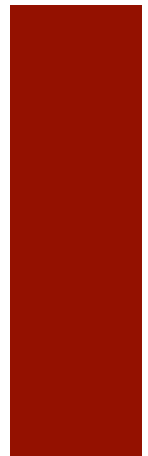


Trenton Prevention Policy Board



Annual Report

October 2014

*Evidence-based solutions to promote positive youth development and prevent
juvenile delinquency*

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Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trenton Prevention Policy Board (TPPB) is a pseudo-grassroots¹ effort that aims to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development in Trenton. Approximately 75 local stakeholders and other experts gather together once or twice a month to share their knowledge about relevant trends, youth-serving programs, public policies, research, and best practices. They do so in order to advance two very practical goals: to make informed recommendations to leaders in the area via the production of an annual report; and, to work together to implement some of those very same recommendations by tapping into the internal resources of the TPPB network.

This report begins with an update on the major recommendations that the Board offered in its first report in 2012. It starts with the Board's two largest success stories: the receipt of \$1.1 million to create the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy as well as the development of a new transition program for eighth-grade students who are moving on to high school in Trenton. The document then summarizes the progress that has been made with respect to two important integration efforts. The first linked the needs of high school students with the teaching objectives of The College of New Jersey's Masters in Counselor Education program. The second connected the call for more mentors to receive training on domestic violence issues with one of the County's annual RFP processes. Finally, the report clarifies what positive steps have been taken by TPPB participants to create an employment program that is similar to the HomeBoy Industry model.²

In addition, these pages convey the newest set of recommendations that have emerged from each of the six TPPB working groups. These call for the development of a teacher's handbook on domestic violence; the creation of an ad hoc task force to help the School District comply with the 2011 Teen Dating Violence law; and, a campaign that helps the District's Family and Community Engagement Office integrate evidence-based models into its emerging parent-engagement strategy.

In regards to civic engagement and employment, the TPPB is calling for a pilot program that utilizes the arts and community service as a vehicle to promote positive youth development among at-risk teens, as well as establishing apprenticeship programs and/or partnerships in the area. The Learn and Earn model would link local college programs to the needs of one or two major employers, while providing an opportunity for Trenton residents to grow their technical and/or technical skills.

¹ We use this term to convey that the TPPB includes a significant number of non-profit and public agency professionals. It is seeking funding to deliberately engage a larger number of residents and local youth.

² Homeboy Industries (HBI) is a comprehensive job placement, training, and education program, founded by Father Gregory Boyle in East Los Angeles, CA. HBI has been touted as highly successful by media organizations, educators, and law-makers.

Finally, the report includes a number of recommendations to promote healthier children, young adults, and adults. It aims to increase the capacity of individual schools to identify and respond to traumatized children, and promotes the creation of community-based trauma response teams for the city's most challenged neighborhoods. In addition, Board members support the consistent delivery of proven teenage pregnancy prevention programs in city schools and non-profit organizations working with young women, as well as the opening of a residential detox center in Trenton.

These recommendations, coupled with efforts already taking place within the Board, represent a coordinated effort to address some of the needs of the Trenton community and its youth. The members of the Trenton Prevention Policy Board remain committed to the board's mission: to advance evidence-based solutions to address juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development in the city of Trenton.

This report was produced in collaboration with several faculty members and students from The College of New Jersey who provided research and literature reviews for the recommendations detailed below. Thank you to Dr. Bruce Stout, Dr. Sandy Gibson, Dr. Stuart Roe, Heather Silivanch, Ryan Gale, and Brittany Aydelotte.

THE TPPB: ORIGINS & DEVELOPMENT IN TRENTON

As noted in the Board's first report in 2012, the idea of developing local Policy Planning Boards in a few New Jersey cities emerged during the administration of former Attorney General Anne Milgram. A few key staff recognized the value of having local stakeholders review the evidence, the policies, and the practices pertaining to at risk youth, and supporting them so they could offer recommendations to prevent young people from entering into the juvenile justice system.

The concept of local prevention policy boards was included in the Governor's Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods of 2008. The strategy called for local participants to use a "research based framework" and focus on "risk and protective factors." It was first deployed in Vineland, Camden, Trenton, and Newark, and has since expanded to include Asbury Park and Atlantic City.

Trenton's involvement in the initiative began in June of 2009. During the Board's first phase, the Rand Institute of Rutgers University in Camden, NJ and the Office of the Attorney General guided participants through a "data walk." As part of this phase, participants in the process looked carefully at data from Trenton and important indicators concerning juvenile delinquency in the city. This led to the creation of four areas of concern and consequently four working group: Education (high dropout rate); Employment (high unemployment among young adults); juvenile delinquency (high rates and the prevalence of violence); and, domestic violence (high number of incidents and the effect on the development of minors). Two working groups, health and mentoring, were subsequently added in 2012 as members of the Board identified additional indicators and needs.

The College of New Jersey assumed the lead facilitator role of the TPPB in the fall of 2011. It integrated the needs of the Board with TCNJ's community engaged learning objectives. Staff from the Bonner Institute for Civic and Community Engagement joined the Board as facilitators for each working group. In addition, a team of Bonner Academic Fellows was established, linking TCNJ faculty with each working group to provide research and training, as well as to produce a literature review on each initial idea. Through this process, the Board ensured that the ideas that were put forth by the working groups would be based on evidence and best practices.

The leadership of the Board has evolved over time, however it includes one of the original leaders, Marygrace Billek, the Director of Mercer County's Health and Human Services Division. Two additional co-chairs join her: Patrick Donohue, Assistant Provost for Community Engaged Learning and Partnerships at TCNJ and, Jason Rogers, a city employee and President of Fathers and Men United for a Better Trenton. Madeline Bell of the Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research at TCNJ is the staff Coordinator of the project.

RECENT TRENDS AND THE CHALLENGE

For each of the six working group areas, there are startling statistics that highlight the challenge that faces this Board and others who are working to improve the quality of life in the city. These include:

- **Crime and Juvenile Delinquency** — The Trenton Police Department recorded 37 homicides in 2013, an all-time high for the city. There are about 480 youth on juvenile probation in Mercer County, 80 percent of which live in Trenton, according to the Mercer Vicinage Probation Division. As of June 2012, there were close to 40 youth in detention in Mercer County.
- **Domestic Violence** — The Trenton Police Department reports that a domestic violence incident occurs every seven minutes in the State of New Jersey. In 2013, the Trenton Police Department recorded over 1,111 domestic violence incidents.
- **Education** — As reported by the New Jersey Department of Education, the graduation rate for the city of Trenton was just under 50 percent for 2012; 59.29 percent for Trenton Central High School, 80 percent for Trenton Central High School West, and 7.69 percent for Daylight/Twilight High School.
- **Employment** — The official unemployment rate in Trenton is around nine percent according to the Trenton Health Team's Community Health Needs Assessment, though it is likely much higher in reality. Mercer County is projected to have 2,400 job openings annually between 2014 and 2014; however only 22 percent are likely to require low to moderate skill levels, and high school is the highest level of education for 67 percent of Trenton residents.
- **Health** — The Trenton Health Team reports that the city's rate of violent crime in 2010 was 4.5 times higher than the rest of the state, exposing the Trenton's youth to higher levels of trauma. Exposure to violence and traumatic events physically alters the development of a young person's brain, often leading to increased risky behaviors. Due to a pregnancy, approximately 13 percent of female students in Trenton Central High School dropped out during the 2009-2010 academic. 55 percent of 2012 Mercer County substance abuse treatment admission were cases from Trenton.
- **Mentoring** — There are approximately seventeen established mentoring organizations in the city of Trenton, and likely many more grassroots groups that provide mentoring to youth in need, according to the Trenton Mentoring Coalition. Access to information about best practices, information about funding opportunities, and trainings and workshops is limited to a select few due to a gap in resources.

Though the Board recognizes there is much more to be done in the city, this report offers a glimmer of hope. It captures the work of nearly 100 individuals who take the time each month to accept an important challenge: find evidence-based solutions to help our youth stay away from or escape

delinquency. They know if they learn and act together they can advance concrete changes that have the potential to help young people in Trenton and the overall city. Twelve such changes are discussed in the next section of this report; followed by the latest round of recommendations.

Implementation Efforts

As mentioned previously, the Trenton Prevention Policy Board has assumed two roles as it worked collaboratively over the past year. The Board labored to develop new recommendations and implement some of the very same proposals that were discussed in the previous year's report.

First, it is worth noting that Board has followed two strategies as part of this implementation plan. The leaders understand that there are a lot of resources even in the most challenged community; and, if the right people are united around the table, those local resources can be compiled and leveraged to support community interests. These resources include material support such as funding and facilities, as well as more abstract assets including influence, knowledge, and expertise. The TPPB has effectively tapped into these existing resources during the last year.

In addition, the leaders of the TPPB understand that the best method to attract external resources is to tap into the vast reservoir of expertise that lies on, and more importantly off campus. The Board's success to date is in part the result of good information, data, and research. At times, this comes from professionals who have worked with youth for years, or former program participants who share their perspective. At other times, it comes from the research literature, and often it is derived from a combination of all three.

The summaries of five major implementation efforts are briefly described on the next several pages of this report.

The Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy (TVRS)

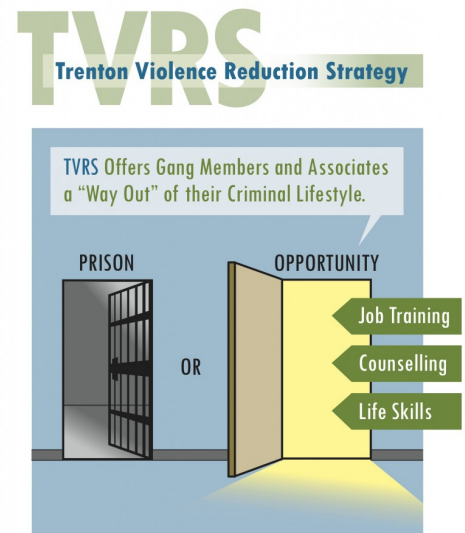
In the 2012 TPPB report, the Juvenile Delinquency Working Group recommended that the Operation Ceasefire strategy be reinstated in Trenton to reduce gun violence. The main goal of the initiative is to recruit and train outreach workers who will be able to engage high risk victims and their families, as well as the families of those who commit violence, in meaningful dialogue about ending the cycle of violence. Workers would be able to link the victims and families to social services, distribute materials that encourage residents not to retaliate, and organize activities that aim to defuse tension.

On September 26, 2013 the New Jersey Attorney General's Office awarded the Trenton Police Department and The College of New Jersey a \$1.1 million grant to implement a hybrid version of Operation Ceasefire, entitled the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy (TVRS) over a three-year period. The TVRS is built on evidence-based models such as Ceasefire and Project Safe Neighborhoods that have proven successful in other parts of the country. It has also been specifically tailored, based on an analysis of crime trends, to meet the specific needs of Trenton. The TVRS strategy takes a holistic approach to assisting those individuals and their families by deploying social services

and outreach workers into neighborhoods experiencing high levels of criminal activity. The strategy offers needed counseling, job training, and other aid as an alternative for young people who might otherwise engage in criminal activity, while maintaining a firm message of deterrence through the unified efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement for those who refuse to change their behavior.

To date, eight paid outreach workers have been hired and trained, and connected with a caseload of five individuals and their families in two neighborhoods in Trenton. Isles, Inc. is serving as the lead social services agency, providing youth and families in the program with necessary services, or referring participants to other organizations in the Trenton area. The first call in meeting took place in March of 2014, during which

law enforcement personnel, social services provider, outreach workers, faith leaders, and other community members spoke directly with those youth and their families who are committing or are victims of violence. The call in meetings iterate the resources available to those in need, as well as the heightened consequences for those who continue delinquent and criminal behavior. Subsequent call in meetings were held over the spring and summer of 2014, and a total of 24 individuals have joined the program, the vast majority of which have been connected to jobs, academic programs, and other services.



Eighth-Grade Transition Program

As part of its set of recommendations, the Education Working Group proposed that the eighth-grade transition program at Trenton Central High School (TCHS) be expanded to include all eighth-graders in the district who are moving up to TCHS. The Education Working Group collaborated with the Trenton School District, Mercer County Department of Human Services, and other partners including Princeton-Blairstown to develop and implement an evidence-based eighth-grade transition program in the summer of 2013.

The four-week program, entitled Tornado Alley Transition Summer Experience (TASTE), provided classroom instruction taught by Trenton Central High School teachers, brought students to TCNJ's campus to participate in the REAL Game, an evidence-based program evaluated by the University of Massachusetts, and included a week of adventure-based experiential education at the Princeton-Blairstown Center. The evidence-based programming was designed to help prepare students for high school in the 2013-2014 academic school year. The partnership between TCNJ, Trenton School District, and Princeton-Blairstown will continue throughout the year as evaluations of the program are conducted.

The College of New Jersey and Trenton School District are currently working together to complete an assessment of the program, the results of which will be used in organizing future programming.

Higher Education Counselor Support Project

The Education Working Group, as part of its group of recommendations in the 2012 Annual Report, proposed that a pilot program be established in which TCNJ students in the Masters in Counselor Education program conduct their practicum hours at a Trenton school. The program would benefit Trenton schools and students by providing additional staff to assist with the substantive counseling tasks that have been demonstrated to lead to student successes. It would also benefit TCNJ counselor education students, as they would receive valuable and mandated field experience under the supervision of a full-time school counselor. As of the spring of 2014, seven TCNJ students have completed the program, delivering a total of 4,200 hours of counseling to the Trenton school system.

Domestic Violence Trainings

Since much of the juvenile justice work is focused on mentoring programs, the Working Group on Domestic Violence wants to ensure that mentors are well prepared for this responsibility. The Domestic Violence Working Group recommended, in the 2012 Annual Report, that mentoring programs offer ongoing trainings for their mentors. In addition, mentors should be trained on how to properly respond if a mentee reports having to deal with domestic violence and sexual assault at home or in their personal life. The Mercer County Youth Services Commission incorporated this recommendation into their grant awards for mentoring programs, by requiring that all requests for proposal include trainings for mentors on the impact of domestic violence on children and how to effectively respond.

The Domestic Violence also helped in the implementation of this recommendation by offering three free trainings for mentors in Trenton on how to properly respond if a mentee reports having to deal with domestic violence and sexual assault at home or in their personal life. These workshops covered several topics, including domestic violence 101, media literacy, and bystander intervention with the Rutgers SCREAM theater program. The sessions trained participants on how domestic violence can affect youth, the affect of the media on young people regarding the portrayal of gender and relationship norms, and how to help young people understand how to address domestic and dating violence among their peers. Additionally, Womanspace, Inc., a key agency in this field, continues to offer free, ongoing training via their Education and Training committee.

Homeboy Industries

The Employment Working Group recommended in the 2012 Annual Report that an RFP be developed by a foundation or other major funding institution for the creation of a social entrepreneurship site,

similar to that of “Homeboy Industries.” In its recommendation, Isles was sited as a potential site to host the program. Homeboy Industries (HBI) is a comprehensive job placement, training, and education program, founded by Father Gregory Boyle in East Los Angeles, CA. HBI has been touted as highly successful by media organizations, educators, and law-makers alike.

The Employment Working Group worked with a Cost Accounting class at The College of New Jersey taught by Professor Bea Chiang in the fall of 2013. The class began the process of developing business modules and identifying the true cost of developing a business that would hire youth in Trenton. More recently, A Better Way and CityWorks have collaborated in an effort to open a business in the city as part of a social entrepreneurship model, similar to Homeboy Industries. The goal of the project is to establish a for-profit business with a social justice mission, to provide those hard to employ individuals an opportunity to make a living while gaining valuable work experience.

Domestic Violence Working Group Recommendations

Dating partners are responsible for 44 percent of homicides for female youth, ages 15 to 18, with African-American youth disproportionately affected.ⁱ Dating violence during adolescence is also associated with other negative outcomes, including: poor health, depression, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, substance abuse, unhealthy weight control, sexually transmitted infections, physical injury and suicidality.ⁱⁱ Exposure to non-fatal dating violence during adolescence may also have a negative impact on physical and emotional health, and the capacity to form healthy relationships both in the immediate and long-term future.ⁱⁱⁱ There were 1,111 domestic violence calls in the city of Trenton in 2013.

Despite broad calls for primary prevention, few programs with demonstrated effectiveness exist.^{iv} When exploring best practice for prevention of dating violence in adolescence, it quickly becomes clear that interventions must start young, very young, if long-term, sustained outcomes of violence-free adolescent dating relationship are to be recognized. ‘Prevention’ programs that are administered in high schools tend to be ‘interventions’ rather preventative, responding to existing attitudes and/or behaviors regarding dating violence. This is not to indicate that such interventions are not needed, but rather, to demonstrate that the opportunity to change the culture and beliefs about dating relationships must be addressed much earlier in life.

Teacher’s Handbook on Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence Working Group is interested in working with the Trenton School District to produce a handbook for teachers regarding domestic violence. Such a manual would provide teachers with information on how to recognize and support students affected by domestic violence or interpersonal violence. One model of this type of approach can be found in the State of Vermont, which has developed the *Vermont Teacher Handbook on Domestic Violence*. The handbook answers several questions, including: (1) what are the signs of domestic violence?; (2) how can I support the student?; (3) how can I deal with the challenging behaviors at school?; (4) where can I get help for the family?; (5) how can I talk to the mother?; and, (6) what encourages healing?

The TPPB Domestic Violence Working is currently working with Womanspace to modify this publication, with the publisher’s permission, to make it appropriate for New Jersey teachers. The manual will be distributed to the Directors of Guidance in schools throughout Mercer County.

Domestic Violence Prevention Legislation

Governor Christie signed the Teen Dating Violence bill into law in May of 2011, with it going into effect in September of that year. The law requires schools to provide education on dating violence, and to establish prevention policies. This law requires dating violence education in Health/PE curriculum for grades seven through 12, and it must be covered every year through those grades. It also requires the use of a structured curriculum, however, there is no specific curriculum mandated by the law. The TPPB Domestic Violence Working Group recognizes the value of this last component, as schools will not be able to merely “talk about it” briefly and deem themselves compliant.

To date, many school districts have not complied with this law. To date, the Domestic Violence Working Group has been unable to find any evidence of the programs or a district policy in Trenton public schools. It appears that Trenton School District is currently noncompliant with this law. This working group will work to educate the Trenton School District about the legal mandate for such education in the schools and policy development, and offer support in identifying appropriate curriculum in the drafting of district policy.

Education Working Group Recommendations

Although education is described as a major asset for Mercer County, with five colleges and universities located within the county, there is a major disparity in equal access to that education. The Trenton School District has less than a 50 percent graduation rate, and only 64.5 percent of city residents across the six zip codes have graduated from high school.^v To some degree, the problem starts with truancy; several middle schools in the city had over 20 percent of their students qualify as chronically absent (missing 10 percent of the school year or 18 days) during the 2012-2013 academic year.^{vi3}

Not surprisingly, there is a significant relationship between the educational outcomes, delinquent behavior, and societal costs. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States would substantially reduce its public health, criminal justice, and welfare costs by cutting high school dropout rates in half; it would also gain an additional \$45 billion in tax revenues.^{vii}

Parental Engagement Campaign

Education researchers continue to support the notion that effective parent involvement in schools is crucial to students' academic success. As evidenced by a number of recent studies, those students with a significant adult involved in their learning are more likely to be successful in schools.^{viii} In fact, family involvement has a positive impact on children regardless of the cultural backgrounds of the families, their income, or their parent's education levels.^{ix} The literature proves that well-planned outreach and school-based programs can increase parental engagement, particularly among parents who have been considered hard to reach.^x

While there are a number of models for increasing parental engagement, the most prominent and evidence-based approaches have been informed by Epstein's Typologies.^{xi} Epstein's model encourages reformers to recognize six important facts: (1) Parents need help learning about child development and the resources that are available to them and in establishing home environments that are conducive to learning; (2) Communication involves fostering effective, timely, appropriate, two-way communication about school events as well as student progress in school and in the home; (3) Providing meaningful volunteer opportunities gives parents and community members the chance to support and advance the mission of the school; (4) To promote learning at home, school personnel must provide culturally appropriate resources and activities to help parents learn how to best support their children at home (such as clear homework expectations and the importance of setting aside time for homework, etc.); (5) Parents and community members should be involved in decision making processes at school, not

³ One middle school had a chronically absent rate of 56 percent in the 2012-2013 academic school year.

simply called on when advocacy efforts are needed; and, (6) True Collaboration with the community calls on school personnel to identify and - to the extent possible - integrate community resources into the school to meet the needs of families, students, and school employees.

Many successful parental engagement programs start with a parent engagement committee and some school districts have found it useful to hire a parent engagement coordinator who is committed to these engagement efforts. And, many have found that developing a family-school partnership policy that describes how the school, parents, and the community are committed to the success of every student is a good place to start. The Trenton School District has shown signs that it is moving in this direction and is dedicated to promoting parental engagement among all parents, even those of young people involved in the truancy or juvenile justice system.

The Education Working Group recommends that the TPPB should work closely with the new Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Office within Trenton School District as well as the Trenton Parent-Teacher Association to foster more parental engagement. Specifically, it should help take stock of the status of current parent engagement programs and examine ways that existing practices are linked to student achievement. In addition, it should also advance the development and adoption of a parent engagement strategy that is based on the Epstein model. The first phase of this strategy should include a plan for a school-based pilot approach or one that is citywide. In addition, the Working Group should continue to conduct research on best practices, including finding a successful Parent University model that may work in Trenton.

Civic Engagement and Youth with Increased Risk Factors

While the District may see stronger education outcome figures if parents become more involved, the same may be true if young adults themselves have opportunities to be more engaged.

Despite recent increases in youth civic participation, less educated and low-income youth - particularly African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics - continue to report lower rates of civic engagement than Whites, as well as higher attrition out of civic activities from one year to another.^{xii} In general, the literature agrees that it is important to individuals to develop a civic identity based on (1) a sense of connection to their community, and (2) an understanding that the connection entails responsibilities to engage in activities that benefit both them and the communities in which they live.^{xiii}

To encourage civic participation among low-income, ethnic minority youth, researchers recommend developing programs and activities that use a Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) framework. This framework focuses on building an understanding of personal challenges as societal problems that can be collectively address. Five principles guide the work of the programs and groups that embrace SJYD:^{xiv} (1) analyzing power in social relationships; (2) making identify central; (3) promoting systemic social change; (4) encouraging collective action; and (5) embracing youth culture. One promising strategy for engaging youth involves the use of media arts, including film and television. An increasing

number of young people want to master the use of media tools to explore their identities, express themselves, and connect with peers. Significantly, the literature shows that vulnerable youth who participate in arts programs are more likely to show positive outcomes, including lower rates of truancy and antisocial behavior, more civic engagement, and effective communication, than their peers.^{xv}

The TPPB Education Working Group recommends an assessment of current civic engagement programming as well as a review of a pilot curriculum that will tap into this literature and utilize the arts as a vehicle for promoting positive youth development. In particular, the group recommends that the pilot target those youth who are most at-risk of dropping out of high school, or who are already in some program that recruits out-of-school youth to get back on track in terms of school or preparing for employment.

Employment Working Group Recommendations

The rate of unemployment in Trenton is reportedly around nine percent, according to the Trenton Health Team’s (THT) “Community Health Needs Assessment” report; however, the actual unemployment or underemployment numbers are most likely much higher according to community leaders, including Christian Martin, Executive Director of the Trenton Downtown Association. And yet, in an ideal world, local folks looking for work should have some reason to be optimistic. Large businesses, like Amazon, are establishing facilities in the county. And, according to the THT’s Community Health Needs Assessment report on Trenton, Mercer County’s top 20 occupations are projected to have 2,400 job openings each year between 2014 and 2018.^{xvi} While these developments are impressive they are not necessarily on track to directly benefit the residents of Trenton who are looking for work. High school is the highest level of education for 67 percent of Trenton residents; and, only 22 percent of future job openings in Mercer County require low to moderate skill levels. In fact, the two sectors that employ the largest number of people in Trenton – Government (18 percent) and Education and Health (20 percent) – require a postsecondary degree for the majority of their positions. Consequently, Trenton residents without a degree higher than high school have less than a 10 percent chance of finding employment in these sectors. There is clearly a systemic gap in workforce development and the needs of employers in Trenton that needs to be addressed if anything is to be done about the high unemployment and underemployment rates

Learn and Earn or Apprenticeship Programs

“Learn and Earn” and apprenticeship programs can help address the education gap issue and create more employment opportunities for some Trentonians, while simultaneously meeting the needs of employers in Mercer County. These generally involve a partnership between postsecondary educational institutions including community colleges, four-year colleges/universities, and technical schools, and employers to provide educational opportunities for current and potential employees.^{xvii}

There are several models that could be useful in developing a program in Mercer County. One UPS Earn and Learn site has seen significant success on both the student and employer side. The Metropolitan College in Louisville, KY provides employees to attend the University of Louisville, Jefferson Technical College, or Jefferson Community College tuition-free. UPS, the largest employer of that region, covers half of the tuition costs and the commonwealth of Kentucky covers the remainder through scholarship and grants. Metropolitan College offers a flexible approach to scheduling to allow participants to work. By 2001, over 3,000 student-workers had participated in the program, contributing to “what has been

described as ‘third wave’ economic development.”^{xviii} In turn, UPS substantially increased its productivity and workforce, gaining a 600 percent financial return of investment.^{xix}

Additionally, apprenticeship programs have recently gained national attention for their success in preparing individuals, particularly young people, for employment. Apprenticeships generally include 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and a minimum of 144 hours of classroom-based learning each year.^{xx} Local community or technical colleges typically provide the classroom-based instruction. The Center for American Progress (CAP) reports that registered apprenticeship programs have a \$23.00 return on investment for every dollar spent. According to CAP, 98 percent of employers that are registered apprenticeship sponsors in the United States would recommend the programs. A study by the Employment and Training Administration found that approximately 87 percent of individuals who successfully complete registered apprenticeship programs in 2012 were employed shortly after the program ended and, of that group, 87.9 percent were still employed six months later.^{xxi}

It is important to note, however, the literature recognizes that different communities face unique education and workforce challenges. As a result, the Business-Higher Education Forum recommends that the Metropolitan College model could *inform* a wide range of Learn and Earn scenarios “especially with the right input from policymakers and experts.”^{xxii} It also suggests that communities work with qualified analysts to explore, adapt, and improve the model in the context of their specific needs and challenges.

The TPPB Employment Group recommends that Mercer County and the City of Trenton organize a Task Force that will focus on creating the right Learn and Earn or apprenticeship model for the city. It could be initiated with the Amazon facility in Robbinsville and local higher education and technical training institutions. The working group should consider a combination of apprenticeship and learn and earn models for such a program, so that individuals have an opportunity to explore a wide range of career interests and passions.

Health Working Group Recommendations

The research literature indicates that adverse childhood experiences alter the biochemical pathways in children, directly affecting their cognitive development in negative ways. These experiences include childhood abuse, neglect, and exposure to other traumatic stressors, such as violence and crime. In fact, exposure to violence and crime is a particularly troublesome traumatic stressor. Individuals who have these types of experiences are more reactive to social and emotional stimuli. And, exposure early in life may be the strongest predictor for later aggression, substance use and abuse, and participation in other high risk and delinquent behaviors.^{xxiii}

In light of the above, the Trenton Health Team rightly placed Safety/Crime as well as Substance Abuse/Mental Health on their list of five priority areas, after completing their community needs health assessment in 2013. The Trenton Health Team also recognized several areas of importance beyond their five priority areas, including teen pregnancy, lead poisoning, asthma, HIV/Aids, and transportation. Teen pregnancy, which is substantially higher in Trenton than the rest of the state, is particularly prevalent when addressing juvenile delinquency because children of young mothers are at a significantly higher risk for delinquent and criminal behavior.^{xxiv}

Trauma Response: Teacher Training & A Pilot Police-School Partnership

As indicated above, young people who are exposed to violence are at risk. There is an accelerated rate of development among these teens, many of who are living in poverty. They are often unable to reach cognitive and emotional milestones due to the stress associated with their life situation, which shapes what they believe is normal.^{xxv} And, repeated exposure to traumatic events wreaks havoc on other parts of their lives, decreasing school performance, for example, or creating difficulties in their interpersonal relationships.^{xxvi}

In one study, published in 2011 in the *School Psychology Quarterly*, teachers were asked to reflect on what schools can do to help youth exposed to high levels of stress. 89 percent agreed that schools could play a more active role in addressing the mental health issues of students; however, only 34 percent of teachers felt comfortable recognizing the symptoms of trauma in their students.^{xxvii} Yet, it is commonly accepted that the most effective way of reaching students is often via school-based services. School psychologists, in particular, are potentially a great resource as they have experience in mental health, consultation, program evaluation, and could serve as advocate for the child.^{xxviii}

The Trenton School District does have licensed school psychologists, however, each one is responsible for multiple schools.^{xxix} In addition, Trenton Central High School has a School Based Youth Services

program with licensed counselors who provide counseling services to the students. Unfortunately, all of the schools in Trenton do not have this type of program (perhaps due to inadequate funding), even though the environment strongly suggests such services should be available to the entire student population. Furthermore, the five-year plan for the construction and rehabilitation of Trenton Central High School, which sends the students to various other buildings around the city, is yet another barrier to providing these services to all those who need them.

All stakeholders need to find a means to increase the school system's capacity for providing counseling services to students who have experienced trauma. The first step is to develop, or find and make available, training tools for teachers.⁴ This will help them identify symptoms and refer students to counseling services.

Second, if not a School Based Youth Services program, each school should have a clinical mental health counselor who is easily accessible to students and families. Along these lines, the Working Group is interested in the idea of professionals completing needs assessments for families and students at the beginning of the academic year in partnership with the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Office.

Finally, the Steering Committee is interested in a new policy or practice that would build upon the current working relationship between the school district and police department. It suggests a two-step process: (1) when officers respond to a traumatic event at a household and identify what school-aged youth live in the home, they should record the school the child attends and report that information to the district; and, (2) at the start of the next school day, the school psychologist (or other qualified professional) assigned to that young person's school should meet with him or her and start the process of developing a service plan, if in fact one is needed.

Community Trauma Response Teams

Children in urban areas are at a higher risk for psychological harm following a traumatic community disaster or event, as well as those that occur in the home (as previously discussed) and require additional services. The main approach for trauma response has often been a law enforcement approach. While this strategy is valuable, the literature also supports using clinical techniques and social movement to respond to personal and communal tragedy, such as the community response to the recent 4:00pm homicide that took place in broad daylight on Martin Luther King Boulevard.^{xxx} Researchers cite evidence to argue that interventions should be offered as quickly as possible, in close proximity to the events, and offer a positive environment by comforting and consoling victims and/or witnesses.^{xxxi}

⁴ Perhaps using social media or online options that teachers can utilize on their own time, since so many other demands are made on their time.

One model for trauma response teams is critical incident stress debriefing.^{xxxii} The approach focuses on reducing anxiety and posttraumatic stress symptoms. The Community Services Program in Boston is a successful example of a community-based approach. It was initially developed to meet the needs of school-aged youth and focuses on specific short-term ways to stabilize children who were exposed to trauma in order to prevent long-term negative consequences. Other communities use Psychological First Aid programs to offer individual crisis intervention services, such as information about available resources, comfort, and support such as counseling to reduce initial post-trauma distress.^{xxxiii}

The TPPB Health Working Group recommends that a community-based trauma response team be developed to help respond to incidents in which children are victims, are close relatives to victims, are witnesses, or are concretely aware of a tragedy (e.g. a daytime shooting on their block). The Trenton Health Team has also identified this area as a priority, although perhaps with a narrower vision of what children may be eligible, and the TPPB Health Working Group supports their efforts. The TPPB will work collaboratively with the THT and the Traumatic Loss Coalition, as well as the Trenton Police Department and other local programs, in an effort to support and expand trauma response services in the city.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programming

Studies show that children of young (teen) parents are at a higher risk for delinquent and criminal behavior. Children of adolescent mothers generally experience poorer health, are at greater risk for suffering child abuse or neglect, and are at a higher risk for behavior problems such as aggression. They are also less likely to successfully graduate from high school. In fact, the sons of teen mothers are three times more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives, in comparison to men born to non-teen mothers (age 20 and up).

The most current quantitative data indicates that in 2008, the teen birth rate among youth ages 15-19 in Mercer County was 25 per 100,000 families. Based on national and state data, inner city, economically disadvantaged youth are at a greater risk for becoming pregnant at a young age than their peers in other areas. Three-quarters of teen mothers in Mercer County were living in Trenton as of 2005. It is no surprise that this hinders a young woman's chances to reach her potential; about 13 percent of female students in Trenton Central High School dropped out during the 2009-2010 academic year due to pregnancy.^{xxxiv}

All of this seems to suggest that evidence-based programming to prevent teen pregnancy needs to be expanded in the Trenton area. The first recommendation is for a Task Force to take stock of what programs are currently offered, how many are evidence-based, and if there is indeed a large gap between the need and supply. The Board is aware of at least one program being offered in Trenton. HiTOPS is already providing evidence-based programs in the Trenton school district, among others in Mercer County. It is currently working at PJ Hill Elementary School with the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classes, and is expanding its clinical presence in the city. The organization is currently undergoing an

intensive, five-year evaluation of its programs to determine their level of effectiveness. The second recommendation is that local policy makers, administrators, and stakeholders should review the outcomes of the HiTOPS evaluation, and, if warranted, should expand that teen pregnancy prevention program (or a similar one) within the Trenton School District.

Detox Center in Mercer County

Substance abuse and drug use is also a major issue facing many communities, particularly Trenton. In 2011, there were 2,930 alcohol-related calls to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in Mercer County; 73 percent of these calls came from Trenton.^{xxxv} In 2011, there also were 1,474 admissions to Mercer County hospitals for substance abuse; this makes up 55 percent of the total countywide admissions for substance abuse. In the following year, 55 percent of Mercer County's hospital admissions for substance abuse occurred in Trenton; the majority of these hospital admissions in Trenton involved marijuana or alcohol.

Despite the fact that substance abuse is such a prevalent issue in Mercer County and Trenton, there are no detoxification centers within the county; the closest center is more than an hour and a half away. Detoxification is the initial step in the healing process. In order to go to a rehabilitation facility to treat addiction, an addict must go through a detoxification program first. Detox programs are a medical necessity; the risk of death from withdrawal is significant and warrants appropriate professional supervision.

The Trenton Health Team (THT) has a goal of expanding the capacity of the screening system in the Trenton area, as well as improving the ability of local health centers to link individuals to quality behavioral treatment services. As part of that goal, the THT is working to reestablish detoxification programming within the Trenton area. The team plans to work with city and county offices to identify, acquire, and ready a facility for such programming. The TPPB Health Working Group recommends a detoxification center be established in Mercer County. The TPPB Health Working Group supports this goal and effort, and will work with the THT, the Mercer County Department of Human Services, and other stakeholders to bring a detoxification center to the greater Trenton area.⁵

⁵ Trenton has a methadone maintenance program, but does not have either a medical detox facility or a medically monitored center. For the latter, Trenton residents must travel to either New Hope or Williamstown in southern New Jersey.

Juvenile Delinquency Working Group Recommendations

Compared to the rest of New Jersey, Trenton has extremely high violent crime and property crime rates. In 2010, Trenton experienced a violent crime rate of 1,433.8 per capita, and a property crime rate of 3,011.3 per capita.^{xxxvi} In 2012, residents reported 4,925 crimes. This jump may be attributable to the fact that the number of Trenton police officers fell from 372 to 356 between 2009 and 2010; and, in 2011, 105 more officers lost their jobs. The crime rate is also linked to a strong gang presence, with 11 reported gangs made up of approximately 5,325 members, as of 2010. Some of these reportedly have a presence in the school system. For the most part, these gangs were largely responsible for the record high number of homicides (37) homicides in 2013.

In terms of juveniles and delinquency, there are currently about 480 youth on probation in Mercer County, approximately 380 of which are from Trenton. As of June 2012, there were close to 40 youth in detention from Mercer County, four of which were waived up to the adult criminal system. As a result, the county has the highest number of youth who were waived up to the adult system in the state, usually for gun-related charges.^{xxxvii}

Structured Response System

The Structured Response System seeks to help standardize the use of incentives, interventions, and sanctions on youthful offenders supervised in the community statewide. It does so through the introduction of a range of potential consequences for noncompliant behavior, and a range of positive reinforcements to encourage and support positive conduct and actions

In part, the system is a strategy for reducing the need to file a revocation of parole or a violation of probation, and subsequently the number of youth admitted to either detention or a Juvenile Justice Commission facility. It does so by delineating a range of graduated responses to various types of noncompliance and implementing corresponding policies and practices. This ensures that all other appropriate options have been exhausted before a juvenile has his or her parole revoked or deemed in violation of their probation. By limiting a juvenile's exposure to the juvenile justice system, the structured response system focuses more on positive culture change for both the young people and officers. The structured response system can serve as a transformative tool for supervision, and as an avenue by which parents and partners can become part of the decision-making process, making it a more positive, fair, and transparent exercise.

New Jersey is piloting the Structured Response System in three counties. Similar systems, referred to as "structured decision making," have been implemented in other areas including Sedgwick County,

Kansas.^{xxxviii} The TPPB Juvenile Delinquency Working Group calls for a Task Force to further examine the specific incentives and negative consequences within probation that are being piloted in New Jersey. It would like to provide input and, based on what it has learned to date, may recommend that the Structured Response System be piloted in Mercer County as well.

Truancy Court

There is a significant body of literature indicating that truancy can lead to larger juvenile delinquency problems. One response to this has been the implementation of truancy courts. These courts bring together persons from different areas of a child's life with the purpose of addressing the causes of his or truant behavior and increasing his or her school attendance. Unfortunately, there is a relatively small amount of literature regarding the effectiveness of truancy courts.

One national study, known as the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project, did identify the most effective components of a truancy court model.^{xxxix} They are: (1) a commitment from schools to keep at-risk youth in school; (2) collaborating with community resources; (3) a continuum of supports with meaningful incentives and consequences; (4) parental involvement; and, (5) a built-in capacity to conduct an ongoing evaluation of the intervention program. Project START (Stop Truancy and Recommended Treatment) in Philadelphia has been recognized as one such successful truancy court model. It is a multimodal program that involves the school district, judicial system, Department of Human Services, and community service organizations. At its foundation, there are consistent policies that direct the court procedures and call on all groups, in particular the families and providers, to focus on recognizing and eliminating the barriers that deter youth from attending school.

Project START was evaluated in an urban environment in the Northeast United States and found to be more effective in reducing truancy for participating youth compared to a control group of students who did not participate in the program.^{xl} However, while the truancy court model is found to be effective in decreasing truancy, it is not clear that it is more effective than other alternatives^{xli}.

This working group recommends that the full Board organize a forum so all stakeholders can gain a much better understanding of the truancy problem in Trenton and what intervention efforts have taken place over the last several years. This forum could be informed by another round of literature reviews that focus on the alternative models referenced above. It could also benefit from a team from Trenton visiting a truancy court outside of the city that has seen success, and report back on its findings. At that time, the Board may be in a position to entertain establishing a court that is similar to Project START in the city.

Mentoring Working Group Recommendations

There are approximately seventeen established mentoring organizations in the city of Trenton; however, many of them do not have access to the type of resources that they desire and need to provide evidence-based mentoring services to Trenton's youth. The Trenton Mentoring Coalition was established to provide these organizations and programs with these additional resources, whether they exist on campus at The College of New Jersey (such as research), or from the community itself (such as a proven practice or a collaborative funding opportunity).

The number of mentoring organizations in the city reflects the fact that it is one of the most commonly used and successful interventions to prevent, divert, and remediate youth who are engaged in or thought to be at-risk for delinquent behavior. For example, an individual who has a mentor in his or her life is less likely to have problems that are associated with aggression issues. And, the positive findings pertain to both at-risk youth and those already involved with the juvenile justice system.^{xiii}

Mentoring for Youth with Incarcerated Parents

In New York State, an estimated 85,000 New York children have a parent in prison. These children are at particular risk for academic difficulties, social problems, and living a life in poverty. One program, MentorCHIP, offers site-based mentoring at partnering organizations with an academic and asset-building focus. One primary goal is to build the confidence and resilience of children ages six to 16 whose parents are incarcerated. It also strives to significantly improve the cognitive and social development of children, as well as promote "lifelong learning" of minors who are affected by incarceration.

MentorUP is another program with similar aims. However, it trains volunteer mentors to build the academic confidence and social skills of youth who are in Alternatives to Detention programs, similar to the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative in New Jersey. MentorUP's highly motivated volunteers offer site-based mentoring with partnering agencies to help young people break the cycle of recidivism by providing innovative curriculum designed to promote their intellectual and social development.

The TPPB Mentoring Working Group recommends that the Trenton Mentoring Coalition develop a program targeted at youth ages six to 16 whose parents are incarcerated, based on best practices similar to MentorCHIP and MentorUP. Some TPPB participating organizations, like El Centro de Recursos Para Familias, have expressed interest in developing such programs in the past; perhaps over time one could exist in each of the city's four wards and reflect the diversity in Trenton. An additional

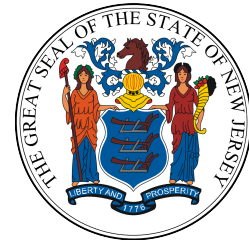
component to the program could focus on helping youth in detention centers in order to prevent recidivism. The Juvenile Justice Commission reports that there are approximately 13 Trenton youth residing in the nearby Bordentown facility (Johnston); there is an opportunity to provide one-on-one mentoring for youth in the center based on the best practices referenced above.

Conclusion

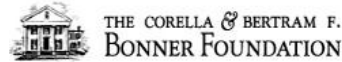
The Trenton Prevention Policy Board is dedicated to promoting policies, programs, and practices that address the needs of Trenton's youth. It is comprised of a dedicated group of volunteers who are committed to a shared vision; and, they work hard to not only develop new ideas, but to bring them to fruition. By working together, rather than competing, this Board and its members have established a unique and effective system of collaboration that has a real impact on the community. It is one that focuses all of the streams of expertise (community, practitioner, youth, academic) on a common set of foals and agenda.

The Trenton Prevention Policy Board looks forward to continuing this important work with its partners in the community, in the government, and at The College of New Jersey, to help provide opportunity and hope for Trenton's youth. To get involved, please contact trentonpolicyboard@gmail.com.

Member Organizations



A Better Way



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