



THE CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE CHANGE

Summary: PENewark Forum on Barriers to Educational Success

*On Dec. 15, 2010, the Center for Collaborative Change co-hosted a PENewark forum, along with co-sponsors Newark Now, 13th Avenue School, Essex County College—College Yes, New Jersey Community Capital, Jewish Renaissance Medical Center, and Lotus in Action. The forum was held at Thirteenth Avenue School in Newark, New Jersey, and was attended by a diverse group of participants, including Newark parents, students, educators, City officials, and members of the nonprofit, philanthropic, and business communities. Part of PENewark’s citywide community engagement campaign around education in Newark, the forum examined barriers to educational success in the community with a focus on health and healthcare, neighborhood conditions, public safety, and food access. The purpose of the forum was to draw out connections between neighborhood conditions and student educational success to be incorporated into the ongoing PENewark campaign and inform research and reforms going forward. Below is our forum summary, prepared by the Center for Collaborative Change.*

I. Speakers:

I. Joshua Trent Thompson, Researcher, PENewark:

Introduction to PENewark and PENewark’s research methodology

2. Dr. Chris Pernell, Wellness Physician, Strategist and Founder, My Body & Me:

Big Picture Statement: No large-scale success happens haphazardly or by chance; sustainability demands an environment, structure/scaffold which increases the likelihood of the desired outcome

The Relevance: Educational success as the gateway to “life-long success,” also safe and successful learning environments:

- ease transition to college
- help children to imagine and experience a broader world
- equip children with skills to achieve success outside of the classroom

The Factors: Risks in the external environment (i.e., the neighborhood) can threaten health and well-being (i.e., physical, emotional and mental) and interfere with classroom performance include:

- crime/violence (domestic, abuse or outside of the home)
- homelessness/unsafe/unstable housing
- access to safe, monitored transportation
- hunger, poor nutrition and improper sleep hygiene
- fractured/absent social support (the importance of social capital)

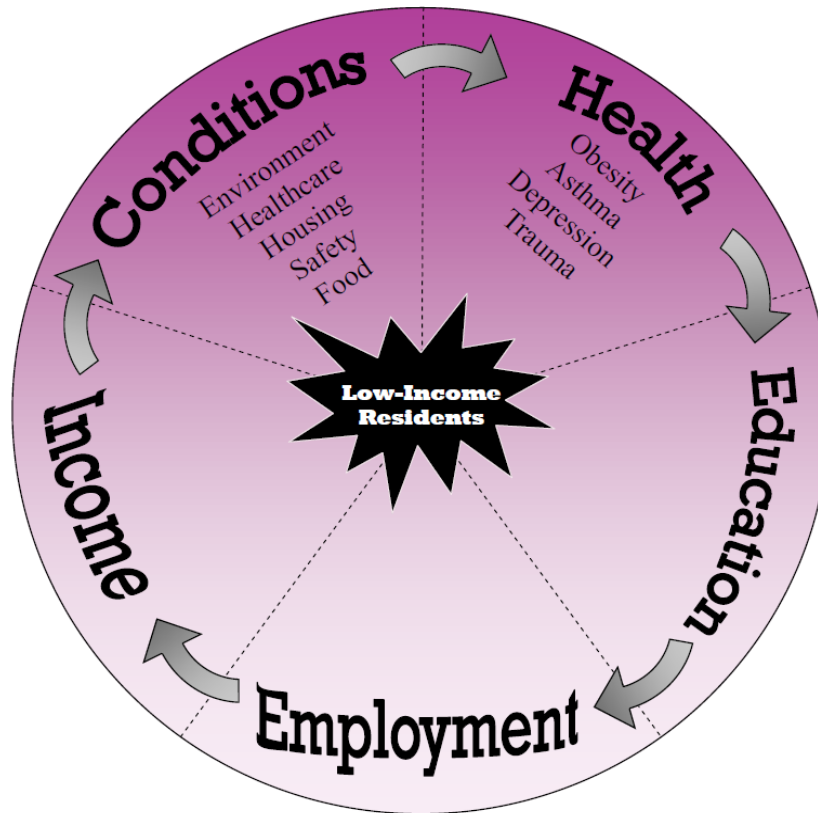
Specific Examples:

- violence/abuse/chronic illnesses → absenteeism, emotional/physical/mental injuries
- transient housing, frequent relocations interfere with school readiness, contribute to uneven performance, impair classroom bonding
- children taking public transportation to and from school unassisted
- tired children have difficulty concentrating, healthy foods stimulate learning and neural processes, unbalanced/unhealthy diet as a detriment to classroom performance
- lack of intimacy and supportive atmosphere in the home can affect learning cues, values placed on education, commitment to learning, accountability, goal-setting

Collaborative Problem Solving: Solutions are only as good as the processes from which they are derived; self-efficacy, partnerships, inclusive approach

3. Laurel Dumont, Executive Director, the Center for Collaborative Change

# Wellness Cycle



Low-Income residents are trapped in an unhealthy cycle. Conditions in the neighborhood, such as access to quality food and affordable health care, have a direct impact on the health of those residents. Examples of health concerns endemic to low-income Newarkers include obesity and asthma, and mental health concerns such as depression and trauma. These health problems lead to decreased attendance and educational deficiencies, which result in high drop-out rates, the acquisition of fewer job skills, and ultimately lower eligibility for employment. Without a high school diploma and fewer marketable skills, a living wage becomes difficult to earn. With less income available for housing, less-desirable neighborhoods must be chosen, often without quality food and affordable health care. Thus the cycle begins anew.

## II. Break Out Sessions:

### I. What are the barriers to educational success outside of schools?

- Lack of affordable decent housing:
  - in unstable housing situations, high mobility leads to a lack of consistency in a child's education, as well as supporting community and friends
  - housing quality: student success is affected by
    - having a place to study, sleep
    - health and safety concerns, e.g. hygiene, toxins, hazardous conditions
- Lack of economic well-being: Lack of time and resources prevents greater parental participation
- Poor environmental conditions lead to conditions such as asthma
- Poor neighborhood conditions
  - lack of after school program, clubs, sports and other recreational outlets
  - lack of social cohesion
  - lack of services on the neighborhood level, such as libraries and hospitals
- Lack of public safety
  - fear of violence and/or sexual harassment prevents use of parks, outdoor recreation and exercise, negatively affecting health
  - fear of gangs in and on the way to school leads to absenteeism
- Poor health hinders student education attainment
  - Mental Health
    - high rates of stress due to family financial struggles, hunger, unstable housing
    - high rates of PTSD due to exposure to violence and poor living conditions
    - social isolation (from high mobility rates, fear of violence, poor health, low self-esteem)
  - Physical Health:
    - unaddressed hearing/vision issues
    - hunger
    - lack of exercise
    - fewer sport and recreation opportunities
    - asthma
    - lack of primary and preventative care
  - Obesity and Poor Nutrition
    - lack of nutrition and food skills education
    - lack of healthy, affordable food access: "it's easier to get a gun than a tomato around here"
    - poor parenting skills regarding enforcing healthy eating habits
    - cultural attitudes and preferences about food and nutrition

## 2. Moving Towards Solutions

- Physical Well-being
  - school based health care, e.g. on site clinics, school nurses
  - more urgent care facilities
  - health education
  - vouchers for recreational opportunities (and transit to them) provided by community organizations and public private partnerships
  - promote safety at home by combating child abuse
- Community Well-being
  - Promote family and social cohesion through teacher/student family units, creating parental buy-in, cultural awareness, especially utilizing nonprofits and community groups.
  - promote a culture of safety through meditation, mediation, yoga, mentoring, possibly in partnership with Newark Police Department
- Economic Well-being
  - living wage and rent control ordinances
  - job-focused education
  - first-source employment
  - square footage fees from retailers to benefit job training and other community programs
- Housing and Neighborhood Well-being
  - More neighborhood-based services available
  - empower people to report violations (self advocacy) and demand better conditions (community organizing)
  - more random inspections
  - provide alternatives to “the corner” for Newark youth, including work, youth corps, community centers, computer labs
  - safe routes to and from school
    - combat violence and bullying
    - improve traffic safety
    - examine models to promote walking together, such as walking school buses
  - greener environment
- Nutrition Well-being
  - access: promote cheaper, healthier food options
    - investigate urban food cooperatives as a possibility for Newark
    - provide financing for structural/equipment improvements at local grocers and bodegas
    - promote grocery stores, especially those with low-cost generic brands
  - incentives to make better use of food stamps
  - resources for people who fall just above food stamp eligibility
  - education: how to eat better on the cheap

- collaboration: work with stores near schools
- healthier school lunches
  - investigate and reform bidding process for school food service vendors
    - increase competition for contracts and ensure that providing high quality nutritious foods is the main priority (rather than automatically awarding contracts to the lowest bidder)
    - more fruits and vegetables, better quality food
    - make it possible to organize and share ideas
    - law and policy: collaborate to reform bad laws, such as New Jersey state law prohibiting a nonprofit from using municipal land to sell food

### III. Report Back: What Can We Do As Newark Community Members?

#### I. The City of Newark:

- Adopt living wage and rent control ordinances. *[Ed: Newark has universal rent control. However, public awareness of this seems to be lacking, indicating that greater outreach and enforcement may be necessary.]*
- Better enforce housing code violations
- Promote and enforce first-source hiring agreements to ensure job opportunities for Newark residents.
- Impose square footage fees on retailers to benefit job training and other community programs

#### 2. Nonprofits and businesses:

- Fill in voids and vacancies to better meet unmet needs.
- Engage the community through culturally salient outreach efforts. Work with faith based or community based groups that have access to people to introduce issues of health and environment, and support the leaders in those groups to help spread the message
- Overcome cultural inertia: building family cohesion; student-teacher family units; framing message in culturally salient terms
- Support youth recreation through donations, e.g. for uniforms, trips
- Efficiency through collaboration: cross fertilization of events to pool resources

3. Residents:

- Participate in block associations and use them to reach out to the community, especially parents who may not feel empowered to get involved otherwise.
- Demand better conditions through self advocacy and community organizing

4. Newark Public Schools:

- NPS should be able to focus on educating our students. Negative environmental factors make it more challenging to educate our children and that's why it costs so much to educate them, which is why the community needs to work together to address them.
- Examine national best practices to promote leadership by recruiting and supporting good principals.
- Examine tenure reform proposals that would require longer service and/or continuous assessment.
- Support and promote good leadership from the top down.
- Follow the recommendations made in the Newark Public Schools Strategic Plan: Great Expectations.

IV. Forum Sponsors:



## V. Forum Attendees:

### Facilitators

Caroline Nagy, The Center for Collaborative Change  
Farha Ahmed, The Center for Collaborative Change  
Laurel Dumont, The Center for Collaborative Change  
Yaminah Spotswood, The Center for Collaborative Change  
Maria Morales, The Center for Collaborative Change

### Participants

Andrea Fraser, college student  
Barbara Waddell, 13th Avenue School  
Brenda Brown, Harriet Tubman School  
Lyndon Brown, 13th Avenue School PTA  
Dr. Chris Pernell, My Body & Me  
Christina Corea, Brick City Development Corporation  
Dafina Mosley, Youth Consultation Services  
Damon Rich, City of Newark  
Dorothy Rivers, Community Member  
Iris McMarrow Matthews, 13th Avenue School  
Jennifer Kohl & students, Lotus In Action  
Jeremy Johnson, City of Newark/ Council of NJ Grantmakers  
Kim Ostrowski, Prudential Foundation  
Kuelli George, Startup: Education  
Lynne Irby Jackson, Principal, 13th Avenue School  
Marsha Jones, NJIT-Upward Bound  
Mary Modlin, Our Children Their Dream-Our Mission  
Michael Ann Kyle, Newark Rx  
Michele Alonso, City of Newark  
Renita Regan, College-YES Essex County College  
Richard Felsing, Community Member  
Richard Cammarieri, New Community Corporation  
Roberto Frugone, La Casa de Don Pedro  
Robin Brown, Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Ruben Gomez, Brick City Development Corporation  
Tiesha Green, PENewark  
Vivian Fraser, Urban League of Essex County