

Testimony of  
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February 19, 2007

Testimony

Presented to:

U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Mentoring and Community-Based Solutions to  
Delinquency and Youth violence

Senator Arlen Specter, Ranking Member

February 19, 2007

10:00AM

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"Through the school system, the character of which, in spite of itself, the university determines and in a large measure controls . . . through the school system every family in this entire broad land of ours is brought into touch with the university; for from it proceeds the teachers or the teachers' teachers."

-- William Rainey Harper, *The University and Democracy* (1899)

"We prepare teachers for the public schools, and we admit their students. So it is our problem just as much as theirs."

--Donald N. Langenberg, Chancellor, University System of Maryland

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 20, 1998)

". . . It is my firm conviction that the great universities of the 21st century will be judged by their ability to help solve our most urgent social problems."

-- William R. Greiner, President, State University of New York, Buffalo

*Universities and Community Schools* (1994)

"To be a great university, we must first be a great local university."

-- Shirley Strum Kenny, President, State University of New York, Stony Brook  
New York Times (August, 18,1999)

"No one mistakes Penn for an ivory tower. And no one ever will.

Through our collaborative engagement with communities all over the world, Penn is poised--and I think uniquely poised--to advance the central values of democracy in a great urban city: life, liberty, opportunity, and mutual respect.

Effective engagement of these values begins right here at home. We cherish our relations with our neighbors, relationships that have strengthened Penn academically and...have strengthened the vitality of West Philadelphia...."

-- Amy Gutmann, President, University of Pennsylvania  
Inaugural Address, "The Penn Compact," (October 2004)

Truly democratic partnerships between universities and schools are a powerful strategy for changing communities, schools, and higher education itself--and for reducing youth violence. The partnerships described below represent the fruits of over two decades of collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), community organizations, and the public schools in West Philadelphia. Penn's Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) together with community partners have created university-assisted community schools that are centers of education and engagement that provide a range of services for students, their parents, and other community members. This approach works toward tapping, integrating, mobilizing, and galvanizing the resources of communities, including colleges and universities, to improve the community, the school, and the education of students.

Somewhat more specifically, the strategy assumes that like colleges and universities, public schools can function as environment-changing institutions and can become the strategic centers of broad-based partnerships that genuinely engage and coordinate a wide variety of community organizations and institutions. Public schools "belong" to all members of the community. They are particularly well suited, therefore, to function as neighborhood "hubs" or "nodes" around which local partnerships and youth programs can be generated and formed. When they play that role, schools function as community institutions par excellence; they then provide a decentralized, democratic, community-based response to significant community problems and help young people make positive contributions to the community and learn better (and at increasingly higher levels) through action-oriented, collaborative, community-based problem-solving.

Begun in 1985 by Penn and its school and community partners, the university-assisted community schools program now involves over 6,000 children and youth, parents, and community members each year at its six primary sites in West Philadelphia. Additional school day, after school, family and community programming reach several thousand more individuals. Through collaboration between school, university, and community partners, each university-assisted community school site has a variety of locally determined activities and partnerships, often with a focus on health, environment, or arts and culture. The programs engage students

(K-16+) in real world, hands on, community problem solving that is integrated into the school curriculum as well as through extended day, weekend, and summer programs.

Young people at each of these schools are engaged in creative work designed to advance their skills, abilities and personal and social development through service to their school, families and community. At Penn, students and faculty are also engaged in service learning that entails the development and application of knowledge to solve local problems along with active reflection on the impact of their work. Currently, over 150 such courses have been offered (57 in the 2006-07 academic year), engaging more than 60 faculty members from an array of disciplines. More than 1400 students participated in academically based community service (i.e., problem solving service learning) courses in the 2005-2006 academic year. Penn students support all aspects of the university-assisted community school program by assisting in its evening, weekend, extended-day, and school day programs.

#### The Sayre High School-Penn University-Assisted Community School Initiative

The Sayre High School-Penn university-assisted community school initiative provides an example of how these principles have been put into practice. The principal of Sayre School first approached Penn's Center for Community Partnerships with the idea that having a health center on site would be a boon to the students and the community. How to galvanize the necessary resources was a major hurdle. Then, in the spring and summer of 2002, a group of Penn undergraduates in an academically based community service (ABCS) seminar focused their efforts on helping to solve the healthcare crisis in West Philadelphia. The students' research and work with the community led them to propose establishment of a community health promotion and disease prevention program at a public school in West Philadelphia, the Sayre Middle School. Their research proved to be so compelling that it led to the development of a school-based Community Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program at Sayre Middle School (In 2006-2007, Sayre completed a three-year transition and became a high school.)

The school-based Community Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program at the Sayre School was formally launched in January of 2003. It functions as the central component of a university-assisted community school designed both to advance student learning and democratic development, as well as to help strengthen families and institutions within the community. The multidisciplinary character of the Sayre Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program (SHPDPP) enables it to be integrated into the curriculum and co-curriculum of both the public school and the university, assuring an educational focus as well as sustainability of the program. To support this aim, Penn faculty and students from across the University now work at Sayre through new and existing courses, internships, and research projects. As an outcome of the integration of health promotion and service activities in the curriculum, Sayre students serve as agents of healthcare change in the Sayre neighborhood.

A considerable number and variety of Penn academically based community service courses provide the resources and support that make it possible to operate, sustain, and develop the SHPDPP. Literally hundreds of Penn students (professional, graduate and undergraduate) and some twenty faculty members, from a wide range of Penn schools and departments, work at Sayre. Since they are performing community service while engaged in academic research, teaching and learning, they are simultaneously practicing their specialized skills and developing,

to some extent at least, their moral and civic consciousness and democratic character. And since they are engaged in a highly integrated common project, they are also learning how to communicate, interact, and collaborate with each other in unprecedented ways, which have broadened their academic horizons.

In spring of 2004, the SHPDPP established a community board to apply to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for funding to create a federally qualified health center. The application was successful, and the Sayre health clinic opened in 2006 to serve students, their families, and other community members.

The Dean of Penn Medicine, Arthur Rubenstein, recognized the potential of the SHPDPP when he appointed Bennett L. Johnson, Jr., M.D. to the newly created position of Senior Associate Dean for Diversity and Community Outreach in the School of Medicine. Dr. Johnson, a Professor of Dermatology and the Senior Medical Officer of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, had played the key role in engaging the Medical School with the Sayre project, recruiting students, residents, house staff, and faculty to contribute to various health education and health promotion activities

For example, Sayre eleventh graders in an Intake Medical Procedures course work with Penn students learning how to perform the basics of intake medical procedures (blood pressure, height and weight, glucose, reflex, vision, etc.). Sayre students also learn about prominent community health concerns (hypertension, obesity, diabetes, etc.) and will gain clinical experience by operating an after school health monitoring clinic. When the health clinic opens its permanent facility in Summer 2007, Sayre students will work with Penn doctors and nurses, health professional students, and community members to provide basic intake services, medical information, and referrals.

The Sayre-Penn model extends student learning and positive youth development into out of school time as well--the time when crimes by youth are most often committed. With Sayre as a site for a city-funded Beacon and a 21st Century Community Learning Center (21C-CLC), the building is open to students of all ages to participate in a myriad of academic, enrichment, and fitness activities, carrying the school day health focus into after school programs, offering a safe space to youth of all ages. A Community Advisory Board oversees the Beacon/21C-CLC, and staff from Penn's Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) coordinate the activities. Sayre represents a unique and highly effective integration of city, community, and university resources that aims to enhance the educational, recreational, health related opportunities, and improve the overall quality of life of the students at Sayre High School, its feeder schools, and the surrounding community. Examples of program activities include:

? The K-8 Project Based After School Program, staffed by Penn students, serves over eighty youth from Sayre's feeder elementary and middle schools, providing a safe space daily between 3:00 and 7:00 p.m.

? The 9-12 Grade After School Program combines elements of academic support, college and career mentoring, real-world job experience/training, and extracurricular activities.

These programs engage over one hundred high school students and their families. Several activities are highlighted below:

- o Early College Planning (ECP): Penn undergraduates mentor 9th and 10th graders to plan for a successful high school career and beyond.

- o Let's Get Ready! assists 11th graders with the college process and preparing for the SAT's.

- o Youth Job Corps employs over thirty Sayre students as peer health educators, after school instructors for K-8 program, and in community organizing and asset mapping.

- ? Sayre's evening community programming includes Family Fitness Nights, run by Penn staff and students twice a week. Nearly 100 community members participate in recreational, self-improvement, education, and health classes at no charge to them.

- ? The Saturday Basketball League (boys and girls age thirteen and under) is led by Penn undergraduates. The league also holds practices and tutoring sessions Mondays through Fridays after school.

- ? The Sayre Beacon Pride Summer Camp involves over 120 community children age five to twelve in educational, recreational, and enrichment activities five days a week, as well as high school youth as camp counselors.

Most recently, as issues of youth violence have flared in Philadelphia, the Sayre-Penn university-assisted community school has begun to address these issues more directly. The following are several examples of recent developments:

- ? CCP is working closely with the District Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell to coordinate and implement a Safe Corridors program to be staffed by community volunteers. The Beacon Youth Council (12 Sayre student leaders) is also working with Penn students, using GIS technology, to map local "safe havens."

- ? The community school staff is organizing parents, community leaders and local groups to assist in efforts to address neighborhood violence.

- ? The District Attorney's Office, DHS, the School District, the City, and the University are supporting anti-truancy initiatives, through the REACH (Real Every Day Alternatives--Choices and Help) program.

The preceding examples illustrate some of the ways in which Penn's CCP has coordinated University-wide efforts in partnership with the community in order to create and develop community school programs. The Sayre program, which is very much in its early days, is the most ambitious project. It aims to become a university-assisted community school with a comprehensive community problem solving curriculum and community-wide program that is fully integrated across both the Sayre curriculum and the curriculum of a number of Penn's schools. The work at Sayre demonstrates that higher education can become a permanent anchor for revitalizing schools and communities and advancing student learning and development if the vast resources it possesses, particularly its faculty, students, and staff, are brought to bear in a coordinated fashion. The Penn-Sayre project further demonstrates that when universities such as Penn give very high priority to actively solving strategic, real-world, complex problems in and with their local community, a much greater likelihood exists that they will significantly advance the public good and realize their own potential.

## Conclusion

In summary, university-assisted community schools serve, educate, and activate students, their families, and other local residents. Students not only learn by doing, but also learn by and for service. Simultaneously, the university benefits from the unique, critical opportunities

community schools provide for learning, research, civic consciousness, outreach, and program development. Putting this theory into practice, the Sayre-Penn university-assisted community school initiative appears to hold promise for West Philadelphia, Penn, and other communities and universities across the country. (Penn's University-Assisted Community School Replication Project, to date, has included twenty-two colleges and universities and their school and community partners; teams from an additional seventy-five higher education institutions have been trained on the model.) To speed and advance the development of university-assisted community schools as a vehicle to make our schools and communities safer for students, teachers, parents, neighbors and businesses, the Federal government could:

1. Develop and apply innovative funding strategies that provide support to broad-based local coalitions designed to develop and sustain university-assisted community schools.
2. Create a multi-agency federal commission designed to advance and implement university-assisted community schools.
3. Strengthen and expand community-based work-study to engage more college students with local public schools.

I want to applaud Senator Specter and the Senate Judiciary Committee for holding this most important hearing. Thank you for your time and interest.