The State of Community Schools in New Jersey

A GROWING EDUCATION AND HEALTH REFORM STRATEGY

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Prepared by: Reuben Jacobson, Ph.D., Deputy Director

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Thanks to Jennifer Masutani of the Coalition for Community Schools for her support in data collection and many other aspects of this white paper.
Background on the Request

In spring 2015, New Jersey Health Initiatives (NJHI) asked the Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership to conduct a scan of community schools, with a specific focus on the ways in which community schools can support the growing Culture of Health movement. The purpose of this white paper is to describe the state of community schools in New Jersey. This report is based on interviews and focus groups with a variety of New Jersey stakeholders and the knowledge and experience of the Coalition for Community Schools.

We begin by discussing the key characteristics of community schools with a special emphasis on the role of health. We then describe the state of the field from a national perspective, and conclude with a description of some of the communities in New Jersey that are implementing or pursuing community schools, as well as those places with potential for development.

The Community Schools Movement

The community schools movement is an education reform strategy that is experiencing a resurgence as more leaders look for comprehensive approaches to address our most challenging education and social problems. It is rooted in the work of Jane Adams and John Dewey who believed that schools could be places that served the needs of students and families, and also be rich academic environments that expanded a student’s learning and imagination. Over time, many of the community school ideas became incorporated into other education and community change efforts including afterschool programming, family engagement, and community-based learning partnerships.

Contemporary community schools experienced a resurgence in the 1990s. Their visibility was lifted when Joy Dryfoos wrote a book in 1994 titled, Full Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families. In her book, Dryfoos shared the concept that schools could be full service centers that addressed many of the developmental challenges facing our students. Many cities, organizations, and government agencies began to create their own local versions of community schools, including the Children’s Aid Society and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships.

A small collection of those organizations came together and created the Coalition for Community Schools (“the Coalition”) in 1997 to re-energize this revolutionary idea. Now, the Coalition counts over 214 partners and community schools are viewed as an innovative reform strategy on the rise once again. We now turn to the question, what are community schools and how do they work?

Key Characteristics of Community Schools

Community schools share common characteristics that make them unique in the education reform and neighborhood development spaces. Using schools as hubs, community schools bring educators, families, and community partners together to identify local assets and needs and organize a range of opportunities, supports, and services to help young people thrive, and strengthen families and communities. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—during and beyond school hours, including evenings and weekends. The community school is a results-focused strategy; community school leaders and practitioners believe that attending to the diverse needs of the whole-child and creating a safe and enriching school climate will lead to better results. Please see the community schools logic model, Figure 1, on the next page for an illustration of the ways community schools achieve results.
Figure 1. Community School Logic Model

**Inputs**
- Supportive principal
- Skilled teachers, instructional support personnel & para-professionals
- Community school coordinator
- Sufficient resources (funding, facilities)
- Results-focused partners
- Site leadership team
- Support from families and the community
- Leadership & initiative level infrastructure

**What Can Happen at a Community School?**
- Family engagement
- Social & emotional learning
- Early childhood development
- Expanded learning opportunities/Youth development
- Health, mental health, & social services/Family support
- Joint professional development
- Linkages between school and partners

**Outputs**
- High quality, engaging, instructional programs
- Supported families
- Comprehensive learning supports
- Integrated academic enrichment and social services to support children's intellectual, social, emotional and physical development
- Partner integration into school day

**Short-term Results**
- Students are actively involved in learning and their community
- Students attend school consistently
- Schools are engaged with families and communities
- Children are ready to enter school
- Families are increasingly involved in their children's education

**Long-term Results**
- Students succeed academically
- Students are socially & emotionally competent
- Students are healthy
- Students live & learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment
- Communities are desirable places to live

**Impact**
Students graduate ready for college, careers, and citizenship.
Community schools meet the specific needs of students and their families and create a school culture and set of partnerships that fosters student learning and development. Together, these stakeholders create the conditions for learning. These include:

- **Early childhood development** is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.
- The school has a **core instructional program** with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are **motivated and engaged in learning** -- both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- The basic **physical, mental and emotional health needs** of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- There is mutual respect and effective **collaboration among parents, families and school staff**.
- Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a **school climate** that is safe, supportive, and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.

While obvious to nearly all educators, the conditions for learning aren’t always understood or considered by many in the education reform space who believe in silver-bullet, top-down approaches. However, when the conditions for learning are in place, students are able to develop their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, civic, and ethical competencies and the capacity to thrive in college, career, and life and as participants in our democracy.

To create these conditions, community schools organize a wide variety of programs and supports through their results-focused partnership strategy that are responsive to the unique needs of that particular community and are aligned with the results the school seeks to achieve. These activities can be grouped into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential health, social supports, and other services</td>
<td>• Health &amp; mental health services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dental &amp; vision</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Early chronic absence interventions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mentoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Peer conflict resolution</td>
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<td>Expanded learning opportunities that are motivating and engaging during the</td>
<td>• Afterschool learning opportunities</td>
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<td>school day, after school, and in the summer</td>
<td>• Summer learning opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community-based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning partnerships during the school day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and community engagement where these stakeholders are treated as</td>
<td>• Adult education</td>
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<td>assets in the lives of their children and youth</td>
<td>• Home literacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teacher home visiting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Academic parent teacher teams</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Education organizing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Parent leadership</td>
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In thriving community schools, a site based collaborative leadership group guides the strategy and includes the principal, teachers, youth, coordinator, families, key partners, and residents. The key ingredients for a strong community school include:

- **Principals**, who know their community, see achieving equity as fundamental to their work, and make their building a place where educators, partners, and the public feel comfortable working together.

- **Skilled teachers and instructional support personnel**, who have high expectations for their students, enjoy collaborative relationships with families and community partners, and offer students robust learning experiences that draw on community resources and expertise.

- **Community partners** with the expertise to help achieve the goals of the community school and who are well integrated into the life of the school.

- A **community schools coordinator**, who serves as a bridge between school and community, aligns the work of educators and community partners toward a common set of results, and supports a site leadership team.

- A **site leadership team** that gives families, young people, and residents a voice and involves them, along with educators and community partners in the planning, implementation, and oversight of the community school.

- A **community needs and assets assessment** that identifies the needs of students, schools, families, and the community as well as the assets of individuals, formal institutions and agencies, and informal organizations in the community that can be mobilized to meet these needs.

- A **focus on results and accountability** that uses data to define specific indicators which the community school seeks to improve, and the capacity to collect and analyze data to measure progress.


**Community Schools around the Country**

There are a variety of approaches to community schools but they are united by common principles and practices. It is an inclusive movement where all schools operating under the community school principles may find a home. Any school can be a community school. This includes regular public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, parochial schools, and private schools. However, most existing community schools are public schools. Community school initiatives (places that have developed a system of multiple community schools) also vary in scope and scale. Some initiatives focus on a small number of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern), while many communities have implemented community schools across a county, multiple school districts, within an entire school district, in one neighborhood, or across a feeder pattern.

Each of the places that have created community schools have begun with a collection of leaders who are working toward a collective vision for improving education, health, safety, and other relevant outcomes.

The Coalition counts nearly 150 places that are implementing community schools at scale and estimate that there are more than 5,000 community schools across the country. The box below provides examples of some community school initiatives.
Based on our analyses, there has been a tremendous growth in the number of places implementing community schools at scale. The number of places has tripled since 2007. An increasing number of schools, districts, cities, and local non-profits are recognizing the effectiveness of the community school strategy in helping them achieve their goals. One of the most recent and visible leaders to embrace community schools is New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. The mayor has made community schools central to his education reform approach. He has quickly created 130 new community schools across the city. Other leaders, like Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, are calling for the development of community schools in their communities.

In addition, community schools have received attention from federal and state officials. The U.S. Department of Education implements a Full Service Community Schools grant program appropriated by Congress. Thus far they have awarded a total of $30 million to 32 communities for five-year grants.

An increasing number of states are showing interest in the community schools approach. The 2015 legislative session saw the most bills ever introduced (12) from nine states and Washington D.C. Of those states, Maine and Minnesota both passed bills to authorize pilot programs to implement community schools. Likewise, the interest from state superintendents for community schools continues to grow, including Illinois, Indiana, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

How are Community Schools Funded?
There is no one right way to fund community schools. Most sustained community schools have diversified by blending funding streams. The financing logic behind a community school is that there are assets and resources in the community – institutional and individual – that can be most effectively provided in the school setting. To mobilize those assets a community school coordinator is needed at the school level and an intermediary organization (e.g., school district, United Way) at the systems level.

Community schools may be funded by federal, state, county, city, private, or other funding sources. For example, Multnomah County, OR funds the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods community school initiative and New York City funds their community schools through repurposed state dollars and city funds. Community schools can also be funded by school districts through general purpose dollars or Title I funds, and by United Ways, community foundations, private foundations, and corporations. Often these funds cover the costs of coordination at the school site.
Community schools benefit from redirected programs managed by community partners and financed with funds partners receive. For example, many community partners – public and private – redirect their services into the school, and align their work more directly with the goal of helping young people learn and thrive.

A diversified financing and resource development plan helps ensure that community schools are sustained when one funding stream ends or program changes. In addition, a diversified financing strategy assures that more institutions participate and are invested in community school implementation.

Based on a study that the Coalition conducted in 2010, we found that only seven percent of a community school’s costs go toward coordination, the rest are spent on learning, supports, services, and other opportunities. Another study found that community schools are a good social return on investment (SROI): every dollar spent returns between $10.30 and $14.80 of social value.

What Impact do Community Schools Have?
Community schools are a results-based strategy. They represent what research says are the essential elements of a successful school. According to Anthony Bryk and his colleagues, there are five essential supports for successful schools: school leadership, professional capacity, parent-community ties, student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance. Community schools incorporate each of these elements through their partnership approach.

Community schools have demonstrated progress in improving academic and other school-based outcomes, as explained in a 2014 paper by the non-profit, nonpartisan research center, ChildTrends. In their paper, Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers, researchers synthesized rigorous evaluations of community school initiatives, particularly integrated student supports, and concluded that there is growing evidence that community schools reduce grade retention and dropout rates, while increasing attendance, math achievement, and grade point average.

Additional research from local communities demonstrates impact:

- During the 2012-13 school year, Cincinnati’s Community Learning Centers and its 445 community partners served 17,898 students. Tutoring, mentoring, and other supports have made a difference. Student receiving mentoring or family engagement supports increased their state reading score by 2.8 points from 2012 to 2013. Students receiving tutoring or youth leadership supports increased their state math score by 2.4 points over that time.

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1 Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success [http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf)
• Evaluators of Baltimore’s community school initiative found that experienced community schools had significantly better attendance and lower chronic absence than non-community schools.\(^6\)

• In an evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI), TACSI students significantly outperformed comparison students in math by 32 points and in reading by 19 points in schools where the community school model was implemented most successfully. Poor students in high implementing TACSI schools performed on par with non-free/reduced lunch students and significantly higher than free/reduced lunch students in the comparison schools.\(^7\)

While additional research is always needed, studies point to a positive impact of community schools along multiple measures. Community schools could use additional support for evaluations as they receive increasing attention from practitioners and policymakers.\(^8\) More research is needed on what the essential ingredients are in community schools, their impact on a range of outcomes, and how they are implemented at scale. For more information about the impact of community schools, visit http://www.communityschools.org/results/.

A Special and Ongoing Connection with Health

Almost since their inception, community schools have had a connection to the health field. Community school leaders envision the school as a place where the health and education systems could collaborate and where students and families could receive the health and other services they require to be successful.

The evidence on the impact of health on education is clear. Charles Basch made the connection explicit in his seminal 2010 report, *Healthier Students are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap*. In that report Basch reviews the literature and finds clear connections between a students’ health, including vision, asthma, teen pregnancy, physical activity, and hunger and their academic success. When students receive the supports they need, they have the opportunity to succeed.

Health is a common feature of many community schools.\(^9\) Oakland and Cincinnati offer good examples:

**Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)** has become a full-service community school district that has made health a core element of its systemic approach. Currently, 24 of the district’s 86 schools are fully implementing the community school strategy and all are progressing toward full implantation. At the

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\(^8\) Community schools have not received the same level of funding and attention as other reforms such as charter schools have. Consequently, fewer resources have been spent on evaluation of this strategy. Still, the existing evidence on community schools is largely positive.

systems level, a community school leadership council guides the initiative. This group is comprised of key representatives from the district, health agencies, and community partners. One partner, the Alameda Health Agency (ACHCSA) supports a good portion of the health services in community schools with more than $25,000,000 in annual contributions to school health. This funding includes:

- 16 school health centers,
- site and district level behavioral health clinicians in 65 schools,
- 16 public health programs,
- three youth and family opportunity hubs,
- many youth development activities,
- the Central Family Resource Center as part of a district-wide eligibility and enrollment initiative, and
- special equity-focused projects, primarily supporting boys and young men of color.

OUUSD and its health partner in the county are creating a Culture of Health in and around their community schools.

**Cincinnati’s Community Learning Centers (CLCs)** have had a significant impact on the Culture of Health in the city’s neighborhoods.\(^{10}\) The initiative has organized the city’s health and mental health providers into two networks that are able to collaborate in meeting individual school’s needs. The health network called “Growing Well,” is led by staff from the Cincinnati Department of Public Health. This network has removed the need for health providers to compete over access to schools and has streamlined the process for schools to identify the providers and partners that best meet their needs. The network is also able to blend funding streams and reduce inefficiencies. To date, Growing Well has supported 21 school-based health clinics, dental clinics, and a vision center. Another network, MindPeace, focuses on mental health services in the CLCs. One school, the Oyler Community Learning Center, provides a wide array of services to students and families including mental health, health, dental, and vision.\(^{11}\) The vision center serves students from other public and private schools and the health clinic is available to neighborhood families and residents.

These are just some of the examples of the ways in which community schools have responded to local needs to support healthier communities. Combined with other opportunities and services such as afterschool, early childhood connections, youth engagement, and an enriching curriculum, community schools create communities where all children thrive.

In the next section we explore the state of community schools in New Jersey.

**New Jersey Community Schools Scan**
Community schools can be found in nearly every state, and New Jersey is no different. However, little has been written about community schools in the Garden State.

To learn more about the current state of community schools, and the potential for growth, we conducted a community scan during the summer of 2015. Our focus was to interview various

\(^{10}\) Cincinnati calls their community schools “community learning centers.”

stakeholders about their involvement or familiarity with community schools. We asked about the perceived value of community schools as a strategy that warrants consideration for implementation. The specific scanning strategies we used follow.

First, we built a comprehensive list of the places working on community schools and related strategies to identify our interview pool. We reviewed our existing databases, and talked with partners about what community school activity already existed to develop a list of potential interviewees. Based on our existing relationships, we knew of some existing sites. For example, Paterson is a member of the Coalition’s Community Schools Leadership Network (CSLN), a network of the leaders from close to 100 community school initiatives. The National Center for Community Schools at the Children’s Aid Society has provided technical assistance to some New Jersey community schools and initiatives, and was particularly helpful at providing places and contacts.

We also looked for related education and place-based strategies that may employ a community school or related approach in their school-based work. Examples of these strategies include Promise Neighborhoods, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, cradle-to-career initiatives, and others.

We then searched the web for strategies that appeared to have a community school connection and added them to our potential participant list.

Second, we reached out to state contacts, especially those state affiliates of our national partner organizations (e.g. the American Federation of Teachers), to get a better sense of the state context. New Jersey is a complex state with large urban areas and significant state control over education in many of these cities. Understanding the state context was very important to ascertaining the obstacles and opportunities for community schools.

Finally, we focused on the places that NJHI had recently awarded Building a Culture of Health in New Jersey – Communities Moving to Action grants. These multi-sector coalitions seek to address the many factors that influence health through systems-level change. It was important for us to understand what level of school engagement may already exist among these developing coalitions and what they knew about community schools.

After collecting our lists of places and people, we scheduled interviews and focus groups by phone or in person. We organized our sample by region of the state (south, central, and north). We sent requests for phone or in-person interviews to the sample and received responses from approximately 65%. We scheduled phone interviews and focus groups as well as a set of in-person focus groups that took place between July and September 2015. Our data collection included a visit to New Jersey for three focus groups that represented jurisdictions primarily around the north-central part of the state.

In summary, our data collection included nine individual interviews and five focus groups for a total of 27 participants (see Appendix for a list of participants). It’s difficult to capture the exact jurisdictions that were represented in our sample because some of the interviewees represented larger jurisdictions (e.g., counties or multiple counties in the case of United Ways and some NJHI grantees). However, some of the jurisdictions include:
The interviewees represented multiple sectors and organizations including school district officials, funders, community members, health care providers, child advocates, community agency partners, and more.

Characterizing the State of Community Schools in New Jersey

New Jersey’s government agencies, local community based organizations, health care providers, institutions of higher education, and others vary in their connections to schools and in how partnerships have developed and been sustained. One recognizable program that bridges the divide is the state-funded New Jersey School Based Youth Services Program; created in 1998 it provides health and other services at or near school sites. The Coalition featured this program in our 2003 report, Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools.

Less is known about the current state of other school-community partnerships, especially the community school strategy. Based on data collection, we have organized community schools efforts in New Jersey into four categories (see Table 1 below): existing and growing; pursuing; potential; and places that don’t know enough about community schools.

Table 1. Community School Sites in New Jersey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Year Started</th>
<th>Number of Community Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing and growing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>In development</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Places with potential</td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., Perth Amboy, North Bergen, and Garfield)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places where community schools are unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Existing and growing

The initiatives described below have been developing their community schools for between one and seven years. They are characterized by years of stakeholder education, capacity building, and nurturing relationships followed by implementation, improvement, and in some cases expansion. We begin with
the closely related cases of Paterson and Orange and then discuss the work in Trenton and Camden. Paterson and Orange started from a similar place, with significant support from an external source, the JP Morgan Chase Foundation. Trenton exemplifies a community where a local organization identified and worked toward the community school strategy. Camden provides an example of a university assisted community school model and the potential for greater expansion of existing district family engagement work. Each of these places represents community schools on the rise and provide models for other New Jersey communities.

**Orange**

The community school story in Orange started in 2008 when Orange and Paterson were selected by the JP Morgan Chase Foundation to implement the community school strategy. A strong supporter of community schools, the foundation had been working with the National Center for Community Schools at the Children’s Aid Society in a number of places around the country and wanted to go deeper in two communities.

Orange is a city of 32,868 in Northern New Jersey with many challenges. Our interviewees characterized Orange as a small but siloed post-industrial town. The largest employers are the school district and the City. Orange does not receive a lot of funding compared to major urban areas where education reforms abound, lacks institutional capacity, and loses much of its talent to other jurisdictions. Despite these obstacles, Orange was a place where a systemic community school approach could succeed, in part because of its small size and the recognized need for a comprehensive solution to local challenges.

The foundation began having conversations with district leaders and together they decided to start one community school. Orange launched its first community school at Rosa Parks Elementary School in 2009 and the initiative funded the Orange YWCA to serve as the school’s lead agency (in some community school models this is the organization responsible for hiring a community school coordinator and identifying and aligning partners and supports).

While the community school started well, interviewees identified a number of challenges that are typical when implementing a new strategy. For example, one subject acknowledged that they did not sufficiently engage the community, including residents and many of other local organizations, in this decision. Consequently, they had to spend more time later explaining the community school strategy and securing buy-in. Another interviewee indicated that this made the process take twice as long to get community members and organizations to start thinking in a collaborative community schools way.

Other implementation challenges included insufficient understanding of the community school strategy, institutional capacity to deliver on the promises of community schools, and variability in the strength of the principals at the school (the school was a combination of two smaller schools). Also, organizations did not have the capacity or the relationships to collaborate and support a successful community school strategy. According to one source, Orange had a “small and fragile non-profit sector.” The foundation tried to address the institutional capacity obstacle by funding multiple community based organizations (CBOs) to develop capacity. This funding became a driver of collaboration in a city unaccustomed to significant investments in their CBO sector.

Despite these challenges, Rosa Parks Community School continued to develop partnerships with area nonprofits and service providers. A key community partner was Montclair State University (MSU). As a result of their work in Rosa Parks, the JP Morgan Chase Foundation funded MSU in 2013 to be the new
lead partner at the school. Programs at the community school included a health fair, afterschool and mentoring support from AmeriCorps volunteers, MSU students, and more. As a result of their work, MSU sought to deepen their involvement in the community school strategy and received support and guidance from the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, a leader of the University-Assisted Community School approach. Foundation funding also supported MSU to be the lead partner at a second elementary school, Oakwood Avenue School.

By 2013, more people were familiar with community schools from the experience at Rosa Parks Community School where many of the initial implementation challenges had been readily addressed. According to one source, members of the community were “connecting the dots and getting the arrows aligned.” The city leaders, institutions, and community members had begun to develop a shared understanding of community schools. Now, the two schools learn from one another and are continuously improving their practice while developing and sustaining trust with the community by delivering on their promises.

The school superintendent continues to be a strong supporter of community schools and wants all district schools to become community schools by 2021. In fact, that goal is part of the district’s strategic plan. This is significant because in Orange, the school district holds most of the financial resources and is one of the most important city institutions. The district now hires the community school coordinators and works with partner organizations in the two schools to align programs. The district also hired the former JP Morgan program officer to lead its community school initiative. Community schools have become a known element in the district and leaders and partners have been successful at sustaining funding through a number of grants. Montclair State University, in partnership with the school district, also received a U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools grant in 2014 for $2.5 million over five years.

Creating a Culture of Health is a core element of the Orange community schools approach. For example, the first school developed an on-site health clinic and there are plans to create another clinic at the second community school.

Montclair State University is also a participant in the NJHI Communities Moving to Action grant to create a community coalition that will work across sectors towards better health services and outcomes in the community. The NJHI-funded coalition views schools, specifically community schools, as the key to creating healthier communities.

*Paterson*

Paterson began in a similar place as Orange, with support from the JP Morgan Foundation in 2010. The foundation provided funds to the Paterson Education Fund (PEF) to co-lead the Full Service Community Schools initiative together with the district. They got started with School 5 and began to engage the community. According to one interviewee, “The support of the superintendent and the support of a solid group of community members really opened the door for success.”

At the systems level, leaders created a Steering Committee representing different stakeholder groups such as the district, business, CBOs, faith-based groups, the mayor’s office, and the schools’ lead

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partners. They developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for partner agencies and created other infrastructure to support an initiative that wanted to move to scale. The district established and staffed a district office for community schools. The National Center for Community Schools at the Children’s Aid Society helped leaders in all of these activities and continues to support the initiative.

When it came time to scale up the strategy, initiative leaders initially selected those schools who applied and demonstrated readiness to become community schools. As time went by, and the reputation and success from the first community schools grew, community members asked the initiative to create community schools in those schools demonstrating the greatest challenges, including a school deemed the lowest performing in the state.

The initiative had community and district buy-in, but limited initial funding. That changed when Paterson won a 2010 U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools grant. This support enabled Paterson to open the additional community schools. The district was required to match the federal funding for five years. Not only did they meet the match, but there were times when they went beyond it given their commitment to the strategy. Paterson now boasts five community schools and their most successful site hosts visitors from around the state who are interested in the strategy. There are more than 40 partner organizations and each school has a lead partner.

However, like many New Jersey school districts, budgets are shrinking and the district has been cutting its funding for community schools, even as they help to lead the initiative. Another funding obstacle is that the district is in state receivership and according to interviews, the state doesn’t understand the community school strategy and thus restricts what funds can be used for its growth and development.\(^{13}\) Other challenges interviewees identified included limited local non-profit capacity, insufficient understanding by today’s elected and appointed officials about the school strategy, and maintaining the cross-sector Steering Committee.

Initiative leaders are addressing these challenges and are meeting now to breathe new life into the initiative and to develop a strategy to move forward successfully. In 2015, the school district was awarded its second U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools grant. The district is expected to sustain their schools and grow the strategy over five years thanks to the $2,500,000 grant.

**Trenton**

Trenton’s community schools are poised for growth. Mercer Street Friends, a local human service agency that has been working in the community for 57 years, started Trenton’s community schools. The organization has recently received a U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools grant for $2.2 million over 5 years. Mercer Street Friends has regularly been a source of services and supports for Mercer County and have created trust by demonstrating their commitment and reliability.

Over the past three years, Mercer Street Friends has been laying the groundwork for launching a community school strategy in Trenton. They have been educating organizations and key individuals (including the former superintendent and school board) about community schools and their vision for Trenton. Mercer Street Friends understands that relationships and trust are essential to the success of any initiative. They have been using an educational approach to build a shared understanding in the

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\(^{13}\) This view about the state represents the perspective of local participants who had dealings with state officials.
community. Last year they held a mini-conference for local organizations and they regularly meet with others to talk about community schools.

Key among these efforts at relationship building were working with the superintendent, the district office of Family and Community Engagement, and the school board. These school personnel bought into the community school strategy and worked with the organization to create an MOU and share data. The school district selected the first community school, Rivera Middle School. Mercer Street Friends wanted to demonstrate their commitment to partnership by letting the district pick the school; one with the greatest need and where there was a significant opportunity for success. Thanks to these relationships, the district committed to keeping the school principal in place. They understood the success of an initiative likely would depend in part on keeping a strong school leader in place.

Over the past year, Mercer Street Friends has been working in the school, prior to it “officially” becoming a community school. They have been building trust by getting to know the families and the community and by developing their implementation plan together. Mercer Street Friends hired the National Center for Community Schools at the Children’s Aid Society to provide technical assistance. In addition, they collected data and conducted a needs assessment. The community got to know the organization in multiple ways, including organizing a mobile vision van where students, families, and neighborhood residents received services and share their needs and stories. Mercer Street Friends officially launched their community school at Rivera Middle School at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year.

Mercer Street Friends plans to take their community schools efforts to scale across all Trenton schools. They understand that other CBOs will need to become more involved in order to meet the needs of a fully scaled strategy. They want to be a community school leader, in partnership with the school district and other organizations, to create community change. The organization recognizes that they cannot scale up the strategy on their own. In an interview, staff noted that they need to learn even more about the community school strategy, continue relationship building, and secure additional funding sources and capacity building expertise. Trenton has a number of organizations working to serve students and families, however, it was clear from our interviews that there is a need for creating more institutional capacity so that the right organizations can meet the needs of neighborhoods for which they may be best suited. This need echoed the developmental story we heard from Orange and Paterson.

In Trenton, school district and community leadership is committed to the community school strategy, even during times of leadership transition. While the superintendent has recently resigned, Mercer Street Friends has stayed in contact with the Board of Education, whose president supports community schools, and the school district’s community engagement office. They will need to reach out to the new superintendent once that person is selected. Trenton’s leaders are moving slowly and deliberately to create a sustainable strategy. While local funding has yet to significantly support the work, leaders across sectors are supportive and may be willing to identify funding based on the success of the work at the Rivera community school.

Camden
Camden has a small University Assisted Community School model and may be ready for developing a broader community schools initiative. While it also belongs in the “places with potential” category, we discuss it here because of the existing community schools work with the local university.
Rutgers University - Camden became involved when they asked a previous superintendent to have the resource-rich university do more than just extended learning time activities. They began to explore the University Assisted Community School model (UACS) which focuses on university-school partnerships.\(^\text{14}\)

The UACS model is a type of community school that features engagement of university students and faculty who provide supports and learning opportunities at the school site. The university decided to implement the UACS model in three Camden City School District schools. They work with family engagement coordinators and the principals at each school to implement extended school time activities and a full service program that coordinates activities, programs, and partners in the school, including health services.

In addition to Rutgers University’s work with UACS in Camden, there are other opportunities for community schools to grow. Interviewees recognized the need for growing the strategy, and the potential to better align existing partnership and family and community engagement efforts. According to one interviewee, “Camden is resource rich and coordination poor.” That is to say that there are many organizations including religious entities, medical institutions, non-profits, and universities that are doing good work, sometimes with schools, but that there isn’t effective coordination.

The school district has some programs in place that could play a role in future community schools efforts. A Chief Family and Community Engagement Officer in the Camden City School District (CCSD) is responsible for working with families and partners, including community organizations, universities, business to support student success. CCSD has coordinators in schools that directly work with families. One interviewee observed that schools are open to partnerships, but that partnerships vary by school and aren’t very strategic. Health partnerships in particular vary from site to site and are not distributed equitably. These health partnerships tend to focus on nutrition, food insecurity, physical education, and general health education. According to one interviewee, if Camden school principals wanted to pursue the community school strategy, and possibly turn their family engagement specialists into community school coordinators, the superintendent would be open to the conversation.

Camden City School District also operates School Based Youth Services in 11 sites that offer a variety of services including wrap around services (health, mental health), expanded learning opportunity programs, family involvement, and more. Funding for this program comes from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, Division of Family and Community Partnership and a U.S. Department of Education grant.

Interviewees believed that there is potential for community school growth and expansion in Camden but also identified a number of challenges facing implementation of a community school strategy including public understanding of the strategy, a complicated and difficult bureaucracy, school-site administrator buy-in, and financial resources.

**Pursuing**

The schools and systems implementing community schools in New Jersey are still relatively young. They are stabilizing but have a great deal of work ahead of them. One city we have identified as demonstrating strong interest in pursuing the community schools strategy is the City of Newark.

\(^\text{14}\) The UACS model is best exemplified by the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania.
Newark

There is great enthusiasm from the community and elected leaders for the community school strategy in Newark. As Dale Russakoff made clear in her recently released book, The Prize: Who’s in Charge of America’s Schools?, the city has experienced years of heavily funded education reform that neglected community input and which focused on a narrow set of education reforms. Russakoff writes that new mayor Ras Baraka is enthusiastically supporting community schools, something our interviews confirmed.\(^{15}\)

Newark remains in state receivership and interviewees report that the community has felt disenfranchised for years. This is a challenging context for locally-driven education reform. However, the state-appointed superintendent is beginning to prepare the city for local control. Consequently, the school system is now planning for local ownership that was hard fought by community members and local elected officials.

There is a history of community schools work in Newark on which to build. In 2010, local leaders, in partnership with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University (NYU), started a community school strategy called “Global Village” in seven school sites in Newark’s Central Ward. The schools were on a continuum of community schools implementation. However, the initiative faced obstacles including varied buy-in from selected schools (they had been assigned by the superintendent to become community schools, rather than selecting that option), funding, poor partnership participation, and inundation of other education reforms (such as Renew Schools, a school turnaround strategy created by Superintendent Cami Anderson who replaced principals and half the staff at selected schools, and the One Newark open enrollment plan). Still, there was demonstrated success at Central High School, whose principal was current Mayor Ras Baraka. According to former NYU Professor Pedro Noguera:

> Our greatest progress was achieved at Central High School, which in the spring of 2010 had been designated chronically under-performing by the State of New Jersey and received a School Improvement Grant to support turnaround efforts (SIG). After its first year, student test scores in language arts increased 32.5% and 25% in math. State officials told us that the progress being achieved at the school under the leadership of Ras Baraka the principal, was unmatched by any other turn around school in the state.\(^{16}\)

Despite success at Central High School, Global Village ended in 2012 because of lack of support from the new superintendent and city leaders, and a focus on alternative reform strategies.\(^{17}\)

After years of top-down education reform strategies the community has mobilized for better schools. In January 2014 community members, unions, parent groups, former educators, the Newark NAACP and others formed the Alliance for Newark Public Schools and advocated for district-wide implementation of community schools in a May 2014 report, Envisioning the Future of Newark Public Schools: Excellent Neighborhood Public Schools for All.\(^{18}\) The Alliance also held community meetings to raise awareness

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\(^{15}\) To learn more about the development of community schools in Newark and the mayor’s support, watch this video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6iJ628-CVE&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6iJ628-CVE&feature=youtu.be)


about the community school strategy. The community was also pushing back on education reforms like Renew Schools and the One Newark plan.

The community’s efforts moved forward when Ras Baraka was elected mayor in 2014 on a platform that included community schools and collaboration across city agencies and local service providing groups. At the same time, community organizers and unions were trying to educate the public and policymakers about the community school strategy. The tone and context in Newark has changed. Now, according to one interviewee, there is political will to support community schools among the mayor and city council, as well as support from state legislators.

The mayor is currently engaged in an intensive process to implement a community school initiative, in partnership with the Alliance and others in the community. In March 2015 the mayor called for the creation of five community schools, one in each ward.

Even as the mayor calls for starting community schools, the education of community groups, funders, and others continues. One example we heard was the mayor’s attempts to reach out to hospitals in order to get their support for the health services that will need to be part of future community schools.

The Mayor’s Office is now developing an implementation plan including a plan for funding, capacity building, and an application process for schools. The Mayor is working with new Superintendent Christopher Cerf and several community coalitions and other interested stakeholders (e.g., the local teachers union) to select schools and develop an implementation plan. According to one interviewee, under the best case scenario every school in Newark will be a community school within the next five years. Despite the opportunity, clear political and financial hurdles remain. The politics in Newark are still tenuous and the state remains in control of the school system. Financially, the city and the school system continue to face deficits and limited funding. While the mayor is clearly prioritizing community schools, community members, organizers, and funders expressed caution about moving too quickly without the proper planning for success. These groups are now meeting together to work toward a sustainable and effective community schools effort.

Places with potential
The examples above illustrate the places that we learned were either implementing or planning to implement community schools. It’s likely that there are other individual community schools in cities or rural areas that aren’t affiliated with a local initiative that we knew about. In this section, we briefly discuss the places that interviewees indicated may be ripe for the community school approach because they are implementing similar strategies and have expressed a desire for greater and more strategic school-community partnerships.

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19 Mayor Baraka referred to this as the Global Village Compact (http://rasjbaraka.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/BARAKA-EDUCATION-PLAN-for-web.pdf)


Many of those we spoke with work primarily in the health field and are connected to NJHI through their *Building a Culture of Health in New Jersey – Communities Moving to Action* grants. These included organizations working in approximately eight counties. Their primary work with schools involved providing educational opportunities for school nurses and other health staff, serving as resources and liaisons to the health community, and supporting school wellness plans. Some health organizations only support schools when requested by the school. Direct service delivery wasn’t typically a regular part of their work, as it may be in a community school.

In general, interviewees observed that partnerships with the school varied in their intensity and longevity. Some of these coalitions are also organizing to collaborate on getting schools the resources they need.

Importantly, interviewees also noted some challenges in working with schools such as infrequent contact, access to the schools when superintendents, principals, and teachers view partnerships as an unnecessary burden to their core mission, schools only being open during typical school hours, and transportation. Community schools are designed to address these challenges. When interviewees learned more about the strategy during our interviews, many saw its potential.

Overall, interviewees stated that the need and usefulness of health and school partnerships spans geographic location. While many of the needs are greatest in poor urban and rural communities, many interviewees noted that even in the communities within their more well-off counties, there are pockets of need that are often disguised. A few communities are using data to identify those students and families that need additional support. In rural communities, transportation, especially for afterschool programs, was the most common challenge interviewees expected for a school partnership strategy. However, this challenge may mean that having access to more health and other resources on the school site would be a productive strategy in rural communities. Some specific places interviewees suggested as holding potential include Perth Amboy, North Bergen, and Garfield. These places were recommended because they have an existing state institution that supports them, such as a union, and knows their situation and whether the community school approach may address local needs.

**Places where community schools are unknown**

Our final category includes those places that do not know about community schools yet. Based on our conversations with the places that aren’t already implementing community schools, it’s likely that there are many communities that have not heard of community schools. In our interviews, participants explained what they thought community schools were and they portrayed a vision that is very close to how the Coalition thinks about the strategy. Community schools represent an ideal that many of our participants value, and likely many others. However, based on our observations, there are many in the state that don’t yet understand the ways community schools actually operate. This point represents an opportunity to educate more school and community leaders about how community schools operate and what results they seek to achieve.

This education strategy will look differently in urban and rural places, and depending on level of experience with school-community partnerships. In urban areas, there may be other partnership approaches that are similar to the community school strategy and which could provide a point of reference for the uninitiated. Rural communities likely have fewer examples of school-community partnerships and would need to learn about a different type of community school, one that accounts for
specific rural challenges. One interviewee gave transportation as an example of the unique rural context. In addition, we didn’t find much evidence of community school knowledge in southern New Jersey, except for Trenton. Those places on the coast and in the south are areas particularly fruitful for learning about community schools, but would need to travel greater distances to learn from the places currently implementing the strategy.

New Jersey’s Capacity for Community Schools Expansion

A number of places are implementing, or are planning to implement community schools. Other communities have an identified need for community schools based on our interviews. In this section we describe what we learned about the political, funding, and organizational capacities in New Jersey. While there are challenges in each of these areas, that is typical in communities around the country, including those that have created thriving community schools. In fact, community schools often arise as a solution to some of these challenges.

Politically, interviewees said that the situation is very challenging and prospects for political wins are low at this point. One interviewee said, “There has never been a more difficult political environment to advocate in...Everything is a fight. There is no transparency.” The state has a lot of control over what happens in local communities, especially in those school districts that have lost local control such as Newark and Paterson. Further, the state budget has led to funding challenges as well. Interviewees suggested that moving on new funding priorities is unlikely in a political environment where budgets are low and the focus is on meeting state obligations such as their pension system or the Transportation Trust Fund.

At the same time, interviewees indicated that there are a number of legislators, including those in leadership who would be interested in supporting the community school strategy. Participants suggested that while funding is unlikely at this time, these legislators may be willing to hold hearings on community schools in order to build momentum when the political environment shifts.

Another opportunity is that teachers unions and community members are organizing to support community schools across the state. This grass-roots political strategy will help spread the community school vision and may set the stage for future political victories.

The funding situation is particularly challenging. The state spends a lot on education, in part thanks to the historic Abbott case which played a transformational role in how schools were funded. Abbott spread access to pre-school and made New Jersey a national model. In fact, we heard from interviewees that Abbott was also supposed to include many of the strategies community schools would include such as better access to supports and services at the school site. However, interviewees suggested that the implementation of Abbott has been “uneven” and schools haven’t made the gains they were expected to realize. The funding focus on 31 districts identified by the court has become an issue as demographics shifted and the needs have spread to other communities. While this issue was supposed to be addressed in a revised school funding formula in 2008, the recession hit hard and the schools were never fully funded. As one interviewee put it, the promise and implementation of Abbott “fell flat” in regard to providing services such as afterschool, school based health, and counseling.

At the state level, there appears to be little appetite for new funding. One interviewee captured the sentiment of others saying, “There is no money, and we keep hearing that over and over again...When it
comes to issues like this [education and community schools] that’s the cowards way of hiding behind issues, [saying] ‘Well, there’s just no money.’"

While public dollars are unlikely in the next two years, another approach to supporting new community schools is to reach out to the foundation and private funding communities. However, as one interviewee put it, foundations would be able to help start community schools efforts in local communities, but not at the scale that public dollars would. Still, while state funds are unlikely in the short-term, communities may find catalytic support from local funding sources.

This political and funding environment suggests that any statewide community schools effort should focus on explaining the community school strategy and building political support before seeking state funding. Such an approach would help policymakers understand how community schools can repurpose and blend existing funding streams for greater impact in the communities that need them most.

We also asked about the capacity of existing institutions to support community schools. Organizational capacity and levels of cooperation vary across the state, but most interviewees suggested there is a dearth of both. There are 540 school districts which poses a challenge for many non-profits and potential partners according to one interviewee. Working with so many school districts means that organizations would have to expend a lot of energy and resources building relationships with multiple districts and their leaders. From one interviewee’s perspective in a particular city, while there are a lot of non-profits and universities, collaboration and partnership is challenging to create because everyone is so focused on their particular mission and programs, there’s rarely opportunity for people to come together. They say that it’s not necessarily an unwillingness to work together, there’s just never been a culture of collaboration and partnership.

Interviewees told us about myriad non-profits that are doing important work around health, education, youth development, hunger, and more in communities. However, we also learned that these organizations rarely collaborate and rarely have access to schools.

One possible existing capacity to draw from is the state-run School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP). The SBYSP is administered by the state’s Department of Children and Families. According to a State website:

School Based Youth Services Programs (SBYSP) are located in all counties in or near schools in the community. The programs provide services before, during and after school and throughout the summer and are open to all youth ages 10 -19 enrolled in any school that hosts a SBYSP. Major services include: mental health and family services; health services; substance abuse counseling; employment services; pregnancy prevention programs; learning support services; referrals to community based services; and recreation. (http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/families/dfcp/DFCPDirectory.pdf)

The SBYSP funds hospitals, boards of education, non-profits, and others. SBYSP grantees are either located in a school or offer services that are available to schools. Currently, there are 67 high schools, 18 middle schools, and five elementary schools across all 21 New Jersey counties that are SBYSP sites. Each of the high schools are required to have a mental health provider on site. The SBYSPs are funded by a combination of federal TANF dollars and state funding.
The SBYSFs offer an opportunity to build community schools in places with strong existing programs. It’s possible that these places are already accustomed to collaboration and may be interested in an intentional results-based partnership approach.

Students, families, and communities face myriad challenges, especially in high-poverty urban and rural communities. Community schools offer an opportunity for New Jersey’s schools, governments, higher education institutions, health providers, community-based organizations and others to collaborate to identify the results that will improve conditions and prospects for all citizens. As described above, there are a number of political, financial, and organizational challenges. However, these challenges also represent an opportunity to grow a community-based approach to solving some of our most important issues. Community schools have developed in other states facing similar challenges and there is reason to expect they would also start and thrive in New Jersey.

Summary
There is a demonstrated need and potential for progress in growing community schools across New Jersey. We suggest that the time is ripe for significant investment in and growth of community schools in New Jersey.

A number of places have started and are deepening and scaling their community school practice. These places need networked learning opportunities, sustainable funding and supportive policies to maintain and grow their efforts. Newark is attempting to quickly ramp up its community schools. All these efforts should be closely watched as leadership and community engagement unite to create a positive change for their communities.

Still other communities are exploring how to add the community school strategy to their already developed education, neighborhood change, and health initiatives. The growth of community schools could help create a more effective vehicle to implement these other approaches and help them achieve their goals.

Finally, there are communities, smaller cities and rural counties, which just learned about the community school strategy from our discussion and identified it as a promising approach to creating a better Culture of Health in their schools and neighborhoods.

The momentum from local community school efforts in New Jersey is a strength that has the potential to have a catalytic effect on other communities whether they are urban, rural, or suburban. The current political and financial challenges will shift over time. As more communities implement and explore the community school approach, there is potential for even greater spread in the future. The need for this type of education, health, and neighborhood change strategy is clear. A results-focused school-community partnership approach will create the conditions where children and their families will thrive.

New Jersey is clearly a complicated state, but so are many others where community schools are thriving. What it takes is the will of political, community, health, and school leaders to unite behind a common vision for creating healthy and thriving young people, families, and communities. Community schools are a demonstrated way to achieve collective goals. The opportunity in New Jersey is significant.
### Appendix: Participant List

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison Acevedo</td>
<td>United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roland Anglin</td>
<td>Rutgers University, The Joseph Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley Anglin</td>
<td>Atlantic Health</td>
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<td>Rachel Bland</td>
<td>Orange Public Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donna Chiera</td>
<td>American Federation of Teachers New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tia Colliier</td>
<td>Newark Fairmount Promise Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Emge</td>
<td>United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura Engelmann</td>
<td>AtlantiCare</td>
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<td>Rosie Grant</td>
<td>Paterson Education Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Green</td>
<td>United Way of Essex and West Hudson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Keh</td>
<td>Prudential New Jersey</td>
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<td>Tobi Knehr</td>
<td>Paterson Public Schools</td>
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<td>Elliot Lee</td>
<td>Orange Public Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda McGowan</td>
<td>United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey</td>
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<td>Tia Morris</td>
<td>Camden City Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryan Murdock</td>
<td>Montclair State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cynthia Rice</td>
<td>Advocates for Children of New Jersey</td>
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<td>Antoinette Richardson</td>
<td>Center for Popular Democracy</td>
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<td>Ed Richardson</td>
<td>New Jersey Education Association</td>
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<td>Gwendolyn Rippey</td>
<td>Atlantic Health</td>
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<td>Sharon Seyler</td>
<td>New Jersey School Board Association</td>
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<td>Anniesha Walker</td>
<td>Mercer Street Friends</td>
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<td>Maryann Walsh</td>
<td>Atlantic Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyeema Watson</td>
<td>Rutgers Office of Civic Engagement Camden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Wells</td>
<td>Office of the Mayor, Newark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tee Williams</td>
<td>Center for Supportive Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryan Williamson</td>
<td>American Federation of Teachers New Jersey</td>
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