

New Jersey Department of Education
Comprehensive Accountability Office for State Supervised School Districts

Transition Plan for the Return of Local Control to Jersey City Public Schools

Comprehensive Accountability Office Report – December 2020
12-Month Interim Report

February 2021
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STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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SUMMARY

This report is the second of three planned reports of the Department of Education's (department) Comprehensive Accountability Office (CAO) concerning the final phase of the transition of the Jersey City Public Schools (district) from being a state supervised school district to one with full local control. It follows the *1st Annual Report* that covered the period October 2018 through September 2019. It reports on the district's progress in meeting metrics described in the Accountability Scorecard that is part of the Transition Plan to local control.

Following the *1st Annual Report*, this Interim Report began as a six-month report covering the period October 2019-March 2020. The district was granted an additional 6-month extension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this report covers the full 12-month period from October 2019 through September 2020.

The CAO reports that the district is receiving "1" and "2" scores on a majority of the required metrics. This is a slight overall improvement over the 1st Annual Report. These scores reflect metrics that are not implemented or only partially implemented. As required by the Transition Report, the CAO has provided recommendations for those metrics that, if implemented will provide a pathway for the district to improve its score for the 2nd Annual Report.

A Background section in Appendix A provides information on the role of the Comprehensive Accountability Office and the history of state supervision of the district. Additional details concerning the Scorecard are found in the 1st Annual Report available on the [CAO website](#).¹

CAO REVIEW AND OBSERVATIONS

The Plan requires the CAO to "score" the district's efforts to achieve "substantial and sustained" progress to meet the expectations of the Plan. In the district's agreement with the department, the work of the CAO does not include any interpretation or analysis of the data, i.e., could something had been done differently, or evaluating the quality of a presentation. It further reflects that the CAO "must remain neutral and not engage in interpretation, other than its role to ensure, to the extent reasonably possible, the reliability of the data."

While the Plan's expectation of the CAO to not interpret data is conceptually well-intended, in practice, the obligation to evaluate the status of each metric requires some level of limited judgment. Judgment, however, is inherent when it comes to meeting the intent and requirements of the project. The CAO has taken care to remain neutral in making these assessments. Upon review of the online documentation, interested parties may have different interpretations, as reasonable people may view content, data and observations from different perspectives.

In conducting its task, the CAO relies on the Highly Skilled Professional (HSP) employed by the department and the district. The role of the HSP is to support and coordinate the district's efforts to meet the requirements of the Plan. The plan also requires that the HSP gather and provide documentation for evaluation and provide observations on the district's efforts to meet the metrics.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the end of the initial 6-month evaluation period (March 2020). At that time the district was physically closed for learning, having shifted to technology-based remote learning. In the fall, the CAO, department personnel, and the HSP re-established communication through conference calls

¹ The CAO Website is found at <https://go.rutgers.edu/NJSDScorecard>

and emails. Those circumstances led to the 6-month extension of this Interim Report to cover 12-months.

The district also experienced challenges that affected providing the CAO evidence-based documentation. For example, the district was unable to perform in-class teacher evaluation. In response, it appears to be using a Remote Teacher Observation protocol. While the intention was demonstrated, evidence to document when and how this tool was implemented was not provided. Other examples include limited evidence of how department and school-based budgets were used in the budget process, how budget and financial decisions were made, and how student achievement data is used to improve teaching and learning.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

There are several general observations about district practices that are noteworthy. They relate to the lack of evidence that support board of education (board) and administrative decisions.

1. In July 2019 (8 months after the Transition Plan took effect) an "Accountability Scorecard Committee" was created. The HSP reported that the committee consists of "three Board Members, three District Administrators and the HSP as Committee Facilitator for a total of seven members." The board president and two other members represented the board. The purpose of the committee was "...to address all aspects of the Transition plan and the Accountability Scorecard...It was responsible for gathering all of the content information that has been submitted in all three report submissions."

Minutes of several meetings from September of 2019 were provided. There is no further documentation concerning the committee's work other than references in HSP reports.

2. The district and board use standard meeting scheduling forms. They show who is invited with all board members, the HSP, and key district staff members pre-listed. The form has space to list agenda topics, and for each topic, space for discussion notes, conclusions, and action items, identification of the person responsible for them, and deadline dates. They also include a sign-in sheet.

In practice, while they may list an agenda and check off people expected to attend, they rarely include any discussion notes, conclusions, or list action items. Sign-in sheets for those in physical attendance may be provided, but do not appear to indicate if individuals attended remotely.

An example of this are the records of Board sub-committee meetings (aka, "3x3" meetings – three board members and three administrators). These meetings are to brief board members and discuss issues, without making formal decisions that may be subject to the state's Open Public Meetings Law. While they may list attendees and agenda items and have sign-in sheets (for those not attending remotely), they rarely reflect what was discussed. Their limited documentation (with some exceptions) is generally unconvincing as evidence.

The HSP noted that these are "informal" meetings and considered "confidential." Leaving aside the purpose and meaning of "confidential" for these meetings, the lack of documentation compromises the historical record of decisions. It also limits public accountability and transparency into district activities. For the CAO's purpose, the lack of documentation, ordinarily used as evidence to support district activities, made it difficult to verify the HSP's assertions of progress by the district. This is highlighted by the lack of documentation reflecting the activities of the Accountability Scorecard Committee.

It is important to note that in December 2020 the district developed a new web-based online form to improve documentation of meetings. The plan was scheduled to be approved by the board in late January. This was after the close of the 12-month evaluation period and was not taken into account by the CAO in the evaluation. By itself, the system will not resolve the challenge. Executive direction and oversight will be necessary to ensure the opportunity is fulfilled and sustainable.

3. Also noted is that copies of presentations made to the board and district staff often lack the presenter's information and the date(s) of the presentation. In addition, presentation copies are rarely accompanied by attendance lists (either of physical or virtual attendees). This is another example of limited accountability. Including dates on presentations and lists of participants provides evidence of board and staff training and records of who was informed by the material. The district should consider a standard protocol of including dates on presentation printouts and documenting attendance.

4. The CAO has completed evaluation of the Newark and Paterson districts; both districts had similar metrics, met the requirements of their Transition Plans and were released from state supervision. Jersey City district officials may want to consult with their counterparts in these two districts, to see if their practices would assist in improving the district's scores.

The CAO hopes these observations will assist the district in its compliance efforts.

EVALUATING AND SCORING EACH METRIC

For this report, the CAO's evaluation is based on its review of JCPS documentation provided by the HSP, HSP reports on individual metrics, and supplemental information requested by the CAO to help clarify the reported evidence, all intended to reflect the Mechanism for Measurement for each metric.

The Accountability Scorecard calls for each metric to be evaluated on the following scale:

1. Not Implemented: There is no significant evidence that the standard is implemented.
2. Partially Implemented: A partially implemented standard is being met in only a limited way.
3. Substantially Meeting: Most elements of the metric are being met and are sustainable.
4. Fully Implemented: All elements of the standard are substantially implemented, are sustainable, and have a process for ongoing evaluation.

The Scorecard directs that metrics with a scores less than 3 are considered to be failing grades.

In contrast to the challenges of the CAO obtaining documentation for the 1st Annual Report, the filing of documentation for this report was improved and more reliable. Nonetheless, the examination of the documentary evidence did not provide adequate indication of compliance with several metrics. These low scoring (1 and 2) metrics warrant district leadership and the HSP to carefully review the CAO comments and the related requirements of the Transition Plan to ensure compliance moving forward.

The specific observations of the CAO are reflected on the following tables. There is a separate table for each metric. Each metric is shown by category and Plan element, along with the associated Mechanism for Measurement. In some cases, the table combines several related metrics in the same section (but separately scored) as they are closely linked. Documentation supporting the observations can be viewed on the CAO website.

Each metric includes an Evaluation Comment and Finding on the metric; this is the CAO's observation on the information and the conclusion reached. This is reflected in the 1 thru 4 numeric score, and Not Applicable status assigned to the metric. As required by the Plan, items scored less than 3 have additional information regarding actions to be taken to achieve compliance (shown in italics).

This report along with evidence supporting the CAO evaluation and findings are found at the [CAO website](#). The 1st Annual Report with additional background information and association evidence is also found there.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAO expresses its appreciation of the HSPs and District senior staff in their support and assistance in providing information.

The online version of this and other reports in the series and supporting documents are available at:
<https://go.rutgers.edu/NJSDScorecard>

JCPS Transition Metric Analysis

Part 1: Fundamental Considerations		Score	
<i>Section 2: State Engagement with the District During Transition</i>			
Metric # 1	The Board and Superintendent provide the HSP with a sufficient level of access and transparency into decision-making activities such that the HSP can monitor the progress of plan implementation and have adequate information to meet its responsibilities as liaison to the state regarding the Board's ethics practices.	1st A*	Int.*
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP. The CAO may additionally verify this information through conversations with the Superintendent and board members.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: 1) During the term of the Transition Agreement the board used standard meeting agenda/minutes forms and an email scheduling process for all full board, subcommittee, and other meetings. The form lists board members, senior leadership, including the HSP as potential attendees. Review of minutes of board and committee meetings (virtual and in person) did not reflect the HSP as present many of these meetings. Samples of meeting minutes reflected agenda items without documentation of the content or outcomes of those discussions.</p> <p>2) Several HSP reports refer to the district's Accountability Scorecard Committee. Evidence of this committee reflects its initiation in July of 2019 and several orientation meetings in September. The HSP reported on its composition, responsibilities, and noted that their work is considered confidential. There is no further evidence that documents the committee's meetings, decisions, or activities. Other report elements observe that other board and administration meetings are confidential, do not require formal reports and are "apart from accountability scorecard meetings."</p> <p>Thus, while the HSP report asserts that the HSP has been in attendance at many meetings the district's practices lend little evidence to support this.</p> <p><i>The HSP's attendance at meetings and participation in activities should be fully documented as a means of providing evidence of engagement.</i></p>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part 1: Fundamental Considerations		Score	
<i>Section 5: Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan</i>			
Metric # 2	The Board commits zero violations of the School Ethics Act.	1st A	Int.
		1	3
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP, School Ethics Commission Report.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: The School Ethics Commission and the HSP have advised that no board member has been found by the Commission to have violated the School Ethics Commission during the time the Transition Plan has been in place. The Commission is not allowed to disclose if complaints have been filed and are under investigation.</p>			
Finding: While this metric requires a continuing effort, the district is substantially meeting it at this time.			

Part 1: Fundamental Considerations		Score	
<i>Section 5: Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan</i>			
Metric # 3	The Board does not administer the schools, but confines its actions to policy making, planning and appraisal.	1st A	Int.
		1	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: The HSP reported that the Accountability Scorecard Committee agreed that a periodic process (with the board and administration) to review board policies is necessary as there are some policies that could lead to board interference into district administration. There was no evidence provided of meetings reflecting discussion of these policies that require attention or a plan of action. Evidence (e.g., 5/21/20 Board minutes) provided examples of policies that the board adopted. Many of these were general policies unrelated to the metric itself. There were several board workshops that addressed guidelines for effective governance of board members and the administration per the Transition Plan. While these actions express an intention, there is little evidence to document its outcomes.</p> <p><i>While periodic reviews of board policy can be useful and appropriate, the lack of evidence surrounding board subcommittee meetings (e.g., "3x3" meeting) does not demonstrate compliance with the metric. It is possible that the implementation of a planned new meeting reporting system will resolve the issue for the future.</i></p>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part 1: Fundamental Considerations		Score	
<i>Section 5: Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan</i>			
Metric # 4	The Board maintains appropriate oversight, without inappropriate interference, into personnel decisions.	1st A	Int.
		1	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP		
<p>Evaluation Comment: Evidence suggests that the district may be moving toward compliance with this metric. Board personnel committee agendas and meeting minutes from November 2019 thru February 2020 occasionally reflected topics of discussion in their meeting minutes. However, outcomes were not always shown and attendance by board members was inconsistent. From February thru October 2020 no additional meeting minutes were provided. Other than indicating polices were adopted and the new meeting system would be employed in 2021, there is little evidence that demonstrates the district is meeting this metric. A</p> <p><i>Consistent documentation of Personnel committee meeting minutes will provide evidence concerning this metric.</i></p>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part II: Governance		Score	
<i>Section 2: Ethics Training for BOE and Senior Officials</i>			
Metric # 5	All board members complete all the training programs required by N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33 within one month of the applicable deadlines.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Sign-in sheets, transcripts from New Jersey School Boards Association, observation and report by HSP.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: The Mandated Training Summary Report shows that 4 of 9 board members did not complete the required training programs within one month of the applicable deadlines. The HSP notes that the Board Secretary and Board President are designated responsible for ensuring that board members are on track with completion of mandated training on time.</p> <p><i>Board members should be scheduled for and complete the past-due training as soon as possible. The district should assign a staff member to ensure board members are completing mandated training on time.</i></p>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part II: Governance		Score	
<i>Section 2: Ethics Training for BOE and Senior Officials</i>			
Metric # 6	The Superintendent, in cooperation with the HSP, develops a training module to be provided to all board members at a retreat that addresses the components and subject areas listed on pages 17-18 of Section 2 of the Plan.	1st A	Int.
		2	3
Mechanism for Measurement	Training module, Sign-in sheets, observation and report by HSP.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: This metric and references to the Transition Plan concerns ethics training for the board and district leadership. A board retreat was scheduled and delivered by the NJ School Boards Association on 9/21/20. This session addressed most of the topics required by the Plan.</p>			
Finding: While this metric requires a continuing effort, the district is substantially meeting it at this time.			

Part II: Governance		Score	
<i>Section 3: Professional Development for the BOE and District Leadership Regarding Governance Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 7	All board members, the Superintendent, and Senior Officials attend a professional development session regarding governance best practices.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Sign-in sheets, observation and report by HSP.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: The Superintendent and the HSP presented a Governance Best Practices program at a virtual board retreat on October 13, 2020. The presentation focused on the District's Transition Plan. The full board and senior staff were in attendance. Also included was a Governance Training Plan which contained only one slide on Governance Best Practices.</p> <p><i>The Superintendent, HSP, and appropriate professional staff need to plan and deliver training to board members and appropriate district leaders. The training should be consistent with Part 2, #3 (p. 18-19) of the Transition Plan.</i></p>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part II: Governance		Score	
<i>Section 7: Search for Successor Superintendent</i>			
Metric # 8	The superintendent search meets all five requirements in conducting the search, as described in the Plan.	1st A	Int.
		NA	4
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP, observation and report by state representative on search committee, report by selected search firm.		
Evaluation Comment: The district is no longer being evaluated on this metric. The State Commissioner of Education rescinded the search process.			
Finding: This metric has been fulfilled.			

Part II: Governance		Score	
<i>Section 7: Search for Successor Superintendent</i>			
Metric # 9	The Board and search committee substantially meet timelines and deadlines laid out in the Plan.	1st A	Int.
		NA	4
Mechanism for Measurement	Report by state representative on search committee, report by selected search firm.		
Evaluation Comment: The district is no longer being evaluated on this metric. The State Commissioner of Education rescinded the search process.			
Finding: This metric has been fulfilled.			

Part III: Instruction and Program		Score	
<i>Section 2: Student Performance Data</i>			
Metric # 10	The District analyzes its student achievement data in line with the current NJQSAC Instruction and Program Indicators.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Meeting agenda(s), observation and report by HSP.		
Evaluation Comment: Evidence shows there are limited, ongoing efforts to meet this metric. This is represented by examples of student performance dashboards, analysis and plans in the areas of attendance and special education for ELA and math, overall district performance, and aspirational intentions. The district uses several intervention programs that utilize student achievement data. However, the evidence represents a limited approach with minimal application of broad-based use of the data and alignment with NJQSAC. <i>The district must utilize performance data to improve teaching and learning and to align curriculum and instruction to the NJ Student Learning Standards. The development of specific programs involving faculty and staff should be developed and documented to achieve this. The District's response to the NJ Student Learning Assessment should also be presented to the board.</i>			
Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

Part III: Instruction and Program		Score	
<i>Section 2: Student Performance Data</i>			
Metric #11	The District makes a decision and communicates to the State by November 1, 2019 about whether to apply for an extension of its equivalency or its intention to be evaluated going forward by the current NJQSAC Instruction and Program Indicators.	1st A	Int.
		4	4
Mechanism for Measurement	District's NJQSAC submission to the County Office or submission of an equivalency to the Commissioner.		
Evaluation Comment: The district provided the equivalency request approval signed by the Commissioner of Education.			
Finding: The district has fulfilled this metric.			

Part III: Instruction and Program		Score	
<i>Section 3: Expectations for Continued Focus on Academics</i>			
Metric # 12a	All trainings are completed on time by a quorum of the board members.	1st A	Int.
		2	1
Metric # 12b	All trainings are completed by each member of the full BOE within 1 month of the deadline.	1st A	Int.
		3	1
Mechanism for Measurement	Sign-in sheets, Observation and report by HSP.		
Evaluation Comment:			
<p>12a: The Transition Plan requires that training be provided to board members and district leaders (as determined by the Superintendent) in "NJSLS, formative assessments aligned to PARCC and effective strategies to close the achievement gap." There is no evidence that training has been offered or provided.</p> <p><i>The Superintendent, HSP, and appropriate professional staff need to plan and deliver training to board members and appropriate district leaders consistent with the plan (Part 3, #4, page 27-28).</i></p> <p>12b: Consistent with the lack of training development as noted in Metric 12a, no training has been provided.</p> <p><i>The Board must attend the training.</i></p>			
Finding: There is no significant evidence that the standards are being met.			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 13a	The District prepares a balanced annual budget based on expense analysis, discussions with individual departments, and incorporation of anticipated new needs and cost increases.	1st A 2	Int. 2
Metric # 13b	The Board approves a balanced budget on time.	3	3
Metric # 13c	The Board engages appropriately with the District in the development of the Budget.	1	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Board meeting and Finance Committee minutes, observation and report by HSP, report by Superintendent, report by School Business Administrator and Chief Financial Officer.		
<p>Evaluation Comment:</p> <p>13a: Evidence includes budget development instructions for principals, school level data on number of types and total salaries for teaching and administrative staff for all schools. The HSP reports that “3x3 meetings” are held with BOE members to brief them on the budget prior to their advertised board meeting where they vote on the budget. Lacking is evidence describing the decisions made by the central staff and the board for each school and department. Surprisingly, the system does not appear to use technology commensurate with the size and complexity of the district to support budget analysis and decision making.</p> <p><i>The district should carefully examine its budget review process to ensure that decisions are effectively documented. Additional use of technology should be reviewed to support that process. Consultation with Newark and Paterson districts on their practices may prove helpful to achieve this.</i></p> <p>13b: The final approval of the SY20-21 budget cycle was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, along with adjustments to meeting schedules, and the district’s efforts to respond to the emergency. Complicating these circumstances was the reliance on the final decision of a payroll tax appropriation from the Jersey City municipal government. However, the budget was adopted on time. The district still lacks revenue and budget stability, which when added to the impact of the pandemic adds to fiscal uncertainty.</p> <p>13c: The administration and board use the 3x3 meeting practice to review the budget prior to the meeting where the vote takes place. Evidence suggests that several 3x3 meetings took place in February 2020 however minutes were not documented. Other than a summary-level presentation, this leaves no documentation of the board’s review of the budget and decisions that resulted in the final budget.</p> <p><i>New policies concerning budget decision making should be adopted that reflect the budget deliberation and decision-making process for both internal decisions and final decisions made by the board. The planned online meeting form could be a helpful instrument for record keeping.</i></p>			
<p>Findings:</p> <p>13a: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.</p> <p>13b: While this metric requires a continuing effort, the district is substantially meeting it at this time.</p> <p>13c: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.</p>			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 14	Schools are allocated funding based on school-based budgeting focused on equity and transparency in school allocations.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Review of District’s budget development files and School Business Administrator’s board and public presentations.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: Evidence provides limited and inconclusive indication of efforts to achieve this metric. This evidence took the form of examples of individual school equity plans, school-based lists of federal aid allocations and student eligibility for free school lunches. However, there is no indication of how the data is integrated into school-based budgeting. This is another indication that the additional attention needs to be paid to the budgeting process (see Metric 13).</p> <p><i>Evidence showing how budget requests move through the review system and how final decisions are made in context of equity and transparency needs to be provided. Documents supporting the Board’s engagement in decision making need to be provided.</i></p>			
<p>Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.</p>			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 15a	The monthly Board Secretary’s report is completed and reconciled without exceptions as described in the Plan.	1st A	Int.
		3	4
Metric # 15b	Three times a year the District presents a fiscal forecast for the remainder of the year to the Board, as described in the Plan.	2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Board meeting minutes.		
<p>Evaluation Comment:</p> <p>15a: Board Secretary Reports were provided indicating that this metric continues to be met.</p> <p>15b: The required reports were not presented during the 12-month interim evaluation period. However, evidence was provided that a report was made to the board at the 11/19/20 board meeting, outside of the reporting period. The presentation noted subsequent reports would be provided in February and May of 2021.</p> <p><i>The November presentation and subsequent reports will be taken into account in the 2nd Annual Report. Subsequent evidence should include the minutes of the meeting highlighting the report.</i></p>			
<p>Finding:</p> <p>15a: This metric is being met and appears sustainable.</p> <p>15b: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.</p>			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 16	At least monthly, the district prepares and analyzes fiscal year cash flow management for all funds, all payments are made on a prompt basis, and reimbursement requests for federal grant awards are submitted in a timely manner for the actual amount of incurred expenditures.	1st A	Int.
		4	4
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP, Report by School Business Administrator.		
Evaluation Comment: A cash flow report is prepared monthly for all funds. Documents showing timely and regular grant reimbursement requests were provided.			
Finding: This metric is being met and appears sustainable.			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>			
Metric # 17	The District ends the year with no deficit balances and no line item over appropriated expenditures by more than 10% in the general fund, special revenue fund, capital projects fund or debt service fund (other than permitted under state law and GAAP).	1st A	Int.
		2	NA
Mechanism for Measurement	Review of the district's budget and financial reporting documentation.		
Evaluation Comment: As the annual audit/CAFR for school year 2019/2020 is not required to be completed until the end of CY 2020, this item is open until the 2nd Annual Report is prepared.			
Finding: Not applicable at this time.			

Part IV: Fiscal Management		Score	
<i>Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices</i>		Score	
Metric # 18a	All trainings are completed on time by a quorum of the board members.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Metric # 18b	All trainings are completed by each member of the full BOE within 1 month of the deadline.	1st A	Int.
		2	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Sign-in sheets, Observation and report by HSP.		
Evaluation Comment:			
<p>18a: Board members have met the requirement of minimum NJSBA training, and several have taken additional NJSBA finance-related courses. However, there is no evidence of plan-required supplemental fiscal training.</p> <p><i>The plan requirements at page 32, #3 should be reviewed to determine the courses that are necessary. The HSP and board staff should make the courses available</i></p> <p>18b: Reflecting Metric 18a, the state required School Board Mandated Training Status Report was provided as evidence of board member training. This does not reflect supplemental training required by the plan.</p> <p><i>The plan requirements at page 32, #3 should be reviewed to determine the courses that are necessary. The HSP and board staff should make the courses available.</i></p>			
Finding: These metrics require continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.			

V: Personnel		Score	
<i>Section 2: Establishing Expectations for Decision-Making and a Working Relationship between the Board and Staff</i>		Score	
Metric # 19	The District submits all contracts (new and amended) to the Executive County Superintendent for review and approval for the following employees in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7-8(j) and N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-3.1(a): superintendents, deputy superintendents, assistant superintendents, school business administrators, and any other interim, acting, or person otherwise serving in these positions. The Board does not approve or execute the contracts until the Executive County Superintendent approves the contracts.	1st A	Int.
		3	4
Mechanism for Measurement	Board minutes, approval letters from the Executive County Superintendent.		
Evaluation Comment: The district continued the practice of Executive County Superintendent review and approval for the required district staff. Several contracts were provided as evidence to support this metric.			
Finding: This metric is being met and appears sustainable.			

V: Personnel		Score	
<i>Section 4: Expectations Regarding Additional Personnel Initiatives</i>			
Metric # 20	The District continues to implement AchieveNJ. This includes training school leaders to rigorously and fairly evaluate teachers, supporting teachers based on their evaluations, and exiting low-performing staff when appropriate.	1st A	Int.
		3	2
Mechanism for Measurement	Observation and report by HSP.		
<p>Evaluation Comment: There is limited evidence suggesting that the district is conducting online evaluations of teachers. While affected by the pandemic, an “Administrator Protocol for Remote Learning Evaluations” slide deck was provided, however it did not include a date(s) or presenter information. This was complemented with YouTube presentations which also did not include a date, presenter information, or participant information. Furthermore, there was no additional evidence that supports how evaluations are occurring across the district and their impact on teacher effectiveness.</p> <p><i>The District must provide evidence that the Remote Learning Evaluation framework, including outcomes is being used across the district. Evidence should include dates, attendance records, samples of observations, observation data, impact on effectiveness, and other factors.</i></p>			
<p>Finding: This metric requires a continuing effort and data to demonstrate compliance and sustainability.</p>			

ACCOUNTABILITY SCORECARD

RESULTS AS OF NOVEMBER 2020 OBSERVATION

The Department of Education anticipated that the JCPS was moving ahead to implement the Plan and anticipated progress on the metrics. The scores bear out this anticipation.

PLAN SECTION	#	METRIC	STATUS	
			11/19 Annual	11/20 Interim
Part I: Fundamental Considerations				
Section 2: State Engagement with the District During Transition	1	The Board and Superintendent provide the HSP with a sufficient level of access and transparency into decision-making activities such that the HSP can monitor the progress of plan implementation and have adequate information to meet its responsibilities as liaison to the state regarding the Board's ethics practices.	2	2
Section 5: Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan	2	The Board commits zero violations of the School Ethics Act.	1	3
	3	The Board does not administer the schools, but confines its actions to policy making, planning and appraisal.	1	2
	4	The Board maintains appropriate oversight, without inappropriate interference, into personnel decisions.	1	2
Part II: Governance				
Section 2: Ethics Training for BOE and Senior Officials	5	All board members complete all the training programs required by N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33 within one month of the applicable deadlines.	2	2
	6	The Superintendent, in cooperation with the HSP, develops a training module to be provided to all board members at a retreat that addresses the components and subject areas listed on pages 17-18 of Section 2 of the Plan.	2	3
Section 3: Professional Development for the BOE and District Leadership Regarding Governance Best Practices	7	All board members, the Superintendent, and Senior Officials attend a professional development session regarding governance best practices.	2	2
Section 6: Search for Successor Superintendent	8	The superintendent search met all requirements in conducting the search, as described in the Plan.	N/A	4
	9	The Board and search committee <u>substantially</u> meet timelines and deadlines laid out in the Plan.	N/A	4

PLAN SECTION	#	METRIC	STATUS	
<i>Part III: Instruction and Program</i>			<i>11/19 Annual</i>	<i>11/20 Interim</i>
Section 2: Student Performance Data	10	The District analyzes its student achievement data in line with the current NJQSAC Instruction and Program Indicators.	2	2
	11	The District makes a decision and communicates to the State by November 1, 2019 about whether to apply for an extension of its equivalency or its intention to be evaluated going forward by the current NJQSAC Instruction and Program Indicators.	4	4
Section 4: Professional Development for the BOE and Senior Staff Regarding Instruction and Program Best Practices	12a	All trainings are completed on time by a quorum of the board members.	2	1
	12b	All trainings are completed by each member of the full BOE within 1 month of the deadline.	2	1
<i>Part IV: Fiscal Management</i>				
Section 2: Basic Fiscal Obligations: Budget Requirements and Best Practices	13a	The District prepares a balanced annual budget based on expense analysis, discussions with individual departments, and incorporation of anticipated new needs and cost increases.	2	2
	13b	The Board approves a balanced budget on time.	3	3
	13c	The Board engages appropriately with the District in the development of the Budget.	1	2
	14	Schools are allocated funding based on school-based budgeting focused on equity and transparency in school allocations.	2	2
	15a	The monthly Board Secretary's report is completed and reconciled without exceptions as described in the Plan.	3	4
	15b	Three times a year the District presents a fiscal forecast for the remainder of the year to the Board, as described in the Plan..	2	2
	16	At least monthly, the district prepares and analyzes fiscal year cash flow management for all funds, all payments are made on a prompt basis, and reimbursement requests for federal grant awards are submitted in a timely manner for the actual amount of incurred expenditures.	4	4
	17	The District ends the year with no deficit balances and no line item over appropriated expenditures by more than 10% in the general fund, special revenue fund, capital projects fund or debt service fund (other than permitted under state law and GAAP).	2	N/A

Part IV: Fiscal Management			11/19	11/20
			Annual	Interim
Section 3: Professional Development for the BOE and Senior Staff regarding Fiscal Management Best Practices	18a	All trainings are completed on time by a quorum of the board members.	2	2
	18b	All trainings are completed by each member of the full BOE within 1 month of the deadline.	2	2
Part V - Personnel				
Section 2: Establishing Expectations for Decision-Making and a Working Relationship between the Board and Staff	19	The District submits all contracts (new and amended) to the Executive County Superintendent for review and approval for the following employees in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7-8(j) and N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-3.1(a): superintendents, deputy superintendents, assistant superintendents, school business administrators, and any other interim, acting, or person otherwise serving in these positions. The Board does not approve or execute the contracts until the Executive County Superintendent approves the contracts.	3	4
Section 4: Expectations Regarding Additional Personnel Initiatives	20	The District continues to implement AchieveNJ. This includes training school leaders to rigorously and fairly evaluate teachers, supporting teachers based on their evaluations, and exiting low-performing staff when appropriate.	3	2

APPENDIX A

Background of State Supervision of Jersey City Public Schools

After more than nearly two decades under full supervision by the State Department of Education, Jersey City Public Schools (JCPS) began its process of transitioning to local control in 2008 with the return of Governance and Fiscal Management, followed by plans for the return of Personnel and Operations in 2016. Equipped with local control over all NJQSAC components, the district is ready and willing to fully transition pending the final decision of the State Board of Education now, set for 2021, which is predicated upon the district successfully meeting requirements of the Transition Plan (Plan).

The Plan “is predicated on optimism that progress will continue in the future.” Since 2017, the District has demonstrated academic progress and improvements across the five areas measured by the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) evaluation system. This has led to progress in all of the NJQSAC areas, more specifically in the areas of Instruction & Planning, and Operations & Personnel; all of which were returned to local control in 2008, 2015, and 2017 respectively. The plan created an “Accountability Scorecard” to measure the district’s success in implementing these improvements.

The Plan notes that over the last few years the District has seen significant success in achieving its goals and demonstrating that progress is sustainable. At the end of the long process, the Plan requires the Department to continue its monitoring to ensure the plan is successfully implemented and is sustainable. The Plan was scheduled to expire on October 18, 2020 and has been extended to May of 2021, but the State Board of Education must find that JCPS has satisfied all components of the Plan before the transition to local control is complete.

To support the transition effort, the state has appointed one “Highly Skilled Professional” (HSP) to assist the district in the implementation of the plan. A final element of support is the State’s “Comprehensive Accountability Office” role in monitoring the Accountability Scorecard. Taken together, these elements, working in concert with the District and its Board of Education and the Superintendent are expected to lead the way to continued success for the students of Jersey City.

The Comprehensive Accountability Office

The Plan called for the State and the District to work with its previously established Comprehensive Accountability Office (CAO) that has “the capacity to collect, analyze, and publish data regarding the ongoing operations and performance of school districts and boards recently exited from State intervention and returned to local control.” The JCPS is the third district the CAO is tasked to support Newark Public Schools and Paterson successfully completed the process over the last two years.

In 2018 the Commissioner of Education, who oversees the work of the CAO, engaged the Bloustein Local Government Research Center, a unit of the Rutgers University Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy to serve as the CAO under a contract with the Department. Bloustein Local is composed of individuals with deep experience in New Jersey state and local government activities, along with an understanding of public school administration that enables them to perform this task. The Commissioner has expressed full confidence in the capacity of Bloustein Local to fulfill the unique position of the CAOs .

The CAO is charged with gathering and analyzing data from the District and State, and supported by the HSPs to monitor progress and compliance with the metrics established in the Plan's Accountability Scorecard "to determine if the expectations for sustained progress and continual improvement continue to be met."

Specifically, the CAO is responsible to:

1. Compile relevant data and information to establish the annual status of the District compared to the Scorecard metrics and providing information necessary to assess annual progress on the Plan.
2. Publish and present the data to the Department and to the public in a credible, digestible, and actionable way, such as through the development of an easy to understand dashboard of District performance that will be publicly available.

The CAO is to present observations and findings based on evidence, but not to express value interpretations concerning Scorecard compliance. Under the Plan, the CAO report findings (along with other inputs), if warranted, allows the Department to establish interventions to address concerns or deficiencies.

This report is the first of two required annual reports required under the Plan. As the initial effort, the website to present data is will not be available until several months after the publication of this report, but, is intended to be available by June 30th at the latest. That date coincides with a required semi-annual update by the CAO. However, this report contains web links to the evidence relied upon by the CAO for its observations. Those material at those links will be transferred to the website when it is completed.

² The biography of the CAO's Principal Investigators, Marc Pfeiffer and Leila Sadeghi are included as an Appendix to the report

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from the Transition Plan for the Return of Local Control to Jersey City Public Schools

Section 1

5. Consequences for Not Meeting the Expectations of the Full Transition Plan

It is expected that the progress made in recent years leading to the transition of Governance, Fiscal Management, Operations, Personnel, and Instruction & Program, will continue and that the District will align its efforts and resources to drive further improvement for schools and students.

However, this Plan must also responsibly provide for a scenario in which that progress is interrupt-ed. As discussed above, the HSP and the Comprehensive Accountability Office will report on the District's overall progress. After the State's review of this overall progress, the State will establish interventions and modifications to this Plan, consistent with statutes and regulations that specifically address any area of identified concern or deficiency. These interventions may include:

- Continuation or reinstatement of the HSP;
- Providing additional levels of State oversight and support;
- Directing that the District take specific actions consistent with the terms of the Transition Plan as an alternative to initiating formal statutory or regulatory intervention processes, including reinstating full state control; and/or,
- Elongating the timeframe for the expiration of the transition plan.

In addition to the data reported on annually by the Comprehensive Accountability Office, there are certain events that may occur either through action or inaction that are so inarguably egregious as to fundamentally change the progression of the transition and require the immediate reestablishment of State intervention.

These egregious events would include clearly that the District has not developed the capacity necessary to fulfill its responsibility to the children and families of Jersey City. In such an instance, the State may take any actions authorized by statute and regulation, including full State intervention pursuant to N.J.S.A.18A:7A-15 and N.J.A.C. 6A:30-6.1 et seq.

This provision is triggered in the event of non-compliance in any or the following critical areas as established by this Plan and identified by, or reported to, the Commissioner, the independent

Comprehensive Accountability Office, the HSP, or the School Ethics Commission:

- A pattern of violations of the School Ethics Act by members of the School Board or District Leadership;
- Incidents of interference in personnel decisions that undermine the effectiveness of the District. These may include violations or any of the following laws as determined by the School Ethics Commission or Commissioner of Education as appropriate:

- o Conflicts of Interest law (N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24):
 - o Code of Ethics for School Board Members (N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1); and/or,
 - o Nepotism policy required by N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-6.2
- Contributions to District Board of Education Members and Contract Awards (N.J.A.C. 6A:23A3):
 - As determined by a court, government agency, or by the HSP and verified by the Commissioner of Education, failure to abide by federal and state laws related to District responsibilities) and Board policies and bylaws, that are applicable to members of the Board of Education and District Leadership and that undermine the effectiveness of the Board as a whole;
 - Failure of the Board to pass a balanced budget in compliance with State requirements;
 - Adverse opinion in the annual financial statement audit;
 - Insufficient cash flow to make payroll or vendor payments;
 - Policies or actions by board members or District Leadership that knowingly are putting children's safety at risk;
 - Failure of the Board to approve State standard-aligned curricula: and,
 - Other widespread, consistent, or egregious actions that hinder the ability of the Superintendent to efficiently and effectively operate the District as identified by the HSP and verified by the Commissioner.

APPENDIX C

JCPS Transition Metric Analysis

Leila Sadeghi, Ph.D.

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Leila Sadeghi is a New Jersey based consultant with over 15 years of experience in education spanning K-12 and higher education. Dr. Sadeghi has published extensively in education policy over the years and taught graduate courses in teacher and administrative training in state higher education systems. She most recently headed a government affairs institute for a former Congressman, and is currently in her second career as a business development consultant where she works for clients in a variety of sectors.

Marc H. Pfeiffer, Senior Policy Fellow

B.S. in Urban Affairs, American University; MPA, New York University

Assistant Director, [Bloustein Local Government Research Center](#)

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Research Interests

Municipal Governments

Finance and Property Taxation

Public Contracting

Shared Government Services

Technology

Energy management

Marc H. Pfeiffer retired in 2012 from a 37-year career in New Jersey local government administration, having served as a municipal administrator in several municipalities, and 26 years of service in the State's local government oversight agency, the Division of Local Government Services. At DLGS he served as Deputy Director for 14 years, and periodically as Acting Director. He is now in this third public service career at the Bloustein School where he continues to assist state and local government officials and the public on a range of public policy and administrative matters.

Marc has broad experience in many areas of local government policy and administration, including specific expertise in areas such as finance and property taxation, public procurement, shared services and consolidation, technology, energy, labor relations, and general local and state government administration. He also has deep experience in the legislative process and as a regulatory officer.

In addition to participating in Bloustein Local, Marc makes his extensive government experience available as a guest lecturer, conference presenter, and other collaborative efforts. He is also assisting the Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration with the State's Certified Public Manager Program in curriculum development and instruction.

He also serves as the Principal Investigator for Bloustein Local in its capacity as the N.J. Department of Education's Chief Accountability Office for state supervised school districts in the process of exiting state supervision.

The Bloustein Local Government Research Center

New Jersey is served by more than 1,500 distinct local government agencies: municipalities, school districts, utilities, counties, and more. Yet, even with this wealth of opportunity, precious little substantive research has been done within the local government environment to inform some of our state's most pressing policy issues.

The **Bloustein Local Government Research Center**, or **Bloustein Local** <http://blousteinlocal.rutgers.edu/> serves as a focal point and engages in a range of services, including:

- Encouraging and conducting applied and academic research on local government fiscal and administrative issues, emphasizing application and support to New Jersey local government.
- Developing resources that can assist others in conducting research and analysis.
- Organizing and hosting conferences and symposia on New Jersey local government fiscal and administrative issues.
- Supporting New Jersey local government fiscal and administrative policy development, implementation, and analysis through contract research and on-call advice for organizations and institutions that engage in local government policy setting and policymaking.
- Promoting and increasing public understanding of local government issues by partnering with and supporting civic and media organizations that inform and educate the public on local government matters.

A list of the Center's current projects may be found online at <http://blousteinlocal.rutgers.edu/projects/>.

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