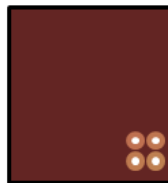
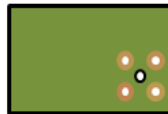
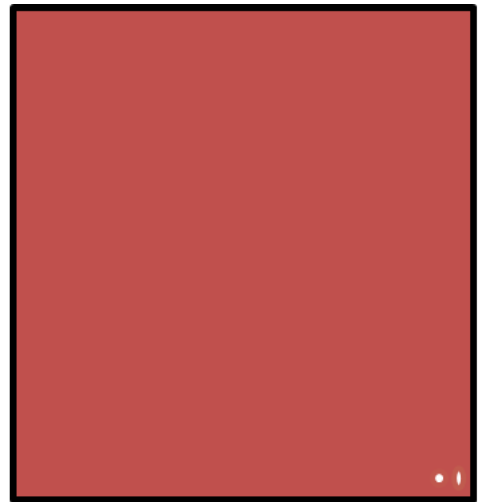


# Trenton Prevention Policy Board



# ANNUAL REPORT

October 2015

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

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## Introduction

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trenton Prevention Policy Board (TPPB) is a network of individuals and organizations who live and work in Trenton, New Jersey, that work together to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development in our community. Approximately 75 local stakeholders and other experts from the government, non-profit and higher education sectors 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 public policy recommendations to leaders in the area via the production of an annual report; and, to work together to implement new programs and practices by tapping into the internal resources of the TPPB network.

This report begins with a summary of findings and policy recommendations from the Trenton Youth Voices Project, led by TCNJ Professor Stuart Roe and Destiny De La Rosa, TCNJ MUSE Student, in conjunction with TPPB. The document then summarizes the newest set of public policy, program and practice recommendations that have emerged from each of the six TPPB working groups. These recommendations include a mindfulness program for at risk youth in Trenton schools, collective parent engagement programming, a youth work-readiness certificate program, mental health first aid trainings for Trenton educators and comprehensive juvenile correctional program assessments.

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, staff, students and AmeriCorps members 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, Dr. He Len Chung, Steven Rodriguez, Jesse Schor, Adams Sibley, Amelia Ahnert, Brandon Barney, Karina Kainth and Erin Armington.

### TPPB: ORIGINS & DEVELOPMENT IN TRENTON

The concept of local prevention policy boards emerged during the administration of former Attorney General Anne Milgram and was included in the Governor's Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods of 2008. The strategy for protecting at risk youth called for local participants to use a research-based framework and focus on risk and protective factors in order. It was first deployed in Vineland, Camden, Trenton, and Newark, and has since expanded to include Asbury Park and Atlantic City. Policy boards in Jersey City and Paterson are currently under development.

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 identification of four areas of particular concern and the development of 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

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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. Under the leadership of Patrick Donohue, who was at that time the Assistant Provost for Community Engaged Learning and Partnerships at TCNJ. The needs of the Board were integrated 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 board owes much of its successes to the leadership, enthusiasm and passion of Pat Donohue. A determined leader and passionate Trenton resident, Pat never took no for an answer, and much was accomplished due to his tenacity and vision, including the data collection project with Dr. Patricia Ward, the domestic violence training manual and liaison for public school staff, the G-9 summer program with the Trenton Board of Education and TCNJ, the employment collaboration with Princeton Chamber of Commerce and Princeton Air, and the statewide model program, Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy. Pat was the champion, architect, cheerleader and the conductor that led the way through TPPB's many successes and challenges. Pat's leadership shaped the foundation of our work and invigorated our community with the will to charge forward through any obstacle to achieve results for the young people of Trenton.

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: Michael Nordquist, Interim Executive Director of the TCNJ Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research and, Jayson Rogers, a city employee and President of Fathers and Men United for a Better Trenton.

## **RECENT TRENDS AND THE CHALLENGE**

For each of the six working group areas, slight improvements were seen in 2014 as compared to 2013. Nevertheless, there are startling statistics that highlight the continued challenge that faces this Board and others who work to improve the quality of life in the city. These include:

- **Crime and Juvenile Justice** — The Trenton Police Department recorded 32 homicides in 2014, down from 37 in 2013. Violent crime in Trenton saw an overall reduction of 17%, whereas violent crime in the State of New Jersey as a whole saw a reduction of 9.6% from the previous year. Though we are excited to see these results, there is much work to be done. As of December 29th, 2014 there were close to 40 youth in detention in Mercer County.
- **Domestic Violence** — In 2013 (the most recent available data), there were 64,556 domestic violence offenses reported by the police in the State of New Jersey, a 1 percent decrease compared to the 65,060 reported in 2012. In the same year, there were 821 arrests for domestic violence charges in the city of Trenton.

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- Education — As reported by the New Jersey Department of Education, last year's graduation rate for the city of Trenton has improved slightly, increasing from 48.55% in 2013 to 53.95% in 2014. This year graduation rates for each school were: 67.23 percent for Trenton Central High School Main Campus, 83.8 percent for Trenton Central High School West, and 14.29 percent for Daylight/Twilight High School.
  - Employment — Along with decreased unemployment rates nationwide, the official unemployment rate in Trenton is down significantly this year, to 6.4 percent. Mercer County is projected to have 2,400 job openings annually between 2015 and 2016; 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 — Trenton saw 13.5 incidents of violent crime per 1,000 residents in 2014, the 8<sup>th</sup> highest rate of violent crime in the State, exposing 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. In 2013, there were 2,698 total admissions in the county for substance abuse, 55 percent (1,474) came 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.

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# Trenton Youth Voices Project

*“Because it’s like if I’m out here selling drugs and stuff and that’s paying my bills and my kids are fed and I’m fed and we’re all good. We got clothes and stuff. We’re warm. We’re not out here sleeping under bridges and stuff. I’m not going to back to school and struggle.”*

- Program participant perspective regarding why people sell drugs

## Background and Rationale

In the past year, TPPB collaborated with Stuart Roe, PhD, Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at The College of New Jersey and Destiny De La Rosa, TCNJ MUSE Student in interviewing young people in Trenton in order to learn about their view on positive youth development.

Opportunities for positive youth development are important for the health and well-being of youth and the cities in which they live. In their comprehensive study of community programs to promote youth development, researchers from the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2002) identified eight attributes of quality youth programming which included: Developmentally appropriate program structures that recognize adolescents’ increasing social maturity and expertise; physical and psychological safety and security; supportive relationships which include emotional and moral support; opportunities to feel a sense of belonging; exposure to positive morals, values and social norms; opportunities to be efficacious and make a difference within the organization; opportunities to build new skills; and strong links between families, schools, and community resources.

Civic and community leaders who are in positions to make important decisions regarding youth programming often do so with the best of intentions, however, often without input from those that are impacted most directly by those decisions, children and adolescents. The eight areas identified above cannot be accomplished without meaningful input from youth. Recent studies have illustrated the importance of youth voice in making policy and programming decisions.<sup>i</sup> Finding meaningful ways for the voices of children and adolescents within urban areas such as Trenton is even more important as these voices are often silenced by poverty, discrimination and language barriers. In addition, Trenton is home to a disproportionate number of children who are part of the foster care or juvenile justice systems, two particularly vulnerable youth populations whose voice is often disregarded<sup>ii</sup>.

Youth involvement in community programming is mutually beneficial for youth as well as the health of the city. Evidence suggests that youth who are given opportunities to be active participants in their community more willingly accept challenges as they transition to adulthood<sup>iii</sup>. Youth who are involved in Trenton as children and adolescents may be more likely to serve and work to improve their city as adults.

The purpose of this study was to give Trenton youth a forum to have their voices heard regarding issues facing their city. Youth were given the opportunity to discuss changes they would like to see happen, discuss the barriers they experience related to participating in school and community activities, and offer their perspective on ways to improve the city.

## Method

A phenomenological inquiry approach using semi-structured focus groups was chosen for this study over other qualitative approaches because –

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- there is a paucity of research regarding how the voices of youth are incorporated into city and school district policy decision making processes
  - it was our desire to accurately represent the lived experiences of the Trenton Youth interviewed for this study.<sup>iv</sup>
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### **Participants**

Participants for this study consisted of youths who currently live in Trenton who were given parent's permission to participate. There was a nearly even distribution between male and female focus group participants. Four focus groups with children and adolescents of various ages were interviewed. Focus groups could be described as follows:

- Group 1 (n=11, elementary/middle) ages 8-12
- Group 2 (n=9, high) ages 14-20
- Group 3 (n= 12, high) ages 14-20
- Group 4 (n=6, college), ages 19-22

Approximately 60% of the participants identified as African American, 30% Hispanic and 10% White or Caucasian.

### **Procedure/Data Collection**

Semi-structured, focus groups were conducted to gather data for this study, each lasting between 30-60 minutes. Interview questions were developed based on a literature review related to seeking youth voice and input regarding community decisions that have a direct impact on youth and youth programming. Students were asked to imagine themselves as the "Mayor of Trenton" with unlimited power and resources and discuss the challenges and changes they would like to see in their city.

## **Results: Participant Viewpoints**

Four primary themes emerged from the focus group data. These themes, with supporting participant voice are presented below:

### **1. Environment and Safety**

**Students were concerned about their physical environment, including concerns for their safety.** Violence and crime are obstacles that students must face while living in Trenton, and many times, they do not have access to safe spaces. Improvement of their environment was also a concern such as park upkeep, having clean streets, and having more age appropriate activities.

"If all you know around you is violence... If you go home and all you see is violence..."

"It's a lot of gangbangers and stuff. When in you're a gang you feel like you're safe."

"...the parks abandoned. There are chains everywhere and I'm like why are their chains everywhere. Shouldn't there be a place where kids want to go."

"I think like cleaner streets because there's some streets that are not that good."

### **2. Improved Schools**

**Students often discussed the need to incorporate additional resources to improve their schools.** Students discussed a lack of arts programming and limited school materials such as textbooks. Also mentioned was the need for a more friendly and welcoming school environment.

"Some of the books can't be used because of how torn up they are."

"We need to be buying us new books or a new desk or fixing the walls or something like that."

"Then you go to a school where it's supposed to be equal education, but you have less resources than a kid who goes to another school because their parents have more money to pay for the school."

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“... because the school has actually gotten, a lot more run down since I been there. There like, it's, it's not the prettiest school, it's not like how I remember it, like everything was colorful, and teachers had posters everywhere.”

### **3. Economics**

**Students viewed their social economic status as limiting their opportunities for involvement.** Students discussed how buying food was difficult for their families, sometimes resulting in the student needing to work. Many students also discussed wanting to get out of Trenton if they could afford it.

“If you're cutting the budget, you don't feed the kids. What if that's the only meal that child gets a day? You're cutting the budget and you're cutting their food. Food is serious. It's serious.”

“...the students who have to work late night jobs to support their families.”

“It's hard for, they don't hire us. I put in 15 applications down there for like a whole two years I haven't gotten any calls.”

### **4. Services Needed**

**Students discussed the need for more services both in school and in the community.**

Students talked about the desire for more after school programs, which included participating in organized games. The older students also showed concerns about having different activities in the community that represented all age groups. Community engagement and prevention program were other major concerns for students.

“... you can have sports that the kids can do, so they can like, have something to do.”

“...more playgrounds, like parks for kids to play.”

“Yeah because they cut down the community centers so we don't really have nowhere to go.

Everybody doesn't have a place to go.”

“They have programs but the programs it is like little kids.” “There's no programs for our age group.”

“After a certain age your programs don't let you come back because you like that program but after a certain age you can't come back because you are old and they don't, some kids don't even know about some of the programs that are around here so it is just like be ghetto and hang out on the streets with my friends.”

“We don't plan on, my mom always tell me they used to have a skate rink here and they closed everything down. Then they wonder why our generation is so out of involved in anything because there is nothing for us to do here.”

“...Extra curriculum's such as performing arts. At my school we don't even have a drama club.”

“More expression programs. More programs where teens can express their selves.”

## **Recommendations for Trenton Policy Makers**

- Incorporate youth voice into city decisions impacting youth, perhaps via a citywide youth council and/or focus groups to gather youth input regarding youth programming.
- Coordinate Programming for city youth so that a variety of programming for various age groups is offered, currently most programs for high school aged youth take place during the school year and are college focused.
- Offer programs in a variety of locations throughout the city and coordinate transportation and or bus/tokens
- Consider youth as part of solutions to city issues as there are a large number of youth who are looking to adults for direction related o addressing city issues
- Invest in youth programming that is free of charge, eliminating financial pressures associated with participation

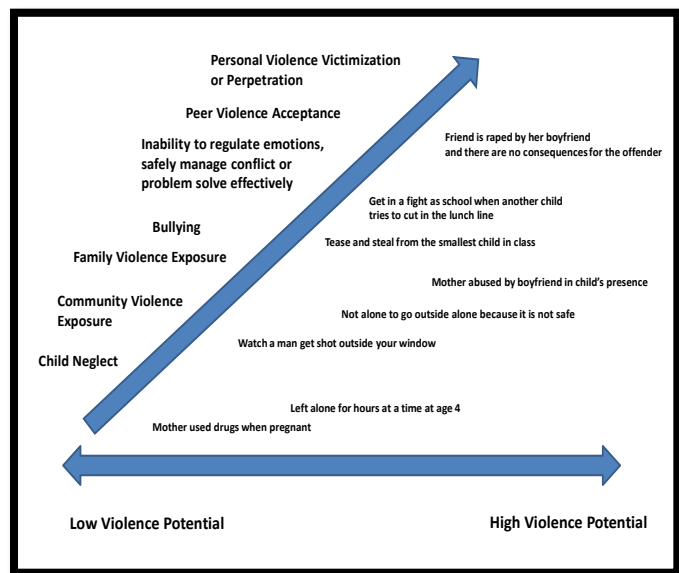


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- Invests in low/no cost daycare options for city parents, allowing older youth to participate in activities, instead of providing childcare for younger siblings while parents are working.

# Domestic Violence Working Group Recommendations

Dating partners are responsible for 44% of homicides for female youth ages 15-18, with African-American youth disproportionately affected.<sup>v</sup> 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 (STIs), physical injury and suicidality<sup>vi</sup>. 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.<sup>vii</sup>

When exploring best practice for the 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 relationships are to be recognized. “Prevention” programs that are administered in the high schools tend to be ‘interventions’ rather than ‘prevention’, responding to already existing attitudes and/or behaviors regarding dating violence. This is not to indicate that such interventions at the high school level are not needed, but rather, to indicate that if that is all we do, there will be a continued demand for such interventions, because we will be missing the opportunity to change beliefs about dating relationships in key developmental periods of time with youth.



The Domestic Violence working group recommends the following prevention/education programs that aim to help support young people in developing positive interpersonal relationships in order to prevent interpersonal violence from occurring. These are by no means the only evidence-based programs that may work. They are simply the ones we think may be the best to implement in the Trenton community in the near future. The following recommendations are for programs that target groups of young people. It is also important that we do not lose sight of the fact that effective strategies must also involve families, concerned adults and neighborhoods.

## I. Mentors in Violence Prevention

At the peer level, having non-violent conflicts in existing dating relationships is a predictor of later dating violence, especially if youth have peers experiencing and/or perpetrating peer and/or dating violence. There are several programs in existence that attempt to reach this adolescent population. The one proposed for this review is the Mentors in Violence Prevention Project, developed by Jackson Katz. This program focuses on the definition of masculinity, attitudes about manhood, and is facilitated in all

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male workshops. This model requires mentors to acquire formal training and to dedicate times for intervention. Training involves three, 90-minute sessions, with a fourth session offered for those who wish to assist in facilitating future workshops. Rather than offer scenarios that focus on participants being violent themselves, most of the scenarios posed in these workshops intentionally focus on bystander behavior, as it is believed that this will reduce defensiveness.<sup>viii</sup> Empirical evaluation of this model to date focuses on college student populations. Findings suggest that students exposed to the MVP model are more likely to see forms of violence as being wrong, and are more likely to take actions to intervene than students who are not exposed to the model.<sup>ix</sup>

## **II. Coaching Boys Into Men**

Coaching Boys into Men (CBM) is a program that reaches young men through the schools, yet does not add additional work for the Student Assistance Coordinators and School Counselors. This program intends to alter the norms that foster interpersonal violence perpetration by engaging athletic coaches as positive role models to deliver violence prevention messages to adolescent male athletes. Coaches need only participate in a 60-minute training, and receive 'training cards' to use as a guide for their discussions. A trained community organizer trains the coaches and acts as a program representative to the school. Evaluation outcomes indicate that although individual-level offender behaviors were unchanged as a result of the intervention, peer-level changes were significant, including higher levels of bystander intervention behavior. The evaluation also reported intervention impacts according to intensity of program implementation, showing a clear dosage effect and highlighting the importance of rigorous program management in order to achieve desired outcomes.

The CBM program can naturally be implemented through existing reserved times with coaches and their athletes, and requires little training to implement. CBM has evidence with similar samples as to youth in Trenton, is affordable, easy to implement without the hiring of trained professionals to do so, and offers free evaluative tools to assess efficacy.

The Domestic Violence working group recommends that an area organization adopt the CBM model and work with the School District to implement it.

See the following databases for additional evidence supporting potential model programs for violence prevention, including child abuse:

Blueprints for Violence Prevention: [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: [www.ojjdp.gov/mog/](http://www.ojjdp.gov/mog/)

SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices: [www.nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov)

US DHHS Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness: <http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/models.aspx>

## **III. MindUp: Mindfulness in Public Schools**

The Domestic Violence Working group recommends that the Trenton Public Schools work with TPPB and its academic partners at TCNJ to develop mindfulness programming, such as MindUp, for its most at-risk students.

MindUp is a Social-emotional learning (SEL) program. SEL Programs within schools work to improve executive function, and it has been suggested that mindfulness, in conjunction with SEL programming

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could strengthen resiliency<sup>xi</sup>. An essential part of youth development is learning how to respond to emotions in socially appropriate ways, and students with positive social and emotional skills show resiliency when confronted with stressful situations<sup>xii</sup> and exhibit reduced aggressive behaviors.<sup>xiii</sup> The underlying premises of mindfulness can be succinctly explained as three steps involving:

- 1) directing focus to an ‘attentional anchor’ (e.g. breath, and external object, deity, person who is loved),
- 2) dispassionately observing internal and external distractions and regularly disengaging from them, and
- 3) focusing attention from distractions back to the attentional anchor.<sup>xv</sup>

Put a different way, “Mindfulness seeks to bring into awareness, in a specific way, a person’s relationship to their experiences (thoughts, emotions, and behaviors)”<sup>xvi</sup>. It is shown to affect neurobiologic changes in reactivity to stress, allowing one to be aware of thoughts and emotions as they occur without being reactive to them.<sup>xvii</sup> Such mindfulness skills can allow adolescents develop a ‘hardiness’ when faced with uncomfortable feelings that might otherwise provoke aggressive or violent behaviors<sup>xviii</sup>. The promotion of these skills in early childhood and adolescence has the potential to offer youth an alternative to responding physically to emotional discomfort.

Several programs have been developed to date to serve youth with mindfulness work, including The Hawm Foundation MindUp<sup>xix</sup>, Inner Resilience Program<sup>xx</sup>, Mindfulness in Schools Project<sup>xxi</sup>, Mindful Schools<sup>xxii</sup>, and many others which do not offer evidence of efficacy, so are not listed here.

Ultimately, the research supports mindfulness in schools. It also shows that there needs to be teacher buy-in and teacher training. When this happens, teachers are able to maintain rigorous fidelity to the model and create the behavioral changes we are hoping to see through program implementation. Following through with integrating mindfulness in the Trenton Public School System will require administration buy-in, teacher buy-in, teacher training, and certified trainer observation to monitor fidelity and support teachers. If there is administrative and teacher buy-in (this includes teacher time to get trained), the cost of implementation is rather modest, particularly because we have several individuals within our network who can become certified trainers. This is a reasonable path to take with the potential for exceptional outcomes for youth.

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# 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. 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. The Education Working group offers recommendations to improve learning outcomes amongst Trenton youth in order to reduce juvenile crime.

## **I. Parent Academies and Collective Parent Engagement**

In the 2014 Annual Report, the Education Working Group recommended that TPPB work closely with the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Office within the Trenton School District to foster more parent engagement. In this report, we further recommend that a task force be convened to review the 2014-15 New Jersey Department of Education Parent Academy for Student Success (PASS) program to see how the program's goals align with the goals for student learning in Trenton, and how Collective Parent Engagement can be incorporated.

Parent academies are traditionally collaborations between schools and community-based partners to increase home-school communication and acknowledge, honor, support and promote family involvement in student achievement. Years of research have documented that parent involvement (PI) contributes to improved student outcomes related to learning and school success. One approach for increasing parental involvement and home-school partnership involves parent academies. Although the benefits of PI are well established, identifying successful PI strategies remains a challenge, especially in low-income school communities. Research indicates that PI continues to be sporadic or nonexistent in many of these communities. For this reason, it is critical that programs consider how to successfully engage low-income, ethnically diverse parents in and around their children's school. Specifically, it is important to take an ecological perspective to home-school partnership, such that the partnership is viewed as within the context of a larger community.

One promising, alternative approach to PI programs is Collective Parent Engagement (CPE). The CPE model differs from conventional PI in several ways. While PI strategies typically target improvements in individual parents' school-related knowledge and skills (e.g., how to communicate with children's teachers, how to help children with homework) as the primary mechanism for improving children's academic outcomes, CPE models tend to target parent social networks to improve children's academic outcomes. This type of collective approach to engagement and problem solving is important for parents who may be trying to address community-level barriers (e.g., crime, school disciplinary practices, social isolation, community safety) that are especially difficult for individuals to change. Research suggests that parent empowerment can be achieved in low-income school-community settings when parents work

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collectively to develop the knowledge, skills, and authority they need to gain control over the barriers and constraints that most affect them.

Like the PI model and approach, CPE programs can vary in their content and implementation. In one recently piloted CPE program, parents became empowered to reduce barriers to their children's learning and become agents of change in their communities. Parents received training to assess and understand barriers in their communities and then received support to design and implement programs with other parents that addressed the challenges in their school community<sup>xxiii</sup>. For example, in this pilot program, parents helped to establish: a home visitation and outreach program that engaged socially isolated and excluded families, a school-based referral and information center for families in need of formal social and health services; and a student-to-student mentoring program to foster leadership development among students. Results of the pilot program evaluation suggest that CPE is a promising approach to improving school outcomes among urban youth.

Regarding local efforts, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has designed an innovative model for strategic support to enhance student achievement through home/school academic partnerships. See: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/toolkit/>. The purpose of the Parent Academy for Student Success (PASS) Model is to engage in highly focused academic partnerships that will drive student learning and success. The NJDOE PASS Model is singularly focused on student learning. Together, educators and families are expected to exchange key information and use instructional strategies that can be applied out-of-school to support in-school performance. Effective PASS implementation requires a new dialogue and a commitment from every stakeholder group in the education community. Therefore, the suggested partners include superintendents, boards of education, principals, teachers, parents and families, and students.

The Education Working Group recommends that The Trenton Board of Education and Superintendent of Trenton Schools convene a task force to review the suggested themes for the 2014-15 NJDOE PASS program to see how the program's goals align with the goals for student learning in Trenton. It is important to consider modifications to the NJDOE PASS program to successfully engage parents/families in Trenton. Collective parent engagement (CPE) should be considered, as it is a promising approach for engaging parents and improving student outcomes.

## **II. Reading Recovery Programs**

In 2013-2014, 74% of students in Trenton Central High Main Campus and 86% of students in Trenton Central High West Campus were proficient or above in HSPA Language Arts testing. In contrast, the statewide average for 2013-2014 was 93.3% which placed these schools in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> percentile, statewide.

### **Why Reading Recovery?**

The Reading Recovery program identifies 5 and 6 year olds with the lowest achievement levels in literacy after their first year of schooling. The program increases literacy outcomes in these students while reducing the long term educational costs. Approximately 75% of students who complete the full 12- to 20-week intervention can meet grade-level expectations in reading and writing. Follow-up studies indicate that most Reading Recovery students also do well on standardized tests and maintain their gains in later years.

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Descubriendo la Lectura, the Spanish language interpretation of Reading Recovery, has shown a similar positive learning growth for students who speak Spanish as their first language.

As the Trenton School District aims to improve literacy rates and overall student performance, a Reading Recovery program reliant on one-on-one tutoring instructed by a trained teacher would be a strongly effective step in this direction. The Education Working Group recommends that this program be adopted in Trenton Schools.

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# Employment Working Group Recommendations

Since 2000, teenagers ages 16 to 19 have faced the highest levels of unemployment nation-wide. The percentage of employed teens from 2000 to 2010 fell by 20 percent, and though the number of jobs nationwide increased by 8 million between 2003 and 2007, the number of employed teens fell by 10,000. According to the most recent estimate, over 40 percent of Trenton's youth are unemployed, compared with a 10 percent overall unemployment rate. According to an Assessment report on Trenton, Mercer County's top 20 occupations are projected to have 2,400 job openings each year between 2014 and 2018. 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.

## **I. Strengthen Preparations for Career-Technical Education in Trenton High Schools**

A nation-wide study on high school graduates concluded that traditional academic curricula, even those with a focus on college readiness, fail to provide graduates with the skills necessary to thrive in the workplace, such as oral and written communication, critical thinking, and professionalism. This does not even address the specific skills high school graduates would need for employment in certain industries. Vocational education programs present a possible solution. Career-technical education (CTE) is predicated on “contextual” or “situated” learning, which entails the application of academic skills to real-world challenges.

In February of 2015, the New Jersey Department of Education approved the Trenton school district's application for four CTE programs: electrical, physical fitness, certified nurse assistantship, and automotive. This marks the first time in 15 years that Trenton will be offering vocational education in a formalized, co-curricular framework. The newly approved programs will be integrated into the school curriculum when the new Trenton Central High School building is built.

To ensure the successful implementation of these programs, the Employment Working Group recommends that the Trenton school district work with its members in order to review and consider adopting the best practices of successful CTE programs from around the country, which have been researched and compiled by TPPB academic fellows. These include: 1) strong collaboration between the school and employers/industry partners to offer ample opportunities for work-based learning; 2) guidance from teachers and counselors in professional development; and 3) student organizations dedicated to developing leadership skills and administering mentoring services for those enrolled in the CTE program.

## **II. I LEAD Program and Community Leadership**

<http://i-leadusa.org/>

Both higher levels of education attainment and increased parent involvement in the schools and the larger community are correlated with better outcomes for youth. The Employment working group



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recommends that a college or university in the Trenton area collaborate with the Pennsylvania-based I-Lead program and recruit participants amongst the parents of at-risk youth in Trenton Public Schools. The Pennsylvania-based Institute for Leadership Education, Advancement & Development (I-LEAD) aims to address these two interrelated issues in low-income areas. Founded by David Castro, JD, I-LEAD tackles both issues by offering programs that help adults in urban areas earn associate's and bachelor's degrees in leadership, which in turn provides communities with leaders. As of May 2014, more than 500 students attended degree-granting programs at community college campuses throughout Pennsylvania. The I-LEAD core curriculum focuses four study areas: Effective interpersonal and organizational dialogue, Systems thinking, Public systems and Private systems. For the associate's degree program, classes are taken in local communities, making educational accessible to those without cars or reliable forms of transportation.

One of I-LEAD's flagship programs, Achieving College Education (ACE), which delivers coursework for an accredited associate's degree in community-based locations such as neighborhood churches and community centers, boasts an impressive graduation rate of 80 percent. 90 percent of students who graduate from ACE are able to find employment. The program is funded through a revenue-sharing model in which I-LEAD reinvests tuition revenue in community based organizations, resulting in the colleges returning 40 percent of the students' tuition to I-LEAD, while community organizations that host the program receive 50 percent of I-LEAD's share.

Overall, programs like I-LEAD that combine adult education with leadership development represent a promising approach to the complicated issue of adult education and community development. By training adults to become grassroots leaders, I-LEAD and similar programs not only increases access to job opportunities for its graduates, it also helps create self-sustaining communities that are built upon strong leadership and institutions. Both outcomes will contribute to positive youth development in Trenton.

### **III. Continuum of Career Development Programs for Youth**

The Employment-Working Group recommends a continuum of coordinated career exploration and workforce exposure programs for youth from an early age. To goal is to lay a foundation for a series of afterschool program designed for elementary and middle schools in Trenton that educate students on career pathways and foster skills geared toward achieving that career, as well as soft skills that help to manage anger and protect against interpersonal violence later in life. The American Counseling Association found that career development awareness programs in middle schools help students to become aware of personal characteristics, interests, aptitudes, and skills; develop an awareness of and respect for the diversity of the world of work; and understand the relationship between school performance and future choice.

The State of New Jersey recently approved four career technical education (CTE) programs in the Trenton public school system (See Employment Working Group Recommendation #1) We propose a model for after-school programs connected to CTE coursework that encourage students to explore career pathways that are relevant to their physical environment (i.e. urban agriculture, construction, engineering), wherein students learn from, and participate in activities with, a professional from that field.

Some model programs that have shown success, and could be adapted for Trenton, include:

*Project PORTS (Promoting Oyster Restoration through Schools)*

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This program connects middle school children in Cumberland County, NJ with the local oyster population in the nearby Delaware Bay. Rutgers University created the community-based oyster habitat restoration and education program in order to expand educational opportunities and create a sustainable stewardship program, while also improving the oyster habitat. Project PORTS promotes scientific concepts, environmental consciousness and stewardship values through hands-on inquiry-based lessons that integrate science learning with historical and social perspectives.

*Junior ACE (Achieving a College Education) Program*

In Sacramento, CA, this program teaches middle school students about green design and introduces them to careers in the architectural design and construction industries. Students take part in a variety of architecture and engineering classes after school on relevant topics including alternative energy, green plumbing and green land use and design.

The Project PORTS and Junior ACE Programs are a great starting point for a new model program for Trenton. As seen in Project PORTS and Junior ACE, local academic institutions and their facilities could be utilized as a partnering effort. Local colleges could act as hosts for an afterschool program in order to better educate the students and give them proper hands-on learning experiences. Moreover, it would be beneficial for the program to partner with an on-campus organization, such as an Engineering Club, to help lead the program. The Employment working group can serve as a network of public and private sector organizations to pool together information resources, funding, and organizational resources to be accessible to students and schools to partner with.

#### **IV. Work Ready Certificate Programs for Trenton Youth Jobseekers**

Finding and maintaining employment is a difficult task for young jobseekers, who often lack the work experience and social capital that are necessary in a competitive market. Soft skills – those personal attributes such as communication, leadership, time management, and conflict resolution that aren't taught in traditional curricula – are perhaps as important as hard, or technical, skills. Soft skills, while teachable, are often garnered through work experience. Unfortunately, today's young jobseekers are less likely to have held a job compared with previous generations of youth, and are thus historically underprepared for entering the workforce. In response, many non-profits, government agencies, and educational vendors have developed training modules which recognize soft skills as a critical component of employability.

A number of Trenton-area non-profits and agencies recognize the efficacy of soft skills training. However, a consistent grievance amongst these service providers – and the clients they engage – is that employers tend to ignore applications from Trenton jobseekers, attaching a stigma to the city and its residents.

One promising solution to the “foot in the door” problem is the work ready certificate (WRC), a credential which certifies that its holder has successfully completed a soft skills curriculum and is therefore employable. These programs legitimize the WRC as a legitimate credential, like the GED, and are thus able to engage local businesses to consider their clients more favorably in their hiring practices. The most effective WRC programs report that 96% of participants secure employment within 30 days of graduation.

There are several models for WRC programs, but they each share in common the following attributes:

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1. The curriculum reflects skills which employers indicate are important. Research at the regional and national levels has outlined what skills are most important to employers. For example, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments has developed a “Lifelong Soft Skills Framework” based on input from hundreds of regional stakeholders. The matrix includes 18 skills in three categories: personal traits (e.g., judgment, initiative), academic learned skills (e.g., basic digital literacy), and life skills (e.g., accepting criticism, problem solving).
  2. There is an assessment component to mark success. Successful programs assess whether program participants actually gained the intended skills or traits. This is accomplished either through participation benchmarks (e.g., number of workshops attended, hours of homework completed), through a work readiness exam, or a combination of both. The most widely used assessment is the National Work Readiness Credential, a four-part test currently offered at sites in 20 states and the District of Columbia. Organizations can be trained in teaching and proctoring the exam and become permanent assessment sites.
  3. The program partners with area businesses to provide preferential treatment to jobseekers who have the certificate. Programs partner with local businesses, often through an area Chamber of Commerce or Workforce Investment Board, to build a network of employers who recognize the certificate. Participating businesses may agree to factor the WRC into their hiring practices, to guarantee interviews to certificate holders, or to sponsor a certain number of program graduates for employment.

#### Promising WRC Programs

Daviness County Soft Skills Certification: Requires participants to meet certain benchmarks at school (e.g., few unexcused absences, 2.5 GPA, no disciplinary referrals for fighting or vandalism) to enroll. The program allows curricular flexibility. Participants may fulfill their certification by choosing from a menu of approved programs, including: enrolling in the Junior Achievement career readiness program, completing a senior project that includes a structured internship, and/or enrolling in the local Workforce Investment Board’s five-session soft skills workshop series. Partner businesses promise to consider the certificate in their hiring practices.

Asbury Park Go for the Gold Program: Participating youth must complete a soft skills course, pass the National Work Readiness Credential exam, and receive a letter of recommendation in order to receive their “gold card.” The program is a partnership between the city’s Community Development Initiative, the Workforce Investment Board, and the host non-profit, Interfaith Neighbors. Participating employers agree to interview any “gold card” holder.

Schenectady County Certificate of Employability: Employs a 30-hour curriculum based on New York state standards and the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), a matrix of competencies developed by the Department of Labor. Because of the intensive curriculum, the program has developed an expansive number of business partnerships. The CoE is now offered in 11 New York counties, and interested non-profits, schools, or chambers of commerce may apply to be endorsed as soft skills training sites.

Los Angeles Work Readiness Certificate:<sup>xxv</sup> Offers soft skills workshops, but there is no mandated curriculum. Interested youth submit a resume and take an online test which covers topics like math and customer service. They are then offered a mock interview and scored on a work readiness rubric. Upon passing, participants receive a certificate and are counseled on job leads with participating employers.

#### **Recommendations**

The Employment Working Group recommends that Mercer County RFPs for youth employment training program grants should favor soft skills training programs which offer a recognized credentialing

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assessment and which teach skills that employers consider most important, based on preexisting standards like the National Work Readiness Credential and the Lifelong Soft Skills Framework.

The Employment Working Group further recommends that non-profits and workforce agencies providing soft skills training curricula should replicate model work readiness certificate programs, perhaps in conjuncture with the Mayor of Trenton, and form relationships with local businesses to offer interview preference to those candidates who have received the certification.

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# 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.

In light of the above, the Trenton Health Team rightly continued this year to focus on youth mental health as an area of high priority, both in identifying appropriate moments to intervene/identify a mental health crisis, as well as building resiliency as a protective factor against future traumatic experiences.

## **I. Emotional Resiliency Training**

Resiliency is the ability to achieve positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding negative paths linked with such risks. Resiliency factors most strongly supported by evidence-based research include emotion regulation (which can be learned through mindfulness), school connectedness, religious connection, involvement in community activities, employment, social trust, and the capacity for effective problem solving.

Too often programs work to diminish risks faced by youth known to diminish their personal wellness and promote deviant behaviors, rather than increase resiliency factors. In Trenton, we face many challenges, including the three most significant risk factors for youth identified in research, including: ambient neighborhood hazards (e.g., violence and property damage), neighborhood perceptions, and drug-related indicators (i.e. people using or paraphernalia on the streets). Risk-taking among youth may be the by-product of socially toxic environments that lack developmental assets for youth. This in combination with excess opportunities for high-risk behavior being more prevalent in disordered environments, and an increased exposure to social toxins early in the life likely negatively affects children's developmental trajectories.

What we know:

1. Violence exposure negatively impacts the neuroendocrine system and brain development during critical periods of the normal developmental trajectory.
2. This disruption leads to vulnerability in systems necessary for cognitive, self-regulatory and emotion processing.
3. Age of first exposure, frequency of exposure and exposure to multiple types of violence are important variables to consider in the development of mental health problems.
4. It essentially disrupts the process of normal child development.
5. Promotes increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, PTSD and aggression

We are proposing that through the incorporation of mindfulness and social-emotional regulation exercises into the Trenton Public Schools, we can provide the environmental manipulation to build resilient brain functions for youth with high levels of existing environmental risk conditions.

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One Model program that uses this methodology is the “Holistic Me” after school program, run by the Baltimore Holistic Life Foundation. Students in Holistic Me learn a combination of yoga, mindfulness practices, meditation, centering, and breath work that empower them with skills for peaceful conflict resolution, improved focus and concentration, greater control and awareness of thoughts and emotions, improved self-regulation, anger management, as well as stress reduction and relaxation. Already in Mercer County, the Mercer Prevention Coalition has one person who is trained in Botvin Life Skills training. Such a training program, if expanded to reach all school-aged children, could be very beneficial.

When working with urban youth we can teach them self-compassion and self-acceptance while helping them to remain aware of their personal reactions to situations. An example of one activity is ‘Name it to tame it.’ As youth are commonly unaware of their own emotions, they have been taught that certain emotions are weak or will be perceived as such and therefore should be avoided. It is typically these very emotions that youth will respond to with violence, as they have no other effective way of understanding these emotions or responding to them. Violence is often what they have seen modeled to them when others in their lives experience such emotions. How safe do you think it is to outwardly express fear, anxiety or sadness in Trenton? Aggression is a powerful defense mechanism. If a youth is taught to avoid certain emotions, the use of aggression to stop others from evoking those very emotions can indeed be quite effective, albeit harmful and dysfunctional. Ultimately, the process of mindfulness helps youth see better into their own minds, and be truly aware of what they are thinking and feelings. By doing this, youth are also better able to see things from someone else’s mind or perspective as well.

## **II. Mental Health First Aid for Trenton Educators**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in their report, Mental Health Surveillance Among Children in the United States (2011) document the tremendous need to address the mental health needs of children. The first step in treating students with mental health issues is appropriately identifying those students in need of support. Appropriate school system response and support for students reduces the risk of developing behavioral, emotional and mental health disorders. Adolescents do not typically seek assistance on their own and rely on adults to recognize and provide referrals for mental health issues. Furthermore, mental health needs of children often go unaddressed because of the difficulty in recognizing problems, negative attitudes and fear associated with mental health and substance abuse concerns as well as a lack of resources to address these concerns. In addition, mental health and substance abuse issues also impact education. According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), mental health problems that are left untreated lead to poor academic outcomes, limited vocational opportunities and can lead to mental health issues that persist into adulthood.

Effectively training educators to recognize and provide appropriate first responder care using Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) protocols may be an appropriate first step in meeting the mental health needs of Trenton city youth. Mental Health First Aid is an evidenced based program that, for program completers, has been shown to increase confidence in and the likelihood of helping individuals who are in distress, can identify multiple types of professional and self-help resources for individuals with a mental health or substance use issues and show an increased likelihood that they will help individuals in mental health or substance abuse distress. To be certified as a YMHFA first responder, teachers/adult-serving youth will be required to complete an 8-hour YMHFA course. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Topics covered include anxiety,

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depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders.

The Health Working Group recommends that YMHFA be adopted by a Trenton area organization to prepare Trenton youth serving adults (including teachers) to recognize various mental health and substance abuse needs of their students (k-12) in the classroom and make appropriate referrals for mental health and substance abuse related evaluation and services when necessary. Similar to Red Cross First Aid Training, educators could be trained to recognize and provide appropriate first responder care using Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) protocols. Youth Mental Health First Aid is an evidenced based program that, for program completers, has been shown to increase confidence in and the likelihood of helping individuals who are in distress, can identify multiple types of professional and self-help resources for individuals with a mental illness or addiction and have an increased likelihood that they will help individuals in mental health or substance abuse distress. The specific goal of Youth MHFA is assist youth serving adults to appropriately intervene and support youth in crisis.

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# Juvenile Justice Working Group Recommendations

The Trenton Police Department recorded 32 homicides in 2014, down from 37 in 2013. Violent crime in Trenton saw an overall reduction of 17%, whereas violent crime in the State of New Jersey as a whole saw a reduction of 9.6% from the previous year. Though we are excited to see these results, there is much work to be done. As of December 29th, 2014 there were close to 40 youth in detention in Mercer County. In addition, some youth arrested in Trenton are referred to correctional facilities in other areas of New Jersey

## **I. Comprehensive Juvenile Correctional Program Assessments**

The need for comprehensive program assessments of New Jersey's juvenile detention centers has never been greater. In recent years, with the New Jersey Department of Corrections collaborating with the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), the number of youth placed in New Jersey detention centers has decreased greatly. As facilities close down, and juvenile offenders are transported to other counties for services, there is a need to ensure that all facilities are operating in as rehabilitative a way as possible. The Juvenile Justice working group recommends that our local legislators introduce legislation to both the Assembly and the Senate that would require that a Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI) or a Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) be performed on all juvenile detention centers in the State of New Jersey, in order to assess which facilities promote better outcomes in terms of reduced recidivism. Once these assessments are available, we further recommend that Mercer County refer juvenile offenders to the facilities that score higher on the CPAI test, indicating successful rehabilitation and lower rates of recidivism.

Recognizing the difficulty of measuring the connection between a program characteristics and rehabilitative success, researchers used the principles of effective intervention to create the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory<sup>xxvi</sup>, or CPAI, a test of 66 criteria to measure and evaluate correctional programs. These criteria are divided into six sections, including:

- Program implementation: deals with the work of the program director, the use of best practices in the development of programs, and the program's connection with the community and funders.
- Client Pre-service Assessment: looks at evaluation of the offender to ensure that they are properly matched with the program in a way that is most conducive to their rehabilitation
- Program Characteristics: focuses on the specific makeup of the program, including treatments offered, rewards and punishment and rehabilitation strategies.
- Characteristics and practices of the staff: what are staff skills, how are they trained and utilized.
- Evaluation: how does the facility incorporate evaluation and assessments and make improvements on its programming.
- Other Items/Miscellaneous: includes criteria on ethics, monetary and public support.

Researchers knowledgeable in the field of corrections determine scores. They visit the facility over the period of a few days, and observe the program through interviews with staff members, reading through case files and watching facility programming. Multiple researchers collaborate on each criteria to ensure reliability, and then score each section and the entire evaluation based on a point system.



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The CPAI as a measurement for a program's rehabilitative success has been established through several studies. Nesovic (2003), Lowenkamp, Latessa and Smith (2006), and Matthews et al (2001) have all used the CPAI to evaluate correctional programs with high correlations between the criteria score and recidivism of clients. The University of Cincinnati has evaluated more than 40,000 juvenile and adult offenders, clients within more than 525 facilities. These studies have all supported a correlation between positive scores on the criteria and lower rates of recidivism.

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati, working with the CPAI, modified the process to create the Correctional Program Checklist (CPC). The CPC looks at similar criteria, and is measured by similar standards as the CPAI. The CPC similarly strives to understand how well a program follows the principles of effective intervention mentioned above, with the goal of enabling a facility to understand its strengths and opportunities. Studies support its relevancy for both adult and juvenile populations.

The CPAI and CPC have exposed common areas for improvement in correctional facilities. Matthews et al. (2001) determined a need for improved client evaluation prior to starting programs, program characteristics including the ability to determine client risk and need factors, better evaluation procedures, as well as a need for greater staff training. Pealer and Latessa (2004) in their CPAI evaluation of a range of 107 juvenile detention programs discovered a need for greater use of best practices, needs based treatment, assessment of offenders both during treatment and after release, staff training, more reward based programs, and more effective punishment methods.

The recent adoption of JDAI in New Jersey and the closure of several juvenile detention facilities in the state are indicators that the field of corrections has been rapidly changing, and will continue to do so. The use of CPAI and CPC evaluations can enable New Jersey to understand its programs at a deeper level. It would provide a comprehensive look at what programs are rehabilitative and which ones are not. It would provide justification for the use of services in our cash-strapped state, and steer our corrections facilities in a direction that is better for all.

## **II. Dedicate Percentage of Drug Forfeiture Assets to Juvenile Crime Prevention Programming**

The Juvenile Justice Working Group recommends that the Office of the Attorney General and the Mercer County Prosecutor dedicate a portion of drug forfeiture assets to support juvenile crime prevention programming. As background, the Criminal Code contains a provision that authorizes police to seize assets if they believe that those assets are derived from or used in an illegal enterprise, such as drug dealing. Once seized, these assets are split between the local prosecutor's office and the Attorney General's Office and are typically used to support ongoing law enforcement functions.

The proposal to dedicate a percentage of these seized funds to prevention programming involves a policy decision that would have to be made by either the county prosecutor or the Attorney General's Office. Since funds are currently used to support law enforcement functions, there may be resistance to this proposal, because it would mean reducing funding in other areas.

Such a proposal parallels, in some respects, the largest prevention funding mechanism that currently exists in New Jersey. Currently, a percentage of the state's liquor tax receipts (commonly referred to as the "booze tax") is dedicated to drug and alcohol prevention programming. The "booze tax" funds are used to fund the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. The Council passes a significant

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percentage of its funds (approximately \$10M annually) on to municipal alliances to prevent alcoholism and drug abuse to support local prevention programs.

If this proposal were to be adopted, the impact of the new prevention funding could be maximized if the funds were dedicated to evidence-based prevention programs. These are programs that have been rigorously evaluated and been found to significantly reduce the incidence of alcohol and drug use among youth would be exposed to them. This is especially important to the field of drug and alcohol prevention, because the field has a long history of funding programs with evidence of minimal or no effectiveness, most notably D.A.R.E.<sup>xxvii</sup>

There are several sources that are available for identifying evidence-based prevention programs. The Institute for Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder (<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>) has identified what it terms Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. Blueprint programs meet a very high standard of effectiveness and include several drug and alcohol prevention programs. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) also has maintains a “National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices” (<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov>). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has an on-line model programs guide that ranks programs, including drug and alcohol prevention programs as “effective”, “promising” or “no effects.” This guide is accessible at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/>. The National Institute of Justice also rates the degree to which programs, including drug and alcohol prevention programs are evidence-based at <http://www.crimesolutions.gov>. Last, the Campbell Collaboration conducts meta-analyses to determine which programs are evidenced-based. Several of their reviews (which are accessible at <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org>) cover drug prevention and treatment programs.

### **III. “Shotspotter” not Mandatory Minimums**

Following a shooting that occurred in broad daylight in Trenton this year, members of the Juvenile Justice working group questioned whether or not increased penalties for such crimes would help deter them. After consulting with academic partners at The College of New Jersey, the Juvenile Justice Working Group concluded that increased criminal sentencing penalties do not act as deterrents for such crimes. We include these finding here in order to clarify our policy position against increased criminal penalties for violent crimes.

Shootings that occur in broad daylight can be especially traumatic for witnesses and for law-abiding citizens who reside or own businesses in the neighborhoods where these shootings occur. Given the heinous nature of these crimes, a proposal was made to seek a modification to New Jersey’s Criminal Code, Title 2C, to require or permit the imposition of extended terms of incarceration for anyone convicted of a public shooting. While a definition of “public shooting” would have to be articulated, the goal would be to deter these crimes, however they are ultimately defined, through the threat of extended terms of imprisonment.

Ironically, New Jersey’s first mandatory term of parole ineligibility was enacted to also address the problem of gun violence. The Graves Act, which applied to anyone who used or possessed a firearm during the commission of one of ten serious offenses, was signed into law on February 12, 1981. The Graves Act, like the current proposal, was intended to deter the use of firearms in crimes through severe punishment. Unfortunately, the only evaluation of the Graves Act conducted found that the law had not

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achieved its policy goal – it had not resulted in a decrease in the use of guns in crimes (Stout, 1989). Evaluations of other state statutes intended to reduce gun violence by enhancing the punishments for gun crimes, such as Massachusetts’s Bartley-Fox Amendment and Michigan’s Felony Firearm Law, have also found that the enhanced punishments are not effective in reducing gun crimes<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Deterrence relies on three parameters to be effective – severity of punishment, celerity or timeliness of punishment and certainty of punishment. These three parameters do not operate independently – a severe punishment will not have a deterrent effect if there is no chance (certainty) of being caught, and a sanction with 100% certainty of being imposed, will not be a deterrent if the punishment is too weak to have an impact. Celerity refers to the time between the act and the punishment – if this is too long, the offender cannot relate the punishment as a consequence of the act that s/he committed.

Deterrence research has demonstrated that significant increases in the severity of punishment have only minor or moderate, at best, deterrent effect. Conversely, minor increases in certainty – the probability of being caught, can have a very significant deterrent effect.<sup>xxix</sup> As an example, consider a type of illegal behavior that a large percentage of the American populace engages in – speeding. If you drove to work daily taking the same route and were informed one day that the fine for speeding had doubled (a big increase in severity), you are still likely to speed on the way home, if that is what you do. If, however, on your drive in to work one day you went by a radar speed trap (which increases the certainty of getting a ticket), you are likely to drive more carefully and within the speed limit on the drive home. Certainty of punishment is much more important to changing offender behavior than severity of punishment.

There is no evidence to support the view that enhancing the punishment for public shooting will deter this crime. Based on the evidence of the deterrent impact of certainty of punishment, it would be potentially more impactful for the committee to consider proposals that would increase the certainty that those who engage in public shootings would be identified and caught. One way that other cities are doing this is by installing “Shotspotter” technology that attenuates to the sound of gunfire and almost instantaneously trains a video camera in the direction that the gunshot comes from. Efforts to induce eyewitnesses to provide descriptions to the police might also be effective. “Hot spot” policing that concentrates officers in areas with high gun violence might also be effective. An increment to the probability of being caught for committing a public shooting will be more effective than an increase in the sanction for a public shooting.

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# Mentoring Working Group Recommendations

There are approximately seventeen established mentoring organizations in the city of Trenton; however, they have historically lacked resources to provide evidence-based mentoring services to Trenton's youth. The Trenton Mentoring Coalition was established by way of the TPPB Mentoring Working Group, in order to provide these organizations and programs with additional resources, by way of research assistance from professors at The College of New Jersey and networking opportunities between community organizations that otherwise would not have a venue to share proven practices or seek collaborative funding opportunities.

Many of the Trenton youth who receive mentoring services have an absent father. This year, the Mentoring Working Group has focused on ways to engage fathers. It is well known that fathers who are absent or uninvolved in their children's lives may have adverse effects on their children's psychosocial development.<sup>xxx</sup> Numerous studies suggest that older children and adolescents with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school, live in poverty, engage in risky behaviors like drug use, get involved in the juvenile justice system, and be incarcerated later in life.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Conversely, father involvement contributes positively to numerous short- and long-term psychosocial and developmental outcomes for children such as their cognitive ability, capacity for empathy, social behavior, peer relationships, psychological health, gender socialization, and educational achievement.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Trying to increase father engagement is complex, as this issue involves a heterogeneous group of men who often encounter significant barriers to positive involvement with their children. Research indicates that low-income fathers in particular are less likely to live with and have contact with their children and may have greater difficulty providing for their children financially.<sup>xxxiii</sup> They are sometimes disconnected from employment (have trouble finding jobs), society (more likely to be incarcerated), and housing (either homeless or experience housing instability), all of which create significant barriers for fathers who want to be involved in their children's lives.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Another vulnerable group are children in the foster care system. In 2003, only 54% of nearly a half million children in foster care (in the United States) had contact with their fathers in the span of a year, compared to 72% of children in the general population<sup>xxxv</sup>. Finally, there is more diversity among fathers than ever before. An important recent trend is that more fathers are living apart from their children, especially unmarried fathers. The percentage of births to unmarried parents has increased in recent years; in 2009, they represented 53% of all births to women under age 30. Five years after the birth of a child, 75% of parents were not living together, and unmarried fathers without a close relationship to mom at birth were most likely to disengage.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In recognition of fathers' interest and the importance of fathers in their children's lives, efforts to support and promote positive father involvement have increased in recent decades. Although most programs continue to focus on the mother-child relationship<sup>xxxvii</sup>, some programs now focus on helping fathers increase involvement with and provide emotional and material support for their children, teaching parenting and co-parenting skills, and helping fathers attain economic self-sufficiency. Many programs also work with and through other systems that may involve fathers, including child support enforcement, education or training, and criminal justice.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The Mentoring Working Group recommends three methods of engaging fathers: Parent Education Programs, Co-Parent Court, and Community Visitation Centers.

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## I. Parenting Education Programs

It is important to consider father engagement in parenting programs. This does not mean that programs should develop father/men-only programs (men are less likely to attend these). Instead, it is critical to integrate fathers – along with other family members who play important caretaking roles in children’s lives, e.g., grandparents – into the planning and implementation process. In addition, it is important to identify and reduce barriers to involvement. Rather than create separate education programs for men, existing parent education programs in the City of Trenton should make a special effort to perform outreach to fathers and include them in their programming.

## II. Co-Parent Court

In focus groups held by TPPB this year, fathers in Trenton often cite problems with the child’s mother as a barrier to being involved. This issue is particularly salient for unmarried fathers who do not live with their children. One promising approach to reduce relational barriers is Co-Parent (problem-solving) Court.<sup>xxxix</sup> Co-Parent Court is an innovative collaboration between court, county, university and community resources to provide comprehensive services to low income, unmarried parents establishing paternity. Parents are scheduled for a series of co-parenting workshops, referred for social services to meet any of their unmet basic needs, and eventually assisted in completing a joint parenting plan. In a recent evaluation of a Co-Parent Court project, 709 mothers and fathers participated in the program, 95 percent of whom do not live together. Study results indicated that the project serves high-needs, young, predominantly African-American parents with high rates of unemployment, receipt of public assistance, criminal records, and co-parenting with more than one other parent. Results also suggest that attendance at the Co-Parent Court workshops is very high, and a significant majority of the parents are completing parenting plans together. A continuing impact study indicates that Co-Parent Court fathers who complete the program are paying child support orders at a much higher percentage (87%) than fathers who are not enrolled in the program (69%) and report greater satisfaction with their involvement in their child’s life. One of the most interesting messages from the third year continuation report is the “sense of optimism” demonstrated by fathers who have completed the program. In addition, mothers report significantly improved co-parenting relationships, an increased amount of time their child spends with the father, and improvements in their own parenting bond with children (Marczak et al., 2014).

Co-Parent Court can help to increase father engagement for parents involved with the legal system (e.g., custody issues, child support). Because it is likely that parents already have a negative impression of family court (fathers sometimes feel like they are viewed as just a “paycheck”), it is important for parents to know how Co-Parent Court is different from other court experiences that they have had.

## III. Community Visitation Centers

A father who does not live with his child and has limited resources may not have access to transportation to facilitate frequent visitation or may have to use unreliable transportation that may make him late for visits or that may not be safe or practicable to use to transport children. The majority of fathers choose to use public transportation to save expenses, but they find that the time investment it

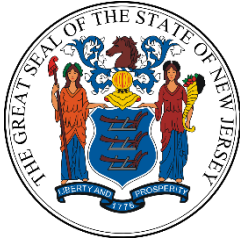
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requires is costly.<sup>x1</sup> Also, some fathers do not have a suitable home to welcome visits with children. One promising approach to address this issue is for communities to support or sponsor visitation centers to provide a monitored, appropriate venue for visits. At visitation centers, parents can visit with their children in child-centered play spaces for up to several hours. If visitations are monitored by the court system, staff can monitor visitation to ensure everyone remains safe and keeps track of attendance for the court. Visitation centers can alleviate the logistical barrier of where visitation will take place for fathers who may not have appropriate housing. When visitation centers are located in low-income neighborhoods, fathers can take advantage of visitation even when their transportation options are limited. Use of a center can also reduce conflict between fathers and mothers because visitations can be monitored and records are kept that reduce disputes about frequency and details of visitation.

Visitation centers can help reduce barriers to father engagement. Visitation centers may already exist in Trenton. If so, it is important to understand whether the space is being used effectively. Many centers have inadequate space to accommodate requests from parents and/or courts. In addition, parents sometimes feel inhibited in their ability to engage with their children because they are monitored by staff. Although supervision of visits may be required, centers can use evidence-based strategies to help to make visits feel more intimate for fathers and children.

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## Member Organizations



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## End Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Scales & Leffert, 1999; Brennan, Barnett & Lesmeister, 2006
- <sup>ii</sup> Courtney et al, 2007
- <sup>iii</sup> Berk, 2005
- <sup>iv</sup> Moustakas, 1994
- <sup>v</sup> Martin et al., 2012
- <sup>vi</sup> Tharp, 2012; Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Turner, 2012
- <sup>vii</sup> Baxendale, Cross & Johnston, 2012
- <sup>viii</sup> Katz, 2010
- <sup>ix</sup> Katz, Heisterkamp & Fleming, 2011
- <sup>xi</sup> Sanger & Dorjee, 2015
- <sup>xii</sup> Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010
- <sup>xiii</sup> Brock et al., 2006
- <sup>xv</sup> Zylowska et al., 2008 (as cited in Waters et al., 2013)
- <sup>xvi</sup> Bostic et al., 2015
- <sup>xvii</sup> Bostic et al., 2015
- <sup>xviii</sup> Broderick & Metz (2009)
- <sup>xix</sup> Hawn, 2011
- <sup>xx</sup> Lantieri and Goleman, 2008
- <sup>xxi</sup> Kuyken et al., 2013
- <sup>xxii</sup> <http://www.mindfulschools.org/resources/healthy-habits-of-mind/>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Alameda-Lawson, 2014
- <sup>xxv</sup> <http://www.hirelayouth.com/wrc.html>
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Gendreau and Andrews (1994)
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Ennett, Tobler, Ringwalt & Flewelling, 1994; Lynam, Milch, Zimmerman, Novak & Logan, 1999
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Pierce & Bowers, 1979 & 1981; Loftin, 1979; Loftin & McDowall, 1981
- <sup>xxix</sup> <sup>xxix</sup> Kleiman, 2009; National Academy of Sciences, 2015
- <sup>xxx</sup> Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and child outcomes*. West Sussex, England: Wiley & Sons.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Flouri, 2005; Nock & Einolf, 2008; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2007; Cryer & Washington, 2011; Fatherhood Institute, 2013; Feldman, Bamberger, & Kanat-Maymon, 2013; Flouri, 2005; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Kim, Mayes, Feldman, Leckman, & Swain, 2013; Lamb, 2010; Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2012; Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Palkovitz, 2010; Pattnaik & Sriram, 2010; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Pruett, 2000; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Nelson 2004
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Moses, 2010
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Malm, 2003
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Waller, 2014
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Panter-Brick et al., 2014
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Coakley, 2015
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Waller, 2013
- <sup>xl</sup> Kohn, 2013