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### **Fixing No Child Left Behind: Innovation to Better Meet the Needs of Students**

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss how the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) can better meet the needs of students and families through innovation. My name is Henriette Taylor. I am a licensed social worker employed by the University of Maryland, Baltimore's School of Social Work (UMB), which is proud to claim Senator Mikulski as a most distinguished alumna. We are a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhood planning grantee working with five public schools in the West Baltimore neighborhood of Upton/Druid Heights. Within the Promise Heights initiative, I work as a community school coordinator at The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School.

Upton/Druid Heights is located about a mile and a half from the UMB's professional campus and Baltimore's Inner Harbor, yet is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. According to the 2010 US Census, it is currently home to approximately 10,342 residents, 28% of whom are children. There is little racial and economic diversity in the community as 93% of the population is African American and 53% of households have an income less than \$14,999. Nearly 58% of children live in poverty, as compared to 28% in Baltimore City, and 10% in Maryland overall. As is the case of many poverty stricken communities, the educational attainment for neighborhood residents is weak, with 49% of the residents 25 years of age and older having obtained less than a high school diploma or equivalency. Nearly six out of ten adults were either unemployed or not in the work force during the last census. Just over 1800 students attend the five neighborhood public schools—from pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade—and half are not proficient in reading, almost 70% are not proficient in math, and more than 20% are chronically absent. At the three elementary schools and the middle school, the FARMS rate is over 95%. At the high school, it is over 80%. This is a neighborhood experiencing the stress and trauma of extreme poverty.

Since 2009, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, through the Promise Heights initiative, has been working for and with the community through the implementation of a cradle-to-college-to-career pipeline of services. These services are delivered through the community school model, a strategy to align school and community resources for student success, positive enrichment of families, and community cohesion. A community school is not just a neighborhood school, but also acts as the hub of a community—open before and after regular school hours, including nights and weekends—so that the school becomes the center of the community where everyone belongs, works together, and thrives. Each school creates this

environment for itself, depending on its own strengths and needs, through the leadership of the community school coordinator working closely with the school's principal.

Promise Heights has been the lead agency for the community schools in Upton/Druid Heights for the past five years and my school has been a community school for the last two years. The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary is a school has 467 students, from age three through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We have 26 partnerships with community organizations that provide both supports and enriching learning opportunities for students. In Baltimore, community schools are specifically tasked to work on attendance, school climate, and parent engagement. In my role as a community school coordinator, I work closely with the administration and teachers to find out what students and their families need and want, and then recruit the right set of community partners in a very intentional way. The goal of facilitating these partnerships is to provide sufficient supports to students and to connect them with learning opportunities beyond the school day that match their unique interests, so that teachers are able to focus on academics. We act as a bridge between a family's needs and a student's academic success so that families experience less of the stress of poverty and can more effectively participate in their student's academic success.

These partnerships may be nationally recognized organizations, such as Laureate Education and KaBOOM!, whose employees came together last summer to help community residents build a 4,000 square foot playground at the school, as the neighborhood had nowhere for children to play. Now, if you drive by the school tonight at 7pm or on a Sunday or during a school holiday, you will see children and their families playing, having a picnic, or talking about neighborhood events. Laureate employees also built a community room for us so that parents can have a place of their own in the school and community groups can have a place in the neighborhood to gather, whether for a personal interaction or to take a workshop or class. It may be a partner such as the Maryland State Department of Education, which provides the school with a Judy Center, where families with children from birth to age 5 can attend classes on early learning, access developmental assessments, visit the school's food bank, or take a GED course, all for free. We partner with all six UMB professional schools. Social work students work directly under me providing case management to students and families, including making home visits around attendance and programming such as Mom's support groups. Nursing students assist with asthma education, health learning parties for parents of pre-k and kindergarten students, and mentor 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls. Dental students provide education and dental services. Medical students partner with our after-school provider to provide education around nutrition and obesity. Pharmacy students tutor middle and high school students in math, science, and SAT prep. Law students hold clinics several times a year for neighborhood residents to address issues such as expungement, landlord/tenant issues, and small claims. Of course, we also have neighborhood partners, such as Union Baptist Church, which has provided funds to assist funeral expenses, whose members volunteer in the school, and whose senior pastor is co-leader of our Promise Neighborhood Community Advisory Board. We also partner with

Pearlstone Center to provide outdoor education to our students, ranging from farm animal care, planting, and nutrition.

The community school strategy has produced several exciting outcomes at our school. For example, in connection with the Judy Center, Promise Heights employs another social worker who engages with the pre-k and kindergarten students on social emotional learning. Last year, our Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) scores increased from 58.2% to 79.4%. This was done through one-on-one work with students, families, and teachers, group lessons in the classroom, and learning parties with families after school. We also focus heavily on attendance with myself, social work interns, a Public Ally, and other school staff conducting home visits to families whose students are on track to miss 20 or more days of school in one year. Last school year, we visited over 100 homes, and were able to address barriers such as lack of uniforms, homelessness, food scarcity, and funding for evictions or electricity bills. We provided families with education around bedtime and morning routines, why school every day matters even for four and five year olds, and how to communicate with the school. Inside the school, we celebrated attendance achievements and improvements with photographs, bulletin boards, and incentives. All these efforts enabled us to greatly improve the attendance at the school and decrease the chronic absenteeism rate, and we were subsequently given the Mayor's award for the greatest reduction of students at-risk for chronic absenteeism.

This year, with the addition of new immunizations needed for kindergarteners and seventh graders, my school and the middle school found themselves with 77 students missing those shots and, so, at risk of being barred from school. Through my role as community school coordinator, I was able to recruit UMB's doctors and nurses to volunteer their time to provide those immunizations right in the school nurse's office during school hours. Myself and other Promise Heights staff went door-to-door to bring parents to the school so they could consent, thus keeping those 77 students in school. Holidays can be hard for our families. Trick-or-treating is not necessarily safe in our neighborhood. A church partnered with us to create an alternative event with jewelry making, face painting, dress ups, cotton candy, cupcakes, games, photos, and a backpack for every student. For the past 25 years, the UMB School of Medicine has provided a full Thanksgiving dinner at our middle school which any community resident may attend. At Christmas, many of our families find themselves without any resources for gifts. Through the leadership of the Promise Heights family stability program director, every family who contacted us was able to receive clothes, toys, and even furniture.

I have visited community school initiatives in Cincinnati and New York City and have learned from their work. Community schools exist in nearly 100 places across the country and in 34 states and can be found in urban, suburban, and rural schools. In Baltimore, our community schools are supported by an intermediary organization, the Family League of Baltimore, which trains and supports community school coordinators. Baltimore community schools are supported by a combination of funds: federal funds including Title I and 21st Century Community Learning Center, and state, district and city funds. Each lead agency also provides

some funding for their respective schools. Community schools in Baltimore have been able to get \$4 of programming for every \$1 spent by the city through the leveraging of partnerships and resources provided through the lead agency. The costs associated with the community school initiative allow for a more effective use of existing funds for public education. But any cuts to the school budget (like the \$35 million cut proposed by Maryland's Governor) are devastating to maintaining the minimum conditions for success as they mean larger class size, fewer teachers and support staff, and eliminating after-school and summer programs.

Promise Neighborhoods and community schools have a very similar approach in that they address the development of the "whole child" and they leverage community resources for students and families through intentional school-community partnerships. Promise Heights is also funded through federal, state, and city funding, as well as private foundations. These include Promise Neighborhoods from the Department of Education, early childhood education funding through Administration for Children and Families, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers through the Maryland State Department of Education, family stability funding through the United Way of Central Maryland, and several family foundations in Baltimore. This funding has allowed us to sustain the work we do in Upton/Druid Heights for the last five years and has meant significant positive change for the neighborhood including:

- Implementing an infant mortality reduction program called B'more for Healthy Babies, housed at another elementary school, which has contributed to a 4% decrease in teen pregnancy rates, an 11.8% drop in infant mortality rates, and a 40.1% decrease in Medicaid NICU costs for the zip code from FY2010 to FY2012.
- Creating Parent University to enhance parents' sensitivity to their infants and toddlers cues, discourage negativity, lessen reliance on spanking, promote reasoning with toddlers, increase the number of age-appropriate materials around the house as well as the amount of time spent reading and talking to children, and increase the number of toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start.
- Improving MMSR scores at one elementary school from 34% to 96% in three years, by bringing Early Head Start and Head Start into the building to provide students with a curriculum aligned to the regular day school program.
- Obtaining funding for over 270 students to attend a literacy and enrichment based after-school program.
- Training over 200 teachers, staff, mental health consultants, and residents in trauma-informed behavior management skills.
- And, providing over 200 families with free income tax preparation and collected over \$377,000 in federal and state tax refunds.

The federal government has a very important role to play to support innovative approaches like community schools, and to ensure that each student is getting equal opportunity for an excellent education. From my work in a community school, I know that partnerships with community organizations are essential to provide students the full range of opportunities and

supports they need and deserve. Schools cannot do it alone: they need strong community partnerships to give students the level of education they need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

That's why I fully support and recommend the ESEA recommendations included in the [letter](#) to the Chairman and Ranking Member from the Coalition for Community Schools that has been signed by 45 national organizations. These recommendations if adopted would not only strengthen the work we do at the Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and in Baltimore City, but would provide the right incentives and frameworks to expand this innovative approach to other schools and districts.

There are issues which are particularly relevant to me at the school level. As a Community School Coordinator, it is imperative that I be able to access student data in a real time setting. In order for me to bring in the right partnerships to obtain the best academic and social outcomes for students, I must be able to identify and report results beyond academic achievement to include indicators for health and wellness, discipline, attendance, and family engagement. By providing non-traditional training and professional development for teachers, principals, specialized instructional support personnel and other school-employed staff, they can work more effectively with families and community partners during and outside the school day. And we should ensure that before school, after-school and summer learning is not considered an add-on, but is seen as integral to a student's success and well-being. And while I understand that educational funding is dwindling at an alarming rate, it is imperative that our students be given the opportunity for learning within the arts, such as music, theater, and visual arts. Many of our students lack a safe space for physical activity at home and the school is often the place where families can feel secure that children are not at risk. Finally, even if other school-based staff or partners are addressing a child's social emotional learning and well-being, teachers should be trained on how deficits in the areas of health, mental health, or family stability can and do affect a child's behavior and learning. Therefore, we support dedicated and increased funding for Full-Service Community Schools to help more schools and communities connect more strongly for student success and to grow the best practice of a full-time coordinator to manage and sustain these school-community partnerships.

As a Promise Neighborhood grantee, we also believe that connecting community and school to family and student is the only way to gain strides for both the individual and the community as a whole. We support dedicated and increased funding of that program so that grantees can have the opportunity to transition to full implementation and new communities can begin the planning process. While I cannot guarantee that when students arrive at school each day they will have had breakfast or have packed a lunch or have clean clothes or have had a good night's sleep, I can guarantee that they are bringing their homes, their families, and their neighborhoods into the classroom. If we don't ensure that those homes, families, and communities are as healthy, productive, and stable as possible, then we know that students will not only fail, but will also create chaos for those around them. If we want students who achieve and schools that succeed then we must have families and communities that function well.

Promise Neighborhoods and community schools are two successful strategies in creating that change.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to tell you about my work, my students, my school, and our community. Please think of them as you work to improve and reauthorize the ESEA.