



Trenton Prevention Policy Board

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

Annual Report 2015-2016

September 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The Trenton Prevention Policy Board (TPPB) is a network of individuals and organizations that work together to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development in Trenton, NJ. Local stakeholders and experts from government, non-profit and higher education sectors gather together regularly to share their knowledge about relevant trends, youth-serving programs, public policies, research, and best practices. Two practical goals drive TPPB's activities: 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2015-2016 year, TPPB continued its efforts to develop evidence-based proposals to address recurrent and pressing issues that face youth in Trenton. This past year marked a year of transition as the board began operating under the new leadership of co-chairs Marygrace Billek and Michael Nordquist, as well as the departure of TPPB staff manager Sarah Aubrey in October of 2015. With this transition came a new focus on the structure and goals of TPPB, and an effort to highlight and define TPPB's internal processes and external outputs.

This report documents the need for creative and evidence-based solutions, progress on past TPPB-initiated efforts, as well as proposed solutions to three key concerns that affect Trenton youth, specifically mentoring, family engagement, and structural unemployment.

The first section, State of Trenton Youth update, provides recent data on trends and characteristics that influence the ability of youth to succeed. Gathered from the most recently available public sources, this update compares local- and state-level data around several key indicators of positive youth development, and highlights the continued needs of youth in the city of Trenton.

The second section provides brief progress reports on TPPB-initiated projects, including the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy, Trauma-Informed Mental Health training, and Youth Empowerment Project, among others.

The third sections contains the three policy proposals designed to address current issues that Trenton youth face. This includes:

- Family Engagement
- Mentoring
- Structural Unemployment

In addition, we provide a summary of ongoing research that working groups are exploring, including Youth Courts and Positive Behavior Support in schools.

This report was produced in collaboration with several faculty members, staff, students, AmeriCorps, and AmeriCorps VISTA members from The College of New Jersey who provided research and information to support the recommendations included below. Thank you to Drs. Diane Bates, He Len Chung, and Stuart Roe, AmeriCorps VISTA Ciara Colleton, TCNJ CELR Center staff members Brittany Aydelotte, Heather Camp, Megan Nicholson, Karina Lopez, Adams Sibley, Ryan Dawson, Paula Figueroa-Vega, PolicyOptions instructor Brandon McKoy, and TCNJ

students Tyler Holzer, Dillon McNamara, and Deanna Magda. We would also like to thank our meeting presenters, including Afnan Rashid, Alex Rivera, Jeff Wilkerson, and Regine Saintilien. Thanks also to the TPPB co-chairs, Liz Casparian, Kim Cody, Alison Daks, Rob Fiorello, Charles Peters, and Robert Taylor. Finally, our thanks to the members of TPPB and the organizations they represent for their commitment to positive youth development in Trenton.

Additional documentation can be found at <http://tppb.pages.tcnj.edu/2016annualreport/>

HISTORY

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.

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 groups: 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).

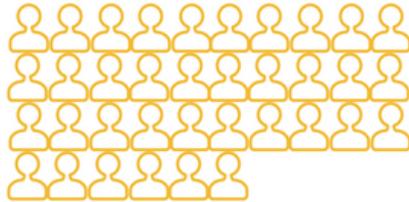
The College of New Jersey assumed the lead facilitator role of the TPPB in the fall of 2011. Under the leadership of Patrick Donohue, the needs of the Board were integrated with TCNJ's community engaged learning objectives. Staff from the Bonner Institute for Civic and Community Engagement joined the Board as facilitators for each working group. In addition, TCNJ faculty members were recruited to support each working group and provide research and training, as well as to produce literature reviews on ideas and questions proposed by working group members. Through this process, the Board ensured that the ideas included in the annual report 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. Serving as co-chair with her since July 2015 is Michael Nordquist, Interim Executive Director of the TCNJ Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research.

STATE OF TRENTON'S YOUTH

School Dropouts

Per 1,000 Students, K-12



Source: NJ Dept. of Education, 2013-14

TRENTON NEW JERSEY

"Students who...drop out of school face social stigma, fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, and higher probability of involvement with the criminal justice system."

"Chronic absenteeism reduces math and reading achievement outcomes, reduces educational engagement, and decreases social engagement."

Chronic Absenteeism



Source: NJ Dept. of Education, 2013-14

School Violence

Reported Cases Per 1,000 Students



Source: NJ Dept. of Education, 2014-15

"Exposure to [school violence] is associated with emotional and cognitive stress as well as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder."

"Millennials with only a high school diploma earn 62% of what the typical college graduate earns."

Educational Attainment

Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 18-24 Year Olds



Source: US Census S1501, 2014

TRENTON
NEW JERSEY

Unemployment Rate



Source: US Census S2301, 2014

Healthcare Coverage

Percent Uncovered, 18-24 Year Olds



Source: US Census B27001, 2014

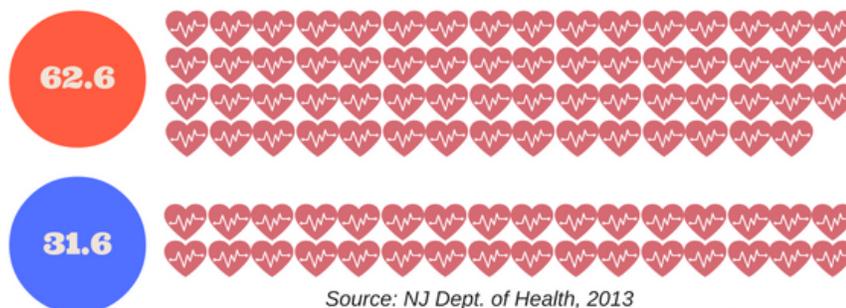
Births to Teens Rate

3.6 times higher in Trenton than NJ state average

Source: NJ Dept. of Health, 2012

Blood Lead Levels

Reported Cases of 5+ ug/dl Per 1,000 Children



Source: NJ Dept. of Health, 2013

"No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels ... have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. And effects of lead exposure cannot be corrected."

TRENTON
NEW JERSEY

Child Abuse/Neglect

Substantiated Cases Per 1,000 Minors



Source: NJ Dept. of Children & Families, 2014

64.3%

Single Parent Households

Among Households with One or More Person Under 18 Years Old

30.6%

Source: US Census B11005, 2013

"Father-absent children graduate from high school and attend college at a lower rate, perform worse on standardized tests, and are more likely to use drugs than children from father-present homes."

Grandparents as Caregivers

Grandparents in Trenton are 2.2 times more likely to be primary caregivers for their grandchildren than NJ state average

Source: US Census B10050, 2013

"Because of their experiences with their parents, children being raised in grandparent-headed families often display developmental, physical, behavioral, academic, and emotional problems. Some of these problems include depression, anxiety, ADHD, health problems, learning disabilities, poor school performance, and aggression."

Quotations

1. Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2009
2. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 2014
3. National Institutes of Health, 2013
4. Pew Research Center, 2014
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016
6. Western Michigan University, 2011
7. American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2016

UPDATES AND PROGRESS ON PREVIOUS INITIATIVES

MEETINGS

TPPB met nine times between July 2015 and June 2016, with each meeting dedicated to a particular topic or concern. In addition, the executive board and coordinating boards met at least monthly throughout the year. Full board meetings are summarized below, and agendas are available at tppb.pages.tcnj.edu.

July 8, 2015: Youth Count

Members of the Youth Homelessness Committee of the Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care and the Human Services Committee presented findings from their recent Youth Count, an assessment of homelessness and housing-unstable youth in Trenton and Mercer County. Having access to this unique, local data set will help inform our understanding of the problem of housing instability that many Trenton youth face. Following the presentation, a discussion about the relationship between housing instability and juvenile crime took place.

September 9, 2015: Updates and TPPB Survey results

Participants discussed plans for the coming year and the results of the TPPB survey administered in July. This survey documented members' priorities and concerns, and a discussion of how best to move forward followed.

October 14, 2015: Trenton Youth Voices

TCNJ Professor Dr. Stuart Roe presented the results of his research into the priorities and concerns of Trenton youth. 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. Dr. Roe summarized his findings and facilitated a discussion about the issues facing youth in Trenton today.

November 11, 2015: Working Group Meetings

Working groups met to develop research questions and ideas, and shared their ideas and priorities with the full board membership.

December 9, 2015: Resource and Networking Fair

Eighteen organizations shared their resources and programs to better inform the Trenton community about their activities and find possibilities for collaboration. Organizations were provided time to introduce themselves and provide an overview of their services and programming.

February 9, 2016: My Brother's Keeper

Alex Rivera from Capital City My Brother's Keeper (CCMBK) provided an update on the efforts of the city-sponsored national My Brother's Keeper initiative. He covered the three areas that CCMBK is focusing on—chronic absenteeism, literacy, and employment readiness—and how they relate to TPPB's youth-focused efforts. Opportunities for collaboration and partnership were explored, and individual organizations have committed to participate and support the CCMBK effort as it dovetails with our and their missions.

March 10, 2016: City of Trenton Planning Division: Trenton250

Planners Jeff Wilkerson and Regine Saintilien from the City of Trenton Division of Planning provided an overview of the results of their year-long planning and feedback efforts for the city's long-term plan. Mr. Wilkerson provided an overview of the process and the findings, summarizing the city's priorities in particular neighborhoods and communities. Participants provided feedback and input to help finalize the plan. Mr. Wilkerson also offered future opportunities for input into the plan, including reviewing the element description briefs that will be developed for particular themes in the plan.

April 13, 2016: Collective Impact

Afnan Rashid from New Jersey Campus Compact provided an overview of collective impact models and their relevance to TPPB and projects like it. He covered the history and main principles behind collective impact, and how much work and commitment it requires from participants. His powerpoint presentation is available on the TPPB website. A discussion about how TPPB can live up to collective impact models and expectations ensued.

May 11, 2016: TCNJ Policy Options Presentations

TCNJ students presented their research on issues facing Trenton youth, including barriers to employment and innovative and effective models for managing schools.

INITIATIVES

TPPB has successfully pursued the implementation of a number of program recommendations during the past year. These include the continuation of the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy, the Youth Empowerment Project, and Mental First Aid for Trenton Educators.

Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy

Originally emerging from the recommendations of TPPB, the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy (TVRS) will enter its fourth year in 2017-2018, and the juvenile justice and employment working groups of TPPB continue to partner with TVRS programs. The New Jersey Office of the Attorney General has agreed to fund another three years of the program, and TCNJ has agreed to host and support the program through 2020. More information can be found at <http://celr.tcnj.edu/tvrs/>

Youth Empowerment Project

A Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) was awarded to a team of TCNJ and community members, building off of recommendations from the 2013 and 2014 annual reports. The application and project emerged from the efforts of the Mentoring Working Group, the use of art-based programming to reach at-risk youth and its use as a vehicle to develop their “internal assets” (i.e. confidence and self-esteem). The team includes TCNJ psychology professor He Len Chung (TCNJ), and the approach incorporates an evidence-based youth empowerment curriculum. The project built upon existing successful partnerships with artist Bentrice Jusu Trenton Ninth Grade Academy and Trenton High Schools. The project ran from early November 2015 through June 2016.

Domestic Violence Victim Response Teams and Sexual Assault Support Services Advocates

The Domestic Violence Victim Response Team (DVVRT) is a partnership of Womanspace, Inc., Mercer County law enforcement agencies, and community members. DVVRT volunteers are trained to meet with victims of domestic violence at police stations to provide information and support at the time of a reported incident or upon request. Sexual Assault Support Services Advocates are volunteer victim advocates who work to enhance the victim-centered approach that is now standard for providing services to sexual assault victims. They provide accompaniment to hospitals in response to crisis calls received by the hotline, from local hospitals, police or the prosecutor’s office. DVVRT/SASS advocates provide crisis intervention, emotional support, information and referrals to victims and their significant others.

Womanspace staff member Alison Daks, chair of the Domestic Violence working group, worked with Karina Lopez, CELR Center staff member and working group facilitator, to offer training for these roles to TCNJ students on campus for academic credit. During the Fall 2016 semester, the 80 hours of training are held at TCNJ on Mondays and Wednesdays. 28 individuals will be trained as part of this training cycle.

Mental Health First Aid for Trenton Educators

TCNJ’s Dr. Stuart Roe, assistant professor in Counselor Education, has provided important resources and guidance for the health and education working groups around preparing educators to be able to handle the mental health issues their students exhibit. Through his work and partnership with TPPB in cooperation with the Trenton Health Team, Dr. Roe has provided trainings and workshops to the staff of the following organizations, many of which are TPPB members:

- Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
- Anchor House
- Children's Home Society
- Mercer Street Friends
- Mercer CONTACT
- Mercer County Family Support Organization

Work Ready Certificate Program

The work ready certificate (WRC) is a nationally-recognized credential which substantiates a jobseeker's employability. Trenton's unemployed residents battle the invisible stigma of place-based discrimination - that their zip code predetermines their ethic and readiness to work. The WRC presents one possible solution. Participants are trained in the most important soft skills that employers have identified as critical to employee success. After passing an exam, the participants receive a certificate (often in the form of a card) indicating their successful graduation. WRC programs partner with area chambers of commerce and workforce investment boards to guarantee interview preference to individuals who have received the credential.

The TPPB employment subcommittee has identified the work ready certificate as a program of promise for Trenton's unemployed youth. Subcommittee members, student interns, and TCNJ faculty have identified an age range, curriculum design, and assessment protocol for a pilot WRC program. The subcommittee plans to meet with potential host sites, particularly those receiving funding through the county's Youth Services Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow continue TPPB's history of focusing on pressing and relevant issues that affect Trenton's youth and proposing practical and effective evidence-based solutions to these issues. These issues, and the recommendations to address them, emerged from discussions among TPPB working groups, TCNJ faculty and students, and CELR Center and Bonner Institute staff members. The research behind these recommendations was performed by TCNJ faculty, students, and CELR Center staff; more detailed documentation of each recommendation is available on TPPB's website, <http://tppb.pages.tcnj.edu/>

The recommendations are of two types. The first recommendation, encouraging policies to support family engagement, cuts across all issue areas and is relevant for service providers, public agencies, and policymakers. The subsequent recommendations are specifically geared towards single issues around education/mentoring, and employment.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Working group: All board recommendation

Across working groups, TPPB stakeholders have noted family support as a critical, under-addressed issue in positive youth development. In the words of one member, “We can provide the best possible programming, but what happens when our kids go home to an unsupportive environment?” As the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard notes, efforts to help youth overcome adversity often mischaracterize the battle as one of “motivation or grit... [sending] a signal that kids themselves are at fault if they fail to thrive ... [and missing] opportunities to provide the relationships... that can actually strengthen resilience.”¹ A stable relationship with an adult is perhaps the most predictive factor in children who successfully overcome the adversity caused by hardships like poverty, violence, and neglect.² Many parents and caregivers, however, face significant challenges that preclude opportunities to attend to their children’s healthy development, even though 70% of African-American and 84% of Latino parents believe that spending more time with their children would make them better parents.³ “Inner-city neighborhoods with limited social, economic, and institutional resources demand that parents be ‘super-parents’ to ensure conventional development for their adolescents.”⁴ For these caregivers, extenuating factors like unpredictable work hours make significant participation in their children’s positive development an onerous prospect.⁵

In education policy, increasing attention is being devoted to school-based family engagement as a means to mutually reinforce the learning that happens between the home and school. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education define *family engagement* as “the systematic inclusion of families as partners in children’s development, learning, and wellness.”⁶ Children with engaged parents have improved literacy outcomes in early childhood, work habits in K-3, social competence in middle and high school, and college matriculation rates.⁷ Federal legislation like the Head Start Act, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasize parents and families as partners in children’s development.⁸ President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative, announced in 2014, and launched locally by Mayor Eric Jackson the following year, highlights family engagement as a key focus area in helping young boys and men of color overcome barriers.⁹

To date, most efforts to engage families in their children’s development have occurred within the school. However, schools face significant challenges in effectively engaging families, including lack

¹ Walsh, Bari. "Public Policy and Resilience: How We Can Change Our Policies To Help Disadvantaged Kids Cope And Thrive." March 23, 2015. Accessed July 31, 2016. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/03/public-policy-and-resilience>.

² "Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13." *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child*, 2015. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>.

³ Rochlkepartain, Eugene C., Marc Mannes, Ph.D., Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., Shenita Lewis, and Brent Bolstrom. "Building Strong Families 2004: A Study of African American and Latino/Latina Parents in the United States." *YMCA/Search Institute*, November 2004.

⁴ Jarrett, Robin L. "Successful Parenting in High-Risk Neighborhoods." *The Future of Children* 9, no. 2 (1999): 45. doi:10.2307/1602704.

⁵ Weiss, H. B., and M. E. Lopez. "Engage Families for Anywhere, Anytime Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan* 96, no. 7 (2015): 14-19. doi:10.1177/0031721715579034.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Department of Education. *Policy Statement on Family Engagement: From the Early Years to the Early Grades*. May 5, 2016. Accessed July 28, 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/policy-statement-on-family-engagement.pdf>.

⁷ "Family Involvement Makes a Difference in School Success." Harvard Family Research Project. 2006. Accessed July 21, 2016. http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/family-involvement-makes-a-difference-in-school-success#_ftn4.

⁸ Health & Human Services, 5

⁹ Walker, Michael A. "Mayor Eric Jackson Launches ‘Capital City My Brother's Keeper’" City of Trenton. December 2015. <http://www.trentonnj.org/cit-e-access/news/index.cfm?NID=39398&TID=55&jump2=0>

of staff time, lack of training, and parent attitudes toward schools.¹⁰ These barriers are more pronounced among low income, immigrant, minority, and working class families.¹¹ Further, schools often lack the necessary resources to engage so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ parents, i.e., those caregivers least likely to participate due to a number of challenges, including accessibility/transportation, work schedules, language/cultural differences, and feelings of inadequacy. Finally, traditional school-based engagement strategies mistakenly assume parents have their basic needs met and may treat parents as assets (e.g., volunteers). In this paradigm, schools can fail to build trust and reciprocity.¹²

Learning occurs across a spectrum of contexts - not only in schools, but also at home, in museums and libraries, early learning and afterschool programs, in faith-based institutions, and through educational media, all of which have a shared goal of promoting positive youth development.¹³

Among these, community-based afterschool programs may be “uniquely situated” to address the gaps in family engagement facing school systems. Reasons include: expanded (weekend/evening) hours convenient to working parents, provision of counseling and wraparound services for parents with unmet basic needs, the ability to cater programming to distinct community characteristics, an improved sense of approachability compared with school administrators, and the ability to provide incentives for participation.¹⁴ In one model afterschool program piloted by the Michigan Department of Education, parents were twice as likely to communicate with afterschool staff on a weekly basis than with teachers or school administration.¹⁵

The following recommendations are offered to local agencies providing afterschool programming, based on the unique needs of Trenton’s children and families:

1. Offer family supportive services so students and parents have tools to continue learning and thriving at home.

Parents are their children’s first teachers. Family engagement programs should encourage “anytime, anywhere learning.” Strategies: Provide group and individual counseling; create family networking opportunities in which parents can trade encouragement, support, and advice; offer parent-child bonding opportunities; hold tutoring events for parents with limited education.

Family Empowerment Program, Miami, FL: “Combines a structured learning environment with free individual and family counseling services for parents and children to practice problem solving and communication skills.” *Outcome:* “Of children participating in the program who were at risk of or who had a first criminal offense, 98 percent remained arrest-free.”¹⁶

¹⁰ "Afterschool: A Key to Successful Parent Engagement." *Afterschool Alliance*, no. 57 (October 2012). www.afterschoolalliance.org.

¹¹ Smith, Joanna, Chuan Ally Kuzin, Kris De Pedro, and Priscilla Wholstetter. "Family Engagement in Education: Seven Principles for Success." www.CharterResource.org.

¹² Ohio Department of Education. *Ohio Community Collaboration Model For School Improvement: Family Engagement and Support*. Accessed July 20, 2016. <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Models-for-Family-and-Community-Engagement/Family-Engagement-and-Support.pdf.aspx>.

¹³ Weiss & Lopez, 18

¹⁴ Afterschool Alliance, 3

¹⁵ "Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success: A Family Engagement Initiative Pilot in School-Based Afterschool Programs." Center for Youth Program Quality. May 2015. Accessed July 25, 2016. [http://cypq.org/sites/cypq.org/files/publications/2015-05-05 Family Engagement Report Public.pdf](http://cypq.org/sites/cypq.org/files/publications/2015-05-05%20Family%20Engagement%20Report%20Public.pdf).

¹⁶ Afterschool Alliance

Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success, Michigan: “Meals and time to socialize with other families was part of the family program.” ... “Most participants indicated...they would like more interaction with other parents or families.”¹⁷

2. Identify and address barriers to participation among ‘hard-to-reach’ parents.

Parents who are less engaged often have one or more factors preventing their participation. Strategies: Schedule voluntary home visits; assist families whose basic needs are not met by helping them navigate social services like job training and cash assistance; offer adult ESL courses for non-native English speakers to promote inclusivity; build self-efficacy and esteem by offering social events (e.g., potlucks) that require a positive contribution by all participants.

Sunnyside Community Services Beacon Community Center, Sunnyside, NY: “Serves children, teenagers, and adults, offering structured after-school programs and drop-in activities.” In addition to regular afterschool programming, “offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to help parents gain proficiency in English, multilingual workshops to help parents adapt to the policies and expectations of New York City schools, and events such as potluck dinners and performances to foster positive multigenerational and multicultural interactions.” Additionally, the Beacon is open until 10pm on weeknights and all day Saturday to accommodate working parents.¹⁸

Corwin Middle School 21st Century CLC Program, Pueblo, CO: “A key to the program’s success was hiring ‘community advocates’ to focus on families whose children were struggling in school. The advocates listened to what parents wanted then connected families to resources and made referrals to counseling. The advocates also built rapport with students and teachers and helped ‘work things out’ to avoid suspension. When the program began in 2000, attendance at parent-teacher conferences averaged about 23%. During the second year, parent participation shot up to 90% and remained at that level.”¹⁹

3. Offer incentives to promote and sustain participation.

Incentives may encourage parents who face barriers to participation or don’t agree with the intrinsic value of engagement. Strategies: Provide meals, childcare, and/or transportation to programs; host recognition events for volunteers and/or engaged parents; hold prize raffles for engaged parents (e.g., movie tickets for the family).

Kid Power’s VeggieTime Project, Washington, D.C.: “Parents and children work together to harvest vegetables, learn healthy eating habits, and cook healthy meals. In addition, [as an incentive,] the VeggieTime Project distributes a portion of the produce grown to families participating in the program.”²⁰

¹⁷ Center for Youth Program Quality

¹⁸ Afterschool Alliance

¹⁹ Henderson, Anne T., and Carol Sills Strickland. "Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success." Accessed July 28, 2016. http://www.expandinglearning.org/sites/default/files/em_articles/5_engagingfamilies.pdf.

²⁰ Afterschool Alliance

Resources for Non-Profits

The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement offers a table of 39 specific minimizing strategies to address 35 common barriers to family engagement.²¹

The Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet) has developed a toolkit for strengthening family involvement in afterschool programs. The toolkit includes a 49-item checklist of engagement activities, an action plan template, a communication log, and several tips and strategies for developing a family engagement program component.²²

Boys & Girls Clubs of America - Putting Families First: Success Stories from BGCA's Family PLUS Strategy examines five years of family engagement initiatives at 1,537 clubs nationwide. The publication offers a table of engagement activities in five categories: Family Social Events; Academic Support for Children; Outreach, Information, and Communication; Adult Education Courses; and Family Strengthening. It also documents the success of 24 clubs and 40 award-winning model programs.²³

Current and Future Efforts

TPPB recognizes the agencies in and around Trenton which offer family engagement programming, including focused efforts like the Trenton Makes Words! Family Engagement Series, a new collaboration between the New Jersey State Museum, Children's Home Society, and Trenton Community Music School. Likewise, the newly opened Rivera Community Middle School provides a promising bridge between the holistic resources schools can and should be collaborating to provide for children and families alike. The school district's Student, Parent & Community Support program (formerly Family and Community Engagement) is a promising first step toward a robust in-school infrastructure for family support.

The board encourages out-of-school programs for youth to examine and evaluate their current efforts to engage the families of children they serve. At a minimum, programs should commit to regular communication with parents about their child's progress, with emphasis placed on 'hard to reach' parents, and to creating a welcoming environment for families (e.g., inviting parents to participate in their child's structured learning activities). The recommendations outlined above should be considered and implemented based on each program's capacity. The programs and practices highlighted here and online²⁴ can be tailored to meet the unique features of Trenton's many agencies.

Further, the board recommends improved communication between the school district and Trenton's afterschool programs. The school district may consider designating a liaison to share student progress data with afterschool program coordinators, who can broker the relationship between parents and teachers.

²¹ Ohio Department of Education

²² "Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time Programs Toolkit." July 2014. Accessed July 26, 2016. <https://bostnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Handout-B-Engaging-Families-Toolkit.pdf>.

²³ "Putting Families First: Success Stories from BGCA's Family Plus Strategy." Issuu. 2010. Accessed August 01, 2016. https://issuu.com/bgca/docs/family_plus.

²⁴ Supporting documents is available online at <http://tppb.pages.tcnj.edu/2016annualreport/>

STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT

Working group: Employment

Over the past several decades, Trenton has experienced increased unemployment rates and negative employment flows relative to Mercer County. “While the majority of Mercer County municipalities gained jobs, Trenton saw a small decline (2.4%) in available jobs between 2003 and 2011.”²⁵ Additionally, Trenton’s five-year average unemployment is significantly higher than other Mercer County Municipalities, at 15.3%. Ewing Township has the second highest unemployment in the county at over 6% less than Trenton.

Trenton’s lack of private sector jobs plays an important role in the city’s high unemployment. Given the high concentration of skilled public sector work provided by city, county, and state government within Trenton’s borders, the city’s smaller private sector leaves many Trenton residents without work. Additionally, limited private sector infrastructure causes many Trenton residents to commute beyond the city for employment opportunities. “Of the nearly 29,000 members of Trenton’s workforce, only about 20% live and work in the city. The biggest destinations for Trenton residents are Ewing Township (3,300 jobs), Hamilton Township (2,880 jobs) and Lawrence Township (1,257 jobs).” Although Trenton does receive 33,000 daily commuters (10,000 more than outgoing commuters), most jobs are concentrated in the state and public sectors.²⁶

Trenton’s high unemployment and human capital leakage are, in essence, both issues of structural unemployment. Structural unemployment is unemployment caused by supply-side deficit, meaning there are not enough job opportunities in the city for residents to take advantage of. Trenton’s high structural unemployment is traceable to disinvestment during the 1970s, when industrial and manufacturing jobs severely declined in the city. The primary foundations of Trenton’s economy were suddenly removed, causing economic instability. Additionally, a market of low labor mobility was created because of non-transferable employee skills, and an outmoded transportation infrastructure. Trenton’s economy was dependent upon industrial and manufacturing employers, and with their sudden absence, thousands of Trenton residents became unemployed in a low labor-mobility market. Without jobs for thousands of Trenton’s residents, the economy quickly declined. Therefore, addressing structural unemployment in Trenton will repair both unemployment and human capital leakage.

Solutions to Structural Unemployment

Non-economic factors aside, private sector businesses can be developed by fostering an entrepreneur-friendly environment. Most often, “job creation” economic policies target large established businesses, which will relocate their operations from outside or elsewhere in the state to the desired location. However, business relocation oftentimes simply moves jobs, not actually contributing to aggregate economic growth. In fact, “the vast majority of jobs are created by businesses that start up or are already present in a state — not by the relocation or branching into a state by out-of-state firms. ‘Home-grown’ jobs contribute more than 80 percent of total job creation in every state.”

²⁵ *Jobs and Employment*. Rep. Trenton: Trenton250: City Profile Report.

²⁶ *Jobs and Employment*. Rep. Trenton: Trenton250: City Profile Report.

Furthermore, “startups and young, fast-growing firms are the fundamental drivers of job creation when the U.S. economy is performing well.” For example, “during late 1990’s and early 2000’s”, startup and high growth firms “accounted for about 70 percent of all new jobs in the U.S. economy.” Moreover, among small businesses, one-fifth close within five years, and those that do survive often stay small. However, startups serve as valuable “incubators” of rapidly growing firms. Between 1980 and 2010, “Startups on average created roughly 3 million jobs per year. While half of those jobs were gone within five years because the companies that created them did not survive, the other 1.5 million jobs remained. The average surviving firm grew an astonishing 60 percent over the first five years, adding *another* 900,000 jobs to the economy. As a result, at the end of the five-year period a given year’s batch of startups created 2.4 million jobs”. Therefore, one solution to address structural unemployment in Trenton would be to foster a business environment conducive to innovative startup businesses.²⁷

Fostering Entrepreneurship

The conventional top-down model of entrepreneurial growth placed the government as the primary catalyst for development. However, a contemporary model of entrepreneurial growth emphasizes the symbiotic combination of government, venture funds, and incubators. Two policy strategies spur entrepreneurial growth – “business support programs that address the mainstream population or target groups, and structural policies that aim to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation.”

Business-Support Programs

“Business-support programs aim to empower entrepreneurs by fostering their human, social, and financial capital.” Business-support programs are most effective when initiated by a variety of stakeholders, including local government, NGO’s, “private businesses, credit union, banks, and philanthropic foundations and trusts.” In addition to broad business-support programs, targeted programs can benefit specific industry sectors or demographics in order to spur economic development. Trenton, for example, which experiences mass influxes of Hispanic and Latino immigrants, should target immigrants for business-support programs. Already, Trenton’s Hispanic and Latino immigrant populations are rapidly growing. ²⁸From 2000 to 2010, Trenton’s Hispanic population grew 56.7%, “and is expected to grow another 8.3% from 2010 to 2018.” By 2018, Trenton’s Hispanic and Latino population is projected to be about 20% greater than that of Mercer County.

Structural Policies

In addition to business-support services, local structural policies can strengthen an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation. Such examples include:

- Institutionalizing permanent income tax reductions to small businesses with low income and employee qualifications for entry, and as a cap.
- Institutionalizing phase-out property tax reductions.
- “Enhancing labor market flexibility” by developing flexible working agreements, and “facilitating apprenticeships and traineeships.”

Furthermore, Trenton can utilize targeting in order to strategically develop specific industrial sectors. Targeting high-growth and high-income sectors through structural policies

²⁷ Mazerov, Michael, and Michael Leechman. "State Job Creation Strategies Often Off Base." *Cbpp.org*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 3 Feb. 2016. Web.

²⁸ *Jobs and Employment*. Rep. Trenton: Trenton250: City Profile Report. Print.

essentially ensures resource maximization for public and private stakeholders. Additionally, business-support programs can emphasize these specific industries in training programs, in order to encourage the growth of the respective sector.

In order to mitigate employment leakage, Trenton must develop industrial sectors in which it has comparative advantage, relative to Mercer County. Between 2003 and 2012, Trenton experienced higher growth rates in transportation and warehousing, finance and insurance, and professional and technical services relative to Mercer County, with margins of 229.6%, 23.5%, and 19.1%, respectively. Between 2009 and 2012, Trenton experienced higher growth rates in finance and insurance, information, and professional and technical services relative to Mercer County, with margins of 72%, 32%, and 17.5%, respectively. This data does “not yet include any changes to Trenton employment due to the recent expansion of the Trenton-Mercer Airport with the relocation of Frontier Airlines. This expansion supports further opportunities in Transportation and Warehousing in Trenton.”²⁹

Conclusion

In summary, structural unemployment is one of the critical factors to Trenton’s economic development. Unemployment negatively affects Trenton’s economy by reducing consumer spending power, causing skill erosion, and discouraging investors. Additionally, Trenton’s supply-side employment shortage causes employment leakage, in which Trenton residents leave the city to work elsewhere. Employment leakage negatively affects Trenton’s economy by decreasing tax revenue, consumer spending, and private sector business growth.

Structural unemployment can be solved by encouraging private sector business growth and fostering entrepreneurship. Two policy strategies spur entrepreneurial growth: business support programs that address the mainstream population or target groups, and structural policies that aim to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation. Proper partnerships between the public and private sectors can achieve such goals. Strategies for encouraging private sector growth will reduce structural unemployment, and thus mitigate employment leakage, effectively promoting Trenton economic development and social growth.

The entire report, written by Tyler Holzer, is available at <http://tppb.pages.tcnj.edu/2016annualreport/>

²⁹ *Jobs and Employment*. Rep. Trenton: Trenton250: City Profile Report. Print.

MENTORING

Working group: Education and Mentoring

The Education Working group focused its research and recommendations on predictors of juvenile delinquency, types of mentoring relationships, and effective mentoring practices. Over the course of the year, members of the education working group took a close look at what links exist between elementary, middle, and high school education and juvenile delinquency. In addition, the group examined best practices for effective mentoring on a national level and compared these with current practices used by local mentoring programs.

Specifically, the working group wanted to determine the top educational predictors of juvenile crime for elementary, middle, and high school students. He Len Chung, Associate Professor Psychology at TCNJ, along with a research team of students, documented the main predictors of juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior based on current research. The literature identified that while indicators are important and useful, it is important to note that these are not concrete indicators of delinquent or violent behavior later in life. Dr. Chung divided educational predictors of juvenile crime into four groups: general findings, elementary, middle, and high school. Each grouping describes the chief concerns associated with that particular age group along with specific identifiers and definitions.

The groups and indicators are:

- General findings:
 - Absence from school
 - Waning engagement in school
 - Poor or failing grades
 - Leaving school early
 - Association with delinquent peers
 - Involvement in bullying on the giving or receiving end
- Elementary School:
 - Early signs of antisocial behavior (hyperactivity, disruptive behavior, conduct problems)
 - Frequent school transitions
 - Repeating a grade in school
 - Academic failure (especially in Math & English)
- Middle School:
 - Bullying
 - Transition from one to multiple teachers (elementary to middle)
 - High truancy
 - Boys who attend schools with high concentrations of delinquent youth are more likely to fall into delinquent/violent behavior
- High school:
 - Disengagement in school
 - Failing 9th grade or specific courses in 9th grade (Math & English)
 - Frequent school changes
 - Low higher education/career aspirations

A second and more immediately practical research effort examined what one high-impact, low cost, improvement to mentoring programs would be most impactful in preventing juvenile crime. Dr.

Chung's research on national best practice procedures pulled from three separate resource recommendations: The National Mentoring Resource Center: A Program of OJJDP, The Center for the Advancement of Mentoring, and Collaborative Mentoring Webinar Series. From these documents, Dr. Chung put together a general recommendation, stating that every mentoring program make an existing staff member responsible for maintaining familiarity with free program resources to ensure that a mentoring program is following best practices. The three resource recommendations (listed above) provide sound, effective, and low cost mentoring procedures that would prove invaluable to any active mentoring program.

Recommendations

Dr. Chung's research on educational predictors of juvenile delinquency and mentoring practices provide clear guidelines for recommending changes to existing education and mentoring policies and practices.

1. Practice: All mentoring programs in Trenton, NJ, should define and practice mentoring using best practices. In addition, programs should be utilizing all identified practices. These procedures should include:
 - a. Targeted recruitment of mentors
 - b. Customized training prior to matching
 - c. Sound matching between mentor and student
 - d. Case management
 - e. Benchmark evaluations of program
 - f. Evaluations should include assessment in substance use, truancy/grade reports, and parent/peer relationships.
 - g. Consistent contact with student
 - h. Consistent matching has been identified as a mentoring relationship of at least one year, complete with weekly check ins and monthly face to face visits.

2. Policy: All funding and program approval sources for Trenton mentoring programs require implementation of best practice methods, sharing of identified metrics, and holding programs accountable for desired outcomes during formal evaluations. These evaluations should occur on a consistent basis and should be performed by either the funding sources, School superintendent, or the Trenton School Board.

Additional documentation, with references, is available at <http://tppb.pages.tcnj.edu/2016annualreport/>

ON-GOING RESEARCH

Youth Courts

Working Group: Juvenile Justice

In recent years, juvenile justice policies have begun to revert back to youth being perceived as victims, as opposed to minor adult offenders.³⁰ Policies have begun to shift from punitive to more rehabilitative in nature. This shift comes in response to research demonstrating the damage of convicting youth as adults, in addition to concerns about judicial ethics and behavior - with incidents such as the two judges in Luzerne County, PA who were involved with bribery and extortion for committing youth to for-profit facilities.³¹ This change in ethos and policy can be seen in NJ, with a reduction in youth being detained in facilities, and the more recent closing of the Mercer County Youth Detention Facility which had housed several Trenton youth.

Following this same paradigm, several municipalities across the country, including some in New Jersey, have begun utilizing Youth Courts. Presently, Mercer County still sees all juvenile issues in Family Court, which many local residents and community members believe is ill-placed. The Trenton Prevention Policy Board is currently researching the possibility of implementing a Youth Court system or a School-Based Youth Court for Mercer County. Youth Courts have been found to provide more effective sanctioning for youth than decisions made by adults. Additional benefits are also being observed for the volunteers of youth court. In a 2009 pilot assessment of volunteers in a Chester, Pennsylvania's urban school-based youth court, researchers found youth court leaders developed "self-confidence and maturity while learning the conflict resolution skills necessary for rendering dispositions and conducting trials."³² Hence, the benefits of youth courts are multi-faceted, reaching all youth involved in the process. As a result, the Trenton Prevention Policy Board will spend the next few months researching the various models of youth court - juvenile justice systems-based, school-based, and community-based (operated by non-profit organizations) to determine and recommend the one that the working group believes will best fit Trenton and Mercer County as a whole.

Alternative Schools and Positive Behavior Support

Working group: Education

Much of the current discipline policy in Trenton Public Schools revolves around removing students from the classroom. Due to the high volume of students with behavior issues, students who are disruptive are sent out of the classroom to a disciplinarian, and students with significant behavior issues are sent out of district to Alternative Schools. These practices are exclusionary, reduce actual time spent learning in the classroom, and are expensive for the district.

TPPB has begun initial research into a School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) plan that could benefit Trenton schools by reducing the number of disciplinary and behavior issues within the schools by fostering a positive learning environment. A SWPBS plan could also be more cost-

³⁰ Benekos, P., Merlo, A., & Puzanchera, C. (2013). In Defence of children and Youth: Reforming Juvenile Justice Policies. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 15, (2). 125-143.

³¹ Hurdle, J., & Tavernise, S. (2001, February, 9). Former judge is on trial in 'cash for kids' scheme. *New York Times*, p. A20.

³² Hirschinger-Blank, Nancy H., Simons, L., Volz, G.L., Thompson, R., Finely, L. & Cleary, J. (2009). A Pilot Assessment of a School-Based Youth Court in a Resource-Poor African American Urban School District: Lessons Learned from Youth Court Volunteers. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 60(2). 31-47.

effective by lowering the number of students sent out of the district to receive special services. Additional examination of this possibility, and any anticipated obstacles to implementation, may be considered in the coming year.