



ALL-AMERICA CITY FINALIST

CAMDEN, N.J.

Community Snapshot

Walt Whitman described Camden, New Jersey, as a “city invincible.” But in the decades following World War II, Camden lost half of its manufacturing jobs and most of its middle-income residents. It is now, per capita, the poorest city in the nation — and one of the most dangerous. But there is more to Camden. The city is adjacent to two regional economies — Philadelphia and South Jersey. Camden’s Rutgers campus and its proximity to several other universities provide the city with access to intellectual capital. Camden is supported by a network of nonprofit and health care organizations and an active community of regional and national foundations and funders.

Community Solutions Action Plan

The city’s Born to Read initiative has created a comprehensive strategy based on the following focus areas:

- **School Readiness:** Born to Read has a multi-pronged approach that involves both instructional and familial support, preparing Camden children ages 0-5 for the demands of a rigorous academic life
- **Grade-Level Reading:** Born to Read will use the Common Core State Standards for Reading, Writing and Language Arts to ensure that students meet targets and milestones necessary to read on grade level
- **Summer Learning:** Born to Read will provide children with books to encourage voluntary reading over the summer to combat summer learning loss
- **Attendance:** Born to Read will establish a system to track chronic absence. Once the system is established, an early warning component will be developed to monitor students at risk and create an inventory of supports to prevent chronic absence

Partnerships

Born to Read partners are Office of the Mayor, City of Camden; Eagles Youth Partnership; Camden Cooper Lanning Promise Neighborhood and coalition; Center For Family Services; Cooper Foundation; Camden City Public Schools; American Reading Company; Children’s Literacy Initiative; Reach Out and Read; PNC Bank/Anti-Defamation League; Rutgers Camden/Rowan University; Experience Corps; Research for Action; Random House; Hopeworks; BookMates; and Healthfirst. The Camden Cooper Lanning Promise Neighborhood coalition includes Campbell Soup Foundation, United Way of Camden County, Rowan University, Susquehanna Bank, Cooper University Hospital and several partners listed above.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 70,344 residents
- Approximately 11,000 students
- 82 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals
- 20 percent of students read at grade level (Independent Reading Level Assessment)
- 9 percent are English language learners
- 63 percent graduation rate
- 75 percent are ready for kindergarten
- 91 percent of K-12 students attend school daily
- Citywide summer school is available but is in early stages

GOALS

- Increase percentage of K-3 students reading at grade level to 95 percent
- Develop a system to track chronic absence
- Reduce suspensions by at least 50 percent
- Increase school preparedness of kindergarteners to 90 percent
- Increase summer school attendance to 50 percent

“To turn an entire city of non-readers into a city of readers is a massive undertaking that can only happen when true partnership and alignment are the practice.”