

Sustaining an Educational Pipeline in Urban America: A Case Study of Community Development through University Partnerships

Sosteniendo un canal educacional en la urbanidad americana: Un estudio de caso de Desarrollo Comunitario a través de una alianza con una universidad

Gloria Bonilla Santiago, PhD.

Rutgers University
United States



0000-0002-5159-4772

gloriab@camden.rutgers.edu

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ABSTRACT: Building on extensive fieldwork, this research examines a holistic educational community development approach to serving children and families in a vulnerable urban city, Camden NJ. This university-school comprehensive community development partnership is informed by the Community Capitals Framework. This guiding framework of action centers on improving outcomes for young people and families with limited resources and opportunities to cultivate the transformation of schools into entire communities where all children experience an excellent educational system with caring adults in all aspects of their lives. This 25-year study captures best practices during the building and sustaining of community development efforts, with outcomes leading to a successful cradle to college and careers pipeline that has strengthened the community and improved the quality of life for its young people substantially. Through university collaboration, oversight, management, and community ownership, the Rutgers/LEAP pipeline provides an integrated unique model for how to prepare students, train families, build community and remain sustainable.

KEYWORDS: community development, university partnerships, education, poverty.

RESUMEN: En base a un extenso trabajo de campo, esta investigación examina un enfoque holístico de desarrollo comunitario educativo para servir a niños y a familias en una ciudad urbana marginalizada, Camden NJ. Esta alianza de desarrollo comunitario integral entre la Universidad y la escuela se basa en el Marco de las Capitales Comunitarias. Este marco de acción orientador se centra en la mejora de los resultados para los jóvenes y las familias con recursos y oportunidades limitados, con el fin cultivar la transformación de las escuelas en comunidades integrales en las que todos los niños sean parte de un excelente sistema educativo con adultos que se preocupan por ellos en todos los aspectos de sus vidas. Este estudio de 25 años de duración recoge las mejores prácticas durante la construcción e implementación sostenible de los esfuerzos de desarrollo de la comunidad, con resultados que conducen a una exitosa trayectoria que inicia en la primera infancia y continua hasta la etapa universitaria de los estudiantes y sus posteriores carreras profesionales. Esto ha fortalecido la comunidad y mejorado significativamente la calidad de vida de sus jóvenes. Gracias a la colaboración, la supervisión, la gestión y la apropiación de esta iniciativa por parte de la comunidad universitaria, el proyecto Rutgers/LEAP ofrece un modelo integrado y único para preparar a los estudiantes, formar a las familias, construir comunidad y mantener su sostenibilidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: desarrollo comunitario, educación, pobreza.

The Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center (CLC) has been a catalyst in redefining the role Rutgers University-Camden plays in collaborating with the local community in Camden City, New Jersey. The campus has become an anchor to launch successful community development projects that contribute to neighborhood transformation. The Rutgers CLC's work has enhanced these institutional efforts to improve the economic, social, and cultural well-being of a now-vibrant Cooper Street Education Corridor. The CLC strengthened the collaborative ties with residents and institutions and has contributed to Rutgers-Camden's strategic vision of education, discovery, engagement and the development of networks of intellectual capital that reach into the community and around the globe. This case study captures and highlights the CLC's community landmark project during its 25-year trajectory of building and sustaining community development efforts that has led to improved educational outcomes for children from birth through adulthood and strengthened social and community capitals sustaining families and neighborhoods. The central research question being addressed is how does a community development initiative create a school that changes the educational conditions and sustains and produces high achieving students in one educational corridor for 25 years?

The successes and gains of the Rutgers-CLC work in the last 25 years have helped solidify the neighborhood and university campus as anchors in transforming and galvanizing community development efforts. The impact of the work is evident in residents' improved quality of life and the promotion of solidarity and agency, which have allowed people in Camden to live and work

according to their own meaning and arrangements. The Camden community with whom we work has a clear sense of purpose and participation where residents own their personal situation and are constantly working to rebuild and inspire others to pool their knowledge, talents, aspirations, and political will toward the sustainable well-being of their community. Collectively, the Rutgers CLC has accomplished this by drawing on university-community assets, resources and pathways.

The guiding theory of action has centered on the belief that improving outcomes for young people and families with limited resources and opportunities necessitates the transformation of schools into entire communities where all children can experience an excellent educational system with caring adults in all areas of their lives, safe places, a healthy start and healthy development, and opportunities to learn, grow and prosper.

The Rutgers CLC's focus has been on communities that are in need or struggling to sustain themselves, whether they are located regionally or globally. We selected a city (Camden) and place (Cooper Street) where the CLC and community could work closely together collectively to develop and implement meaningful programs that change people's lives. The CLC approach to transformational change is built upon six pillars: (1) An infant to college educational continuum; (2) School as the nexus for community development and transformation (3) Community wellness and leadership development, (4) Capacity building training and experiential learning programs for our college student population, (5) Research opportunities for our faculty and graduate students, and (6) Scaling up of best practices local and globally. A continuum of education running from early

infancy through college and career readiness addresses the multiple and intersecting educational challenges in the Cooper neighborhood and city. Community wellness programs improve the health and leadership of the neighborhood's residents, which have positive ripple effects in areas ranging from school attendance to the employability and productivity of adults. Training and capacity programs for college students support employment and opportunities for the neighborhood, where the research supports new creation of knowledge to inform policy makers at all levels.

The work and evaluation of the CLC's impact has been framed using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) developed by Flora, Flora & Fey (2004), which provides a validated tool to plan strategically and to measure community change. The biggest impact has been on the children and families in our community. The CLC, in partnership with the university, parents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, legislators, and local community members, founded the LEAP Academy University School in 1997 and Early Learning Research Academy in 2008 to build a comprehensive Cradle to College educational pipeline. LEAP, an official charter school district from Kindergarten to 12th grade, has achieved a 100% high school graduation and college acceptance rate for all 14 LEAP Academy graduating classes since 2005, and in this journey, thousands of families have benefitted from our collaboration and provision of health care, parent development training, college preparation support, job placement assistance, and training that build business and entrepreneurial skills to enhance residents long-term self-sufficiency. Moreover, the success in strengthening the university community's

intellectual capital is evident in the use of the CLC's living labs to advance student teaching and high-quality research. Not only have graduate and undergraduate students gained invaluable, real-life teaching experiences in our zone of practice through internships, courses, fellowships, teacher training, and research, but faculty and staff have also conducted and disseminated research based on our educational settings and best practices. Over the years, outstanding domestic and international scholars and practitioners, artists, and educators have visited our lab to learn from our work.

Background

In today's global economy, education is one of the most important factors in the national production of a country. Those societies that have advanced the most in their social and economic aspects around the world have achieved incredible progress in their creation of knowledge, transformation of their K-12 education system, and contribution to new research, production, innovation, and advancement in their competitive economies (Chmielewski & Reardon, 2016). Similarly, the social and cultural development of these countries and nations depends more today in the K-12 educational system for providing an education that will improve new economies, communication systems, innovation, merging technologies and STEM fields (Drew, 2011). The need for a new modern public instructional education system that is efficient, where children are the focus, where excellence is the destination and failure is not an option, is urgently needed so that we can develop and turn around our urban schools in the United States (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). A sustainable instructional educational system from infancy to college, where we can

maximize available resources without compromising the future of our generation of children and families, must be a local and national imperative of our country (Ewell, Jones, & Kelly, 2006; Lawson, 2013).

Historically, the city of Camden, New Jersey, has gone through some of the worst fiscal and economic crises in the history of any city in the United States. These crises were caused partially by political corruption, ineffective local government, a lack of accountability and leadership on the part of school officials, high dropout rates and a laissez faire approach of state supervision, particularly as evidenced by a string of arrests of three mayors within a 20-year period and a lack of accountability and transparency (Gillette, 2005; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Seligsohn & Mazelis, 2014). Camden is one of the poorest cities in the United States, despite going through major economic changes such as business tax breaks to encourage the building of new facilities in the city. With a population of 77,000, it has a poverty level of 39.3 %, which increased since the 2000 Census when it was 32.3 % (United States Census, 2016). The median household income is \$26,200, which increased from \$24,000 in 2000, and the percentage of people with a high school diploma is 68 %, which increased from 51 % in 2000 (United States Census, 2016). Thus, income and high school graduation have increased, but poverty has not decreased.

Like many other cities that experienced deindustrialization and White relocation to the suburbs during the second half of the 20th Century, Camden has had a troubling history, experiencing economic and social downward spirals between 1955 and the mid-1990s (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Gillette, 2005; Seligsohn & Mazelis, 2014). Camden lost nearly

50,000 residents and tens of thousands of jobs (Seligsohn & Mazelis, 2014). As middle-class Whites, industries, and jobs moved to surrounding suburbs, African Americans, Latinos, and poor Whites remained behind in a jobless, decaying city without an economic base, turning to public assistance and perpetuating a cycle of poverty (CSUCL, 1995; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). The city's tax base decreased and government capacity deteriorated (Gillette, 2005). The population rebounded following losses in the 1980s and 1990s, and again after the economic recession in the late 2000s. The Camden City School District population, on the other hand, has continuously dropped from 18,536 in 1998 to 7,941 in 2018, demonstrating detrimental effects of school age children population decline.

The Role of the Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center (CLC) in anchoring LEAP Academy University School

There have been community efforts dating back more than 100 years to transform distressed neighborhoods into places where residents lead healthy and thriving lives. Some of these efforts include the Settlement House movement of the early 1900s, the War on Poverty in the 1960s, and the rise of community development corporations (CDCs) in the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, interest and investment on the national, state, county, and city levels led to a Comprehensive Community Initiative movement among social change efforts, research, and lessons learned from earlier segmented service sectors (Henig, Riehl, Rebell, & Wol, 2015). This movement led to the earliest examples of large-scale, cross-sector collaborations to coordinate health, education, employment, and housing resources for youth and communities. Concerned about the

emergence of this movement, privately funded foundations, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, led similar initiatives aimed to address the complex, interrelated issues a community might face with complex and interrelated solutions. This influx of funding also included support for research on effective coalition functioning, decision-making, and coalition grantee support (Za, Pufall, Donlan, Lin, & Anderson, 2016).

During the 1990s, as the Rutgers CLC was planning and designing the transformation of Cooper Street in Camden, similar efforts began to gain popularity in the country, particularly Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCI). CCIs arose as an ambitious strategy to address the needs of residents of poor communities and as an attempt to try to combat long term poverty (Stagner & Duran, 1994). They intended to go beyond the achievements of existing community-based organizations, notably social service agencies and community development corporations (CDCs), by concentrating resources and combining the «best» of what had been learned from social, economic, physical and civic development in order to catalyze transformation of distressed neighborhoods. Unlike other community initiatives that focused on one intervention at a time, like the production of affordable housing units, CCIs adopted a comprehensive approach to neighborhood change and worked according to community building principles that value resident engagement and community capacity building.

By 2008, after the financial crisis and as the country was recovering, new community development funding streams were designated. Federal efforts included the creation of Promise

Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods in 2010 under the Obama Administration and the White House Council for Community Solutions, which led to the creation of the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (White House Council Report, 2012). The Promise Neighborhoods Initiatives, inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, was created by the U.S. Department of Education to encourage neighborhoods to support youth through their first two decades of life by creating a continuum of family, community, and academic supports. Communities continued to pursue locally-driven efforts consistent with the strategies adopted by Promise Neighborhood grantees despite not receiving federal resources to do so (Tough, 2009). Choice Neighborhood initiatives sought to improve the physical and economic infrastructure of neighborhoods while also providing direct services to youth and families (Schorr, 2009; Za et al, 2016; Smith, 2011).

These CCI initiatives inform our work with Rutgers CLC/LEAP Academy. The work of the CLC and LEAP collaboration adds value to the CCI research in that creates new practices and approaches to community development. Our approach to the work is more comprehensive in scale, focusing on the relationships between different elements of the initiative, as we built social, human and built capital for the community, rather than just the component of the program or organization in isolation.

The LEAP Model

The vision was not just to develop a school near a university, but also to form a community hub and comprehensive holistic model that provided a variety of services inside the school. The founder of the school created the CLC to leverage Rutgers' intellectual assets (Middle

States Commission on Higher Education, 2008) and channel university resources, both financial and academic, toward operations and structures of LEAP. She formed the university Centers of Excellence to complement the innovative STEM curriculum being implemented and built an environment conducive to supporting children and families holistically. The Centers are college-access and culture centers that begin at birth and ends in college, in which students and parents participate in college awareness seminars, dual courses and early college with local colleges, a family support center that provides workforce development, a co-op, microenterprise, and career training center for parents, a health and wellness center for families that provides legal

and family support services and ESL classes, and a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) state-of-the-art fabrication lab for innovation and entrepreneurial education for children and families. All aspects connect to the university; the Rutgers School of Nursing assisted during development of the health and wellness center, the School of Law ran legal clinics, biology and chemistry students and faculty built curricula and projects in the fabrication lab, and students and researchers from the Childhood Studies Department observe infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), the formative center in the cradle-to-college pipeline.

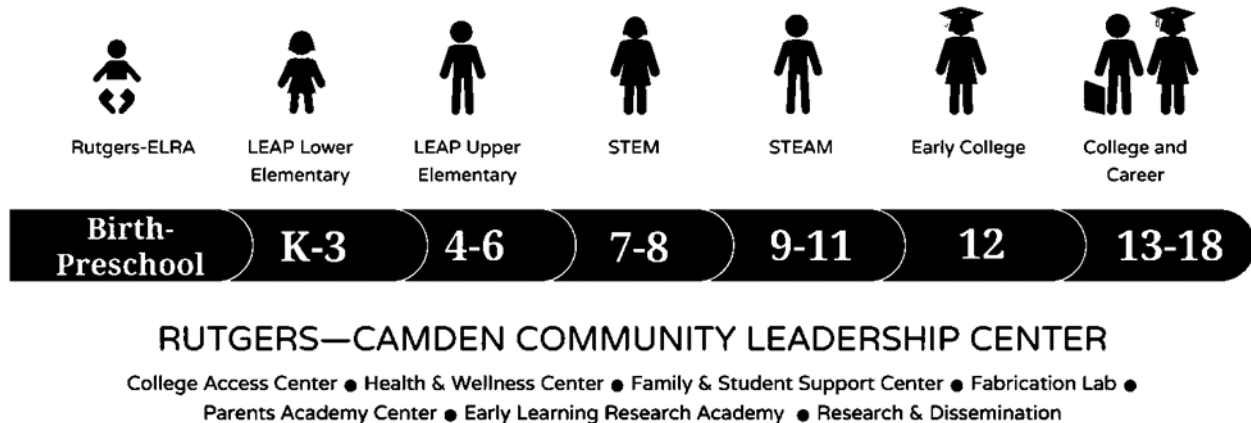


Figure 1. Rutgers/LEAP Cradle to College Pipeline.

Source: Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center, 2018.

LEAP’s current design and systems of operations are reflective of its collaborative path toward its formation. A LEAP working group established a guiding system by which all activities were accounted for based on three components: (1) a mission statement, (2) uniformly held beliefs by the group, and (3) guiding principles (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). The

group developed a focused and collaborative culture that allowed strategic planning to align with the vision and proceed with accomplishing the group’s goals (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). In a strategic plan titled *Camden Counts*, the mission was to «enhance opportunities for the children and families of Camden through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of

education, health, and human service programs and through community development» (CSUCL, 1995, p. 2-7). Based on its collaborative nature, four categories of stakeholders, displayed in Figure 2, represent the indicative partnerships

and alliances: (1) government and public sectors, (2) parents and community, (3) private entities, and (4) Rutgers University (Bonilla-Santiago, 1995).

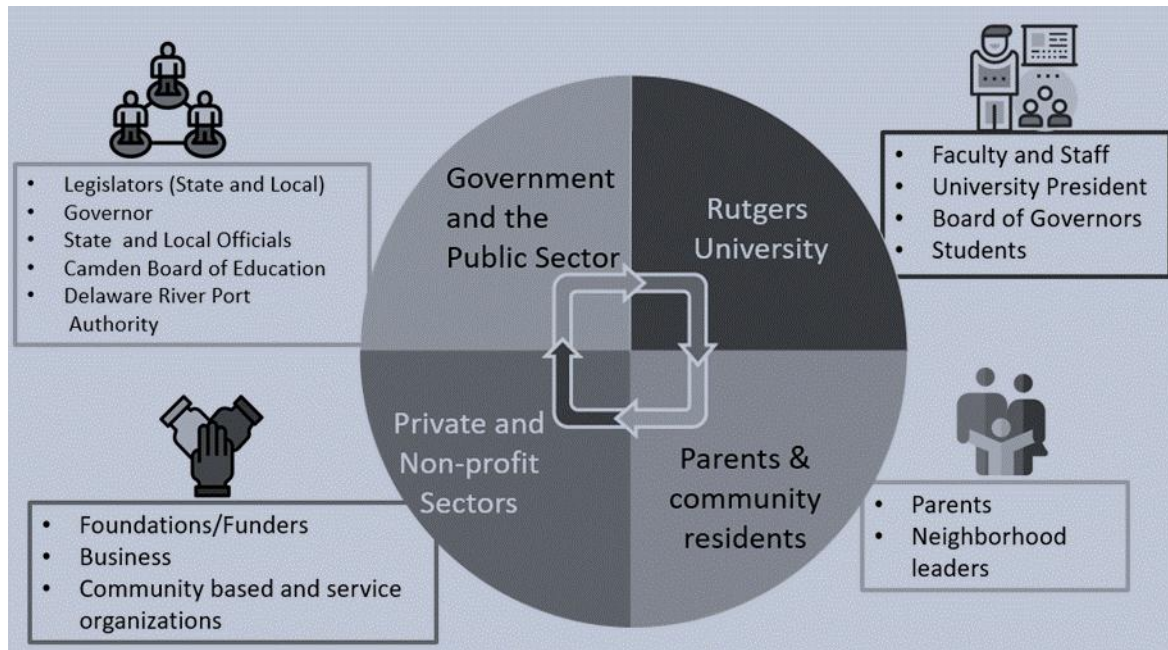


Figure 2. Rutgers/LEAP Cradle to College Pipeline

Source: Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center, 2018.

Figure 3 is a model of four factors grounding a comprehensive approach to sustaining the pipeline: (1) organizational, (2) student, (3) teacher development, and (4) stakeholder/alliance factors. The four elements operate in tandem to ensure that synergies among children, families, teachers, organizations, and curricula produce a focused, rigorous, data-driven, and entrepreneurial environment conducive to teaching and learning in an urban context. Amongst the innovative factors are that students have an extended

learning period and programs geared towards college access; teachers are compensated based on performance and have ample professional development opportunities; parents, institutions of higher learning, and the greater community are actively involved in operations of the initiative; and pipeline governance and systems adhere to entrepreneurial and sustainable accountability measures.

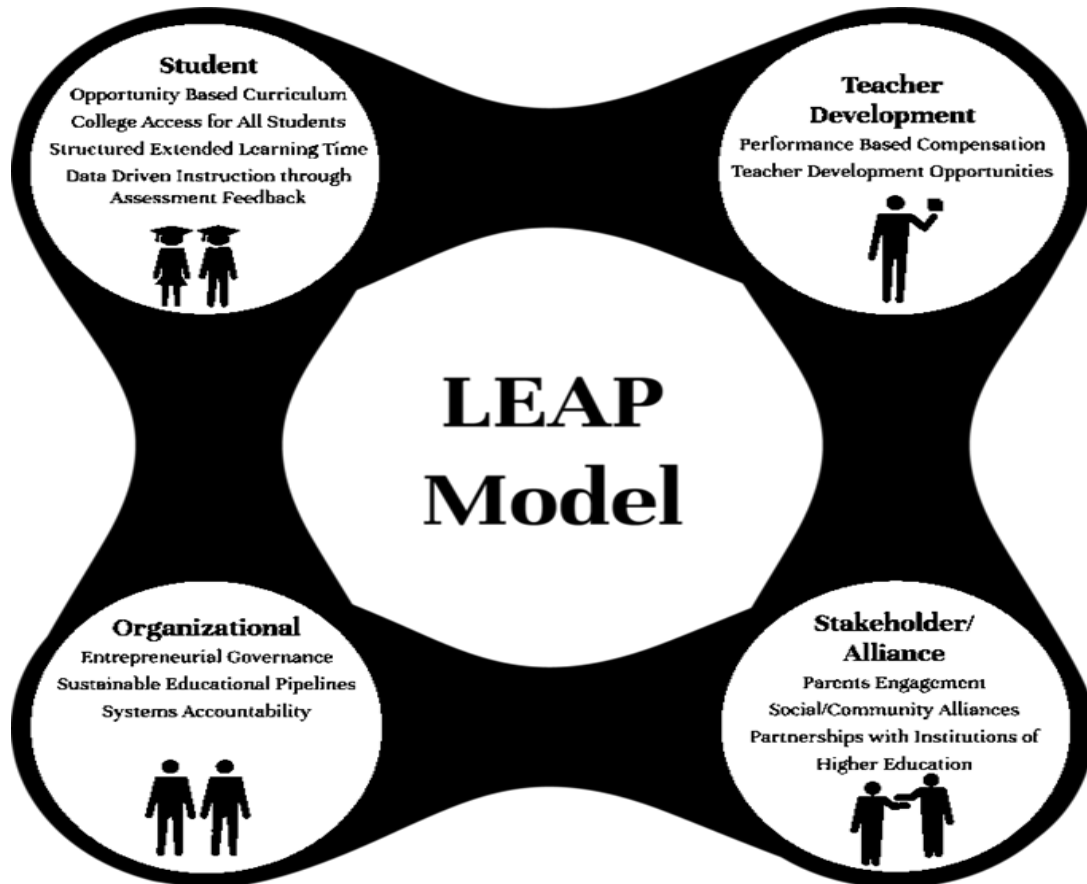


Figure 3. Rutgers/LEAP Model

Source: Bonilla-Santiago, G. (2014) *The Miracle on Cooper Street*. Archway Publishing.

Literature Review

During the planning stages in the early 1990s, the LEAP faculty planning team led focus groups with the aforementioned stakeholders and conducted asset mapping exercises that identified the strengths in the neighborhood, with the Appreciative Inquiry approach helping community members determine best strategies for investing in existing and future community assets (LEAP strategic plan, 1993).

When the initial community group planning process began, groups spoke about change in terms of what needs to change and how they were going to make those changes. Asset mapping and Appreciative Inquiry counteracted the negative conversations. The conversations began by asking participants to identify the positive aspects of the community instead of working from the negative ones. Assets are what we wanted to keep, build upon and sustain for future generations (McKnight & Kretzmann,

1993), either physical, like re-purposing of a building, or social, like volunteers working to clean the streets.

The problems of urban public education that the Rutgers CLC addresses are emblematic of conditions nationwide, which require thoughtful critiques, reflections, and engagement to overcome. Low test scores, high dropout rates, ineffective teachers, and dilapidated buildings are common in urban schools (Noguera, 2003). Constraints to urban public schools are both external and internal to school systems (Noguera, 2003). Externally, they relate to the effects of poverty and social isolation on families in economically depressed inner-city neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987; Noguera, 2003). Internally, high turnover rates among school leaders and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997) and inadequate facilities create disorder (Payne, 1984) that hinders teaching and learning. Noguera (2003) calls for creative approaches and identification of effective schools that serve poor children and demonstrate students can achieve high success.

The CLC/LEAP work is influenced by social justice motivations and various sociological theories of poverty and isolation. Some of the influential pedagogical approaches and fundamental philosophical, sociological, psychological and neuroscientific reforms, theories and models throughout the educational movement at the time were: The *Connectivism theory* developed by Siemens (2005) and Downes (2010), where they suggest that the only way to learn in a post digital era is to consider the ecology of knowledge, the diversity of networks of human behaviors, personal relationships, space and the virtual global interconnectedness; *Cognitive/humanist* theory that Paulo Freire and John Dewey championed and who advocated for

innovative methodologies like *Problem Based Learning* (PBL) and *Active Learning*; and *Constructivism* theory from Jean Piaget (1932), who advocated that we should develop students to trust their own ideas and allow them to develop so they can learn about themselves, make decisions, and accept their mistakes as part of creating new knowledge. There are no good or bad children in a school, children's capacities to adapt to a new learning style depend on the teachers and school methods of teaching and learning (Piaget, 1932); and social and cultural learning of everyone is affected by their social environment in which they develop (Vygotsky, 1978) foundational philosophies grounded in the CLC.

During a wave of educational reform attempts during the 1990s, at the time the CLC was forming LEAP Academy, other researchers recognized that new models of schooling had to emerge. Lieberman (1995) argued that salvation for our schools will not come from without but from within. Lieberman (1995) recognizes that changing schools requires changing practices and structures around the whole school, rather than just individual projects and classrooms. Instead of reforming existing school systems, new school models in the form of community (Dryfoos, 1994) and charter schools (Budde, 1988) demonstrate the power and capacity to achieve these same goals by creating new structures and organizations. The goals of these new models are to decentralize administration to support democratic governance of schools, implement school-based decision-making, and manage resources (Anyon, 1997).

In addition, capital theories of schools, poverty, and community shaped how the CLC connected education and community development initiatives to use schools as

channels for communities to overcome segregation and isolation. Social capital is the value that comes from connections within and between social networks-building of trust, collective norms, and reciprocating relationships (Walter & Hyde, 2012). It represents the communal binding necessary for community capacity-building and collective action and is a contributor to individual and community health and wellbeing (Kawachi et al. 2008; Walter and Hyde, 2012). Glaeser (2001) combines social capital with human capital, defined as educational attainment, arguing that the «education-social connection relationship should probably be the most robust and most important fact about the formation of social capital» (p. 16); an educated person is an engaged person who drives transformative change (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007).

Wilson (1996) argues that schools should play a prominent role in designing policies that address concentrated poverty. Isolation of ethnic neighborhoods produces less social integration and increases disorder (Arum, 2000). Schools that do not produce adolescent attachment to conventional activities experience greater delinquency (Sampson & Laub, 1995). School is a forum for connecting youths to conventional adult norms and adapting them to mainstream societal and economic structures (Coleman, 1988; Arum, 2000). Arum (2000) extends this concept by suggesting, «A school's relevant community is not just a neighborhood demographic environment, but equally an institutional environment» (p. 400). Expectations for success are institutionalized, and school challenges are addressed using intellectual, human, and social capital available from researchers who share meaning and solidarity with a community (Giddens, 1984). Schools have

innate abilities to foster relationships among various power structures of communities and elites, which symbolize a path to economic security because schools are integral during community development, influencing the shift in residents' perceptions of public institutions that are meant to serve them. Social capital regarding school development addresses broader issues of structural inequality, such as underfunding of school systems or school-to-prison pipelines. Warren (2005) defines this issue as relational power, in which community development should overcome external and internal isolation of urban public schools. An exodus of jobs destroys businesses, social institutions, and youth socialization, leading to social isolation (Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2002).

The Rutgers CLC anchors with LEAP to advance community development, empower residents and augment community control in urban revitalization. The CLC's mission resembles Stone et al.'s (2011) components of schools serving as community development vehicles: (1) they provide parents and others in poor communities with valuable experiences to interact with public agencies, (2) they increase skills and aptitudes of community residents for adults and children, (3) they strengthen social ties and the capacity for collective action in poor neighborhoods, and (4) they link neighborhoods with much-needed resources from communities.

The value of schools serving as vehicles for community development is virtuous, but implementation has challenged policymakers and practitioners. Instead of channeling efforts in bureaucracies of traditional public-school systems, university researchers and entrepreneurs recognize the possibility of building autonomous charter public schools to strengthen urban public education. Urban

schools and the promise of educational attainment and success connected to a university attract poor families to neighborhoods and prevent families from leaving. New urban schools anchor community development to influence place-based decisions around economic revitalization (Taylor & Luter, 2013; Luter, 2016, Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

Methodology

To answer the research question of how a community development school initiative (LEAP Academy University School) in Camden changed the educational conditions and sustained high achieving students in one educational corridor, we used the community capitals framework (Emery & Flora, 2006) to guide a direct asset mapping and qualitative approach (Yin, 1984) to document and assess the emerging actions of the Rutgers CLC/LEAP pipeline and best practices that contribute to its sustainability. We conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the formation, implementation, and sustainability of the university-school partnerships, including former university and government officials, professors, former school leaders, parents, and community leaders, alumni, all identified through a review of historical documents, strategic plans, state reports, and newspaper clippings. Through the interviews, stakeholders narrated their own interpretations on the formation, implementation, and sustainability that offered rich content (Borthwick et al, 2003). This stratified, purposeful, and snowball sampling of stakeholders at various levels of the project (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was the most reliable form to assess the project from various perspectives. Each conversation was recorded and transcribed to capture the information for

thematic analysis. Each participant completed and signed an interview consent form for audio/video recording. Upon completion of the interviews and review of documents, responses were coded manually to extrapolate themes that defined the development of the partnership (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Coding of interviews structured the themes and common issues throughout the content. Codes that represented the characteristics of the LEAP educational pipeline and the challenges of sustaining it allowed in-depth analyses. The codes were interpreted and structured to identify patterns, themes, surprises, challenges, and enabled dynamics to be explicated from the data.

Findings

Due to Rutgers and LEAP's working group influence during the 1990s, Dr. Santiago, the founder of the school, extended Rutgers' work to include Cooper Street as the strategic place of focus to transform the neighborhood. Cooper Street was characterized by dilapidated buildings, homeless people, and drug use. Provost Roger Dennis and Dr. Santiago decided to move their offices to Cooper Street in a historic building as the first step to be part of the community. The working group received grants from the Delaware River Port Authority, Tree Foundation, Prudential Foundation, and Ford Foundation and others to re-build and repurpose school buildings, plant vegetation, and repave sidewalks to improve the physical conditions along the corridor, which attracted more capital. The growth of the LEAP Schools along Cooper Street to encompass 6 major buildings, split between the Early Learning Research Academy, Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, STEM building, and 9–12 STEAM building, evidences the innovation and vision required to transform a

neighborhood using schools as vehicles for physical development, combined with social and community development.

During the 1990s, the emotions among families toward the traditional school and classroom environment were of angst and major concern. Gang activities and drug dealing permeated the streets of Camden, leading to incessant crime and behavioral challenges, even inside schools. According to a founding staff member and parent of LEAP Academy:

There was a lot of turmoil, a lot of things happening. And the people in the city felt helpless, hopeless. You could feel it in the educational system and the political system everywhere. It was a very terrible time in the city, for everyone. (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017, n.p.)

A parent of an inaugural year student recalls how parents were distanced from schools:

Camden school systems at that time...they're detached. They don't do much with parents. I guess you're not forbidden to go there but you're not welcome there, I guess, is the right...You don't feel welcomed. (Founding Parent Interview, 2017, n.p.)

In the context of university–community relations, the relationship between Rutgers University–Camden and the community were uninviting. Signs posted on campus prohibited outsiders from walking through, and police patrolled the grounds looking for people who should not be there (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). The university environment was also unfriendly to minorities, since the number of African American and Latino students was low. Professors were unaccommodating, one founding staff member who lived in Camden had

to take care of her children as a single mother, which involved constantly seeking alternative childcare options (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). According to Dr. Deborah Bowles, a Rutgers–Camden associate chancellor and enrollment management leader, recognized the imbalance between the goals of the university and results from the K–12 school district population:

A lot of people feeling that Rutgers was in the community but not of the community, and that Rutgers did not understand its obligation to try to bring along more students who could become eligible for admission to Rutgers or other universities. (Bowles, 2018, n.p.)

In addition to creating new educational outcomes, including graduating high school and entering college, the motivation for LEAP was to provide a welcoming sense of community to parents and children in the city. Many policies precluded people from educational environments both in the Camden public school system and at Rutgers. LEAP treated families with pride, dignity, and respect. Families would be instrumental in shaping LEAP's structure and governance, and as an education program, to provide a sense of being and belonging that had never existed for minority families in Camden before. A founding parent and original board and planning member remarked how Dr. Santiago gave parents a voice for stronger education:

[Dr. Santiago] gave us opportunity to gain knowledge that we wouldn't have gotten in the Camden city school system...it was an opportunity to get out of poverty and get an education. Opportunity for me to want to be more educated, you know, and to have set higher goals for me and my children. And then while you're, you know,

getting your education and you're improving your lifestyle, you also give back to the community where you came from and that's, you know, how I see her. (Founding Parent Interview, 2018)

As part of the LEAP planning process, the Parents as Partners for Educational Change Advocacy Council formed, became the first 500 parent group to legitimize the potential, knowledge, and skill sets parents had to create change. It resembled a major shift in how parents were treated in the city, particularly regarding education. The school system tended to ignore parents and expected them to follow orders and not ask questions (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). Parents were conditioned to not participate in decision-making. Through the LEAP training program, parents were given learning assessments and the Parenting Stress Index to reflect on their own abilities and capacities as individuals. Seminars empower parents with new knowledge, approaches, techniques, and competencies concerning children's ways of learning, their development, and the education system (Bonilla-Santiago, 1995). Consequently, parents' roles as community change actors and drivers elevated. Dr. Santiago capitalized on their strength as a constituent group to lobby state lawmakers as the charter school legislation blossomed. The presence of parents proved effective in moving the legislation to enactment. State associate Melanie Schulz reflects that parents «evolved like butterflies» through advocacy:

[Gloria] gave them the experience of participating, made them proud of who they were, and gave them confidence. All of it changed the dynamics of shaping charter legislation, made a huge impression on legislators, and made the parents valuable participants in the process. That what

she gave to them. (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014, pg. 141)

The new school empowered parents to take hold of their own destinies, build new paths, and open new doors for themselves. Dr. Santiago intentionally organized parents in peaceful and civilly obedient ways to teach them to advocate and create structures to help themselves and their children. She explains:

We went from advocacy in legislating change to how to conduct homework sessions at home, to how to present testimony and communicate with the legislature using peaceful means for getting people to respect the policy process. (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017, n.p.)

The LEAP school changed the social and inter-relational dynamic of how parents were treated; they were now respected and treated with dignity in an environment where they have a voice. LEAP has an integrated holistic model that is unique to any school and throughout this process we collected best practices that are reflected in the school community.

Recommendations and Best Practices

1. Rigorous college preparation programs, access to quality education, and capacity building prepare students from cradle to college and develop soft skills necessary to achieve in higher education and into their careers.

The college access focus throughout the entire Rutgers/LEAP pipeline makes the CLC's efforts strategically significant for Rutgers University. In anchoring our collective work, college and career readiness programs are purposely placed at the center of the school's organizational structure through a focus on high

expectations for all students, educators, and families. College readiness is not only embedded in the curriculum but is also the cornerstone of the development of programmatic structures that support the path and preparation of students through the pre-K-12 program to college. The Cradle to College and careers pathways on Cooper Street in Camden is the only intentional cohort effort in the country with a Latino and African-American population achieving 100 % high school graduation. Current LEAP Director of College Access and LEAP alum Marchelle Roberts comments:

My experience as a student at LEAP and alumni now, opened my eyes to how vital a college education is in this world and how necessary it is to show black and brown students that college is attainable, no matter where they come from, what they may lack, or who may doubt them. It is important to me, that students of color are able to envision a world where anything is possible for them, and that starts with preparing for and succeeding in college. (Roberts, 2018, n.p.)

As of 2018, 1,005 students, which is 100 % of all senior classes, have graduated from LEAP Academy. 200 of LEAP high school graduates have attended one of Rutgers's three campuses in Camden, New Brunswick, and Newark. Since 2013, data on our alumni have shown an 85 % college retention rate and more than \$30 million in scholarship funds to help students remove the financial barriers that often stand in the way of completing a bachelor's degree.

In 2017-2018, the Rutgers-CLC launched the Early College Program and engaged Rutgers and Rowan Universities in articulating a program that provided the opportunity for the entire LEAP senior class to enroll in early college for the entire year, where 100 % of the senior class was

admitted to college with up to 30 college credits. The strategy of teaming up university faculty with LEAP teachers to co-teach as a recitation leader has proven to be an effective strategy for reinventing the senior year.

More students will successfully complete college courses before graduating high school. Khary Golden, LEAP Director of Early College, expresses that the LEAP model informs that:

There is one choice for LEAP Students and families. That is to engage in higher education. We meet them where they are, and students are provided opportunities where they can learn about the avenues and pathways into higher education before they even become graduating seniors in high school or actual college standards. (Golden, n.p. 2018)

The students' biggest challenge with Early College is the rigor of college courses and adjusting to the early schedule, but the best is being part of a college culture and feeling welcomed by professors and staff who wanted so much to support them. A graduating student remarked, «This college program [gave] me the opportunity to show my best potential that there is a path to success no matter where you come from» (LEAP student, 2018, n.p.).

2. The Health and Community Wellness Clinic improves the quality of life for neighborhood residents and positively impacts school attendance, employability and productivity of adults.

Part of the Rutgers CLC mission is to deepen the public's knowledge of health and wellness issues by serving as a resource and care provider of «high quality ambulatory health care to the community» (Rivera, 2018). The Health and Community Wellness Clinic provides family medicine treatment to all LEAP children and

families for asthma, diabetes, obesity, colds, and other illnesses, and has a prevention wellness unit for children with traumas (both physical and psychological) including witnessing parents or family members being killed, traumatized from abandonment and neglect, domestic and sexual assault, and from being bullied. Many of these children and families experience these urban traumas based on squalid environmental and social conditions negatively impact students' ability to focus and learn.

3. Parent Engagement builds school and community culture, creating accountability and transparency, and improving academic performance.

The Family Support center serves as a community place for family education where parents are valued for their contributions to their child's education. The school community builds on individual strengths, assets and talents, and the combined capabilities of parents as stakeholders and partners. Using an asset-based community development approach, human and cultural capital of the schools coalesce to ensure students and parents reach their full potential. Jean Shepard, a founding parent and graduate of the first Parent Academy College program, remarks:

LEAP was an opportunity to get out of poverty and get an education, for me to want to be more educated and to set higher goals for me and my children. While you're getting your education and you're improving your lifestyle, you also give back to the community where you came from. Even though you get a better education, better values, self-esteem and motivations, you'd come back, and you give back. (Shepard, 2018, n.p.)

During the planning stages, parent focus group participants identified many important needs in their community. These discussions and a shared perspective that parental engagement is crucial to creating and sustaining the cradle-to-college pipeline shaped the development of a citywide Parent Academy for School Reform that has engaged and trained thousands of parents. Since 1997, parents have lead and enjoyed stronger family engagement facilitated by the school community as codified by a parent volunteer contract. Parents complete trainings and the majority report that their family's ability to read, write, and perform better is due to increased educational engagement. The Parent Council is part of the school's governance and recommend policies for the school community and Board of Trustees.

4. Academic Pillars for learning should integrate entrepreneurship, data-driven instruction, problem solving, analytical research, applied experimentation, project-based learning, reflection, and active learning.

Across grade levels, students and teachers use data driven and applied learning modules that expose students to core content knowledge to raise awareness, interest and motivation of students in the STEM fields. The Fabrication Lab provides a zone of practice and the setting for multi-disciplinary projects for solving local problems. It offers an opportunity to develop replicable products that impact community and drive curriculum. Its location within a school anchors it as a technical prototyping platform for innovation and invention that stimulates student engagement and creativity and promotes local entrepreneurship. Ricardo Miranda, Director of the Fabrication Lab, supports this: «the FabLab creates a synergistic effect that enriches and

enhances the results of the projects...creat[ing] a new way to alternative, participatory, inclusive communities in the classroom, at school, locally and around the globe» (Miranda, 2018, n.p.).

This approach increases a sense of civic responsibility as students learn to become global citizens and contributors to solving local and global environmental problems such as water quality, food deserts, recycling and composting for organic urban gardens.

5. The University-based CLC is an anchor for community transformation, giving access and parity for community to become partners to create new knowledge and innovations, and a voice and seat at the table in the school governance and in community development efforts.
6. Transformative School Leadership is long, difficult and lonely work. Adults want to maintain the status quo and teachers are impatient for results. School leaders need to have resiliency and knowledge to know what to do, lead with courage and make difficult decisions, know who to listen to and how to manage critics along the way.

From the beginning, it took five years to see signs of sustained improvement in the academic culture and climate of the school community. The journey has been challenging but the rewards for the community are transformative. There are now 14 years of having 100 % of students graduate high school and attend college; 85 % of parents engaged and 95 % of staff have no absences.

Discussion

This study places community development school practice in transforming a neighborhood at the forefront of a university partnership for high school and college completion to catalyze and

champion policies, and systems and practices that ensure all students, particularly low income, first generation students, graduate from college and achieve their careers. The Rutgers CLC, through the LEAP pipeline, created a new theory of action using a school as a comprehensive community initiative integrating a holistic educational approach for children and families in a distressed urban setting. Asset-based community development informed the school model desired by the community and supported by the university, which led to policy outcomes of legislation creating charter schools in New Jersey. This case demonstrates that policies adapted from local grass-roots innovation efforts with community ownership, rather than from government-mandated decisions, are detrimental to communities and neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Implications for practice are that university-school partnerships need to be designed within an asset-based community development framework where community members are part of the planning stages and then are active and beneficiaries in its operations and governance. The cradle to college pipeline is linked to the university and the relationship is reciprocal, collaborative and respectful of community life. Through university oversight, management, and community ownership, the Rutgers/LEAP pipeline provides an integrated model and process for how it prepares students, trains families, builds community, and remains sustainable.

Much can be learned from the LEAP educational pipeline. University faculty and senior staff need to embrace building tangible bridges through dual enrollment, early college, and tuition-benefit opportunities with community

members to instill a college-going culture within the community. Community, particularly parents, needs to be part of the planning process and governance structure to claim ownership and pride in the work, while holding everyone accountable for the work. The university needs to continue to provide leadership in the partnership by institutionalizing the project with ongoing community input, financial and academic support for long-term sustainability of the partnership. Having a university center and staff designated to provide oversight to the partnership proven to be an asset in that it serves as mediator advocates and support for the partnership. The University and Community partnership needs to continue support innovative practices to provide multi-faceted services with the community and be flexible to experiment, listen, evolve, grow, and adapt over time. Most importantly, with conviction, intention, and guiding principles of social justice, equity, respect for community values, universities can be anchors of sustainable and meaningful change.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.