



JOINT UrbanStudies CENTER

Volume 4, Issue 4

Summer 2008

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From the Executive Director:

As of July 1, 2008, Marywood University has joined the higher education institutional collaborative that comprises the Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC); JUSC is now eight institutions strong.



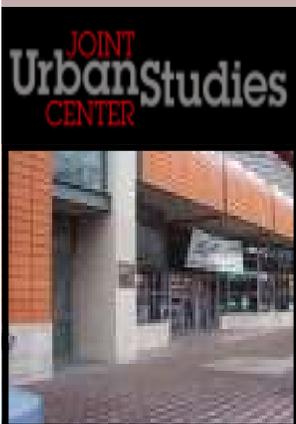
After four years of operation, JUSC has produced three annual indicator reports and has hosted three corresponding forums. In addition, we now have four operating task forces, and we have published fifteen research reports. Further, JUSC was commissioned by various clients to conduct research on proprietary economic and community development efforts, local government affairs, education and workforce development, and social services. In these subject areas, JUSC has prepared strategic plans, conducted surveys, interviews, focus groups, analyzed data, prepared projections, and completed case study analyses. JUSC has completed multiple projects for fourteen local governments, non-profits, and private businesses throughout the region.

JUSC has proudly graduated 73 people from its student internship program. Its graduates have represented seven institutions of higher education and nineteen disciplines.

We believe the next four years will encompass many more research opportunities focusing on northeastern Pennsylvania's incredible anticipated changes. We thank our faithful supporters and paying clients and we look forward to growth, prosperity, and innovation in northeastern Pennsylvania's future!

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Consolidating the Collection of the Earned Income Tax Credit in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's current structure of collecting the Earned Income Tax (EIT) causes a great deal of confusion and results in substantial annual revenue losses.. Senate Bill 1063 (SB 1063) proposes changes to restructure EIT collections and streamline duplicative processes. The bill came to fruition after the Governor's Center for Local Government Services – part of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (PADCED) reported receiving numerous complaints surrounding EIT collections and administration. In 2001, the Center created a work group in 2001 to review such complaints, study the issue and make recommendations for improving the system.

Released in 2004, the Center's study found that the local EIT collection system causes the loss of over \$100 million annually and increases the cost of doing business in Pennsylvania. More specifically, the study stated that the current system suffers from a lack of cooperation among its many tax collectors and is fraught with disputes, inconsistencies and bureaucracy. Underlying the problem is an ambiguous law and the system's lack of enforcement or oversight. Upon further analysis and information from the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL), it was estimated that the Commonwealth actually loses nearly \$240 million annually.

PADCED recommended that the EIT system be overhauled to prevent continuing losses of municipal and school revenues and to reduce the system's negative impact on business. It further suggested that this be accomplished through consolidation and reform of the current system or by piggybacking EIT collection on the earned income portion of the state personal income tax. Ideally, the tax would be collected by one collector on the state level; although, a more feasible alternative is that it would be collected by one collector per county. Due to these findings and recommendations, the Pennsylvania Senate crafted legislation to dramatically reduce the number of EIT collectors from 560 to 66.

SB 1063 was recently passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly and, in July 2008, Gov. Ed Rendell signed the bill into law. Upon analysis of the law, JUSC believes consolidating the EIT collection system is long overdue and will have tremendous benefits to the Commonwealth's government and businesses. JUSC further believes that consolidation of property and school taxes should be on the immediate agenda of our General Assembly

Restructuring Education Funding in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's schools are in dire need of assistance and vital changes must be made in order to adequately fund public education. Pennsylvania is working hard to fix its funding problems and improve education statewide. Both Gov. Ed Rendell and the General Assembly recognize the need to not only increase funding, but also allocate monies in a more responsible and productive way. In July 2006, the General Assembly passed bipartisan legislation directing the State Board of Education to conduct a "costing-out study" to determine each school district's required level of funding in order to help all districts and students meet academic standards. The study concluded that Pennsylvania is short-changing public education by an average of \$2,414 per student.

Sen. Raphael Musto introduced Senate Bill 1338 (SB 1338) this year to establish a new basic education funding formula based on a plan prescribed in Gov. Rendell's 2008-09 state budget proposal. The bill currently sits in the Senate Education Committee. In the House, Rep. James Roebuck introduced House Bill 2449 (HB 2449) – similar legislation, which has since been referred to the House Rules Committee.

The new formula was, in part, derived from the costing out study commissioned by the State Board of Education. Essentially, it would enhance the funding structure and make it more efficient.

The House and Senate would be taking very positive first steps by moving HB 2449 and/or SB 1338. The legislation uses the General Assembly's costing-out study as the benchmark for calculating each school district's needs based on factors such as: enrollment, number of low income students and English language learners, district size and regional cost differences. The legislation, which provide for \$5.2 billion in state basic education funding for Pennsylvania's 501 school districts, would increase state funding for basic education by \$291.3 million over 2007-08.

Educational Indicator

It is a fact that annual income is intrinsically tied to education level. The **Educational Attainment Indicator** examines post high school education levels of residents, age 25-64, in Cumberland, Lackawanna, Lehigh, and Luzerne Counties and compares the counties to each other, as well as to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a whole. The indicator considers four key areas, including: technical schooling, undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional or doctorate degrees.

From 2000-2006, Lackawanna County showed the greatest increase (2.8%) in the number of persons age 25 and older holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. Lackawanna County also posted improving numbers (1.5% increase) of residents holding an Associate's degree and those holding a Bachelor's degree, as well as an increase (1.4%) in the number of residents holding a graduate or professional degree. Of the four counties examined, Lackawanna County ranked first in terms of the number of persons age 25 or older holding an Associate's degree, and second in terms of the number of persons age 25 or older holding a Bachelor's degree.

During the same period, Luzerne County also improved, with its greatest change (3.4% increase) being its number of persons age 25 and older holding a Bachelor's degree. Luzerne County's second largest increase (2.2%) was in its number of persons age 25 and older holding a Bachelor's degree.

Both Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties were the only counties that did not show a decrease or fall below the state average in any area; conversely, Lehigh and Cumberland Counties showed decreases in one or more areas, and/or fell below the state average.

The **K-12 Attendance Indicator** measures average daily attendance of students enrolled in public schools throughout Cumberland, Lackawanna, Lehigh, and Luzerne Counties during the 2005-2006 school year, compared with average daily attendance statistics of other Pennsylvania public schools.

Lackawanna County's average daily attendance rate was 93.7%. By grade level, the county's kindergarten scored a 93.5%, its elementary schools scored 94.8%, and its secondary schools scored 92.6%. Compared with the state average, Lackawanna County's average daily attendance rate remained the same as that measured during the 2004-2005 school year.

Luzerne County's average daily attendance rate was 92.5%. By grade level, its kindergarten scored 93.3%, its elementary schools scored 94.6%, and its secondary schools scored 90.5%.

This **AYP Status Indicator** measures school districts' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status, which pertains to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB was implemented in an effort to ensure all students are proficient in reading, language arts, and mathematics by 2014. Each year school progress is gauged by its AYP, which measures attendance and graduation rate, academic performance, test participation and scores, as well as standardized test scores.

JUSC analyzed AYP status of school districts in Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lehigh, and Cumberland Counties from the 2002-2003 school year through the 2006-2007 school year.

Lackawanna County is the only county, which met its AYP goals in the last two years. Doing so means that all ten of Lackawanna County's school districts are making annual improvements to move closer towards NCLB's 2014 goals.

Luzerne County is also doing well, as ten of its eleven school districts have met AYP goals and continue to show improvement. Just one Luzerne County school district, which missed its AYP goals, is now responsible for implementing different strategies to put the school back on track.

The Pre-K Program Indicator calculates the number of children enrolled in Pre-K programs in Cumberland, Lackawanna, Lehigh, and Luzerne Counties. The indicator measures the number of children in Pre-K programs between 2006 and 2007. Of the counties examined, Luzerne and Lackawanna counties reported the highest number of children enrolled in Pre-K.

Educational Indicator *continued*

In 2007, Luzerne County reported an increase of 1,134 children enrolled in Pre-K. This increase is due to the fact that there are now more public Pre-K programs available. In 2006 there were no children enrolled in any Pre-K programs, compared with 339 enrolled in 2007. In Lackawanna County, there was an even greater increase in Pre-K enrollment. Both Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are showing growth in their number of children enrolled in Pre-K programs, public and private.

The ***Private/Public School Enrollment Indicator*** compares the number of students enrolled in public schools vs. private schools, from pre-school to twelfth grade. Private schools are funded by tuition or endowments and are established and controlled privately, whereas public schools are controlled by the government and taxpayer funded. This indicator compares student enrollment of public and private schools in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties to surrounding counties.

During the 2006-2007 school year, there were 49,318 students enrolled in schools throughout Luzerne County; 42,810 (86.8%) were enrolled in public schools and 6,508 (13.2%) were enrolled in private or non-public schools. The same school year, Lackawanna County reported 33,826 students enrolled in school; 28,962 (85.6%) were enrolled in public schools and 3,842 (14.4%) were enrolled in private or non-public schools. Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties' private/public school enrollment figures are on par with surrounding counties.

The ***SAT Score Indicator*** measures the ability of Lackawanna, Luzerne, Cumberland and Lehigh County students to grasp core education concepts, and compares them to the same level of students and school districts nationwide. This indicator is important in determining whether our students are grasping core concepts necessary to compete with other students - both nationally and internationally.

In 2007 Lackawanna County reported an average SAT score of 942, which was an increase from 2006. Its highest SAT score of 1,023 was from the Abington Heights School District. The same year, Luzerne County reported an average SAT score of 953. Its highest SAT score of 1,017 was from the Dallas School District.

The ***School Assessment Indicator*** compares graduation rates, as well as mathematics and reading proficiency scores, in Cumberland, Lackawanna, Lehigh, and Luzerne Counties with the state as a whole. This indicator is NCLB sub-category. Graduation rates reflect the number of persons receiving a high school diploma, while math and reading proficiencies are measured by the Pennsylvania State School Assessment (PSSA) tests scores, which are given in grades three, eight, and eleven.

With 94% of its students graduating, Lackawanna County reported the highest graduation rate. Its graduation rate ranked 6% higher than the state target. In 2007, Abington Heights School District reported Lackawanna County's highest graduation rate - 99%. On the PSSA tests, as a whole, Lackawanna County achieved a 73% mathematics proficiency rating and a 74% reading proficiency rating, both of which exceeded state targets of 45% in math and 54% in reading. The county's highest proficiency scores were achieved in the Abington Heights School District, which scored an 84% mathematics proficiency rating and an 85% reading proficiency rating. The county's lowest scores of 67% in math and 66% in reading remained above state targets.

In 2007, Luzerne County reported an average graduation rate of 92%, which also ranks above the state average. At 98%, Dallas Area School District reported the county's highest graduation rate. Luzerne County's PSSA results were also well above state targets - as it reported a 71% mathematics proficiency rating and a 70% reading proficiency rating. Like Lackawanna County, Luzerne County's lowest PSSA scores of 71% in math and 70% in reading remained above state targets. Wyoming Valley West scored the county's highest mathematics proficiency rating of 83%, as well as its highest reading proficiency rating of 82%. The county's lowest scores of 63% in math and 59% in reading remained above state targets.

Cumberland and Lehigh Counties both reported graduation rates of 91%, which, while lower than Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, remain above the state average. Further, both counties' PSSA scores exceeded state targets.

Scholarly News

Intern Update

During the summer 2008 semester JUSC staff has had the pleasure to work with interns from Keystone College, Misericordia University, and Wilkes University. Each student brought a diverse set of skills to the JUSC.

Gregory Forde is a senior, business administration major from Keystone College. Greg's assignment for this semester included developing resources for a client based website. For this assignment Greg was required to work with the client and conduct research specific to the housing market.

Patrick Niedert, a senior, business administration major from Wilkes completed research and analysis for a client based project on educational assessments. He also worked on developing resources for a client based website.

Amanda Derr, a senior, biochemistry major from Wilkes worked on educational assessment reports with an emphasis on the federally mandated program, "No Child Left Behind."

Susan Gryziec, a senior, English major from Misericordia completed her internship over a two semester period. Sue was charged with creating a white paper on migration patterns and also completed other Center specific writing assignments.

Thank you summer interns for the excellent job you did!

JUSC is currently interviewing students for internship positions for the spring, summer and fall 2009 semesters. A student of any academic discipline is welcome. The Center is looking for students that have exceptional research and writing skills, database experience, graphic design experience, and web development expertise.

Contact Marla Doddo at 570.408.9850 or doddo@urbanstudies.org for information regarding internships at JUSC.

Visiting Scholar Initiative – JUSC seeking Visiting Scholars

JUSC is currently seeking visiting scholars to join its Visiting Scholar Program. The objectives of the program are to:

- Enhance JUSC's research capabilities by recruiting faculty from diverse disciplines and methodological skills
- Allow faculty to engage in applied research
- Permit faculty to conduct and follow their personal research agenda
- Provide faculty the opportunity to network with local, regional, and state government officials, as well as business and community leaders
- Produce research that improves Northeast Pennsylvania's quality of life

Generate reports that contain recommendations that will bring best practices to local and county governments and non-profit organizations

For more information on the Visiting Scholar Program, please contact JUSC's Marla Doddo at 570.408.9850 or via email to doddo@urbanstudies.org.

Introducing the Northeast Quarterly Bulletin

In January 2009, JUSC is planning to publish its first issue of the Northeast Quarterly Bulletin (QB) – a scholarly newsletter designed to inform and educate business and civic leaders about the facts, issues, and opportunities facing our region. The newsletter will contain four focus sections, including: Jobs and Economy, Education and Workforce Development, Housing and Community Development, and Land Use, Transportation, Infrastructure and Planning.

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JUSC Mission Statement

JUSC's mission is to assist in the revitalization of cities, counties and states through the utilization of the center's expertise and resources to develop more effect and efficient government. These include its member universities, colleges, and their respective faculties and students. JUSC serves as a resource and consultant for communities, non-profits, education, and business to develop best practices, preparation of applied research, strategy development, and the process for its implementation.



Housing Task Force Update

JUSC's Housing Task Force, along with its members and partners, the Lackawanna County Housing Coalition and the Luzerne County Housing Partnership, are developing a Housing Education website. The site will go live in November 2008. Through funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (PADCED), the task force hired BlackOut Design, of Scranton, to design and develop the site. JUSC and its associate student researchers are now creating the site's content.

The creation of this website fulfills one of Housing Task Force's strategic goals - to provide education, resources, and technical assistance to homebuyers and homeowners. The purpose of this strategic goal is to increase homeownership, decrease foreclosures, reduce rental occupancy, and help homeowners to properly maintain properties – inside and out.

Watch for more details as we approach the launch of this website.

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