of early education programs, and expansion of arts programs.

Throughout my first 100 days, we have engaged hundreds of stakeholders, and their input has truly laid the groundwork for our planned path forward. I am proud of the work that has taken place to date and remain steadfast in my commitment to the work ahead.

Our Hackensack Public Schools team has the resources and skills needed to achieve excellence as we deepen our focus on addressing student needs and preparing them for a prosperous postsecondary life. As we move forward – shoulder to shoulder – we will shape the future of our dear Hackensack community.

In Partnership,

*Dr. Thomas McBryde Jr.*

# District Anchors

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## Our District Mission

The mission of the Hackensack Public School District is to challenge all students to excel along their own personal learning continuum and become responsible, civic-minded global citizens of the 21st Century. We inspire and challenge students to be active learners who can think critically, engage in complex problem-solving, communicate effectively, take pride in the work they produce, and contribute to making a positive difference in the world around them.

Our schools strive to personalize learning to meet each student's needs. In partnership with parents and the community, our schools will maximize academic achievement and develop confident students who are accountable for their ongoing learning, value initiative and diversity, and can contribute meaningfully to the ever-changing global society.

### **We believe:**

- Our students will be effective communicators, quality producers, self-directed lifelong learners, community contributors, collaborative workers, and complex thinkers;
- All students are entitled to opportunities to maximize their talents and abilities;
- Our ethnic and cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and prepares students for success in a global society;
- Setting high expectations for students, teachers, and administrators ensures that our students successfully meet or exceed New Jersey Student Learning Standards.
- Parents are essential partners in the education of their children;
- Maintaining a strong partnership with the Hackensack community is integral to student success;
- Understanding, implementing, and responding to current trends in digital learning is intrinsic to success in the global 21st century;

- In ensuring that the district has a well-trained, highly qualified and competent staff;
- In maintaining a safe and secure learning environment.

The underlying values and principles that drive our mission and vision are personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, collaboration, respect for others, honesty, integrity, and the firm belief that every child can learn.

## Our Core Values

In Hackensack School District, our core values serve as the foundation of our educational mission and vision. We are committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where every student can thrive. Our core values — *excellence, equity, high expectations, collaboration, integrity, accountability, and perseverance* — guide our actions and decisions, ensuring that we provide high-quality education and cultivate a community of lifelong learners. These values reflect our dedication to nurturing the potential of each student, promoting a culture of respect and honesty, striving for academic and personal excellence, ensuring equitable opportunities for all, and working together to achieve our shared goals.

## The First 100 Days

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Throughout the first 100 days, Dr. McBryde and the district team were able to visit and celebrate with many community members. Below are several highlights.

### Hackensack Middle School Presents Moana



The Hackensack Middle School student performance of Moana was an enchanting and memorable event that captivated the entire community with its vibrant energy and student heartfelt performances. From the stunning musical numbers to the colorful costumes and captivating choreography, students brought the beloved Disney tale to life on stage with passion and enthusiasm. With each scene, the talent and dedication of the young performers shone brightly, showcasing their creativity and commitment to excellence. The audience was transported to the magical world of Moana as the students' rendition of the story's timeless themes of courage, perseverance, and self-discovery resonated with viewers of all ages. The production was a testament to the hard work and collaborative spirit of the Hackensack Middle School community, leaving a lasting impression and fond memories for all who attended.

The Hackensack Middle School Multicultural Expo at Nellie K. Parker was a beautiful celebration of diversity and learning that connected and inspired attendees. From engaging student activities exploring various cultural traditions to tantalizing displays of international cuisine, the Expo provided a rich tapestry of experiences for all who attended. Students showcased their learning and projects centered around different cultures, offering insightful glimpses into the customs, history, and contributions of communities from around the world. The rhythms of cultural music filled the air, adding to the festive atmosphere and fostering a sense of unity and appreciation for our global heritage. The Expo was a testament to the school's commitment to fostering cultural understanding and appreciation, leaving a lasting impact on students, families, and the entire community.

### **Parker Elementary School Cultural Day**



### **Instructional Leaders Explore K-12 Literacy Curriculum**



The district team, composed of dedicated stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and central office staff members, collaborated tirelessly to develop a comprehensive literacy plan grounded in research and aligned with the science of reading. Drawing upon their collective expertise and insights, the team meticulously crafted a multifaceted strategy that addresses the diverse needs of students at every stage of their literacy development. Through thoroughly examining evidence-based practices and pedagogical approaches, the team designed a framework emphasizing foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, fostering higher-order thinking skills and comprehension strategies. This plan, informed by the latest research and best practices in literacy instruction, reflects the team's unwavering commitment to ensuring that every student has the tools and support they need to become proficient readers and lifelong learners.

## **First 100 Days**

The first 100 days of learning in the Hackensack Public School District have provided a rich tapestry of insights, highlighting both the strengths and areas for growth within the educational community. This



period, marked by a commitment to academic excellence and inclusive education, has seen significant developments across various dimensions of the school experience. From innovative teaching strategies and technological integration to the evolving dynamics of student engagement and well-being, the initial phase entry into the district offers a comprehensive understanding of the district’s strengths and challenges. This report delves into the key learnings from these formative days, presenting a detailed analysis that will inform future initiatives and enhance the educational journey for all students in Hackensack.

The report categorizes the work into four categories: Listen, Learn, Assess, and Plan. Following a summary of the learnings in each of these areas is a clear set of priorities that will catalyze the district’s ability to elevate excellence above and beyond the current state.



## Listen

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**OBJECTIVE:** Learn from diverse stakeholders to identify opportunities for enhancing District operations and outcomes, establish opportunities to listen, and develop ongoing engagement structures.

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**STATUS:** Completed

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District leadership engaged with diverse stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, principals, certificated and classified staff, Local District staff, and community and labor partners to develop strategies for supporting student achievement. From January 2024 to May 2024, stakeholders participated in sessions to share their insights on challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions to address opportunity gaps, enhance organizational effectiveness, and improve teacher practice and student

success. The listening sessions incorporated two-way engagement through in-person and hybrid feedback protocols designed to value all participants' voices and unique experiences in the district. All listening activities aimed to set a tone of inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration. Therefore, the input from these sessions and surveys informed additional actions during the 100-day period and will aid in developing and designing the district's strategic plan that will be published in the fall of 2024.

### Core Listening Activities:

- Scheduled and conducted listening sessions with students, teachers, parents, and community members to gather diverse perspectives on district strengths and challenges.
- Held one-on-one meetings with school board members, district administrators, principals, teachers' representatives, and parent-teacher organizations to gather their perspectives and priorities.
- Organized and hosted meet-and-greet sessions with civic, business, faith, philanthropic, nonprofit, public, and university sectors in partnership with school board members.
- Designed, conducted, and analyzed the results of a district-wide survey aimed at gathering feedback on the district's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- Visited every school and met with all departments supporting teaching and learning, including curriculum and instruction, division of schools, and academic services.

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## Above & Beyond

- **Deepen Transparency & Collaboration Efforts:** Develop a comprehensive communications plan focused on ensuring that information can be disseminated through a variety of modalities, including email, text, phone, in-person, and hybrid. Identify opportunities to celebrate promising practices and initiatives through proactive mechanisms that center the work of staff and the achievements of students.
- **Continued Community Engagement:** Identify opportunities and mechanisms to generate and gather feedback on the experiences of all stakeholders.

## Assess

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**OBJECTIVE:** Analyze and evaluate student performance data across various groups to ensure equitable outcomes and support. Assess the efficiency and impact of the teaching, curriculum, and operations departments to enhance overall educational effectiveness.

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**STATUS:** Completed

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The District Cabinet conducted a comprehensive review of student performance data from the 2019-23 school years, analyzing various demographics such as ethnicity, gender, gifted students, English Learners,

and students with disabilities. The review also assessed academic performance across different school models and socioeconomic groupings. The Student Performance Review highlighted significant inequities and imbalances, necessitating targeted interventions, strategic investments, and decisive actions. We are committed to ongoing data collection, analysis, and transparent reporting, providing easy access to results through online dashboards and reporting platforms for both internal teams and the general public.

### Core Assessment Activities:

- Analyzed student achievement data, identifying trends and disparities among different student groups and schools.
  - Investigated departmental infrastructure, policies, and procedures and reviewed budgets and resource allocation for alignment with strategic initiatives.
  - Assessed curriculum alignment with state standards, leadership skills of administrators, and effectiveness of data monitoring systems.
  - Evaluated community engagement efforts and school climate programs and reviewed district and school improvement plans and accountability trends.
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### Above & Beyond

- **Examine current curriculum:** Identifying opportunities to enhance and improve current instructional materials and replace them with high-quality materials that meet the needs of the diverse learners in the school district.
- **Address overcrowding in middle school:** Reduce the size of the middle school. The school will split into two academies - one serving grades five and six and one serving grades seven and eight. Hire a second principal to support a reduction in overcrowding and focus on improving academic achievement.
- **Develop a Professional Learning Plan:** Collaborate with district and school-based staff to identify professional learning opportunities in instruction, operations, and leadership development.

## Learn

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**OBJECTIVE:** To analyze and evaluate the district systems and structures that support student achievement, pedagogy, district operations, and policies, identifying areas for improvement and proposing actionable solutions.

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**STATUS:** Completed

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The district leadership team worked to evaluate systems and structures that support student achievement, pedagogy, district operations, and effective policy. Stakeholders were engaged between January 2024 and May 2024. This comprehensive effort included visiting schools and participating in numerous sessions and meetings where stakeholders—comprising students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members—shared their valuable insights. Discussions focused on identifying challenges, exploring opportunities, and proposing potential solutions to help us address and close opportunity gaps, enhance organizational effectiveness, and ultimately boost student success.

The work in this phase examined operations and learning environments. While the two are different functions within the district, they each contribute to the holistic experience of students, staff, and community members.

### **Core Assessment Activities:**

- Examined the current state of the school district, including core approaches to teaching and learning as well as operations, curriculum, business systems, finance, and budgeting.
  - Reviewed the District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plans, achievement/growth, and key data points, including assessment, attendance, achievement gaps, discipline data, college and career readiness, graduation rates, and various initiatives for improvement.
  - Reviewed current bargaining unit contracts, benefits packages, and schedule for negotiations with labor partners.
  - Reviewed budget, finance and procurement protocols, central office, and school budgets to determine alignment with district initiatives.
  - Examined current protocols for district support in mental health, social-emotional learning, housing insecurity, and discipline.
  - Conducted analyses of disaggregated district-level data relating to accountability trends and student achievement.
  - Reviewed the most recent curriculum audit to identify recommendations and progress toward those recommendations.
  - Examined facilities and construction reports, budget, litigation, data systems, and technology.
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### **Above & Beyond**

- **Data Use for Instruction:** Identifying high-leverage opportunities to improve teaching and learning and the use of data to provide and improve standards-based instruction. This will include building internal capacity to deliver standards-based instruction with innovative approaches to delivering culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy. Deepen instructional leadership development amongst school-based staff and district leadership.
- **Data Use in Operations:** Anchor district, school, and classroom decision-making in high-quality data. Deepen data-driven decision-making in operations, structures, and policy. Focus on creating more transparency, literacy, and agility with data systems and data content.
- **Aligning Goals and Spending:** Continue to create efficiencies in district spending by creating explicit alignment between school spending and articulated goals and alignment to student outcomes.

# Plan

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**OBJECTIVE:** District leadership will develop and implement systems and structures that support student achievement through goal setting, progress monitoring, and data analysis across all departments and functionalities. We aim to build stakeholder capacity and ensure effective communication and community engagement by facilitating professional learning. Additionally, we will cultivate a collaborative culture focused on continuous improvement and shared responsibility for student success.

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**STATUS:** *In Progress*

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The district is embarking on a strategic initiative to develop and implement systems and structures that fundamentally support student achievement. This initiative begins with setting clear, measurable goals and establishing robust mechanisms for progress monitoring. By utilizing comprehensive data analysis, we will identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth, ensuring that every student receives the support needed to succeed. This data-driven approach will guide our decision-making processes and allow for targeted interventions where they are most needed.

A key component of this initiative is professional learning designed to build the capacity of all stakeholders. Through ongoing training and development, teachers, administrators, and support staff will be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement best practices and innovative strategies. This professional learning will enhance individual performance and foster a culture of continuous improvement across the district. Effective communication channels will be established to ensure that all stakeholders are informed, engaged, and able to contribute to the collective effort.

Community engagement and collaboration are central to our vision of student success. By actively involving parents, community members, and local organizations, we will create a supportive network that enhances educational opportunities for all students. Building a collaborative culture within the district, we will encourage open dialogue, shared responsibilities, and collective problem-solving. This inclusive approach will ensure that our efforts are aligned with the needs and aspirations of our community, ultimately leading to sustained improvements in student achievement and overall educational outcomes.

## Core Planning Activities:

- Develop a district-wide academic improvement plan that outlines specific strategies for raising student achievement levels, including curriculum enhancements, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. The plan will include systems to monitor the progress of academic improvement efforts, establish benchmarks, and hold educators and administrators accountable for results.
- Collaborate with the leadership team to develop a short-term and long-term strategic plan, with a focus on specific, measurable goals for student achievement.

- Develop a plan for engaging parents and community members in the education process, including regular town hall meetings.
- Establish an Equity and Inclusion Task Force to address diversity gaps and create strategies for fostering an inclusive learning environment.
- Develop a plan to provide additional support programs and intervention support for students at risk of falling behind academically. Define and establish an SEL plan that promotes students' social and emotional well-being, incorporating SEL curriculum and support services to address non-academic needs.
- Develop and implement structures to support data analysis and data-driven decision-making through teams.
- Develop the district's professional development plan to meet the needs of personnel (principals, teachers, and Central District staff). Determine to what degree the learning experiences are differentiated to meet the diverse learning skills and experience level, job-embedded, student-achievement focused, foster the formation of professional learning communities, and how the impact of the support is measured.
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan to inform parents, community members, and stakeholders about district initiatives, successes, and challenges. The communications plan will include a culture plan to recognize and celebrate achievements and progress, providing motivation and positive reinforcement for academic success in school communities.
- Develop a budget plan that strategically allocates resources to support student achievement goals, ensuring that funds are directed toward programs and initiatives that impact learning most.
- Develop a CTE and postsecondary education support plan.

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## Above & Beyond - Strategic Planning

- **Goal Setting:** Define clear, measurable goals and objectives aligned with the district's mission and vision, as informed by the learnings in the first 100 days. These goals will address areas such as academic achievement, equity and inclusion, student well-being, professional development, and community engagement.
- **Strategic Planning Committee Formation:** Establish a strategic planning team comprising representatives from different stakeholder groups. Collaboratively develop the strategic plan, outlining actionable strategies, initiatives, and timelines to achieve the identified goals. Ensure that strategies are evidence-based, feasible, and aligned with available resources.
- **Communication and Transparency:** Communicate the strategic plan to all stakeholders, emphasizing the shared vision, goals, and strategies for improvement. Provide regular updates and opportunities for feedback to ensure transparency and accountability.



## Above & Beyond

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Learnings from the past 100 days support the reimagination and shape the future of Hackensack Public Schools. As such, district leadership embarked upon an ambitious journey to redefine our district's theory of action.

This period was not merely a time of assessment but a critical phase of introspection and reimagination. It allowed us to interrogate our existing practices, identify gaps, and envision a more robust framework for the educational experiences we offer. By engaging with a diverse array of stakeholders—including educators, students, parents, and community leaders—we cultivated a shared vision that transcends traditional educational paradigms and lays the groundwork for a future-oriented approach.

The insights gleaned during these initial 100 days served as a catalyst for transformative thinking. We recognized the need to move beyond conventional metrics of success and adopt a more holistic, student-centered, future-forward model. One of the first steps was redefining our theory of action. The redefined theory of action strongly emphasizes equity, innovation, and preparing students to thrive in a rapidly evolving world. By integrating these core values into our strategic planning, we will position ourselves to meet current educational challenges and anticipate and adapt to future needs.

It cannot be overstated how this foundational period instilled a new sense of urgency and possibility within the district. We are committed to going above and beyond in our efforts, driven by the belief that our students deserve the best possible opportunities to succeed. We believe that a forward-thinking approach reflected in our plans and actions will help to implement cutting-edge technologies, foster inclusive learning environments, and develop partnerships that extend learning beyond the classroom. As

we move forward, the momentum generated in these first 100 days will continue to propel us toward a brighter, more equitable future for Hackensack Public Schools.

## Theory of Action

*If the District creates a culture of high expectations for teaching and learning, meaningful collaboration through the development and implementation of clear support systems and structures, and provides the resources to engage in data-driven practices, then schools will make data-informed decisions that will ensure instructional practices are rigorous and differentiated to meet individualized student needs that support student academic achievement and social-emotional development and provide all students equitable access to a high-quality education, fostering a true culture of excellence.*

## Looking Forward

Following the release of the 100-day report, the next crucial step for the Hackensack Public School Leadership is to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. This plan will outline the long-term goals and initiatives aimed at enhancing the educational experience for all students. The leadership team is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with the community, ensuring transparency and involvement throughout this process. They are excited to share that they anticipate publishing the strategic plan in the fall of 2024 and will keep everyone informed of new developments as they arise.

**Hackensack Public Schools District Leadership Team**

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