

# Taking Our Communities Back: An Initial Outline

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## A. Background

- There are 31 School Districts in Erie County.
- The only public school district in which the schools are closed to students at 3 PM and to everyone by 4 PM is the Buffalo District.
- In virtually every school district in the country the schools are the principal social and community culture institution in the neighborhoods the schools are in.
- Schools are places where parents organize and implement initiatives for their younger children.
- Schools are where children learn team work through sports and community projects.
- Schools are points of contact where community meetings are held, block clubs meet, sororities and fraternities meet, holiday parties and supervised socials are held.
- Schools are sites where adult continuing education services are held, community health promoted, and where parenting and non-parenting adult networking activities take place.
- In central city communities across the country it is common to find as many as 74% of the school children being raised in households today, without their biological father.
- Assuming that the majority of the single parents of school age children work, **it is unreasonable to expect that grouping to also be able to provide after school structured supervision and developmental activities for their children.** These children become excessively exposed to the elements in the

streets that are themselves disconnected from a normative family and socialization structure.

- **Children need to be in constant company, tightly and loosely, of adults who care about them, provide structure and protection for them, and who model values and life achievement possibilities for them.**
- If children are in a structured environment from the point that they leave for school to the point that they return home, they will constantly be socialized into normative behaviors reflecting the aspirations and values of the responsible adult community.
- The children of suburban and rural suburban communities have this structure. The model described below is not the complete answer for all of the ills that afflict our communities. It is, however, a cornerstone, building block of that answer.
- There are approximately 35,000 children served in the primary Buffalo public school district, excluding charter and private schools. From about 8:30 AM through 3 PM, there is programming for 100% of these students Monday through Friday, 40 weeks out of the year.
- In Buffalo, however, after 3 PM all of those 35,000 children have to be served in the 12 community centers in the city, along with the senior citizens, the older out-of-school youth, parenting and non-parenting adults, block clubs, basketball leagues, baseball, little league football, and an array of other community users.
- At best these community centers can accommodate about 3,000 children per night.
- It is unconscionable that the 60 public school buildings in the city of Buffalo are not central institutions in the neighborhoods these schools are in, serving as a key element of the social glue that weds community members to each other and organizes community structure and development.
- The public schools belong to the residents of the city of Buffalo, not to the unions or the school board. No contract can be deemed valid that denies the city

community the use of such a critical, well resourced, broad capacity, all ready-owned asset, essential to the restructuring of the dynamic of socialization and children’s development.

## The 1970s: Decade of School Enrollment Exodus from the Cities WHAT IF THERE HAD BEEN NO FORCED BUSING?

<http://www.demographia.com/db-forcedbusing.htm>

During the 1970s, core city populations declined at an unprecedented rate, and, generally core cities that were growing (such as Los Angeles and Houston) experienced slower growth. Among the cities of 100,000 that had not annexed since before 1950, nearly 55 percent of the 1950 to 2000 population loss occurred in the 1970s, according to the Core City Population Trends: 1950-2000, and 97 percent of the loss occurred in the 1950 to 1980 period.

*A principal cause of this unbalanced population loss appears to be rejection of core city education systems, evidenced by the fact that there was a disproportionate loss in school age population. A major factor in many areas was the implementation or threat of forced busing, as many parents perceived it necessary to move to the suburbs to ensure their children’s safety and education quality.* During the 1970s, public school enrollments dropped 3.6 million, while the number of school children bused to school rose 3.5 million, a negative ratio never previously or since achieved.

**At a time when smart growth and new urbanist theorists decry the fact that so many school children no longer walk to school, it is well to remember how this all started.** By conscious public policy, school children were prohibited from walking. They were assigned to schools under forced-busing regimes that were so far away that they could not possibly walk. Many parents who were not able to move to the suburbs began driving their kids to school out of fear for their safety. In the end, major elements of both the African-American and White communities undertook efforts to bring forced busing to a not-too-early end.

The following table provides a counterfactual analysis of the impact Buffalo’s school desegregation plan had on Buffalo’s population. It is estimated that Buffalo would have lost only 70,000 people, rather than the actual 105,000 lost from 1970 through 1980

Metropolitan Area	Core City	1970-Actual Population	1980-Actual Population	Exhibit: See Note: 1980-Calculated Population	1980-Estimate: If No Education Exodus	Difference
Buffalo	Buffalo	463	358	393	393	35

**Keys:**

**Calculated population** refers to the residents the city would have had if the adult population change had been associated with a school age child change consistent with the national rate.

**1980-Estimate: If No Education Exodus column** is the final estimate of what the population of the city would have been in the 1980 census if the number of children per moving adult had been the same as the national ratio between 1970 and 1980. In the few cases where the Calculated Population (above) is less than the actual 1980 figure, the actual 1980 figure is used. These cases are generally very fast growing cities that had large expanses of undeveloped land (Ex.: Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio and San Diego) that contained a larger percentage of metropolitan growth (the exception is St. Petersburg, where the school age to population ratio was already very low in 1970, owing to that city's role as a retirement center).

The American Census Bureau provides a backdrop of Buffalo's population decline from 1950 through 2000 which can be contrasted with the decline in Buffalo's Public School Enrollment.

Buffalo Population

Year	Population	Change
<u>1950</u>	580,132	0.7%
<u>1960</u>	532,759	-8.2%
<u>1970</u>	462,768	-13.1%
<u>1980</u>	357,870	-22.7%
<u>1990</u>	328,123	-8.3%
<u>2000</u>	292,648	-10.8%
<b>Est. 2009</b>	270,240	-7.7

**Enrollment data: table**

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Total</b>	48,128	47,595	48,540	47,845	47,010	47,096	46,370	45,721	44,849	43,474	41,491	38,719	36,706	36,540	35,677	35,090	35,039
<b>K-12th</b>	46,078	45,509	46,536	46,069	45,394	45,222	44,679	43,858	42,941	41,618	39,184	36,806	34,899	34,589	33,712	32,732	32,607
<b>K-6th</b>	27,404	27,352	27,874	27,813	27,227	26,939	26,272	25,524	23,742	22,231	20,331	18,848	17,769	17,857	17,853	17,487	17,350
<b>7th-12th</b>	18,674	18,157	18,662	18,256	18,167	18,283	18,407	18,334	19,199	19,387	18,853	17,958	17,130	16,732	15,859	15,245	15,257

Cornell University **Program on Applied Demographics. Buffalo Public School Enrollment by Race.** <http://pad.human.cornell.edu/schools/trends1.cfm>

Year	White	% of Total	Black	% of Total	Hispanic	% of Total	Total	% Change Yr.
1993	17,889	37.2%	24,320	50.5%	4,690	9.7%	48,128	
1994	16,954	35.6%	24,646	51.8%	4,746	10.0%	47,595	-2.1%
1995	16,588	34.2%	25,796	53.1%	4,933	10.2%	48,540	2.0%
1996	15,842	33.1%	25,837	54.0%	4,966	10.3%	47,845	-1.4%
1997	15,094	32.1%	25,750	54.8%	4,903	10.3%	47,010	-1.8%
1998	14,474	30.7%	26,398	56.1%	5,077	10.8%	47,096	.2%
1999	13,744	29.6%	26,294	56.7%	5,059	10.9%	46,370	-1.56%
2000	13,009	28.5%	26,369	57.7%	5,172	11.3%	45,721	-1.42%
2001	12,350	27.5%	26,047	58.1%	5,266	11.7%	44,849	-1.94%
2002	11,617	26.7%	25,333	58.3%	5,365	12.3%	43,474	-3.16%
2003	10,642	25.6%	24,045	58%	5,275	12.71%	41,491	-4.78%
2004	9,956	25.7%	22,463	58%	5,222	13.49%	38,719	-7.16%
2005	8,946	24.3%	20,044	54.6%	4,913	13.38%	36,706	-5.48%
2006	8,721	23.9%	19,860	54.4%	4,933	13.5%	36,540	-.45%
2007	8,332	23.4%	19,198	53.8%	5,057	14.17%	35,677	-2.42%
2008	7,850	22.4%	18,581	53%	4,871	13.88%	35,090	-1.67%
2009	7,443	21.4%	18,393	52.3%	4,953	14.1%	35,039	-1.15%

**Total decline in district population = 37.4%**

The table above provides a glimpse of what has been happening to the demographic make-up of Buffalo's Public school population from 1993 – 2009. This reflects the last half of the school desegregation period. However, in 1970, roughly 25% of Buffalo's school population was African or Hispanic. The desegregation program was targeted to reduce school children's racial isolation by farming the Black and Brown children to schools all over the City. Additionally, the

district turned many of the schools with primarily Black and Brown children into magnet schools to draw members of the Caucasian school population into those schools.

However admirable those objectives may have then appeared, the reality is that today at least 79% of the current Buffalo Public school population is non-Caucasian. The bussing plan was built around exporting large percentages of the Black and Brown children of the District to majority Caucasian Buffalo schools.

Today there are relatively few majority-Caucasian Buffalo Public Schools. Instead of improving educational outcomes for the children, their educational outcomes have steadily decreased. Yet, Buffalo persists in a cross-bussing adaptation of Judge Curtin's Court-ordered school desegregation plan, whose principal social and educational outcomes can be seen in the deconstruction of neighborhoods, and the erosion of children's academic success.

***It is time to let go, move on, and find better ways forward to give our children a better chance.***

If overcoming racial isolation by children assigned to neighborhood schools is deemed a critical issue, the \$900 million we are paying to teach 35,000 children should be more than enough to find someone in or outside of the district to work that problem out. Don't make the children wait for the benefits of neighborhood schools while you do.

Additional References:

- (1) Kuhlman, Renee (no date). Helping Johnny Walk to School. Policy Recommendations for Removing Barriers to Community-Centered Schools. National Trust for Historic School Preservation
- (2) Lawrence, Barbara Kent, et al. (2002). *Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools*, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2002, 8.
- (3) Steiner, Ruth L., Crider, Linda B. and Betancourt, Matthew (2006). *Safe ways to School: The Role in Multi-Modal Districts*, a report for the Florida Department of Transportation, May, 2006.
- (4) National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/>.
- (5) *The Road...Less Traveled: An Analysis of Vehicle Miles Traveled Trends in the U.S.* [www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/1216\\_transportation\\_tomer\\_puentes/vehicle\\_miles\\_traveled\\_report.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/1216_transportation_tomer_puentes/vehicle_miles_traveled_report.pdf).

## **B. Universal Youth Development for All School Age Children**

Open All Public Schools through 8:00 PM Monday – Friday and 10 – 4:00 PM each Saturday during the school year, and open the public school buildings from 10 am – 8 pm Monday – Friday and 10 – 4:00 PM each Saturday during the Summer, Easter and Christmas breaks.

1. Reduce the cost of bussing children by returning to neighborhood schools
2. Assuming the \$50Million being spent now on school bussing can be reduced by \$15 Million, the \$15 Million savings can be spread across the 60 existing school buildings, this would create an average of \$250,000 per building per year that can be directed to after school and out-of-school youth development.
3. Create neighborhood school zones that form a 15 block radius around each school. Bus children more than 6 blocks away to their neighborhood school.
4. Assuming a cost of \$20/hr for after-school professional staff and \$5/hr for their fringes, 10 staff employed 20 hrs per week for 40 weeks in the school year would cost \$200,000 per year. The remaining \$50,000 can be used for volunteer stipends and Summer, Spring and Christmas programming.
5. The District, in concert with its school lunch providers and internal budget adjustments, can find any additional resources needed to offset supplies, snacks, guest speakers or other costs that the after-school /out-of-school youth development program incurs.
6. Enable block clubs, fraternities, sororities, parent groups and neighborhood associations to provide volunteers to maximize supervision and oversight of students in the universal youth development program.
7. Offer supervised recreation, both indoor and outdoor, arts and crafts, after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities, debate clubs, reading clubs, rites of passage, dress for success, dating and socialization classes, personal grooming classes, African, Hispanic and other cultural history and heritage clubs, community health satellite services, supervised visits, supervised exchanges, health insurance enrollments, urban agriculture classes, talent development, drama clubs, and similar offerings.

### **C. Older Youth/Young Adult Development**

Refocus neighborhood community centers to provide day time services for Seniors, older youth and young adults.

1. Targeted supervised recreation, ACCESS Center employment services, Computer Literacy, GED/HSE acquisition, community-based job readiness training and coaching, job clubs, health education and similar services toward out-of-school youth ages 18 – 30.
2. Targeted group socialization, group exercise, congregate dining, table top recreation and games, intergenerational activities, home owner education, tax preparation services and other services toward older residents.
3. Provide (We Fall, But We Get Up) Mid-Night basketball as an outlet for youth who might otherwise be engaged in destructive street life. The Mid-Night Basketball program could be provided at city community centers from 11:30 PM through 3:30 AM, Monday through Friday, weekdays and Saturdays. An effort can be made to encourage social workers to obtain release time or flex time from their employers to provide professional staff to assess and direct Mid-Night basketball participants to services to meet social and economic needs.

#### **D. Mandatory Youth Structured Development**

Create city ordinances that require parents of children under age 18 to be enrolled in an after-school program at their school, or in another after-school/out-of-school program or activity until still such time that they return home. Any child not in a structured after-school/out-of-school activity must be under the direct supervision of their parent(s) or another adult designated by the parent(s).

1. Every child must be taught a life framework that recognizes that everyone must finish high school.
2. Every child must be taught that the primary goal they must achieve before they leave their parent(s)'s home as adults is to put themselves in a position to be economically self-sufficient and socially competent adults able to function as citizens of the American society.

#### **E. Roles of Church/Faith-based Institutions**

Each Church/Faith-based Institution should identify centers of competencies each can provide to their client communities through the congregants of that organization.

1. Every church/faith-based organization has some form of sanctuary, and most have some form of fellowship hall, community meeting rooms, classrooms, life centers, et al. many have gyms and outdoor spaces that can be used for supervised recreation, urban farming or other uses.
2. Each church/faith-based organization should recruit from their congregant's areas of activity or service they have the ability to provide and/or organize to be provided in the facilities under the control of their church/faith-based organization.
3. Church/faith-based organizations do not have to fill up every day of every week with volunteer or fee for service activities. However, each would be asked to indicate which service or activity is open only to that church/faith-based organization's membership, and which are open to the community-at-large. Those that are open to the community-at-large can be posted onto a city-wide web based bulletin board, listed on public broadcast stations' community billboards, posted in supermarkets, hair salons, barbershops and the bulletin boards of community organizations and public service agencies. There may be a need for some sort of clearing house to screen activities and services for reliability of provision, and to change the listings as new and existing services come and go.
4. Church/faith-based organizations should focus on the kinds of activities that focus on more specialized needs or interests, rather than the more generic activities like intramural sports, GED/HSE services, elderly group recreation and recreation services, computer literacy and tutorial programs, unless that is an area the church is really committed to providing services in.

## **F. Outcomes projected**

While it is certain that the initiatives outlined above will require time and planning to achieve their promise, it cannot be questioned that having virtually all of our school age children in structured activities under the supervision of competent and caring adults will transform the cultural and moral reference points in the consciousness of Buffalo's school-aged children.

Reorganizing urban life, so that most neighborhood interactions revolve around the public school institution serving that neighborhood, will build an intimate relationship between residents, families, children and the professional and paraprofessional staff of each neighborhood school.

If this model is adopted, virtually all school age children will be in a structured, generally supervised framework of activity, play and socialization from 8:30 AM through 8:00 PM most Mondays through Fridays, and 10:00 AM through 4:00 PM most Saturdays. Parents will be accountable for bringing their children home from their after-school/out-of-school program, or insuring that the children are home no later than 8:30PM, weekdays. Parents will be accountable for maintaining a schedule for their children so that the children are under the supervision of competent, caring adults from the start of school through the end of their after-school/out-of-school program, or under the supervision of an adult family member.

By keeping children in a supervised structure when they're away from home, fewer children will be available to street criminals to be drawn into gangs and crime. Therefore, we should see a significant drop in Juvenile Delinquency and PINS petitions before family Court, and criminal presentments before Buffalo City Court.

No parent should accept a grade of less than a "B" on any quiz, test, paper, exam, mid-term or final exam. No parent should accept their child being able to read at less than the child's grade level. Every parent should strive for excellence for every child. By having the schools and other after-school/out-of-school resources available for neighborhood children, each child should receive tutorial assistance specific to remediate deficient mastery of material covered on a test, or to master the reading levels appropriate for the child's grade. We should, therefore, see a system-wide improvement in children's academic achievement levels, **and actually not leave any children behind.**

By providing essentially life recovery services for older out-of-school youth and young adults, many of these individuals could obtain the skills and education needed to obtain viable employment. The ACCESS Center capabilities, that can be provided through community centers and schools, should provide a route to help this group find employment.

## **Immediate Initiatives:**

1. Mid-Night Basketball at JFK, Delevan-Grider, Edward Sanders, Pratt-Willert
  - a. Social Workers on site
  - b. Enrollment in BETC's ACCESS Services on site
  - c. Alternatives to Violence Coaching and Counseling
2. CAO SNUG Cease-Fire program
  - a. Targets the Greater MLK Park area
  - b. Outreach to wayward school-age and out-of-school older youth
  - c. Youth mentoring
  - d. Youth leadership development
  - e. Mitigation of potential violence between individuals and factions
  - f. Access to employment opportunities
  - g. Access to social needs opportunities
  - h. Street outreach during the late afternoon and early evening hours in high youth traffic areas in the greater MLK Park District
3. Boy & Girls Clubs – Integrate the CAO of Erie County, the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Buffalo Urban League into the apparatus of sub-contracts with the District to perform their services on-site in schools.

4. Inventory and listing of church/faith-based organizations/government and community-based organization after-school and out-of-school services and activities that are open to the general public; posting the listing onto a city-wide web based bulletin board, listed on public broadcast stations' community billboards, posted in supermarkets, hair salons, barbershops and the bulletin boards of community organizations and public service agencies.
5. Organization and launch of a community-wide Save Our Selves (SOS) campaign to encourage all parenting adults to create a daily schedule and life plan for their child, that maps out where the child goes immediately after school and when school is out, that creates a chain of supervision from parent to school to after-school back to the parent's direct supervision. The campaign must also include a continuing message promoting educational excellence for all children, reading and counting at grade level or better for all children, obtaining immediate help for any child not performing at or above grade level in the core skill areas of reading and mathematics.
6. Creation of age-appropriate block parties providing for supervised socialization, recreation and entertainment, and parent get-to-know each other programming.
7. Identify existing opportunities to utilize public schools between 4 PM and 8:00 PM, and Saturdays for supervised recreation, enrichment education, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Block Club Meetings, PTA meetings, computer access, school clubs, neighborhood clubs, voluntary tax preparation services, dances, talent shows, community service projects, et al. Post these as "School-centered" opportunities to form the beginning of the reutilization of public schools as central institutions in the neighborhoods where they exist.
8. Make enlistment in any form of gang a violation, punishable by fines, community service, or other non-incarceration measures. This would include wearing any form of identifiable gang insignia, clothing, headwear, tattoos or other markings.