

# **Schools Adapting to Poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

By James W. Horne, Jr., President/CEO, United Way of Greater Union County

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Students who drop out of school are more likely to be living in poverty. We know this as evidence by countless research and also by our own assessments. Furthermore, in lieu of school, youth usually opt for a low-wage job to try to satisfy their material wants but more for their basic needs. However, throughout New Jersey a growing number of middle and high schools in urban communities have implemented “School-based Youth Services,” programs within the school environment. These programs are designed to meet many of the needs of students who live in poverty. Once a student is registered in the program, they have access to a wide-range of services from meeting with licensed social-work clinicians, to going on recreational trips to professional sporting events, the theater and museums that imbue cultural relevancy among impoverished students, while also providing academic support, such as free SAT Prep classes.

These types of in-house school programs have helped curb the drop-out rate among youth. The stigma of poverty can be detrimental to young people, which can lead to behavioral problems, among other things. Again, this is the reason why we see a number of elementary schools in urban settings choosing to have students wear uniforms – to minimize the stigma of poverty.

United Way of Greater Union County’s back-to-school campaign, which collects school supplies and backpacks, has grown exponentially to meet the needs of hundreds of students. The ongoing support of local businesses and corporate donations, in making this campaign a success, is significantly valuable to the families we serve.

Poverty is a key issue that robs a child of reaching his/her full potential. The number of students who are eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Programs in New Jersey have steadily increased since 2009 from 324,699 students to just shy of 400,000 today. This chilling statistic is the reality for so many families who are struggling to make ends meet.

Schools have had to adapt and meet the needs of its pupils in ways society has never known before. Education is a game changer and no child should be left out of the game because of their family’s income.

**Bio - James W. Horne, Jr.**

**James W. Horne, Jr.**, became President and CEO of United Way of Greater Union County (UWGUC) in 2005.

During his tenure, James has designed and implemented significant organizational improvements in the areas of developing strong community partnerships, building and retaining board members and financial competence. He has worked hard to maintain the delicate balance of dedication to mission, the need for bold entrepreneurial initiatives, and the application of sound business management needed to run a successful nonprofit organization. His efforts have stabilized the organization both administratively and financially, with the overall revenue growth of over 40%.

Dedicated to the mission of family strengthening, James has helped to develop and implement a partnership between UWGUC, the Union County Department of Human Services, the State of New Jersey Department of Children and Families and the Nicholson Foundation to create the Union County Family Strengthening Network (UCFSN), a comprehensive system of family support and services in Union County. UCFSN is a unique public-private partnership designed to maximize and leverage all the available resources within the county on behalf of children and families.

James has over 15 years of experience as a United Way professional; most recently serving as President and CEO United Way of Pioneer Valley in Springfield, Massachusetts. Prior to that, he was Executive Vice President, Resource Development for United Way of Summit County in Akron, Ohio. He began his United Way career in his hometown of Bridgeport, CT with United Way of Eastern Fairfield County as a Campaign Division Manager. Before joining United Way, James spent 13 years with Sikorsky Aircraft as a Production and Inventory Analyst.

James lives in Bridgewater, New Jersey with his wife Kathryn and is the proud father of four children, Melissa, James III, LaToya Williams and Megan Somerville. He was former chair of the Union County Human Services Advisory Council and serves on the board of the Union County Workforce Investment Board, Mount Zion Community Development Corporation, and North Jersey Health Collaborative.