

## 2012 Urban Education Study Tour

### Newark, New Jersey

Newark and the Newark Public School District occupy a unique space in the arena of education reform. The district and the city wrestle with multiple challenges to overhauling a system that is under state control and struggles to improve achievement for its students. These challenges are complicated by a history of racial tension in the city, a student body that is almost entirely African-American or Latino, chronic unemployment, a high poverty rate, and unions and state tenure laws that tend to influence the pace of reform. At the same time, high-profile leaders and philanthropic investments have created pressure to succeed. The result is that Newark finds itself in the center of the national conversation about what effective reform can and should look like with a myriad of stakeholders driving multiple initiatives.

In 2012, numerous efforts were underway in Newark to set the city and the district on a path of positive change. Newark’s superintendent was developing a data system for use by public, charter, and private schools. The mayor was leveraging his position to secure additional funding to support education reform efforts. Philanthropy’s presence in Newark remained significant, supporting early education and offering convening power, thought leadership, and asset mapping to identify problems and create solutions.

The potential to stimulate lasting reforms for Newark’s students remains strong. Among the challenges local stakeholders face is engaging the community and building agreement on the vision for education in the city. Their greatest challenge is to build collective will through partnership and collaboration, and create an infrastructure to sustain effective strategies and initiatives.

#### **PLACE, CONTEXT AND HISTORY**

*Part of the New York metropolitan area, Newark is a small city with a national presence and a complex environment for education reform*

The roots of public education in Newark reach back to 1676. More than three centuries of history include social and educational issues that still persist: the role of public education, the needs and demands of immigrants and English language learners, the link between education

#### **Study Tour Learning Objectives**

- I. Explore methods for *building effective partnerships* among funders and between funders, school districts, and other local partners to improve outcomes for all learners
- II. Identify specific, high-leverage strategies to *support students of color and English language learners*, preK through graduation, and to position these students to be college and career ready and to achieve post-secondary success
- III. Understand the challenges of and approaches to *system alignment*, with particular focus on ensuring successful transitions between preK and K-12 and between K-12 and postsecondary institutions
- IV. Learn about successful investments in *human capital*, especially those that support teachers and education leaders
- V. Understand the range of *roles education grantmakers* can play as external change agents for urban school systems, the tensions that arise in these roles, and strategies grantmakers can employ to help resolve these tensions

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#### **The tour was guided by three of GFE’s priority themes**

- I. Closing achievement and opportunity gaps
- II. Strengthening the education pipeline
- III. Supporting more high quality teaching and leadership

and economic opportunity, and a constantly changing city that exemplifies the complexity of urban education across America.

Ethnic and racial diversity coupled with economic disparities have created systemic challenges for educators and leaders for much of Newark's history. A 1942 assessment of the Newark Public School District (Newark PSD) cited a school system that had not adapted to the social and economic changes experienced by the city. By the 1960s, 50 percent of Newark's residents and 70 percent of the school population was black with a predominantly white city council, school board, and teaching staff. Two key events in the past half-century, however, continue to shape the local narrative in terms of race and education: the 1967 civil disturbances and the state takeover of the district in 1995. The racially charged civil disturbances represented mass dissatisfaction with housing, corruption, unemployment, and underachieving schools, bringing increased attention to the poverty in Newark's urban core. The state takeover of the Newark Public Schools, the result of 11 years of documentation, underscored entrenched problems that had plagued the district for decades, including fiscal mismanagement, poor instruction, and a devastated infrastructure. Both events stem from deep-seated frustrations linked to equitable access and opportunity, and underscore the complexity of education reform in Newark.

### **District Challenges**

The Newark Public School District struggles with multiple large-scale issues that complicate reform efforts. Newark PSD has no established, centralized system for collecting and synthesizing data about student demographics and achievement, resulting in knowledge gaps for leaders, educators, and policymakers working to improve education in the city. Additionally, Newark PSD, the largest employer in the city with 12 percent of staff in administrative positions, has struggled to reduce its budget, despite decades of declining student populations and a growing charter school movement. Unions also have a significant political presence and teachers are protected by state tenure laws.

In addition to ongoing struggles with high levels of poverty and unemployment—some neighborhoods in Newark have a poverty rate of 50 percent—control of the district by the governor's office has yielded limited improvements in school performance and student achievement. In 2012, the graduation rate remained under 69 percent (improved by seven points over 2011). Less than half of all 3rd graders were at grade level for language arts literacy. By 8th grade, proficiency in language arts just topped 60 percent. Additionally, nearly 80 percent of 8th graders sought a better quality education by applying to magnet schools.

Increasingly, charter schools represent significant competition for Newark PSD. The first charter schools opened in New Jersey in 1996, attracting students and initiating demographic shifts in the student population. As charter schools attract students, they also acquire 90 percent of the funding attached to those students. This leaves the district paying for an administration, teacher pool, and infrastructure that could accommodate thousands more students than are enrolled today, creating further complications with how to allocate funds.

While philanthropy—both established philanthropic partners and new investors—are active in the community, a wide range of reform strategies, agendas, and initiatives present stakeholders with the challenge of discerning what kinds of investments will have the greatest impact for Newark's students.

## **LEARNING FROM NEWARK**

### **Dedication to Early Education**

The 1998 ruling in the *Abbott v. Burke* case by the New Jersey Supreme Court (upholding the constitutional obligation to provide free public education for children ages five to 18) created the first mandate for high-quality early education in the country. Universal preschool for all children ages three and four was seen as a key investment, prescribed by the court, to support learners in their youngest years and provide a foundation for future learning and success.

### Newark Statistics

- Though Newark is part of a large metropolitan area, its population is under 280,000 and is served by only one district, the Newark Public School District with approximately 37,400 students.
- Newark PSD has an annual budget of nearly \$1 billion and an average cost per student of approximately \$23,000.
- Nearly 56 percent of students in the district are African-American (including immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa) and 36 percent are Latino (the majority are Puerto Rican).
- Student achievement remains among the lowest in the state, and 90 percent of Newark students who pursue postsecondary education require remedial classes.
- In 2009, the per capita income for Newark residents was \$17,372 and 25 percent of residents lived below the federal poverty level.
- Forty-two percent of adults ages 25 and older lack a high-school diploma and only nine percent hold a bachelor's degree.
- Thirty-five percent of Newark's children live below the poverty line.
- Unemployment in Newark is nearly 16 percent and unemployment for adults ages 20 to 24 is 48 percent, with African American youth being the most disconnected from the workforce.

Working with superintendents, Abbott's litigators, researchers, and other stakeholders, The Schumann Fund for New Jersey used its convening power to engage the philanthropic community and solicit input on how to provide universal preschool for all of Newark's three- and four-year-olds. Schumann also enlisted two entities to strengthen implementation efforts: Rutgers University for technical assistance and district-level needs assessment and the Advocates for Children of New Jersey for their ability to engage community organizations, educators, and early childhood experts. More than a decade later, Schumann is still actively engaged in supporting early childhood education.

An example of a program that is a direct result of the Abbott case and Schumann's efforts is Newark's Ironbound Community Corporation. Ironbound's preschool program serves diverse students and families. Nearly 95 percent of students are English language learners and come from immigrant families. Funded by federal dollars, private investors, and philanthropy, Ironbound is located in a Newark neighborhood home to low-income and working class families. The program has a 1:3 teacher-to-student ratio, a modern, well-equipped facility, and highly qualified staff.

Today, more than 90 percent of Newark's eligible three- and four-year-olds are enrolled in high-quality preschool, and the state's investment in preschool has been lauded by other states and the federal government.

### Leadership Creates Momentum

In 2012, Newark's most visible leaders—Governor Chris Christie, Superintendent Cami Anderson and Mayor Cory Booker—had attracted national attention for their work on Newark's challenging education issues and their progressive views on reform. Governor Christie, elected in 2009, appointed Anderson as Newark's

superintendent in May 2011. Within her first year as superintendent, Anderson started implementing reforms that included closing schools, replacing principals, giving authority to principals to select their own staff, opening an early college high school, and extending the school day at dozens of locations. She also initiated the district's efforts to build a data dashboard for every school, including charter schools, designed to sync systemic data for the benefit of educators, leaders, researchers, and policymakers.

Mayor Cory Booker, elected in 2006, used his role and platform to bring attention to education in the city, despite a lack of formal authority over the district. Booker created links between the city's education and employment issues and committed to addressing the needs of students in the city's underperforming district.

While Christie and Booker were unlikely allies due to their differing political affiliations, they found ways to align their efforts in serving the city's children. In 2010, as a result of their partnership, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg awarded the Newark Public Schools a \$100 million challenge grant, creating the Foundation for Newark's Future (FNF).

### **Diverse Grantmaking Strategies Strive for Success**

Education grantmaking in Newark involves a range of strategies employed by a diverse network of local, state, and national grantmakers.

- Local education grantmakers such as The Nicholson Foundation, the Victoria Foundation and The Prudential Foundation support schools and community-based organizations and often serve as informal, but crucial, liaisons between the community and the district.
- The Victoria Foundation funds a wide range of education programs and initiatives, including the Children's Literacy Initiative, arts education programs, and joint efforts coordinated by the Newark Trust for Education.
- The Nicholson Foundation has worked to foster high school completion for at-risk youth in Newark with the Youth Education and Employment Success Center, a multi-sector collaboration for at-risk youth, and the Virtual High School, an online distance learning resource.
- The Prudential Foundation has funded social investment initiatives to help alleviate barriers to educational success.
- The Newark Trust for Education has established the Funder's Collaborative to manage and support the Newark Public Schools Innovative Schools Investment Fund designed to align philanthropic investments with the district's theory of action. The Newark Trust has also built an online, publicly accessible, resource discovery tool called NET Navigator that maps external investments supporting district and charter schools.

Philanthropy also works in concert with local government to improve education and workforce development in the city. In 2007, the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers, working with Newark-focused philanthropy and Mayor Booker, created a Newark philanthropic liaison position in city hall. The liaison engages local, regional, and national foundations, government, and community-based organizations to bring attention to and coordinate efforts for a range of pressing issues for Newark.

The Newark Funders Group, staffed by the city's philanthropic liaison, convenes between 10 and 35 funders on a quarterly basis. The group is open to all grantmakers investing in Newark and serves as platform for networking, reviewing investments and local issues, and developing strategies for solving problems. The education subcommittee of the Newark Funders Group explores ways to link education with workforce development, further

building the relationship between the city, education system, and philanthropy. The education subcommittee has in the past, for example, identified gaps in funding for postsecondary support and, in response, worked to foster a college-going culture by drawing attention to college readiness, access, and attainment and engaging local colleges such as Rutgers and Essex County College.

In 2010, Mark Zuckerberg’s Startup:Education foundation committed \$100 million to Newark with a challenge grant. The responsibility of securing the match dollars falls to the local organization operating in Newark—the Foundation for Newark’s Future (FNF)—and the city. While FNF’s objectives were aligned with local efforts to improve education, the sudden investment in Newark from a previously unknown entity initially created tension among long-standing Newark stakeholders, even as it produced a sense of urgency in Newark for education reform. FNF’s presence in the city, which is time bound and scheduled to end in 2015, also fueled questions about sustaining efforts after the investment ends.

“Families want good. They don’t care [about the charter/public debate]. They want safe schools that put their kids on the path to college.”

—Cami Anderson, superintendent, Newark Public Schools

As a result, FNF’s strategy has involved working with local philanthropic partners such as the Newark Charter School Fund, the Newark Trust for Education, and The Schumann Fund for New Jersey to create strategic investments and build on existing efforts to develop an infrastructure that supports collaboration and action for the long term. FNF’s efforts have included the creation of a community advisory board to identify key partners who can support implementation of FNF’s strategies, foster collaboration and communication, and create conditions for success. FNF also invested in the preparation of a groundbreaking teacher’s contract, approved in November 2012, on behalf of Newark PSD and committed to pay for key provisions in the contract. These included teacher buyouts, outstanding merit pay, and a new teacher evaluation system.

### **THE LEARNING CONTINUES**

Education reform efforts in Newark appear to be moving in the right direction. The momentum is tangible and is driven by leaders, grantmakers, educators, researchers, and activists working in partnership to develop a shared language of collaboration to build the infrastructure for reform. Local government and philanthropy are working in concert to support students while engaged leaders are building collective will. Philanthropy is actively pooling funds to support innovative schools, establish a participatory community advisory board to convene local leaders, fund programs for students of color and English language learners, maintain the dedication to early education, and help sustain continuous, effective leadership.

Philanthropic leaders recognize an opportunity within this environment to develop strategies that engage the community, support collective investment and collaboration, preserve effective initiatives, insulate against changing politics, and sustain the vision for the city. This climate also underscores the importance of having sustained, high-caliber leadership willing to support the long-term vision for the city’s schools. As such, philanthropy also has the opportunity to operate as a change agent, pilot new programs, incent innovation, connect with external strategic resources, and reinforce alignment to the local theory of change. Though the process can be slow and painstaking, dedication to the city’s students, to the community, and to a long-term vision of success will continue to drive reform efforts and eventually yield results.

“If folks come together with collective will and focus and employ the right strategies, there’s nothing we can’t do.”

—Cory Booker, former mayor, City of Newark

## **2012 URBAN EDUCATION STUDY TOUR**

Grantmakers for Education’s 2012 Urban Education Study Tour provided rich, place-based learning experiences for funders seeking to explore effective grantmaking strategies that support student achievement, constructive partnerships, and systemic improvements. Focusing on students of color, English language learners, the P-20 education system, and productive relationships between districts and education philanthropy, participants have had the opportunity to review and discuss data, research, lessons, and future plans to inform grantmaking strategies linked to promising educational models. More than 40 grantmakers participated in the tour’s Newark stop, engaging with local administrators, funders, politicians, students, and the superintendent of the Newark Public School District. As the tour’s second visit, Newark provided contrast to the El Paso experience and simultaneously set the stage for the final stop in Oakland.

### **CITIES AND DATES**

*El Paso, TX—April 2012*

*Newark, NJ—May 2012*

*Oakland, CA—November 2012*

*While the study tour visits took place in 2012, this report was finalized in 2013 to include a current assessment of circumstances and conditions impacting education and grantmaking.*

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Grantmakers for Education | [www.edfunders.org](http://www.edfunders.org) | [information@edfunders.org](mailto:information@edfunders.org) | 503.595.2100