

Daniel F. Murray

Professor Beckley

Poverty Capstone

12 April 2013

The Zuckerberg Effect: A Case Study in Community and Educational Reform in Newark, New Jersey

When Facebook Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced his plan to establish a “\$100 million challenge grant” to the Newark public school system, the education world, residents of New Jersey, and the national media all asked: “Newark?” A once proud and profitable urban satellite of New York City, Newark possesses one of the highest crime rates in the country and “almost one-third (29.9 percent) of all Newark’s families with related children under 18 had income below the federal government’s poverty level” (Myers). Furthermore, in 2011, only 69 percent of high school seniors graduated (*Newark Kids Count*). Although Zuckerberg’s choice of cities seems peculiar, Newark, with acclaimed Mayor Cory Booker and medium size, is an ideal case study for the power of community building and education reform through appropriate grant distribution and innovative programs.

According to the Foundation for Newark’s Future (FNF), which is responsible for distributing the funds, the six “investment strategies” for the grant are: early-childhood education, school options, teacher and principal leadership, community engagement, at risk youth, and operational excellence (FNF). To be fully transparent, the foundation outlines the exact allocation and the rationale for each investment strategy. First, in terms of school choice, Newark deserves the access to numerous school options—traditional district or charter schools. The foundation believes quality instruction is the number one

strategy for improving academic achievement: principals and school leadership must foster teacher quality. Third, community engagement, at home and in the community, leads to better performance and school effectiveness. Fourthly, all of this development commences with early childhood education, which is the “ground work for future success” (FNF). Next, the grant prioritizes the needs of at risk youth, needs that must be met to ensure high school success and college readiness. Finally, the foundation works with Newark’s superintendent Cami Anderson to create Newark Public School “Operational Excellence,” which includes transitional training, resource mapping, and technical assistance for school administrators (FNF).

As a city of perpetual reform, Newark possesses the rare opportunity to be an archetype for educational change, and this paper will show these reforms possess the potential to be universalized. This paper examines the parameters and progress made by the Zuckerberg grant and its resulting reforms. Although teacher quality and principal leadership have received the majority of the funding to date, I argue that community engagement and at risk youth initiatives should be prioritized. The Carnegie Foundations community engagement as: “the collaboration between education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (*Carnegie Foundation*). Given their tumultuous history, Newarkers are unfamiliar with words such as “collaboration,” “mutually beneficial,” and “partnership and reciprocity.” An example of a reform program is PENewark—an organization that promotes community wide conversation—received the majority of FNF’s allocations to the community engagement strategies. However, community engagement transcends

communication. To reach its potential and foster the capability of all its citizens, Newark needs “partnership and reciprocity” including entrusting Newark’s citizens with the ability to lead and improve their existing organizations. FNF employs a holistic approach to education reform, but without the proper support and more importantly trust of the local community these efforts will falter. The collaboration with parents and the community promotes academic success and percolates through all aspects of a child’s life. In accordance with community engagement, deficiencies in programs for at risk youths are equally vital for reform. Violence, crime, and truancy prevent growth and deter all aspects of education reform.

This paper first establishes the educational and attainment gaps in Newark in comparison to the rest of New Jersey, and then articulates the complementary issues from outside the classroom and in the community. These gaps in family composition, employment, violence, child safety, and overall child poverty are the factors that require attention from the FNF. The paper illustrates funding allocation (not overall funding), efficiency, and awareness as the pivotal problem. Next, outlining the history of NJ and Newark Education provides a broad overview of past efforts. Finally, the paper addresses the Zuckerberg Grant and Mayor Cory Booker’s vision for NPS while evaluating the proposed reforms. The paper shows the progress and allocations in school choice and teacher quality, but it argues these strategies are only part of the overwhelming educational picture. I ultimately argue Newark will not emerge from the cycle of poverty and perpetual reform without focusing on community engagement and at risk youth. The legacies of the Booker’s administration and Zuckerberg’s grant depend on these aspects while the people of Newark, especially the children, depend on these leaders.

Educational Achievement, Attainment, and Opportunity Gaps: Newark v. NJ

Early Childhood Education

Education and cognitive development starts during infancy and reaches a pivotal period during the toddler years. Following national research and models, New Jersey and Newark value early childhood education. Dating back to the 1966 Coleman Report, or the “Equality of Educational Opportunity” report, research shows family background and wealth explains a large portion of academic variation. In *Changing Poverty, Changing Policy*, Jacob and Ludwig argue: “Poor children have substantially lower achievement test scores as young as ages three or four before they even start school” (Jacob and Ludwig 266). From a national perspective, New Jersey possesses the highest standards and accessibility for early childhood education. In the 2009-2010 school year, nearly 50,000 New Jersey children were enrolled in preschools and over 14,000 in Head Start. In comparison to the 40 percent national average, only 26 percent of the state’s children are not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten. As a measure of *The War on Poverty* initiative, “Head Start began in the 1960s and strove to diminish the correlation between family wealth and a child’s cognitive development” (Reardon 92). Family income is now nearly as strong of a predictive factor as parent’s education. Enrollment in state provided programs like Head Start should diminish the former factors’ influence. Although there is no significant evidence to suggest the income achievement gaps alter with age, if the income gradient remains stable from ages five to eighteen (99).

The state of New Jersey and Newark, whose education system is state run, appropriately prioritizes early childhood education. In particular, Newark has 172

licensed childcare centers and 202-registered child care homes. In Newark, the average preschool teacher salary was \$48,912 and district employees earned \$13,000 more on average than state counterparts. Newark preschool and early childhood development exponentially increased in the last five years. Three-year old enrollment in public preschools increased 903 percent and four year old increased 24 percent during that time (*Newark Kids Count*). With Newark making strides in public pre-schools and age group factors being neutral, the state's education reforms must focus more attention on improving the later years and overall achievement and attainment. Therefore, provided the state's funding, FNF fairly allocates \$1,046,000 on early childhood education. In particular, the grants focus on literacy including "My Very Own Library," which gifts ten free books of a child's liking and addresses the literacy and resource gaps. Newark children possess a fair equality of opportunity for early childhood care and education.

School Options

The FNF devotes a significant portion, over \$6 million, to ensure the high-quality and fair access to NPS. Newark's education numbers in comparison to the rest of the state illustrate an upward trend, but a substantial gap. As for secondary and high school attainment, 85 percent of New Jersey students graduated from high school on time, which is significantly higher than the 75 percent national average. Of these graduates, over three quarters will attend college and 52 percent will attend a four year accredited institution. In contrast, Newark offers a different attainment outcome story: in 2011-2012, 69 percent of students graduated high school while over 12,000 attended some sort of college. While 30 percent of people above the age of 25 do not have a high school degree in Newark, the future is brighter as college enrollment increased 55 percent among people ages 18 to 24

from 2007 to 2011 (*Newark Kids Count*). Unfortunately, in comparison to their statewide counterparts Newark students scored an average of 100 points less in both Math and Verbal on their SATs (*Newark Kids Count*). Participation in taking the test also remained lower than state and national averages.

Education achievement measures predominately derive from standardized state test, and, in particular, Math and English Language Arts scores. Although the last five years mark overall improvements, Newark students still score lower than the average New Jersey students. In Newark, these differences largely depend on the controversial dichotomy: charter schools versus traditional district schools. The outcomes are mixed, but on average charter school students in 3rd to 5th grade and 8th to 11th grade outperformed their peers in traditional public schools (*Newark Kids Count*). Although Newark charter schools students scored better than the New Jersey average in 8th grade Math and ELA tests, they remain below average in a few areas (*Newark Kids Count*).

Charter schools show promise and substantial growth, but the standard deviation varies greatly on a school-to-school basis. Educational reform and the Zuckerberg grant will not and should not focus on charter school growth alone, but the statistics and growth trajectories are undeniable. Achievement is only one aspect of the larger educational picture—the news for Newark is promising, but not sufficient. These numbers and the emergence of high achieving charter schools illustrates why the Zuckerberg grant prioritizes school options and allocates a significant portion of funds to different charter schools and related initiatives. For instance, FNF already issued over \$300,000 to three different charter schools and at least \$100,000 to the Newark Charter School Fund.

Although in an interview Mayor Booker suggests otherwise, he states: "The focus of the

Zuckerberg grant is not to fund charter schools, it will be going towards traditional district schools, so that's just a falsehood” (TIME). Other Newark residents accused Booker of spending \$1 million of the grant on Newark Education Commissioner Chris Cerf’s consulting firm (“Newark Fights”). The charter school controversy combined with Booker’s high profile will be highly scrutinized throughout the reform.

Identifying and Addressing the Gaps: Families, Employment, and Violence

“There is a boundless reservoir of power in all of our communities, a power not conferred by the powerful but at ready access to anyone willing to claim it.” (Headdon). Cory Booker, the Mayor of Newark and national political figure, made this prophetic quotation shortly after taking over one of the nations most impoverished cities, Newark, in 2006. Newark’s overall diversity and dense minority population makes it an intriguing case study in race-related outcomes and inequalities. The city’s population demography is: 52.4 percent black persons, 26.3 percent white persons, and 29.47 percent Hispanic or Latino, which includes people who are also white (NJ Census). Regardless of race differences, the presence of community has always been essential, although usually lacking, from Newark’s makeup and socio-political framework. Booker understands the inherent power of a community, which should not derive from its political leader, but the diverse community members.

The people of Newark, however, do not have the basic capabilities to claim and benefit from communal power. As of 2010, roughly one-third of the city’s 277,540 people were impoverished. Furthermore, for children, the situation is even direr. According to Kids Count’s data collection, one-half of children, who are five years or

younger, live in poverty. From that group, a little more than half fall under the category of “extreme poverty,” or 50 percent below the federal poverty level (Lee). In comparison, only 14.3 percent of all New Jersey children live in poverty (*Newark Kids Count*). In 2011, 19 percent of Newark children under 18 were considered in “extreme poverty” in comparison to 9 percent of the state’s children. Fortunately, in this category, Newark’s trending upward: from 2007-2011, this rate decreased by 24 percent in Newark, but increased by almost 40 percent throughout the state. Newark remains one of the state’s most impoverished areas, but the gap is shrinking slightly. However, the average median income of a family with children did decrease 17 percent since 2007 to around \$29,000, which is drastically lower than the state’s median. Income inequality is the fundamental gap, from which all other issues and capability obstacles derive.

Aside from a fundamental income gap, the inequalities in Newark extend to all aspects of society: the economy, the family, and individual issues such as health and behavior. Employment is the primary means for increasing income, but 14.7 percent of Newark residents are unemployed—compared to 9.7% throughout NJ (Calefati). The ramifications of unemployment are diverse: depression, failure to maintain the quality of life and often drug abuse. The impoverished children are the most influenced by their parent or guardian’s unemployment. The paucity of marriages and joint incomes compounds the issue of unemployment. In Newark, 56.9 percent of homes are single families. In *Whither Opportunity*, Sara McLanahan argues: the shift in family structures implies a correlating change in key resources such as income and parental time that are available for children. This difference negatively influences education achievement (Reardon 102). Moreover, Annette Lareau (1989, 2003) argues that middle and upper

class parents engage more in “cultural cultivation,” or the deliberate organization of childhood around intellectual and socio-emotional development” (105). All of this research strongly suggests the importance of community and community based reformed that begins in the classroom, but extends to Newarkers’ homes. Similarly, “Expanded choice is only likely to increase student academic outcomes if achievement is a central concern for parents” (Jacob and Ludwig 275). Parents now spend more time on child-care activities and this difference only increased for college educated versus non-college educated parents. More research, however, shows the significant correlation between family income and preschool enrollment. The family is the epicenter for development; regardless of the correlation tested, research implicates the impact of family cannot be underestimated. Successful and beneficial family life can never be completely replicated, but the gap makes the presence of community factors ever more important to a child’s development and later educational success.

Furthermore, to complement these relational statistics, residents of Newark face a significant gap of prenatal care. 50 percent of babies in Newark had low birth weights and/or were born prematurely (*Newark Kids Count*). These children are sickly and prone to development setback from their conception. In a summary, from these relevant statistics, a Newark child can possibly expect to be prematurely born into a single-mother impoverished family whose primary family provider has a high chance of being unemployed. Sadly, this hypothetical Newark child faces countless gaps at conception. Again with a community-based focus, these prenatal problems may be alleviated. The Zuckerberg grant strives to reform the NPS from top to bottom, but with these gaps before birth and discrepancies in parent information and care their efforts will be futile

before they even start. The Zuckerberg should work with existing community programs to spread information and foster community growth beginning at every child's birth.

Without a safe-home and an environment that promotes cognitive development, a child will never overcome these gaps and their capabilities for the future will be greatly diminished. Child protection and child-care are two essential social determinants of later-life success. In accordance with statewide trends, the number of Newark children under the protection of the state Division of Child Protection and Permanency has risen in the last decade. From 2008 to 2012, the number of children in their care increased 14 percent in Newark. A similar gap exist in overall child care as the number of licensed child care centers dropped 9 percent in Newark in the last four years. The economic recession and budget cuts caused Newark families to have fewer options, and their ability to pay for it as diminished. Childcare vouchers decreased 9 percent since 2007 in contrast to 1 percent in Essex County and statewide. Close to 7,000 children qualified for vouchers in 2011. From a young age, neglect and basic care prevent their development into adolescence. Furthermore, unfortunately, New Jersey possesses 6,397 homeless students in 2009-2010, which is significantly higher than the state and national average (*Newark Kids Count*). Even a home itself is not guaranteed for Newark youths.

Directly correlated to educational achievement, one of the interlocking results is crime and youth delinquency. However, only \$280,000 of the \$100 million Zuckerberg challenge grant is devoted to at-risk youth programs. With 90 murders in 2011, Newark still remains one of America's most dangerous cities. In addition to multiple homicides, drug convictions, and weapon charges, New Jersey's largest city saw a six percent overall increase in crime following 2010, which was the "safest year" since the 1950s. The

increase is due in large to state budget cuts that lead to the wide spread layoffs in the police department. In Newark, funding is a problem in almost every aspect of life. However, later in 2011, Newark received a \$2 Million grant for at-risk youth crime prevention programs (Queally). For example, "Operation Cease Fire" is a community-based effort to communicate the detriments of violence and genuine offers of ways of discourage gun crimes. In response to the issues of violence in the community, Booker states: "I do believe crime is a symptom of a larger problem," said Booker "As we saw last week, when a 16-year-old picks up a weapon, shoots people and murders people – this is not a police problem. This is a larger problem within our community, state and nation." (*Community Foundation*). For Booker and his city, fostering the sense of community and promoting growth through civic engagement is the key to closing all of these gaps. Although these efforts are not directly linked to education, the FNF is unwise to disconnect education reform and violence. A community based approach such as operation cease fire can and should be funded by the Zuckerberg grant; Booker and Zuckerberg must consider violence in their cafeteria approach if they are to properly treat Newark's education woes.

During the 2011-12 school year, Newark students were picked up 2,608 times, which decrease 32 percent in five years. Although these numbers show a downward trend and vandalism increased, school related behavioral issues increased. Incidents involving violence rose 16 percent and incidents related to weapons increased 35 percent. Substance abuse related incidents saw a 25 percent increase (*Newark Kids Counts*). Improved police forces and previous reforms helped diminish after school delinquency and teenage crime; however, the issues penetrated the schools. There is evidence that

unsupervised children are at increased risk of truancy, poor grades, and risk-taking behaviors such as substance abuse. Crime rates triple in the after school hours between 3 and 6 in the afternoon when children are most likely to be left unattended, and children are most likely to be victims of violent crimes committed by non-family members in these hours. (Blau and Curry 5). Newark's youth behavioral issues, however, defy Blau's and Curry's well established findings. If Newark, Anderson, and Booker are determined to ensure student safety and a proper learning environment, the addressing this paradox is essential. Allocating more funds to existing youth development programs in Newark such as Youth Education and Employment Success (YEES) is the place to start. FNF surely does not ignore these issues, but at-risk youth must be a priority.

Educational Funding

With an influx of funds such as the \$100 million challenge grant, reformers and citizens alike may ask the question: "Is funding the issue?" Perhaps the most practical method of deducing the causes of poverty and the education gap is to recognize what are not the primary problems. Throughout the country, educational achievement troubles reformers and school administrators with its complexity and wide ranging issues. When addressing the achievement gap, the proper understanding of funding and its fairness is essential. In an Education Law Center's study "National Report Card: Is School Funding Fair?", New Jersey ranks number two nationally on the fairness level that takes into account "mean actual state and local revenue per pupil" (*Is School Funding Fair?*). The national average funding level was \$10,132 in 2007, so New Jersey clearly prioritizes education. However, with numerous struggling districts that fall well below state and

national standards, the question remains: Why then do so many districts, including Newark, consistently fall beyond state and national standard and test scores. Distribution is not the issue. The National Report Card rates New Jersey An “A” as the state has one of the most progressive scales. Students at 30 percent of the poverty line receive \$8,608 of the state and local revenue per pupil in comparison to \$5,700 for children at the poverty line. The report indicates, however, district organization is problematic in New Jersey as the state has a significant share of children served in small, non-unified school districts. In particular, the district places an immense value on early childhood education. In Newark, the average preschool teacher salary was \$48,912 and district employees earned \$13,000 more on average. Furthermore, the \$12,921 per student cost in 2003 was one of the highest in New Jersey. The Early Childhood Program aid (ECPA) and Preschool Expansion Aid (PSEA) provides funding needed for extra costs.

This paper investigates all of these questions as Newark decides to distribute the grant. Newark has the opportunity to be the archetype for education reform and funding fairness and effectiveness. Funding may not be the core cause to poor educational achievement, but the Newark public school system still fails many of its children. Jacob and Ludwig identified the problem with funding complacency; they argued: “Education policies that are capable of improving poor children’s schooling outcomes by enough to justify the costs of these policies are worth doing, even if these policies or programs by themselves are not enough to equalize learning opportunities for American children” (Jacob and Ludwig 260). With the Zuckerberg challenge grant, policy makers and school administrators have the responsibility to ask the hard probing questions such as: Is our district distributing funding among its schools fairly? Are there mechanisms in place to

drive funding to uses and programs in schools and classrooms that have been shown to be effective? All of these questions are particularly pertinent when discussing the community effort in determining what is the best use of the grant.

The Histories of Public Education Systems: New Jersey and the City of Newark

Understanding the history of the NPS and the state of New Jersey is crucial for unraveling the core of educational reform in Newark and projecting the success and failures of the Zuckerberg grant. After a century of education for only privileged children, on September 28, 1875, the State of New Jersey passed a constitutional amendment for “the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all children in the state between ages the ages of five and eighteen” (DiFranseco). Today, this amendment still applies to all school districts, including Newark, but the qualification of “thorough and efficient” is debatable given New Jersey’s school performance. Education became compulsory for students between the ages of 6 and 16 in the 20th century. Following the end of World War II, the suburbia of New York City expanded, the economy, and the population of New Jersey almost doubled. The Public Education School Act of 1975 ruled New Jersey should prepare students for functional life in society, and the NJ Gross Income Tax Act of 1976 funded the provision (DiFranseco). Following the Reagan Administration’s “Nation at Risk” report, NJ enacted two progressive reforms: alternative routes for teacher certification to encourage young talented teachers and district certification to meet state laws and regulations. In the 1990s, NJ was one of the first states to accept the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Additionally, New Jersey serves as an interesting case for funding formulas. In 1973, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in *Robinson v. Cahill* that employing property tax, as the primary source of funds, is discriminatory towards poorer districts. The ruling set the precedent for the NJ Supreme Court's 1985 decision in *Abbott v. Burke*, which ensured the "thorough and efficient" aspect of the 1875 state amendment. *Abbott v. Burke* established comprehensive improvements including adequate K-12 foundational funding, universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year old children, supplemental or at-risk programs and funding, and school-by-school reform of curriculum and instruction (*Abbott v. Burke*). Equalized funding was finally guaranteed in 1990. In 1998, following another funding reform at the state court level, impoverished districts gained access to universal pre-school and received funding for new school construction ("NJ Supreme Courts to").

However, all these funding reforms did not translate to improved school, especially in Newark. On April 13, 1995, Administrative Law Judge Stephen G. Weiss recommended the "New Jersey Department of Education issue an order to remove the Newark School District's Board, create a state operated school district, and take such other steps pursuant to law as are necessary to implement the same." The school board appealed, but ultimately lost and the state control of the district still remains today ("NJ Supreme Courts to").

Then, under the supervision of Governor Corzine, a new law, which deviated from the distinct Abbott district criteria, provided additional funding to any district with disadvantaged children. Following the economic collapse of 2007 and the state's \$11 billion budget deficit, Governor Christie cut \$820 million in education aid distributed across the states 600 districts. However, the Abbott districts were the most hindered by

the cuts, and the Education Law Center challenged the decision, but lost their appeal (“NJ Supreme Courts to”). Now in 2013, a new funding source arrived from the Zuckerberg donation and Mayor Booker and superintendent Cami Anderson led the largest Abbott district with the responsibility of appropriating a record setting grant. Booker previously stated:

We've been talking for quite some time about creating a bold new paradigm for educational excellence in the country to show the way, to put the people of the city of Newark really in the driver seat and the focal point and to work to get all the assets and resources we need to give to them to succeed (“Newark Fights”).

In the past half-century, Newark’s residences have not been in the “driver seat” or the “focal point” of political and educational reform. With each ensuing legislature movement, equality has been on the horizon, but never realized. Through the new resources provided by the state and the Zuckerberg grant, Mayor Booker hopes the people of his city can achieve self-actualization that commences with education and community revitalization.

The Booker and Zuckerberg Vision for Newark Education

Beginning with the live announcement on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Mark Zuckerberg and Cory Booker clearly possessed a plan for the challenge grant that they wished to present on the national scene and at the forefront of education reform. In an interview with TIME, Mayor Booker comments on the donation; he contends: “we wanted to trigger a flash point...an inferno of interest and ideas to put Newark as the center for education reform” (TIME). The challenge grant put the NPS on the map, but the questions remains if it is for the right reasons—the children. With its manageable size

and powerful leaders, Zuckerberg believed Newark was the ideal place to invest. Zuckerberg and Booker, who met and immediately connected at an Allen and Company conference, share a common methodology and vision for education reform. The vision can be encompassed in two words: *big* and *bold*. Booker states: “Let’s not mistake activity for progress...I’m a firm believer of thinking big.” Zuckerberg agrees with Booker that money is necessary, but not sufficient. The mayor advocated for a provocation that would reconfigure notions about education reform. They agreed the grant would employ a “cafeteria approach,” or selection of the most effective tactics from all areas and existing models (TIME). Although the “cafeteria approach” may prove to be effective, the Zuckerberg challenge grant lacks long-term sustainability. Without investing in the community through grassroots movements and development of existing leaders, the grant neglects fostering the capability of Newark’s human capital. Furthermore, to this point, the FNF issues no map for long-term growth. After the grant money runs out in three to five years, these programs can not be renewed without major tax increases or other forms of fundraising, which contradict the precedents of both the Christie and Booker regimes. One of the most controversial and progressive measures, teacher merit pay, needs long-term sustainability to be effective.

Teacher Quality and Principal Leadership

Merit Pay in Newark

Although the FNF outlined six target areas for reform, teacher quality and principal leadership absorbed over \$51 million of the \$69 million already committed. Inefficiency and cost effectiveness are two constant issues for the NPS. Prior to the

challenge grant in 2009, Newark was one of the worst performing school district yet spend \$19,305 per pupil. Moreover, NPS is one of the primary employers for the city. The median salary for a Newark teacher in 2009 was \$84,200, compared with \$59,545 for the rest of the state, according to a study by Excellent Education for Everyone, a reform group (Leonard). Furthermore, 12 percent of all NPS employees were administrators, which is double the NJ average (Leonard). Newark offers another educational paradox: increased teacher salary, administrative presence, and per pupil funding, but low scores and student performance. Enter the Zuckerberg challenge grant and its overseeing FNF (*FNF*). Their proposed answer to this conundrum: the Newark Teacher Contract initiative promises \$48,500,000 to a merit pay system that links teacher pay to student performance (Rundquist).

In November 2012, the Newark Teacher's Union ratified a three-year deal that employs a four-tier teacher rating system to reward "effective" and "highly effective" teachers. Effective teachers entrusting a high need subject at a low performing school can receive up to \$12,000 in bonus-based incentives. There is a direct correlation between student performance and teacher effectiveness (Rundquist). According to a study on NYC public schools, students who have from top tier teachers learn roughly 0.33 standard deviations more in a single year than students whose teachers fall in the lowest tier. (Jacob and Ludwig 273). Moreover, Jacob and Ludwig argue: "although many states have adopted some sort of financial assistance [or bonus] programs, there has been little systematic evaluation" (273). The effectiveness FNF's funding of the progressive merit based system depends on evaluation. FNF states the Newark Teacher Contract "offers teachers the opportunity for continuous improvement through peer review and

professional development” (FNF). The accountability and strengths of these peer reviews combined with teacher’s ingenuity will determine the success of the initiative.

The NPS, however, might experience negative consequences from the incentive based reforms of the Newark Teacher Contract. FNF does not fully outline their plan, but they need to consider potential issues such as “teachers neglected certain students, cutting corners, and even cheating to raise student scores artificially” (Jacob and Ludwig 280).

Newark has not escaped the cheating scandal that marred the Atlanta Public School system. Without proper regulations and development, which requires more reforms and funds, this movement may be failed from the start. In November 2012, three top performing charter schools were under investigation for "failing to physically secure the test documents when they were not in use.... Robert Treat's sixth grade tests had rates of wrong-to right erasure more than three times greater than the state average” (Calefati).

Cheating is not the norm, but a score driven system fosters a certain level of

vulnerability. Although it’s too soon to make a judgment, NPS must hold schools accountable for each and every student by refusing a single cut off value, which would allow teachers to neglect students who are far above or below the passing level (281).

Moreover, the contract authorizes a peer review system to enforce accountability. This is accomplished by having teachers sitting on school panels and taking a direct part in the evaluations. *NJ Spotlight* reviewed the provision and reports: “Some will serve on a district council that will monitor the evaluations as they come in. Teachers can even bring in outside “validators” to double-check their evaluations” (Mooney). Some critics of the reform might fear collusion, but Newark owes it to their students to test out the incentive based model, which coincides with Zuckerberg’s and Booker’s cafeteria approach for

reform. Everyone is not pleased by the provision; one Newark teacher argued: “It’s going to be so difficult you’re never going to see the bonuses” (Rundquist). Like most issues in education, the result will depend on the implementation.

Booker and Zuckerberg’s Public Image

The merit pay program is not the only aspect of the Zuckerberg grant that is criticized, and Mayor Booker’s involvement and fundraising tactics have been highly scrutinized. If Newark education reform is to promote change, transparency among leaders is paramount. Many Newarkers resent Mayor Booker’s celebrity status and are more than suspicious of his involvement with the Zuckerberg grant. In 2012, the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) and Secondary Parent Council (SPC) won a lawsuit against Mayor Booker, which required him to publicly release his emails with potential wealthy donors and Facebook executives. Many of the exchanges reflect poorly on Booker and Zuckerberg. One mail from Facebook VP of communications Elliot

Schrage focuses on Zuckerberg’s public image in relation to the grant. He writes:

"Employ language that resonates well with a mass audience, without alienating potential adversaries... Our goal is to better explain objectives and avoid hot-button words if we can" (Kamenetz). Following his narcissistic portrayal in David Fincher film *The Social Network*, Zuckerberg was poorly received, and the email raises the question: Was Zuckerberg’s donation simply a PR tactic? If so, it diminishes his education ideals and threatens Booker’s role. While another email from Booker’s staff highlight that “Mark’s money is not going into the classrooms.” The public fiasco unfortunately distracts from the real issue—the educational opportunity and achievement gaps. Furthermore, many reformers argue many reforms have been scrapped without ever being evaluated simple

because of change in political leadership (Cuban and Tyack). With Booker's national prominence and aspirations for the Senate, the Zuckerberg grant and its resulting reforms must not depend on Newark's charismatic mayor, but local school leaders, who make daily decisions and possess the staying power to make long term improvements. Moreover, Hess argues tumultuous educational politics at a local level has been of the major factors contributing to lack of progress. Newark needs its leader Booker, but not without the collaboration of organizational and school leaders (Cuban and Tyack).

Community Engagement: PENewark, GVZ, and BBA

Following the email controversy, Mayor Booker assured his city of the community focus; he states: "I look forward to working with other local leaders including the School Advisory Board over the coming weeks to engage all Newarkers in a robust community engagement effort to determine the destiny of our public schools" (Calefati).

The grant allocation, however, suggest otherwise. To date, FNF only allocated slightly over \$3 million to various community engagement programs. In an op-ed article in *The Huffington Post*, Mayor Booker outlined the mission and successes of PENewark—an outreach program designed as a community forum. PENewark strives to promote information and organize reform. In December 2010, PENewark succeeded in hosting 11 large-scale community forums, 25 mini-forums, knocked on 66,000 doors, received more than 20,000 surveys, and contacted 45,000 community members in total. Booker contends: "Newarkers from every corner of the City shared their ideas, concerns, hopes and expectations on how to make Newark Public Schools the best in the nation" (Booker). For impoverished people, information and relevant knowledge are essential for

fostering capability. Although these discussions and forums may not produce complete restructurings or immediate decision-making, the mere conversation is significant.

According to Booker, PENewark most recently conversed about extension of the school day for more learning hours and way to engage parents in every step of the education process. Furthermore, Booker argues “we understand that what happens in our schools has broad implications for our nation and, thus, we must keep the national education community closely and carefully informed about our progress.” No data exists on the correlation between these discussions and community action; however the surveys illuminated useful statistics such as “82.5 percent of our residents rated the city's schools as "fair" or "poor,” “69.2 percent were in favor of giving good teachers additional pay,” and “64.4 percent of residents favored replacing half the teachers at low-performing schools.” Whether PENewark will be successful or not remains unclear, but Booker clearly aspires for Newark to be a model for reform, and especially community involvement. From the National Equity Project to the Institute for Internal Peace, the other community engagement program funded by FNF receive significant allocations, but nothing to the degree of PENewark’s grant.

However, the community engagement programs fail to place a major importance on two seminal areas of education development: after-school and summer enrichment. Given Newark’s family composition statistics, crime rates, and child behavioral issues, limited funding to these areas is a major oversight. The Zuckerberg challenge grant largely overlooks two grassroots program already in existence: Global Village Zone (GVZ) and the Broader, Bolder Approach (BBA). Based Geoffrey Canada’s acclaimed Harlem Children Zone, the GVZ focused on the needs of entire families and “aimed to

strengthen academics and help lift children” (Neufeld). GVZ, like HCZ with a much smaller budget, is run by NYU to provide professional development, parent organizing, extended academic school days, and social services to the families of Quitman Street Renew and six other district schools. The NYU team leader Lauren Wells argued: “you have to consider poverty and the impacts of poverty in everything that you do.” GVZ assumed a grassroots approach to tackling poverty that addressed its all-encompassing influences. The FNF and Zuckerberg grant reforms employed many strategies started by the GVZ including extended school days and “Chat and Chews,” or weekly luncheons for parents and families to provide feedback to the administrators, which are similar to PENewark’s model. Booker and Zuckerberg embraced their cafeteria approach, but did not allow a potentially impactful program the time or money to change the community.

The second related community based program ignored by the Zuckerberg challenge grant is the Broader Bolder Approach (BBA). BBA is also a program of NYU and strives to “build critical partnership that will strengthen the capacity of schools to respond to student needs and enable community interests to come together so parents can hold schools and their leaders accountable” (Noguera and Wells 11). On paper, the BBA’s mission epitomizes community engagement that combines a top to bottom partnership and relations to promote accountability. At Newark’s Central High School, one of the cities lowest achieving schools, BBA presence lead to increased scores and better school culture at the three year mark. Students scored 32.5 percentage points better on ELA test and 25.9 on Math tests. Students were able to identify areas of need to promote professional development. Furthermore, the originators of the BBA argue: “The persistence of failure has contributed to a growing awareness that any efforts to improve

schools in Newark must be carried out in concert with strategies that address economic and social conditions confronting children and family” (Noguera and Wells 14). Noguera argues, “it’s too early to tell” on the future of the BBA, but ultimately the program was not supported by the Zuckerberg challenge grant. However, with its community engagement and grassroots focus, the BBA may provide some insight for future reforms.

The Zuckerberg Grant’s Future: Newark’s Potential Legacy

Now two full years after the Zuckerberg challenge grant, Newark experiences mixed results: improvements in test scores across the board (especially in charter schools), but the community remains marred by poverty related issues that can ultimately devour all educational reform. Foundation for Newark’s Future devoted over half of the \$100 million grant to teacher quality including a new teacher contract with merit pay bonuses. If the contract succeeds in maintaining quality instruction and retaining the highest performing teachers, NPS will prosper—teacher quality is one of the highest determinants of student outcome. However, this success is not guaranteed without proper evaluation and profession development. Furthermore, the question remains if this teacher pay model is sustainable; Newark cannot depend on outside grants every year. After the bill passed, teacher union leader James Del Grosso “Let’s pray there is another Zuckerberg out there for the next contract.” As of 2013, the Zuckerberg challenge grant appears to be a Band-Aid of educational reform. The FNF and NPS need to address the sustainability of reforms. To maintain these programs, especially the merit pay system, Newark and New Jersey may need to increase taxes or expand the budget. Newark must not fall into a cycle of reform dependency. Reform is the norm in Newark and only

through internal and grassroots reform can Newark and its children transcend the cycle of poverty and inefficiency.

Newark is a minority “majority” city, and although the current city is a shell of its racially dysfunctional self, race relations remain an obstacle for growth. Mayor Booker is black, but not a universal favorite in the black community. As the reactions following controversial emails indicate, the Newark community distrusts Booker on certain aspects of educational reform. One parent of Science High students argues: “The foundations are interfering with public education and dividing our community,” says Cassandra Dock, a local resident. “Leave us alone. We don’t want white people coming in here and doing what they do — taking over. Destroy and leave.” Another school board parent reiterates: “you don't just make decisions about people's babies without engaging and having some sort of communication with the parents” (“Newark Fights”). Reform will not appease every student and the Zuckerberg grant is determined to support programs with robust evidence of academic achievement. The FNF needs to respect the pre-existing organization and recruit talented community leaders, who have the trust of the residents, to spearhead new reforms. Society sometimes believes race relations are an issue of the past, but in Newark’s close-knit minority neighborhoods race differences are the reality.

In his most recent city address, Mayor Booker proclaimed: “Looking across our state, and even across our nation, we can take pride that Newark, in a time of urban despair, has become a city of emergent hope” (Booker). The Zuckerberg donation fortified Newark’s place on the national radar, but the question remains: *Will it make a difference?* Unfortunately, the answer is: *to be determined*. The initiatives will falter and Zuckerberg’s challenge will be remembered as an expensive and elaborate public

relations maneuver if the FNF does not address the long-term ramifications. Although no robust empirical evidence currently exists, Newark and the FNF should produce data on these reforms' impact, or lack thereof, on at-risk youth and problems of crime and delinquency. The FNF must proactively move in two areas: at-risk youth and community engagement. To date, these areas are underfunded and under the radar of reform. If NPS wishes to avoid the perpetuation of previous problems, community must be at the center of change. Community engagement, combined with FNF efforts, can help alleviate poverty and foster capability. Mayor Booker vows to match the \$100 million challenge grant; these funds and potential community reforms, can make Newark “a city of emergent hope” and universal model for educational reform, but at this time achieving that standard appears to be unlikely.

“On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this essay.”

Daniel F. Murray

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Washington and Lee University