

# STRIVE TO THRIVE

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Those who live in communities of concentrated poverty all too often must strive to survive, and the next day they must do it again. If only there was a route to be taken that would help both today and tomorrow. To have a better tomorrow, education is the road out and poverty blocks that road. Enhanced educational opportunities provide children the opportunity of a better life tomorrow. Education is anti-poverty. There are existing successful models we all should look to learn from. As we know, replicating is easier than re-inventing.

*"All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. Our Nation is at risk."*(1)

**"A Nation at Risk"** was written in 1983, and shamefully it is equally valid today. The report made clear that those who remain under-educated detract rather than add to our society. *"... individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life."*(1)

A report issued by the National Center for Educational Statistics called **"The Condition of Education"** (released in May of 2010) confirmed what we already know. Students in high poverty schools consistently do not perform well on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments. Most relevant is that students in low poverty and affluent schools perform far better. The achievement gap that so many speak of begins as a much larger income gap. The focus of corrective actions should be on the root of the problem and that doesn't happen. Perhaps we can help to change that.

The Educational Testing Service report called, **"Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward"**, (issued in July of 2013) put forth the challenge we must accept. *"Children raised in poverty today will grow up in circumstances that, the data tell us, will give them a small, if not negligible, chance of following a path that will lead them to a markedly better place than where they began."*(2) Beyond the moral challenge is a huge economic impact. Their researchers have determined that the impact of child poverty has associated costs of \$500 billion per year.

Pedro Noguera and Lauren Wells (New York University) issued a report called, **The Politics of School Reform: A Broader and Bolder Approach for Newark.** Their very educated opinion points out that educational reforms must take into account the social and economic conditions in the specific high poverty area. They make clear that current reform efforts have failed because they do not address the ways that poverty impacts academic achievement. There are many studies over many years, which show that family income, neighborhood social and economic conditions, and parent's education directly impact student outcomes. In fact, these are the major factors.

One of those studies is a controversial report titled **Equality of Educational Opportunity.** This was written in 1966 by James Coleman, and others, for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It was an extensive study conducted as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The researchers came to the conclusion that academic achievement is less a result of the school and more a result of how and where a child lives. Nearly fifty years have passed and we are still struggling to find solutions.

Many of the ideas behind what we hope to accomplish are already in place. If we look for them, they are not hard to find. Say Yes to Education has been active and effective for more than twenty-five years. They have learned from experience and by example have much to teach us. Most notable are programs currently in place in Syracuse and Buffalo, New York. Their program attempts to remove social, medical, fiscal, and academic barriers for all children, from pre-school through college. Upon graduation from high school, there is a college scholarship for every student. All are prepared to succeed. This program is offered to every child in the city.

Say Yes recognized the connection between school improvement and economic development. Quality schools attract families who buy homes, pay property taxes, and purchase goods and services from local businesses. A well-educated local workforce attracts businesses. Everything is in play and the hope is to transform the city. This is truly anti-poverty.

Based in Ohio is an organization called Strive Together. Their motto is "Cradle to Career." Within their vision, they ask us to imagine supporting the success of every child. *"The impact would be tremendous. Children would thrive. A sense of hope would emerge in long struggling neighborhoods, communities, and regions. And our economy would improve as a more skilled workforce feeds innovation and growth."* This is an existing program that provides just what we are seeking. Strive Together began in 2006 and is now offering proven strategies for improvement. They receive funding from known and substantial foundations. We know the Annie Casey Foundation supports ACNJ and the Kids Count program nationwide. They also support Strive Together.

When looking at the costs, we have to consider the cost of not investing in comprehensive programs. There is of course the improvement in the quality of an individual's life, but there is much more. A high school graduate is known to be less likely to require public money for health care, welfare, and the criminal justice system. Financially, the argument is well stated in the N.Y. Times article. *"When the costs of investment to produce a new graduate are taken into account, there is a return of \$1.45 to \$3.55 for every dollar."* (3) They go on to say, *"Under this estimate, each new graduate confers a net benefit to taxpayers of about \$127,000 over the graduate's lifetime. This is a benefit to the public of nearly \$90 billion for each year of success in reducing the number of high school dropouts by 700,000 — or something close to \$1 trillion after 11 years."* (4)

Beyond moral and social obligations, this appears to be a true fiscal obligation. Is this not the very thing that an economic recovery demands? Those on both sides of every fence should support this investment.

Referenced resources:

- (1) **A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform**  
1983, National Commission on Excellence in Education
- (2) **Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward**  
2013, The ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education
- (3) **The True Cost of High School Dropouts**  
January 25, 2012, New York Times; by Henry M. Levin and Cecilia E. Rouse
- (4) **For Each and Every Child; A Strategy for Education Equity. And Excellence**  
February 2, 2013, The United States Department of Education

### **The Condition of Education 2010**

United States Department of Education; Institute of Education Sciences; National Center for Educational Statistics

### **The Politics of School Reform: A Broader and Bolder Approach for Newark**

Pedro A. Noguera and Lauren Wells; New York University