

camden school facilities plan

convening

Summary Report – April 23, 2001



About the Annie E. Casey Foundation



The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

Through the Making Connections initiative the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working in Camden, New Jersey, and 21 other cities around the United States to connect families in neighborhoods to the opportunities, social networks, and formal services that will improve the lives and well-being of children and families. One component of the initiative offers learning opportunities and other technical assistance to the 22 cities in their pursuit of goal achievement for strengthening families in a neighborhood context. For more information, visit the Foundation's website, www.aecf.org.

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Introduction

On April 3, 2001, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) brought together Camden, New Jersey school and government officials, community leaders, state agency representatives and expert advisors in a daylong meeting to share information and discuss community engagement strategies for the Camden School Facilities Plan. Approximately 50 stakeholders participated in the meeting, which was held at the Cooper Waterfront Homes.

For the past 2 1/2 years, the Casey Foundation has been working with a broad cross-section of the Camden community as part of its Making Connections initiative, designed to promote strong families. The Foundation hired DC Agenda, a Washington, DC-based community assistance organization, to plan and facilitate the school facilities plan convening. DC Agenda worked in partnership with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, a member of AECF's Camden site team, which provided strategic advice and staff support in planning the meeting.

The Camden School Facilities Plan was prompted by the 1998 New Jersey Supreme Court decision, *Abbott v. Burke*, which requires the State to fund and implement comprehensive school construction for 30 "special needs" districts throughout the state. Each district is required to submit a five-year facilities plan that must be approved by the State. The plan was submitted to the State in May 1999. At the time of the convening, Camden was one of only five Abbott districts that had yet to have its plan approved.

The purposes of the meeting were to: 1) share information, 2) identify issues and concerns, 3) explore the role of parents, residents and community groups, and 4) identify some of the expertise available to help as the planning process moves forward.

A copy of the agenda is included in the appendix, along with a list of the participants. Below is a summary of the convening.

Overview of the Facilities Plan

A Powerpoint presentation (see appendix) of the Camden School Facilities Plan provided a frame of reference for the day's discussion. The overview was drawn from the Five-Year Facilities Management Plan (May 24, 1999) developed by the Vitetta Group for the Camden Board of Education. An audience discussion followed the presentation. Key points highlighted in the presentation included:

Camden Schools Today

- Camden has 35 schools: 21 elementary, five middle, three high schools (including one magnet), three alternative schools serving middle and high school students, one early childhood center, a special education facility, and an adult education facility.
- Most schools are in poor condition and overcrowded; classrooms and facilities for extracurricular activities are inadequate.
- There are currently 19,000 students. Projected enrollment in five years is 18,300 students.

Facilities Plan Highlights

- Replacement of seven elementary schools; construction of two new elementary schools and renovations to 14
- Closure of one elementary school
- Construction of two new junior high schools, replacement of one, and renovations to five
- Renovations to four high schools, construction of one new magnet school, and replacement of two magnet schools
- Construction of a new technical high school and new alternative high school
- Restructuring of the middle school format (currently grades 6–8) to a junior high model (grades 7–9); elementary schools would change from current pre-k–8th grades to pre-k–6th grades
- Most four-year-olds will be in District schools; most three-year olds will be with community providers.

Key Features

- Specialized spaces for science, social studies, art, and music at the elementary level
- Specialized spaces for music, writing, computer, business technology, consumer science, health education and language labs for junior highs
- Cosmetology, auto repair, electronics, commercial foods, sewing, medical and mechanical labs for high schools
- Separate cafeterias and auditoriums that will also be available for community meetings
- Gyms, weight rooms and swimming pools for high schools—also available for community use.

State's Concerns

technicians whose job it was to give residents the parameters, and then take time to learn from residents what was actually needed.

- A critical step was to get the word out about the product (Master Plan) and the intent. Information was conveyed in English and Spanish via radio, television, flyers and the City's web site. 20,000 Master Plan summaries were distributed to residents through neighborhood associations, churches, and other community-based organizations.
- More than 100 residents were trained to become local experts on the Master Plan and to conduct meetings and collect information. More than 800 people attended a total of approximately 40 meetings. Relationships between the City and residents were established that are expected to be sustained throughout the implementation phases of the Master Plan.

Closing Comments from the Panel

Panel members stressed that it is not too late for Camden to plan and implement an effective strategy that includes residents and other stakeholders in refining the facilities plan. Meaningful citizen involvement is critical, beginning with timely and accessible information to the public. The Abbott decision offers considerable opportunities for Camden to improve its schools—and to stimulate economic and community development efforts. The State is obviously an important partner, and Camden officials need to be deliberate and strategic about cultivating a working relationship. Camden obviously has unique, “particularized” needs that may justify plans that vary from the State's guidelines, but it must make its case by providing data, documentation and evidence of community support.

Role of Parents, Residents and Community Groups

Stuart Bressler, Assistant Director, New Jersey Redevelopment Authority, and Thomas Holmes, Development Director, Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity, kicked off a group discussion on the specific steps that Camden could take to establish an effective community engagement process to move the facilities plan forward. The Redevelopment Authority administers the “Smart Growth” program, which provides grants to New Jersey cities to promote community involvement in planning processes. The Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity partnered with the Camden Board of Education to pursue a Smart Growth grant for the School Facilities Plan. The joint application targeted the Cramer Hill neighborhood as a pilot site for its community engagement strategy.

Stuart Bressler

- Camden's Smart Growth grant has been approved for \$50,000. The purpose of the grant is to strengthen the link between the City's Master Plan and the School Facilities Plan, using Cramer Hill as a pilot neighborhood. The actual scope of work has yet to be finalized, leaving room for broader stakeholder input.
- \$50,000 is a relatively modest amount for community engagement, given the scope of the School Facilities Plan. The Urban Coordinating Council and the Economic Development Authority are collaborating with other State agencies to identify additional resources for community engagement activities.
- The State is offering demonstration grants for six community development schools, yet no school district has applied for the grants. The process has been described as onerous, and there is a lack of State funding for excess purposes.
- The Housing and Mortgage Finance Administration has the right of first refusal for any Camden city-owned property. Efforts should be made to identify and map those sites the city has access to, especially around existing schools.

Thomas Holmes

- Cramer Hill has begun a three-year planning process with an advisory council consisting of representatives from schools, community organizations, social services and businesses. The partnership with the Board of Education was designed to give residents input in site selection for new schools.
- Land acquisition is key. The Redevelopment Authority can help by providing a current list of available sites under State control.

Discussion Issues

The ensuing audience discussion focused on the Board of Education's intent regarding community engagement. Responses from the Board prompted questions about whether the Board is interested in true community involvement or just validation of a process well underway. Previous speakers and resource persons with experience in other cities emphasized the importance of a credible community engagement process that is integrated throughout the entire planning process.

There was consensus that the community involvement process thus far has been limited and narrow, with very little public information about the plan. Community members pointed out that they have first-hand information about their neighborhoods that could be useful to the Board, and that community support is critical to the success of the plan. In response, School Board president Phil Freeman and Superintendent Annette Knox vowed to make it a priority to open up the process. A representative from the EDA cautioned that even after the plan has been approved, it is a dynamic process that can be modified and otherwise refined throughout the implementation phase.

Other comments from the group discussion included:

- The facilities plan needs to be integrated with neighborhood planning efforts currently underway. The Cramer Hill model may not be ready in time to be useful throughout the city.
- The Camden Facilities Advisory Board should be expanded to include broader representation from parents and community members.
- Camden needs to learn from the experiences of other cities and take advantage of the resources available to help move the plan forward.
- The State has hired a grants coordinator to work with Camden to secure additional funds for extra spaces and special facilities that are “above and beyond” the State model.

Next Steps

The Camden School Facilities Plan convening was an important and timely forum that brought together many of the key stakeholders necessary to move the agenda forward. Critical information was shared, concerns were aired, new alliances were initiated, and commitments were made to establish a meaningful role for citizen participation in this important process. In its role as a catalyst, the Casey Foundation will continue to support the Camden community’s efforts to move forward, but leadership must come from the community itself.

Proposed next steps include:

- Confirm commitment from the Board of Education to open up the planning process. Use the Master Plan process as a model for community engagement.
- The Coalition for Our Children’s Schools will work with stakeholders to hold an Abbotters. third.

Camden School Facilities Plan Convening
APPENDICES

Appendix AAgenda
Appendix BPower Point Presentation
Appendix CList of Attendees

Camden School Facilities Plan Convening Cooper Waterfront Homes April 3, 2001

AGENDA

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| 10:00 - 10:15 | Coffee and Networking | |
| 10:15 – 10:30 | Welcome and Introductions | Carole Thompson The Annie E. Casey Foundation |
| 10:30 – 10:45 | Review Agenda and Purpose | John “Skip” McKoy DC Agenda |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of issues and concerns • Exploration of the role of parents, residents and community groups • Development of “next steps” strategies | |
| 10:45 – 11:30 | Overview of the Facilities Plan | Brenda Donald DC Agenda |
| | Role of the State | |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | Panel Discussion: Lessons Learned | Rudy Bryant, moderator The Pratt Institute |
| | Joan Ponessa – Education Law Center Joyce Harley – Coalition for Our Children’s Schools Alex Brown – Trenton Facilities Advisory Board Ed Williams – City of Camden | |
| 12:30 – 1:00 | Lunch | |
| 1:00 – 1:45 | Group Discussion | Skip McKoy, Brenda Donald |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan assumptions • Land use and impact questions • Process questions | |
| 1:45 – 2:15 | Summary of Group Discussions | Skip McKoy, Brenda Donald |
| 2:15 – 2:30 | Break | |
| 2:30 – 3:45 | Role of Parents, Residents and Community Group | Skip McKoy |
| 4:15 – 5:00 | Closing and Next Steps | Carole Thompson |

Camden School Facilities Plan Overview

April 3, 2001

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Camden demographics**
 - Nearly 80,000 residents (down 9% from 1990 population of 87,000)
 - 55% of children live in below poverty conditions; 75% receive free or reduced lunch
 - 82% of Camden residents receive some form of public assistance
 - Unemployment is approximately 15%

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Camden Schools**
 - 35 schools: 21 elementary, 5 middle, 3 high schools (including 1 magnet), 3 alternative schools serving middle and high school students, 1 early childhood center, 1 special education facility, and 1 adult education facility
 - Most schools are in poor condition, overcrowded; classrooms are inadequate and overcrowded; inadequate facilities for extracurricular activities
 - 19,000 students currently – projected enrollment in 5 years is 18,300 students

Camden School Facilities Plan Overview

April 3, 2001

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Abbott School Districts**
 - Camden is one of 30 “special needs” school districts, also known as Abbott districts
 - Camden is 1 out of 5 Abbott districts yet to be approved
 - 1998 New Jersey Supreme Court decision requires a state-funded school construction program for the Abbott districts
 - Court gave priority for health & safety, pre-schools, and elimination of overcrowding

CAMDEN FACILITIES PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

- Replacement of 7 elementary schools; construction of 2 new elementary schools and renovations to 14
- Closure of 1 elementary school
- Construction of 2 new junior high schools; replacement of 1; and renovations to 5
- Renovations to 4 high schools, construction of one new magnet school, and replacement of 2 magnet schools
- New technical high school
- New alternate high school

Camden School Facilities Plan Overview April 3, 2001

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

CAMDEN FACILITIES PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

- Restructuring of the *middle school* format (currently grades 6-8) to *junior high model* (grades 7-9)
- Elementary schools would change from current Pre-K – 8th grades to Pre-K – 6th grades
- Challenge Square Academy to be converted into District Technology Center
- Most 4-year-olds will be in District schools; most 3-year-olds will be with community providers

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

- Specialized spaces for science, social studies, art and music
- Cafeterias instead of “cafeteriums”
- Separate auditoriums that will also be available for community meetings
- Multi-purpose rooms for early childhood and parent/student functions
- Expanded nurses suites to accommodate community health clinic services

Camden School Facilities Plan Overview

April 3, 2001

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

HIGH SCHOOLS

- 4 models: 1) general, broad-based curriculum, 2) a medical arts school, 3) a performing and fine arts school 4) a technology arts school
- Large number of specialized spaces, including cosmetology, auto repair, electronics, commercial foods, sewing, medical and mechanical labs
- Physical education facilities include gyms, weight rooms, and swimming pools – also available for community use

HIGH SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

- Renovations to Woodrow Wilson and Camden High with a reduced student capacity and new grade alignment of grades 10-12
- Renovation to Brim Medical Arts with increased student capacity
- Construction of new performing arts school, which will require a new site
- Replacement of Feters Alternative and Challenge Square Academy with one facility (new site)

**Camden School Facilities Plan Overview
April 3, 2001**

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

STATE'S ISSUES OR CONCERNS

- Proposed school models significantly exceed State's space guidelines
- Too many specialized spaces instead of multiple usage rooms
- Questions about enrollment projections
- Inadequate justification to deviate from State guidelines

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION ISSUES

- Relationship to City's master plan
- Realistic expectations (efficient use of space)
- Impact on neighborhoods
- Community partnerships
- Land-use implications
- Community involvement in the process

Attendees of School Facilities Plan Convening April 3, 2001

Mr. Norton Bonaparte
Business Administrator
City of Camden

Mr. Stuart Bressler
Assistant Director
New Jersey Redevelopment Authority

Mr. Alex Brown
Chair
Trenton Facilities Advisory Board

Mr. David Brown
The Star Group

Mr. Dennis Brunn
Community Building Specialist
The Housing & Community Development
Network of New Jersey

Mr. Rudolph E. Bryant
Associate Director
Pratt Institute Center for Community and
Environmental Development

Ms. Nikki Castle
Consultant
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Mr. Sean Closkey
Executive Director
St. Joseph's Carpenter Society

Ms. Kara Coleman
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Ms. Carol Dann
Executive Director
Camden Neighborhood Renaissance

Ms. Sara T. Davis
Vice President
Camden Board of Education

Ms. Glenna Deekle
Program Assistant, Camden Site Team
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Mrs. Louise Dobbs
Camden City Council/United Neighbors
of Whitman Park

Ms. Brenda Donald
DC Agenda

The Honorable Gwendolyn Faison
Mayor
City of Camden

Mr. Joe Fleming
Director
Camden Churches Organized for People

Mr. Phillip Freeman
President
Camden Board of Education

Mr. Norm Fruchter
Director
IESP, New York University

Mr. Angel Fuentes
President
Camden City Council

Mr. Richard Gray
IESP, New York University

Attendees of School Facilities Plan Convening April 3, 2001

Ms. Dickie Lynn Gronseth
Executive Director
CamConnect

Ms. Joyce Harley
Executive Director
Coalition for our Children's Schools

Mr. Jerry Harris
Executive Director
Urban and Public Policy Institute,
Rowan University

Ms. Maureen Hassett
Office of the Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

Mr. S. Thomas Holmes II
Development Director
Camden County Council on Economic
Opportunity, Inc.

Ms. Rosemary Jackson
Board Member
Camden Board of Education

Reverend James C. Jones
Mt. Calvery Baptist Church

Mr. Dennis Kille
City Attorney
City of Camden

Ms. Annette Knox
Superintendent
Camden Board of Education

Mr. Mark Lohbauer
Schools Program Director
New Jersey Economic Development Authority

Dr. Daniel Mastrobuono
County Superintendent of Schools
Camden County Office of Education

Ms. Loren Mayor
McKinsey and Company

Mr. Skip McKoy
DC Agenda

Mr. Wilbert Mitchell
Executive Director
Respond, Inc.

Mr. Thomas Munlyn
Director of Plant Services
Camden Board of Education

Ms. Bridget Phifer
PBCIP

Ms. Joan Ponessa
Director of Research
Education Law Center

Ms. Cynthia Primas
Consultant
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Ms. Sheila Roberts
President
Cooper Lanning Civic Association

Ms. Betsy Russell
Camden Lutheran Housing

Mr. Bill Shepardson
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Ms. Lisa Simon
President
Simon Public Relations Group

Attendees of School Facilities Plan Convening April 3, 2001

Ms. Karla Spivey
Assistant Director of Research and
Community Projects
Education Law Center

Ms. Ahada Stanford
Executive Director
Camden Development Collaborative

Mr. Warren Sykes
President
Health Systems Consultants and Program
Development, Inc.

Ms. Carole Thompson
Senior Associate
Camden Site Team Leader
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Dr. Win Tillery
Special Assistant to Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education

Mr. Timothy Wallace
PBCIP

Ms. Henrietta Washington
Resident/Parent Advisory Chair
Parent Advisory Council

Ms. Nadine Wells Miller
Concerned Parent

Ms. Connie Williams
President
Eastside Civic Association

Mr. Dwaine Williams
School Facilities Committee Chair
Camden Board of Education

Mr. Edward C. Williams
Planning Director/Zoning Officer
Department of Development & Planning
City of Camden

Mr. Kevin Willis
Senior Vice President
Don Todd Associates



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