

## **PROJECT DESIGN**

Trenton Community Schools Initiative (TCSI) in Trenton, NJ combines the resources, experience and expertise of five core organizations strategically positioned to improve educational outcomes for children in the Trenton Public School system by providing comprehensive academic, social and health supports in a full-service community school model. Project partners include Mercer Street Friends (lead agency), Trenton Public Schools, Luis Munoz Rivera Middle School, YMCA and Mercer County Family Support Organization. This partnership and initiative represent the convergence of a change process for five of the community's most influential organizations seeking alternative responses to dismal educational, economic and social indicators for children and families living in one of the most dangerous cities in the country.

### ***Students, Family Members and Community***

The city of Trenton is a major urban area of over 80,000 people in Mercer County, New Jersey that has been plagued for decades by unemployment, low educational attainment, endemic poverty and soaring violent crime rates. Five year estimates (2008-2012) from the American Community Survey highlight the disparities of families with children under 18 living in Trenton. They are three times as likely (33.6%) to live in poverty as their counterparts in the surrounding county (12.2%) or state (11.4%) and are over twice as likely to have not completed high school (29.5% Trenton; 12.8% Mercer County; 12.1% NJ). The American Community Survey estimates Trenton's unemployment rate, as nearly twice as high as that for the State (17.9 versus 9.5) and well above that for Mercer County (10.2). Given decades of research documenting the links between unemployment, poverty and crime, Trenton's extremely high violent crime rate comes as no surprise. The State of New Jersey 2012 Uniform Crime Report documents a violent crime rate in Trenton of 14.9, five times higher than the State rate of 2.9 and over three times higher than the County rate of 4.5.

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The impacts of poverty and violence have infiltrated Trenton Public Schools – a district with a student enrollment of 11,800 students in 14 K-5 schools, 4 middle schools (grades 6-8), and 3 high schools (two comprehensive, one alternative). Most students (90%) are eligible for free or reduced lunch and violence inside the school reflects the gang, domestic, and community violence that has been a persistent problem in Trenton. The 2012-2013 Violence and Vandalism Report for Trenton Public Schools recorded 552 fights; 374 incidents of student-on-student assault; 145 student on-adult assault; and 126 reports of non-firearm weapons.

The school district also faces many academic challenges. Eleven of the district's 21 schools are classified as persistently low performing. Grade 3 students at all Trenton public schools performed well below other New Jersey students on the Spring 2013 administration of the NJ ASK (Assessment of Skills and Knowledge) tests: 17 to 52 percent of students tested as proficient in language arts, and 17 to 66 percent tested as proficient in math (compared to statewide averages between 70 and 80 percent proficient). Trenton's 48 percent high school graduation rate is the lowest in the state and only 11 percent of Trenton residents continue education beyond high school.

In response to numerous data, including trend data of state assessments and other student outcome indicators revealing stagnant or no growth within the middle level grade-span, the district undertook a significant reorganization of schools in 2013-2014. The district formed a steering committee that reviewed best practices in middle school education, met with school administrators and held community forums to formulate its recommendations. The board acted quickly and in school year 2013-14 moved from a preK-8 schools model to one that now has 14 pre-K-5 schools, four middle schools for grades 6-8 and two comprehensive and one alternative high school. Luis Munoz Rivera Middle School was chosen as the pilot site for implementation of the community schools model because of the academic and social needs of its students and the commitment to the community schools

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model and leadership skills of school principal, Bernadette Trapp. Rivera has 501 students in grades 6 (211), 7 (160) and 8 (130). Nearly one-fourth (23%; 113) are enrolled in special education, 7% have limited English proficiency and 92% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eighty percent of students are African American, and approximately 20% are Hispanic. Over the five year grant period, TCSI will serve at least 380 students, 380 family members and 80 community members.

Over the past several years, TCSI partners have met extensively with a range of organizations working to improve academic, social and health indicators in Trenton and agreed to embrace the community schools model as the most promising opportunity to address gaps in service and improve outcomes.

The community schools model was chosen for its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities that have proven to improve student learning, create stronger families and build healthier communities. This past year, Mercer Street Friends contracted with The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools to help negotiate the partnership outlined in the attached MOU between Trenton Board of Education and Mercer Street Friends. NCCS also provided technical assistance to develop initial plans to pilot this initiative through the Board's Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE), formed as part of the system-wide restructuring process. NCCS has provided on-site training and technical assistance to develop initial plans and the attached letter of commitment demonstrates their intent to provide ongoing support during the first two years of this project.

### *Eligible Services*

### **Partnership**

TCSI partner agencies include Mercer Street Friends (lead agency), Trenton Public Schools, Luis Munoz Rivera Middle School, YMCA and Mercer County Family Support Organization. The specific roles, responsibilities and resources of each partner agency are clearly delineated in the attached MOU.

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Over the past two years, Mercer Street Friends and Trenton Public Schools have engaged in and embraced strategic planning that has been best characterized by boldness, vision, and a deep-seated commitment to the future of the city of Trenton.

Mercer Street Friends (MSF) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit human services organization with an FY 13-14 organizational budget of \$5.4 million. MSF has provided for the basic needs of food, health, family stability, and education in the Greater Mercer County region for over fifty years. Its mission is to bridge opportunity gaps by helping families and communities make the journey out of poverty. MSF recently completed a three-year strategic plan that has refined its service delivery focus to address the impact of trauma on clients and the need for more systemic interventions to address the fallout of that trauma in meaningful ways. Increased need in a context of decreased resources has also encouraged MSF to pursue deeper and more proactive collaborations which identify problems and frame solutions that are both palatable to the community members and sustainable. The plan details how MSF will capitalize on existing expertise and relationships, passion to see families escape poverty, and research knowledge on effective anti-poverty strategies, to implement a broad based, evidence based intervention. MSF will expand its current spectrum of services by partnering with the Board of Education to establish a comprehensive community schools initiative in Trenton. MSF believes that adopting this approach will allow for better utilization of existing resources, clearer evaluative criteria, and most importantly, more penetrating and sustainable community impact.

Trenton Public Schools, in addition to the reorganization of the school system detailed earlier, also created the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Center last year. The FACE Center works to create family engagement pathways that honor the dynamic, multiple, and complicated ways that children learn from the Cradle to Career. The FACE Center attempts to fulfill its mission by generating partnerships with the community and faith-based organizations; maintaining Family Resource Centers

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at each elementary and middle school in the district, and offering support for School and Parent Liaisons by providing them with professional development, sharing information, and assisting them in other relevant areas as needed. As noted earlier, Luis Munoz Rivera Middle School is in its first year of operation as a middle school that resulted from the recent reorganization of the school system. The school's dynamic leadership and needs make it a strong school in which to pilot this initiative.

The YMCA of Trenton was founded in 1856, making it one of the first YMCA's to be established in the United States. The organization is committed to nurturing the potential of our most valuable asset as a community, our children, promoting healthy living and fostering a strong sense of social responsibility. The YMCA has partnered with Trenton Public Schools to provide on-site after-school and summer programming for youth on-site at Rivera Middle School.

Mercer County Family Support Organization is one of New Jersey's family support organizations (FSOs) that operate throughout the state. The family support organizations are family-led, community-based, non-profit agencies whose mission is to provide support, advocacy, and education to families and caregivers of children with emotional, behavioral and mental health needs. The organizations receive significant support for training, technical assistance, policy development, identification of best practices, data collection and resource development from the New Jersey Alliance of Family Support Organizations. FSOs work collaboratively within New Jersey's children's system of care for behavioral health services and with community partners to improve outcomes for children and youth with all emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs and their families. Each FSO also supports the Youth Partnership, a youth organization led by youth and young adults to foster support and leadership of young people with behavioral health needs. Inclusion in a community schools model will expand the scope and target population of services and enable MCFSO to work closely with school staff to improve services for special needs students.

## **Services**

Partners will meet routinely to coordinate and integrate the following five core services with those currently in place in Rivera that are in alignment with the community schools model.

1. Assistance to students who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled
2. Family engagement, including parent training and parental involvement activities
3. Mental health services
4. Mentoring and other youth development programs
5. Access to other community-based social service programs

TCSI has chosen to begin with these interventions because effective partnering with parents and aligning their identified needs with opportunities for support, information, and skill development is key to the success of students, families and communities. An overarching issue consistently identified as a common experience for most of the families with which TCSI partners work is the impact of traumatic stress and lack of resources for addressing stress management. The impact of parental stress has emerged as a primary factor in engagement and retention of parents in services/activities aimed at achievement of goals related to overall family health and self sufficiency. The stress experienced by families living in poverty is amplified for single parents, parents with special needs children, parents with developmental disabilities, and parents who are survivors of unresolved childhood trauma.

Parental stress has a direct impact on the growth and development of children. Current research on attachment emphasizes the importance of the attunement of parents to their children for the development of self-regulation, focus, healthy relationships and resilience through all stages of their growth and development. With the multitude of stressors bombarding parents, it is difficult for them to stay attuned to themselves, let alone their children. Even when they acknowledge their stress, parents are often unsure of its roots, and unaware of the importance of stress management; especially regarding

the legacy of stress related to their own children. We have learned that parents who are supported in working to achieve a sense of healing and wellness: spiritually, socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and financially, report that they are better able to manage their own and their child's health care, education, develop knowledge of milestones of growth/development and discipline strategies, and work on family goal completion and knowledge of community resources.

**1. Assistance to students who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled**

Mercer Street Friends will implement Check & Connect, an evidence-based intervention used with students in grades K-12 who are disengaged from school and learning. This service is expected to serve as the binding model for all other services provided as part of this initiative. The core of Check & Connect is a trusting relationship between the student and a caring, trained mentor. This mentor both advocates for and challenges the student and partners with the family, school, and community to keep education salient for the student. Check refers to systematic monitoring of student performance variables (e.g., absences, tardies, behavioral referrals, grades). Connect refers to personalized, timely intervention focused on problem solving, skill building, and competence enhancement. Students are referred to Check & Connect when they show warning signs of disengaging from school, such as poor attendance, behavioral issues, and/or low grades. Mentors work with caseloads of students and families for at least two years. They function as liaisons between home and school, striving to build constructive family-school relationships. This program will be implemented onsite at school from one to four hours weekly with each identified student during the school year and as needed during the summer months. Coordinators and mentors work with the students and their families for up to 20 hours each month, for a minimum of two years. The program also provides monthly workshops for teachers and other team members.

**2. Family engagement, including parent training and parental involvement activities**

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Effective partnering with parents and aligning their identified needs with opportunities for support, information, and skill development is key to success. Mercer Street Friends will provide two evidence-based programs to engage families and improve family functioning. Both the Family Opportunity and Development Program (FODP) and Family Support and Reunification Program (FSRP) are parenting education and support programs focused on partnering with parents of school age children utilizing the framework of strategies of the evidence based Strengthening Families (SF) approach. Family-centric strategies build parental resilience, enhance social connections, improve knowledge of parenting and child development; provide concrete support in times of need; and nurture social and emotional competence of children. FODP specifically targets all families that could benefit from enhanced parenting education and skills to address trauma. The following program components will be implemented during after-school hours during the school year and during the day in summer months.

- Parenting Education will be provided in a series of eight week sessions to implement the evidence-based, trauma-informed Bavolek Family Nurturing Curriculum for School Age Children to strengthen parental skills related to child guidance and discipline and to improve parental self-efficacy utilizes a number of strategies aimed at maximizing enrolled family strengths and identifying goals to meet challenges and the Stress Management Toolkit that engages parents in practical, simple activities aimed at educating them about traumatic stress and its impact, learning and practicing healing steps, and learning to enjoy their relationships with their children
- Stress Management for Children will be provided in series of eight week sessions and utilizes the same curricula as that for parent education with lesson plans geared for school-aged children
- Parent-Child Interaction groups will be provided in a series of eight week sessions utilizing the



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same curricula but implemented with activities to support healthy interactions between children and their parents who engage in the parenting education and stress management sessions.

- Monthly Parent-Child Activity –fun activity planned by parents and their children to promote bonding and “hands on” practice of skills learned in group lessons

FSRP specifically targets families at risk of or who have experienced the removal of minor children by the Division of Child Protection & Permanency. The goal is to reduce the amount of time that children spend in temporary placement or avoiding placement altogether. The 15 week psychoeducational parenting group assists families in gathering knowledge about healthy, nurturing style parenting skills and to explore inappropriate expectations of children, inability to be empathically aware of children, belief in the value of corporal punishment, and family role reversal. Parents for whom additional support would be beneficial may be referred to individual or family counseling, provided by a licensed clinician. Parents who have children in the home and wish to receive additional information and support may receive in-home services from a trained Family Support Worker (FSW).

Mercer County Family Support Organization will also provide support, education, and advocacy to families and caregivers of children with emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. A key function of MCFSO is to help families access services for their children and youth through New Jersey’s Child Behavioral Health System. They also provide support to families through individual peer support and peer support groups, educational workshops, and connection to other needed resources.

### **3. Mental health services**

The impact of trauma on the lives of the target population requires additional support to strengthen the parenting education and youth development services. Licensed counselors employed by MSF will provide counseling services for up to 36 students, 40 family members and 45 community members annually through individual, family and group sessions. Mercer County Family Support Organization

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will also help develop youth capacity and leadership through their Youth Partnership activities, which also help reduce stigma and improve community understanding. The Mercer County Youth Partnership (YP) is an advocacy group for youth ages 13-21 with an interest in helping to reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Youth may have a mental illness themselves or know someone else who struggles with mental illness and are supported to lead activities, plan events and speak with the public at community events.

### **4. Mentoring and other youth development programs**

Mercer Street Friends will implement the Trenton Digital Initiative (TDI), a program developed from collaboration between Mercer Street Friends, Trenton Rotary Club, HomeFront, Comcast, and the City of Trenton to bridge the digital divide by providing low-income families access to computers and internet from home. This collaboration secured more than 100 computers to begin refurbishing and distributing to needy families. Donations of unwanted computers were collected from corporations, local agencies and individuals. Annually, the TDI participants will be assembled in three cohorts of 12 youth. Cohorts 1 and 3 will operate in a 16-week program, meeting three days per week for three hours per session, totaling nine hours weekly. Cohort 2 will be a Summer Intensive group operating for 9 weeks, totaling 16 hours weekly. The program will operate in a didactic phase and an experiential phase. During the didactic phase, youth will participate in group discussions focusing on life skills i.e. understanding healthy relationships, self-esteem, coping with stress, financial management, etc., on workplace soft skills like developing work ethic and positive attitudes, team building, communication with supervisors, appropriate attire and on hard skills like writing a resume, creating a career plan and making a good impression during an interview. During the experiential phase, youth will be given a \$50 gift card for their participation as computer support technicians. Youth will explore various career options in the field of technology. A career in technology can range from information management and

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service desk to computer programming and engineering. The A+ certification is a certification that indicates a certain level of knowledge in computer technology has been attained. They will learn about computer hardware, various operating systems, installing software, configuration of hardware and software, maintenance and troubleshooting computer problems. MSF is currently partnering with other community agencies to secure donations and to provide storage for donated computers.

The YMCA is currently partnering with Rivera School to provide on-site after-school and summer youth enrichment activities, ranging from sports to educational activities.

### **5. Access to other community-based social service programs**

Families engaged with parenting education services will receive case management services that link them with additional community social service resources as needed. MSF, MCFSO and Rivera school have developed extensive partnerships with agencies providing services such as food assistance, WIC, domestic violence interventions, anger management and primary and behavioral health care.

The TCSI Coordinator will convene and lead a school leadership team that will meet regularly to ensure that the array of services address the holistic needs of children and families and are integrated with the academic curricula and other initiatives being undertaken by the school district to improve academic performance. Services will be provided year-round, during after-school and evening hours throughout the school year and during the summer break. The attached TCSI Memoranda of Understanding outlines the role and services provided by each of the TCSI project partners. We have also attached a separate MOU between Mercer Street Friends and Trenton Public Schools that further delineates the relationship and desired results and outcomes between the two core organizations.

### ***Incorporation into Ongoing Work***

This grant will enable TCSI to establish the operational, financial and infrastructure capacity to incorporate project purposes and activities into long-range plans to replicate this model in other middle,

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elementary and high schools within the Trenton Public Schools system. During the first year of planning and on an ongoing basis, TCSI will build on its extensive array of other community partners to detail plans to secure additional funding to phase in an expanded range of services at Rivera. MSF provides other services that are well suited for the community schools model such as adult education, GED preparation and English as a second language instruction. The MSF Food Bank leads the community response to hunger in Mercer County. It distributes 2.5 million pounds of food annually to a network of food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens and meal sites. It also promotes healthy eating, provides weekend meals packs to food insecure children, provides breakfast and lunch in the summer to low-income children who rely on school meals during the academic year, and helps people apply for SNAP. The program will provide food to eat over weekends for food insecure families; establish an on-site food pantry that offers essentials and fresh produce to families and community members; and will utilize the SNAP-ED program run by Rutgers University Cooperative Extension of Mercer County to conduct nutrition education classes at the school.

TCSI partners will also continue to work with the Trenton Health Team (THT) to identify ways to incorporate into the community schools model strategies and activities identified in its 2014 Community Health Improvement Plan. THT completed a comprehensive, data-informed Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), in which Trenton residents played a key role in identifying and articulating the city's top health priorities. THT, a collaborative of the city's two hospitals, St. Francis Medical Center and Capital Health; its only Federally Qualified Health Center, Henry J. Austin Health Center; and the city government's Department of Health & Human Services, partnered with 29 community and social service agencies across Trenton to develop one CHNA for the city as a whole. Within the overarching priority of poverty, the CHNA process identified five health priorities that require community-wide attention and focus: health literacy & disparities; safety & crime; obesity &

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healthy lifestyles; substance abuse & behavioral health and chronic disease: diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. TCSI will also continue to work with other community partners providing services such as financial literacy and workforce development to expand the services available through this model. Examples of organizations providing potential services with whom MSF has long-standing relationships includes Children's Futures, Millhill Child & Family Development Corporation, UIH Family Partners, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, Child Care Connection and Children's Home Society of New Jersey.

### *Integration with Other Resources*

This project will build on two key initiatives being undertaken by the schools to reduce violence and transformation plans to turn around the district's lowest performing schools. In 2013, the NJ Attorney General's Office awarded the Trenton Police Department and The College of New Jersey a \$1.1 million grant to implement the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy (TVRS) as a promising strategy to end violence in Trenton's communities and schools. The TVRS is built on evidence-based models such as Ceasefire and Project Safe Neighborhoods that have proven successful in other parts of the country, but has been tailored, based on an analysis of crime trends, to meet the specific needs of Trenton. The TVRS strategy takes a holistic approach to assisting those individuals and their families by deploying social services and outreach workers into neighborhoods experiencing high levels of criminal activity. The strategy offers needed counseling, job training, and other aid as an alternative for young people who might otherwise engage in criminal activity, while maintaining a firm message of deterrence through the unified effort of federal, state and local law enforcement for those who refuse to change their behavior.

Rivera Middle School has also applied for a U.S. Department of Education School Improvement Grant to transform the school to one that is educating and supporting the whole child, academically, socially

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and emotionally to prepare them for success in the 21st century. The plan details activities to support leadership development, introduce therapeutic services, enhance professional development, improve academic programming and partner with community-based organizations to implement a community schools model. These plans are in direct alignment with the goals of the plans outlined in this proposal and with the work of the Trenton Board of Education's Office of Family and Community Engagement.

### **ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES**

#### ***Support Provided by Consortium Members***

The attached line item budget, budget justification and letters documenting a total match of 50% in year one, 33% in years two-four and 32% in year five of the five year-project period document the personnel, facilities, equipment, supplies and other resources to be provided by MSF and TCSI Consortium partners. Trenton Board of Education will provide office space and supplies for the TCSI Coordinator; meeting space for community schools model programming; security services during non-school hours; and custodial support. MSF will provide matching support for program personnel to be engaged in the TCSI model. The YMCA will continue to provide after-school and summer programming with support from other funding sources. MSF and Trenton Board of Education will also provide in-kind support for fund development activities to expand and replicate the model.

#### ***Partner Commitment***

The attached MOUs between the TCSI Consortium members and between Mercer Street Friends and the Trenton Board of Education demonstrate commitment of all agencies to planning and implementation of a full-service community schools model in Trenton. Matching funds, plans for future expansion at Rivera Middle School and replication throughout the district' schools further support the Consortium's commitment to this project. TCSI has secured a commitment from The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools to provide ongoing technical

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assistance and training during years one and two to ensure adherence to best practices. The project also includes the services of an experienced external evaluator, FCI Consulting, to support TCSI in its data driven decision-making processes.

### *Reasonableness of Costs*

The proposed budget represents a total five year cost of federal and non-federal funding of \$2,990,211. This calculates to a reasonable cost of approximately \$3,500 per participant (850 individuals) over five years, for an annual cost of approximately \$700.

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

### *Planning, Coordination, Management and Oversight*

#### **Year One – Quarters 1, 2 and 3: Planning**

Shared leadership and community ownership are crucial to developing and sustaining community schools. Upon grant award, the TCSI Consortium will establish a steering committee composed of Consortium members, parents, community members and representatives of other community-based organizations to oversee the transition to a community school, thereby supporting its continual improvement and sustainability. The steering committee will meet monthly to refine program plans, review data and ensure that programs and services offered at the community school are effectively supporting student and family development.

As outlined in the attached TCSI MOU, all TCSI partner agencies agree to designate an organizational representative as a member of the TCSI steering committee. The committee will meet monthly during year one to complete the following activities in support of the five-year results-based plan.

- Document the long-range planning roles and responsibilities of the school principal, the TCSI coordinator, partner entities, parents, community members and the TCSI Consortium
- Detail and implement service delivery mechanisms, such as staffing, scheduling, coordination

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and integration with existing school initiatives

- Develop referral, implementation and follow-up protocols to keep students, families and community members engaged with TCSI services
- Establish data collection, management and analysis protocols to document process and outcome objectives
- Refine targets for numbers of students, families and community members to be served
- Identify and recruit additional community partners to meet emerging student and school community needs
- Develop long-term fund development and sustainability plans
- Actively promote the initiative in the community

The steering committee will abide by mutually agreed-upon goals, implementation procedures and partnership structures; share implementation responsibilities; possess mutual authority and accountability for success; and share information and resources toward community outcomes. A study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, *What Explains Community Coalition Effectiveness? A Review of the Literature*, identifies six elements of successful, effective collaboration. In accordance with these findings, during year one the committee will formalize its rules and procedures, encourage strong leadership among its members, foster active participation, cultivate diverse membership, promote collaborations among member agencies, and facilitate group cohesion.

### **Year One, Quarter Four through Year Five: Implementation**

The following logic model details the alignment of objectives, services, activities and performance measures to meet the project goal to improve educational outcomes for children by providing comprehensive academic, social and health supports in a full-service community school model.

Objectives	Services/Activities	Performance Measures
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<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Services/Activities</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
<p>By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 120 at-risk students (those who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended or expelled) will participate in mentoring and risk-reduction programming.</p>	<p>Trained Check &amp; Connect coordinator and mentors will provide individual/family sessions for up to 20 hours monthly for 5 students and at least 3 parents in year one and 25 students and at least 15 parents annually in years 2-5. Beginning in year 2, at least 15 students and 10 parents and 10 community members will participate in a monthly educational workshop</p>	<p>By the end of the five-year grant, attendance rates at the participating middle school will have improved by a minimum of 70%, and retention rates will have improved by a minimum of 65% from rates at baseline (the school year prior to the grant award.)</p>
<p>By the end of the five year grant, an unduplicated 125 students and 125 parents will participate in one or more of the following individual or group parent training and parental involvement activities: parenting education sessions, parent-child interaction sessions, and/or</p>	<p>A trained coordinator and family support worker will provide weekly parenting education, stress management and parent-child interaction services for 5 parents and 5 students in year one and 30 parents and 30 students annually in years 2-5. In year one, at least 3 students, and 3 parents will participate in monthly parent-</p>	<p>Of 125 parents or caregivers attending at least 80% of parenting education, stress management, parent-child interaction sessions, a minimum of 65% will show improved parenting skills.</p>

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<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Services/Activities</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
parent-child activity sessions	child activity sessions, with 10 students and 10 parents participating monthly in yrs 2-5.	
By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 453 individuals will participate in one or more of the following mental health activities provided through this project: individual counseling, family counseling, group therapy, stress management groups or other support groups.	Licensed clinicians will provide weekly mental health services for up to 8 students and 5 parents in year one. In years 2-5, services will be provided annually to 35 students, 45 family members, and 20 community members. MCFSO will engage up to 10 youth annually in years 2-5 in the Youth Partnerships activities.	Of those individuals who have participated in mental health activities, 75% will show reductions in stress (adults) or positive changes in behavior (children) by the end of their participation in the program.
By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 144 students will participate in the Trenton Digital Initiative youth development program.	The Trenton Digital Initiative coordinator will provide weekly services to 36 students annually in years 2-5, two cohorts during the school year and one during the summer break.	Of 144 students participating in the Trenton Digital Initiative, 90% will successfully refurbish a personal computer to take home.

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Objectives	Services/Activities	Performance Measures
By the end of the five-year grant, 185 unduplicated families will have been engaged in social services by receiving case management through this grant.	Check & Connect staff and parenting education staff will provide weekly case management services for 5 families in year one and 45 families annually in years 2-5.	Of 185 individuals receiving case management services over the five year course of the grant, 85% will have accomplished their primary goal before discontinuing services.

**Experience**

MSF has extensive experience as lead agency charged with coordinating broad-based, multi-agency collaborative efforts. Examples include:

- West Ward Even Start: Mercer Street Friends served as lead agency for the Trenton West Even Start (WEST) program to improve the educational opportunities of low-income families in Trenton’s West Ward by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy/ basic education, and parenting education into a coordinated and integrated community-wide family literacy program. The initiative included five partnering agencies, including Trenton Board of Education, and five collaborating agencies.
- West Ward Alliance: The Alliance is a broad-based community assessment and planning initiative established by MSF in 2010 to create an integrated and seamless approach to meeting the needs of families in Trenton's West Ward. Through a three phase process, the Alliance engaged residents and representatives of social service agencies, schools, businesses and faith-based organizations to 1) identify community needs and resources, 2) develop a plan of action to

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meet those needs, and 3) implement sustainability plans and coordinate resources for program implementation.

- Project Connect: An Initiative of Service Coordination to Seniors and People with Disabilities: MSF served as the lead agency for this United Way funded initiative to help seniors and people of any age with physical, mental, or developmental disabilities living in the Greater Trenton area live in health, dignity, and independence to the greatest extent possible. The initiative brought together eight Trenton area service providers for seniors and people with disabilities, and took a “no wrong door” approach to help them access services to meet a range of needs.
- MSF Parent Child Center West and Home Visiting Component for Children’s Futures: MSF coordinates a number of community-based organizations, such as Greater Trenton Behavioral HealthCare, WomanSpace and the Trenton Community Music School to provide an array of center-based services for low-income West Ward families. MSF has also contracted with Children’s Futures to provide all home visiting services for participants of center-based programming throughout the city.

MSF and the Trenton Board of Education also partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of Trenton & Mercer County to implement the evidence-based Delinquency Prevention Initiative. The goal of the *Delinquency Prevention Initiative* was to create a Support Team that would enable young people between the ages of 14-16 who have displayed pre-delinquent behavior to thrive and become productive members of society. To accomplish this daunting goal the NJ Division of Criminal Justice awarded the Boys & Girls Club of America, a grant to create and implement a unique program that would encourage cross-agency coordination and participation to address support team efficacy through impacting the lives of participating youth. The project implemented interventions in Trenton High School Central Campus, Trenton High School West Campus, The Truancy Center of Trenton, and

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Mercer Street Friends Counseling services. The project provided career development, leadership development, educational development, health and life skills, fitness and recreation and counseling services that resulted in significant gains in cumulative grade point averages. The program was so successful that it served as the model program for NJ Division of Criminal Justice to replicate the program in other communities throughout New Jersey.

### *Staff Qualifications*

The following key staff members at TCSI partner agencies will lead the development, implementation, and evaluation of this initiative during the five year project period and sustainability for subsequent years and replication in other schools. Resumes for key leadership staff at MSF, Rivera School and the FACE program are attached.

**TCSI Coordinator:** Anniesha Walker, MSW, LCSW will transition within 2 months of grant award from her current position as MSF Director of Clinical Services to serve as the full-time TCSI Coordinator. This position will be housed at Rivera Middle School and will have primary responsibility for facilitating the process of transforming the school into a full service community school. She will work in partnership with the school administrator and lead the TCSI steering committee to assess the school community's needs and assets, coordinate all student and family support services, and create a learning environment that supports student achievement and wellness. A core responsibility in year one will be to work closely with the school principal and existing school leadership teams to develop a school-based TCSI leadership team that advised the steering committee as it identifies barriers to learning, catalogues available resources and gaps, and develops programming that is community responsive. The goal is to integrate and align academic and non-academic services available through this initiative. This position will coordinate all student and family support services; maintain an effective referral process; establish and monitor adherence to protocols to manage and maintain quality

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partnerships; assist school staff and TCSI partners in resolving issues related to service delivery, access, and coordination; and develop and sustain partnerships with city and county services and non-profit agencies to provide supports and opportunities to students and families that meet their identified needs as well as fulfill organizations' missions. Since earning a master's degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania in 2004, Ms. Walker has spent eight of the last ten years at MSF, beginning as a youth therapist and advancing to management positions to coordinate, expand and provide clinical supervision for youth development and mental health programs. Ms. Walker is a NJ licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), a certified school social worker, and holds certificates in couples and family counseling from the Ackerman Institute in NY and psychological first aid from the state of NJ.

**Rivera Principal:** Bernadette Trapp will work closely with the TCSI coordinator to form the school-site leadership group that is responsible for planning, implementation, and continuous improvement of the community school strategy. She will also lead the development of additional partnerships with community based organizations, higher education institutions, families, businesses, faith-based organizations, among others to address the needs of students, families, and the community. Ms. Trapp holds a BS in Education of the Handicapped from Trenton State College, NJ, and a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from the College of NJ. She is certified in Special Education and Elementary Education and holds a NJ Principal's Certification, Supervisor's Certification. Over the past thirty years, she has demonstrated her leadership and commitment to student and community change through the adoption of best practices in education and guidance in school reform efforts.

**MSF Executive Director:** Shannon M. Mason, PhD has worked with MSF for over 10 years and in 2012 assumed leadership as the Executive Director. Her commitment to helping people move out of poverty, combined with her vision and passion for the community schools model has been the catalyst

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for the development of the TCSI initiative. Dr. Mason holds a Doctor of Philosophy, Counseling Psychology from Temple University, PA; a Master's of Science in Education, Psychological Services from University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Arts, Psychology Cum Laude from The College of New Jersey.

**FACE Executive Director:** Kathleen Smallwood Johnson, Esq. was hired as the first Executive Director of the Trenton Public School's newly formed Family and Community Engagement. She will help guide the work of the TCSI steering committee to ensure broad-based coordination between school and community based family services. Ms. Johnson holds Master's of Divinity degree from Princeton Theology Seminary, a Jurist Doctorate from University of Bridgeport and a Master's of Education degree from University of Massachusetts.

**MSF Parenting and Education Supervisor:** Karen Hoppock, MSW, LCSW will provide coordination and supervision for all parenting education programming. She brings decades of experience providing clinical services to diverse populations presenting with moderate to severe mental health concerns, a successful track record of engaging minimally motivated individuals and working with families to develop creative interventions. She is an experienced developer of quality assurance frameworks and an expert in strategic program planning, integrating client need/trends, resources of time, staff, and budget.

**MSF Check & Connect Coordinator:** This position will be hired during year one and will have primary responsibility for oversight, coordination and implementation of the Check & Connect model. This position will supervise Check & Connect mentors and act as a liaison between the schools, parents, students, and TCSI partners around issues of student engagement, truancy and drop-out prevention. The successful candidate will hold a master's degree in a relevant social services field or a bachelor's degree and at least three years of relevant work experience.

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**MSF Check & Connect Mentors:** These positions will be filled during year one and will work directly and collaboratively with a caseload of individual student and their parents, school site staff and community service providers to implement comprehensive and inclusive strategies that address school success. The mentors will track the levels of engagement of target students at least weekly and document service utilization and outcome measures. The successful candidates will hold a bachelor's degree in a relevant social services field.

**MSF TDI Coordinator:** This position will be hired in year one to coordinate and lead this innovative after-school youth development initiative. The position will work closely with community partners to secure donated computers for the project. The position will be filled by a candidate with a bachelor's degree in a related social services field.

**Mental Health Specialists:** TCSI will employ two part-time licensed mental health specialists to provide a range of counseling services for students, family and community members.

## **PROJECT SERVICES**

### *Service Alignment with Best Practices*

TCSI utilizes several evidence-based interventions to improve academic learning and increase student engagement in school. The Check & Connect program is a dropout prevention strategy that relies on close monitoring of school performance, as well as mentoring, case management, and other supports. The program focuses on relationships that are based in mutual trust and open communication and nurtured through a long-term commitment focused on promoting a student's educational success. Problem solving and capacity building activities take a cognitive-behavioral approach to promote the acquisition of skills to resolve conflict constructively, encourage the search for solutions rather than a source of blame, foster productive coping skills, and diminish dependency on the mentor. The mentor provides persistence, continuity, and consistency and serves as a source of academic motivation, is



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familiar with the youth and family, and conveys the message that “education is important for your future”. According to the U.S. Department of Education, What Works Clearinghouse, Check & Connect was found to have positive effects on staying in school and potentially positive effects on progressing in school.

MSF mental health services include individual, family and group therapy for adolescents, adults and families. Therapists utilize a range of evidence-based practices tailored to the needs of each individual, family or group. Practices include cognitive behavioral therapy, structural family therapy, motivational interviewing and play therapy.

Parenting education and engagement services utilize the Bavolek Nurturing Parenting Programs, a family-centered trauma-informed initiative designed to build nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglecting parenting and child-rearing practices. The long term goals are to prevent recidivism in families receiving social services, lower the rate of teenage pregnancies, reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency and alcohol abuse, and stop the intergenerational cycle of child abuse by teaching positive parenting behaviors. The Nurturing Parenting Programs are recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Registry for Evidence-based Parenting Programs (NREPP), and a number of state and local agencies as proven programs for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. The Departments of the Army and Navy also utilize these programs to enhance parenting skills for first time parents in bases worldwide. The program also utilizes the Stress Management Toolkit for Parents designed to enhance family engagement in practice/progress in activities related to family strengthening. The Toolkit has been developed in response to the pervasive presence of traumatic stress amongst parents in our service community MSF parent educators and clinical staff have developed this unique model of trauma informed care and are currently engaged in ongoing implementation; including intensive training of

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parent educators who work both in evidence based-home parenting education programs and in community based parenting education group settings. The Toolkit provides community group facilitators with specific strategies for engaging parents in practical, simple activities aimed at educating them about traumatic stress and its impact, learning and practicing healing steps, and learning to enjoy their relationships with their children. These activities are carefully integrated with program goals, objectives and expected outcomes.

The Trenton Digital Initiative utilizes the ARISE Life Skills curriculum designed specifically for youth who are at risk of dropping out of school and teaches them the importance of staying in school, consequences of dropping out, and alternative education routes. ARISE life skills activities are based on the Psycho Educational model. Each lesson helps the individual to recognize the need for change and that they have choice. The goal of each activity is to change behavior. ARISE presents non-threatening, easy-to-comprehend, interactive lessons that motivate youth to make a 180-degree turn towards positive choices and a new healthy outlook on life that is essential for personal growth.

Examples of lesson topics include job readiness, anger management, substance abuse, guns, domestic abuse, teen pregnancy, self-esteem, nutrition, and health. The curriculum stresses learning through imitation and developing self-efficacy, teaches students how to regulate and monitor their behavior by telling themselves what to do, asking themselves questions, and evaluating themselves, and teaches students how to be better problem solvers by understanding situations and consequences before acting.

### ***Improvements in Student Achievement***

Research suggests that projects based on the guiding principles of the Community Schools model that incorporates the six key conditions for learning identified by the Coalition for Community Schools have resulted in increases in academic test scores, school attendance and graduation rates. Communities in Schools (CIS), a national organization that provides wraparound services to students in nearly 200

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schools nationwide, recently completed a methodologically rigorous, multi-year study that used both school-level analyses and student-level randomized controlled trials to evaluate community schools nationwide. This study found positive effects for CIS schools on dropout and retention, academic test scores, school attendance, discipline, and student attitudes, with the strongest effects for schools that had the highest-quality implementation of the CIS model.<sup>1</sup> Another evaluation, of the Tulsa, Oklahoma community school initiative, linked the level of implementation of the community school strategy to students' sense of collective trust at school and found that this sense of trust was linked to higher academic achievement scores.<sup>2</sup>

The TCSI results-based action plan was developed for compliance with the six conditions for learning of a community school.

**Quality Education:** Trenton Public Schools and Rivera school leaders will provide strong leadership with a clear vision; professional development to ensure students have access to competent and prepared teachers, a rich and challenging curriculum and effective instruction; and adherence to high standards and expectation for students.

**Positive Youth Development and Motivation to Learn:** Through Check & Connect, the Trenton Digital Initiative, YMCA activities and support services for individualized education program (IEP) students TCSI offers opportunities for active and concrete learning; after-school enrichment programs that enhance classroom work; use of the community as a living textbook for learning; intentional opportunities for all youth to build developmental assets; and effective supports for reshaping problematic behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> ICF International, "Communities in Schools National Evaluation: Five Year Summary Report" (2010)

<sup>2</sup> Curt M. Adams, "The Community School Effect: Evidence from an Evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative" (Tulsa: Oklahoma Center for Education Policy, 2010)

**Basic Physical, Mental, and Emotional Needs of Students and Families Met:** After-school enrichment activities, parenting education, counseling and case management services will provide students with connections to accessible and affordable physical health, mental health, and substance abuse assessments and interventions, as needed: nutrition education and modeling via lunches and snacks; and opportunities/supports for physical exercise.

**Mutual Respect and Effective Collaboration among Parents, Families, School Staff:** TCSI, through its ongoing meetings to develop and monitor process and outcome objectives, will ensure that the school creates and maintains a welcoming/inviting school environment and practices; offers multiple avenues for parent/family engagement; intentionally emphasizes student and family strengths; ensures services are respectful of differences in cultural, socioeconomic, and other family-specific characteristics or experiences; and regularly solicit and respond to parent and community input.

**Safe, Supportive, and Respectful School Environment:** The array of evidence based services to be offered all place intentional focus on building, reinforcing caring relationships (student to student, student to educator, educator to educator, etc.), engage students, staff, parents and community advocates to help create a safer, more positive school environment.

**Early Childhood Development:** This project, targeted to middle school students, will not specifically include early childhood development services, but families with small children who are engaged in case management or parenting education services will be linked with early childhood programs provided off-site by MSF and numerous other community partners.

TCSI has also allocated resources to contract with an external evaluator, hire a part-time data manager and invest in software to upgrade its technology to accommodate expansions in data management capabilities. Data collection and analysis on the broad array of services offered in a community schools

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model is essential for informing programmatic decision making and policy development. TCSI will collect and share data results to guide development and refinement of goals and indicators among partners and to document lessons learned for program modifications and replication.

### **PROJECT EVALUATION**

#### ***Management, Implementation and Efficiency***

The conduct of TCSI and its results will be evaluated through a comprehensive and rigorous process, as detailed in subsequent paragraphs. The evaluation, conducted under the supervision of an external evaluation firm, will assess compliance with grant terms and conditions, process and progress toward the project goals and objectives, and whether the project is having the expected effects and impacts. (Please see Objectives, Outcomes, and Performance Measures, below.) Evaluation activities will be conducted, aggregated, and reported in a manner and at a frequency sufficient to ensure continuous quality improvement of funded activities throughout the course of the project, and to facilitate and inform project replication across multiple settings.

Compliance with Relevant Regulations: All TCSI participants will be fully informed of the benefits, risks and scope of services available; of rights including those related to information disclosure, participation in decisions regarding the child and family; respect and non-discrimination, confidentiality of information; the right to receive or reject services at any time; the process for complaints and appeals; and participant responsibilities. Participants will also be informed of the types of data to be collected, methods of collection, and confidentiality of data. They will be asked to provide authorization to obtain information from, and release information to, specific partner agencies. The decision to sign the consent form will be made without threats or coercion from MSF or Rivera staff or the evaluation team. An appropriate consent form will be developed upon grant award notice. In accordance with privacy and confidentiality regulations and school and agency policies, access to

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participants' records will be limited to personnel who are involved in the direct care of a participant, the supervision of this care, have essential administrative functions including file maintenance, data entry, billing, evaluation, or maintenance of the MIS system, and have signed an agreement to abide by the Agency's confidentiality policy. Access to electronic case information will be password-protected.

Secure methods will be used to transfer information which can be linked by name to specific participants. All hard copy records will be maintained in a secured area when not in use. Safeguards will be taken to prevent loss from fire, water, damage, theft, and any breaches of confidentiality.

Confidential or sensitive data collected by the external evaluator that can be linked to program participants will be shredded and/or erased one year after the publication of the final report.

### ***Replication***

The TCSI will comply with all reporting requirements that might be imposed by USDOE, including the annual Grant Performance Report (ED 524B), the Final Performance Report, and both annual and cumulative Evaluation Reports. The Evaluation Reports will be designed to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective Community Schools programming, and will include analysis and recommendations regarding implementation, outcomes, and partnership effectiveness. These reports will provide guidance for project replication in multiple settings.

### ***Evaluation Methods***

The proposed evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes by 1) utilizing the services of a qualified external evaluator, and 2) utilizing validated instruments to measure participant outcomes.

Qualifications of External Evaluator: MSF proposes to utilize the external evaluation services of Fabian Consulting, Inc. (FCI), which served in that capacity for MSF's Even Start program from 2009 - 2011. FCI created the preliminary evaluation plan for this proposal, and has agreed to conduct the evaluation

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for the proposed project, as demonstrated in the attached letter of commitment. FCI has provided outcome measurement and program evaluation services since 1997. Besides the abovementioned Even Start evaluation, FCI has been responsible for external evaluation for several organizations and projects related to education and youth development, including design of outcome measurement process and all reporting for Learning Connections©, a multi-year, multi-level program to improve student achievement in five under-performing New Orleans area public schools; evaluation of state-funded (federal pass-through) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at five New Jersey elementary schools and one high school; and evaluation of a federal OJJDP-funded statewide youth mentoring project. FCI evaluation team members to be devoted to this project include Lori Fabian, President, supported by colleagues Dr. Elizabeth Gittman, Dr. Joan Kaspin, Dr. Mark Jurcisin, and others as appropriate. (Curricula Vitae of all team members available upon request.) See [www.fabianconsultinginc.com](http://www.fabianconsultinginc.com) for further information.

**Objectives, Outcomes, and Performance Measures:** The following summarizes a complete plan for measuring performance indicators/objectives, including the validated instruments to be used to measure participant outcomes.

**Objective/Outcome:** USDOE Performance Measure: No fewer than 850 individuals, a minimum of 65% of 1300 individuals targeted for services will receive one or more listed services during each year of the project period (with the exception of the planning year, which will target 120 individuals and serve a minimum of 50.)

**Validation Method:** Examination of program records

**Frequency:** Census kept for all programs continually; aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Program staff, TCSI Coordinator, (Coordinator), Data Manager (DM) External Evaluator (EE)

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**Process Objective 1:** By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 120 at-risk students (those who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended or expelled) will participate in mentoring and risk-reduction programming.

**Validation Method:** Review of student attendance records and program case files

**Frequency:** Recorded at every session, aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Case manager/ mentors, DM, PD, EE

**Outcome Objective 1:** By the end of the five-year grant, attendance rates at the participating middle school will have improved by a minimum of 70%, and retention rates will have improved by a minimum of 65% from rates at baseline (school year prior to the grant award.)

**Validation Method:** Examination of school attendance and retention rates

Frequency: Annually

Responsibility: EE

**Process Objective 2:** By the end of the five year grant, an unduplicated 125 students and 125 parents will participate in one or more of the following individual or group parent training and parental involvement activities: parenting education sessions, parent-child interaction sessions, and/or parent-child activity sessions.

**Validation Method:** Examination of session sign-in sheets and clinical records.

**Frequency:** Recorded at every session, aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Parent Educators, PD, DM, EE

**Outcome Objective 2:** Of 125 parents or caregivers attending at least 80% of parenting education, stress management, parent-child interaction sessions, a minimum of 65% will show improved parenting skills.

**Validation Method:** Improvements from baseline to program completion on the AAPI-2, Family



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Logs, Protective Factors Survey, Parent and Child Stress Inventory

**Frequency:** At first and last session; aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Parenting Educator, DM, PD, EE

**Process Objective 3:** By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 453 individuals will participate in one or more of the following mental health activities provided through this project: individual counseling, family counseling, group therapy, stress management groups or other support groups.

**Validation Method:** Session sign-in sheets and clinical records.

**Frequency:** Recorded every session; aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Clinicians, DM, PD, EE

**Outcome Objective 3:** Of those individuals who have participated in mental health activities, 75% will show reductions in stress (adults) or positive changes in behavior (children) by the end of their participation in the program.

**Validation Method:** Changes from pre- to post-service scores on the Parenting Stress Index – Short Form (adults) or on the Child Behavior Checklist.

**Frequency:** At intake into mental health program and every six months or at exit interview; aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Clinicians, DM, PD, EE

**Process Objective 4:** By the end of the five-year grant, an unduplicated 144 students will participate in the Trenton Digital Initiative youth development program.

**Validation Method:** Examination of instructor records.

**Frequency:** Attendance recorded every session; aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Instructor, DM, PD, EE

**Outcome Objective 4:** Of 144 students participating in the Trenton Digital Initiative, 90% will

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successfully refurbish a personal computer to take home.

**Validation Method:** Examination of instructor records.

**Frequency:** Completions recorded at end of each program cycle; aggregated and reviewed annually

**Responsibility:** Instructor, PD, DM, EE

**Process Objective 5:** By the end of the five-year grant, 185 unduplicated families will have been engaged in social services by receiving case management through this grant.

Validation Method: Case records

**Frequency:** Recorded at every session, aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Case Manager, DM, PD, EE

**Outcome Objective 5:** Of 185 families receiving case management services over the five year course of the grant, 85% will have accomplished their primary goal before discontinuing services. Validation

Method: Case records

**Frequency:** Recorded at every case management session, aggregated and reviewed quarterly

**Responsibility:** Case Manager, DM, PD, EE