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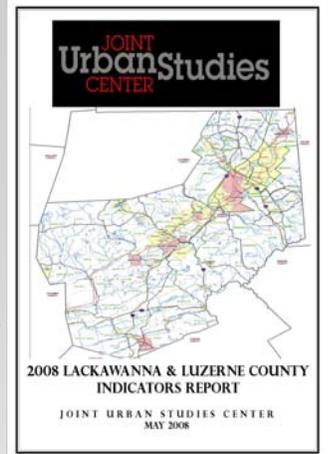
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From the Executive Director: 2008 Lackawanna & Luzerne County Indicators

The Joint Urban Studies Center's (JUSC) 2008 Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties Indicators Report is the third of its kind, which tracks data and trends critical to the region's future. The report was previewed at JUSC's Annual Forum on May 8th at the Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel Scranton.

This year's education indicators reveal that in Lackawanna and Luzerne County SAT scores are down from their 2005 high, math and science proficiencies are in the low 70 percentile, Bachelor degrees are up from 2000 but down from 2005, and Pre-K enrollment is increasing. Health wise, physical fitness of children is decreasing, deaths of children under five and the area's suicide rate are increasing, and incidences of disease remain about the same. Regarding crime, both violent and property crimes are holding steady over prior years. In addition, the area's ratio of children to elders is increasing, as is its number of elderly residents living alone. Further, while per capita income is rising and poverty levels are slowly decreasing, the area has more minors living in poverty than the state average.



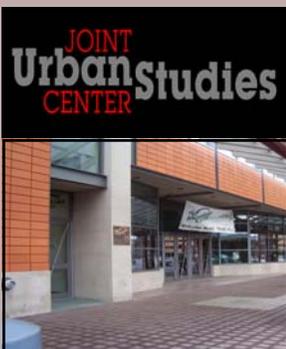
This year's event marks the first time JUSC coordinated with both counties' Commissioners to participate in a roundtable discussion. The roundtable discussion included Lackawanna County Commissioners Corey O'Brien and Michael Washo, and Luzerne County Commissioners, Maryanne Petrilla, Greg Skrepenak and Steve Urban. Austin Burke, President and CEO of the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce, moderated the discussion.

Event proceedings will be posted to JUSC's website in June. Indicator Reports are available for \$35 (includes sales tax, shipping and handling). Order forms are available at www.urbanstudies.org.

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The Quiet Rush: Natural Gas Discovery

(April 3, 2008) – JUSC believes that natural gas exploration in shale deposits may pose both opportunities and challenges for northeastern Pennsylvania municipalities. JUSC's Executive Director Teri Ooms said research identifies an enormous gas field in Pennsylvania, including all counties north and west of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. Preliminary research also shows that shale potential also exists in the very eastern portions of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

The field's existence has been known for the past 25 years, however gas deposits are 6,000 to 8,000 feet underground, and equipment and processes for successful drilling have not been available until recently. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that the field may hold may be 1.9 trillion cubic feet of Marcellus shale. The risk, however, is whether every pocket of shale can produce enough natural gas to make a strong return on investment. It appears that companies are taking that risk.

In April 2007, Wyoming County landowners were offered \$47 per acre for leased drilling rights. Today, \$1,500 to \$2,000 is on the table, according to various county landowners. While gas extraction could bring new residents to Wyoming County, which increases wealth, it also presents new challenges that accompany rapid growth. Such challenges may include strains on public safety, decreased availability and affordability of housing, and increased demand for public services, health care and school enrollment.

How will local government deal with these challenges while maximizing the region's opportunities? In the coming months, JUSC hopes to answers this question.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, average natural gas wellhead prices hovered around \$2 per thousand cubic feet (Mcf) a decade ago. Over the past ten years, that price spiked to \$10.33 per Mcf in October 2005, and was at \$6.99 per Mcf in January 2008.

Such high prices and new processes make drilling in previously unexplored regions more feasible. Western Pennsylvania has already produced successful wells using new processes, and the U.S. Geological Survey indicates that much of Appalachia has this gas-producing Marcellus shale.

JUSC is undertaking a sponsored research project on the economic impact that this find may have on our local economy as well as the strains that rapid population growth can have on local government, education, healthcare, transportation, and other economic indicators. The study will be completed this summer. In addition, JUSC was hired to complete proprietary research on this topic.



Sherry Murray joins JUSC as Research & Policy Analyst

JUSC is pleased to announce that Sherry Murray has joined its team as a Research and Policy Analyst. Sherry previously worked in research positions with various state and federal government offices, including the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the U.S Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Sherry earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from the University of Scranton and a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Maryland.

Improving K-12: Merit Pay for Teachers

JUSC's 2008 Indicators Report shows mixed results for Lackawanna and Luzerne County schools. While graduate and professional degrees are on the rise, Bachelor degrees are slightly below 2005 statistics. Of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, Lackawanna County ranks 53 and Luzerne County 64 for K-12 school attendance. While school districts met Adequate Yearly Progress Standards under No Child Left Behind, SAT scores are dropping. Both counties' math and reading proficiencies (National Assessment in Educational Progress—NAEP) are around 70 percent; provided that the state average is 69 percent for math and 67 percent for reading, northeastern Pennsylvania seems on par. Proficiencies in the 70 percent range, however, are equivalent to a "C" average. Is it really good enough that 7 of 10 kids are proficient? Since our region's youth represent our future, do these scores reflect our future ability to compete globally?

Researcher Gary W. Phillips recently completed a study whereby he correlated the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study with the U.S. National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). The U.S. ranked 20th in math, with Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea rounding out the top three. State wise, Massachusetts ranked among the top ten. In science, the U.S. ranked 12th, with Singapore, Taipei and South Korea rounding out the top three spots. State wise, Massachusetts and Michigan ranked among the top ten. Pennsylvania did not rank anywhere among the report's top 35. (*Source: American Institute for Research*)

There are so many educational best practices to consider for implementation. The key is for our education system to begin to act more entrepreneurially. In addition, change should be facilitated at a quicker pace. One such practice is gaining momentum across the country and should be considered — merit pay for teachers.

U.S. K-12 education trends raise an interesting question, which is being debated in Pennsylvania . . . should teachers be rewarded for their students' success? This question has sparked controversy mainly due to its conflict with the basic principles of teachers' unions, including an "equal pay" system and a sense of workplace kinship. But in many states (i.e., Minnesota), unions are cooperating with plans to implement some form of performance bonus program that compensates teachers in accordance with student achievement. In December 2007, 86 percent of teachers at 205 public schools in New York City signed on to participate in a performance bonus program largely based on standardized test scores. In Florida, the Special Teachers Are Rewarded plan (STAR) lawfully requires school districts to provide 5 percent bonuses to the top 25 percent of teachers based on results of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and other evaluations. Tests like the FCAT have become standard in determining performance bonus recipients throughout the country, resulting in the same sort of scrutiny that No Child Left Behind received; over the years, many professionals have questioned the effectiveness of standardized tests in conducting accurate evaluations. School districts participating in merit pay, however, have generally extended qualifications to include overall performance, credentials, and awards received.

Teachers remain the only segment of K-12 education left out of the equation of measurement, performance and accountability. Teachers are evaluated on the learning process or what they put it into it—a largely subjective process involving principles' classroom observations. Why not measure teachers on the output or the results (student performance), as most workers are evaluated through job performance evaluations? While it should be noted that not all the responsibility of students' performance should fall on the teacher (as parental involvement, language and other factors impact test scores), and therefore evaluation systems should count a number of measures. Merit pay paves the way for a more equitable, well rounded and increasingly objective system.

Merit Pay *continued*

Stanford and Columbia University studies demonstrate that students of effective teachers can advance their learning by a grade level or more. Students of poor teachers, on the other hand, experience an equally adverse effect. A merit system also allows for struggling teachers to get the help they need to be more effective. The bottom line is that teachers make a difference, they are not interchangeable.

Teachers have tough jobs in today's world and they are truly creating our future sustainability—an educated and skilled workforce. The current evaluation system is not objective and does not accurately address how successful they are at their jobs. In other words, the system does not effectively tell us if students are really learning. Not addressing this issue now will quickly impact our regional economy's future success. Given that, good teachers should be paid well for their work.

There are a number of changes needed in our K-12 system to improve education. K-12, like business, must be flexible and evolve with the times. The current system is not working well under the existing conditions. Addressing such issues now, in a thoughtful yet aggressive manner, will positively impact our region for years to come.

JUSC Faculty Research Symposium Held April 18, 2008 on Wilkes University Campus

On April 18th, fifteen faculty members from JUSC's four regional higher education institutions participated in the inaugural Faculty Research Symposium. It is anticipated that the Symposium will become an annual event, which will rotate between JUSC member institution campuses.

During the Symposium, two faculty members presented research in a poster session. The remaining members presented research through a series of panel discussions.

Reynold Verret, Ph.D., Wilkes University Provost and event sponsor, welcomed and congratulated attendees on their research, and encouraged future cross institutional projects. Ken Okrepkie, Vice President of Great Valley Technology Alliance and Northeast Pennsylvania Technology Institute, spoke about the STARS program, Wall Street West initiatives, and various faculty research opportunities.

Faculty Researchers included:

Jennifer Thomas and Megan Cannon, Wilkes University

Karen Beth H. Bohan, Sheila K. Kang, and Kenneth Pidcock, Wilkes University

Gary Decker, MD, Chief of Infectious Disease of WBGH

Daniel Kosinski, Manager, Microbiology Lab of Mercy Hospital, Scranton

Stephanie L. Bressler, University of Scranton

John N. Mellon, Misericordia University and **Representative. Neal P. Goodman**, PA

Thomas J. Baldino, Wilkes University

John M. Sumansky, Misericordia University and **Chris Guinoo**, University of Miami

Terry Clemente, Penn State – Wilkes-Barre

Justin Matus, Wilkes University and **Robert D. Kuschke**, University of Missouri – St. Louis

Richard Crew, Misericordia University

Ruth C. Hughes, Alison McKeachie, and Marleen A. Troy, Wilkes University

Ebonie L. Cunningham Stringer, Wilkes University

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JUSC Mission Statement

JUSC's mission is to assist in the revitalization of small to mid-sized cities and counties through the utilization of the center's expertise and resources. These include its member universities, colleges, and their respective faculties and students. JUSC serves as a resource and consultant for communities to develop more effective and efficient government, best practices, preparation of applied research, strategy development, and the process for its implementation. Based upon these efforts, JUSC develops models for replication by other municipalities confronting similar challenges.



Attention Faculty Researchers:
For more information regarding JUSC's Visiting Scholar Program and Faculty Research, contact Marla Doddo at doddo@urbanstudies.org.

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