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A Focus on the Future

# The Project 126 Report

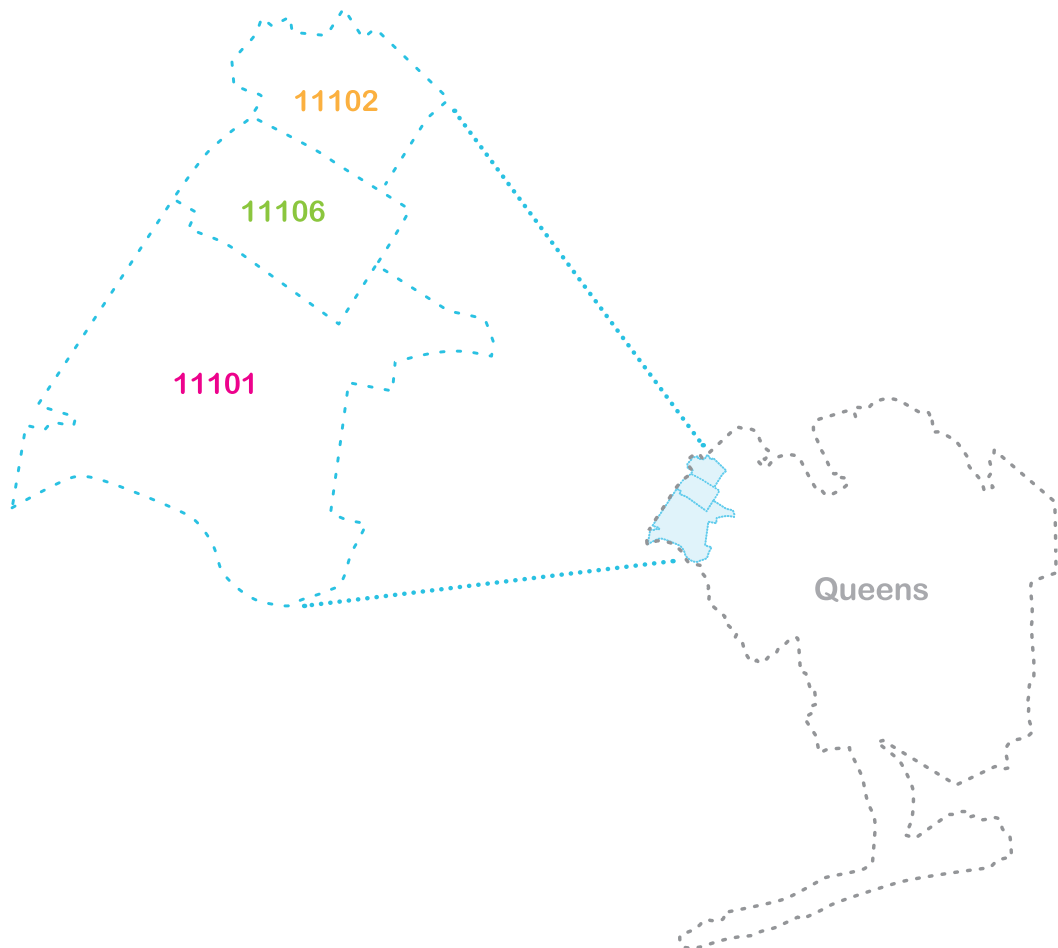
Findings and insights from Project 126, the first comprehensive survey of residents living within Long Island City/Astoria postal codes 11101, 11102, and 11106



In 2006, the Elmezzi Foundation made a long-term commitment to the Long Island City/Astoria area with the greatest social and economic needs: the area covered by zip codes 11101, 11102, and 11106—a region hereafter defined as Zone 126.

As our first step, we elicited community input through the first-ever comprehensive survey of Zone 126 residents. Over a period of 18 months, we collected survey data from 3,000 residents who shared information about their day-to-day lives, their challenges, their perceptions, and their vision for the future.

This report presents in-depth findings and insights from the survey, along with relevant supporting statistics and research from a range of sources.



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# Focusing on the Future

Every child should enjoy an equal opportunity to achieve success. America was founded on the principle that the family a child is born into, the color of that child's skin, and the neighborhood that child grows up in should not write their destiny.

When it comes to a quality education, access to essential health care and health knowledge, or the experience of a safe and supportive neighborhood, we as Americans believe in ensuring *all* children get an equal chance to fulfill their potential and achieve their dream.

Unfortunately, this deeply held belief does not match the everyday reality. Many American children are cut off from the opportunities and supports that could help them grow into healthy, educated, contributing members of society.

Our education system regularly fails our most vulnerable children, with predictable results. As early as the fourth grade, low income and minority students struggle just to read a simple children's book while more fortunate children thrive.<sup>1</sup> Only one out of every ten children born into low-income families in America today will

earn a college degree,<sup>2</sup> and African American children have only a 55 percent chance of even finishing high school.<sup>3</sup>

Our health care system also contributes to grave inequalities among children of different ethnicities and income levels. A child born into a low-income family is at significantly higher risk of becoming obese,<sup>4</sup> diabetic<sup>5</sup> and asthmatic<sup>6</sup> than middle and high-income families. Children from low-income homes have only a one in six chance of even having basic health insurance.<sup>7</sup> If that same low-income child is a minority, his/her risk factors are even greater, and access to insurance even less likely.

The issues are not limited education and health care. Low-income and minority children are affected by myriad circumstances that limit opportunity: family instability, exposure to

**Children in low-income and ethnic minority families are far less likely to graduate from high school, and only one out of every 10 will earn a college degree.**

violence and increased risk for substance abuse, to name a few. These inequalities are real, they are devastating, and they create a nation where the playing field is anything but level for our youngest citizens.

How do we break this cycle of poverty, neglect, underachievement and lost opportunity? It can seem an insurmountable problem, too entrenched and widespread to be overcome. Politicians give speeches about it, government and private dollars are spent trying to fix it; yet the disparities continue to afflict new generations.

Still, change is possible. When we look closer, we can see that the very best efforts of our brightest and most dedicated individuals are effecting real and lasting change among our nation's poorest children.

For instance, several experimental Charter schools are helping at-risk children excel academically. The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), a national charter management organization, has taken low-income, minority students and set them on a remarkable path to success. In 2009, KIPP New York City's fifth-, sixth-, seventh- and eighth- grade students *outperformed* the average Caucasian student in New York State in both the state math test and the English Language Arts (ELA) test.<sup>8</sup> KIPP New York City predicts that in the next few years, more than 50 percent of their former students will have graduated with bachelor's degrees.<sup>9</sup>

And there are other shining examples of success throughout the country. After-school arts programs have helped low-income children attain the highest levels of artistic merit, with many going on to conservatories and careers in the arts.<sup>10</sup> Chess clubs in low-income neighborhoods have produced players that compete at national and world championships.<sup>11</sup> From top-notch karate programs<sup>12</sup> to women's leadership development programs,<sup>13</sup> there are proven examples that, when given the opportunity, low-income and minority children will perform at the same level or even higher

than their privileged peers. They simply need to be given a chance to prove to themselves and the rest of the world that they can do it.

Equal opportunity is at the center of The Elmezzi Foundation's mission, and a core part of every program we fund. It was Thomas Elmezzi, our founder, who said, "every person, regardless of what country they were born into, or what race they are, should have the opportunity to achieve the American Dream." Since 1996, The Elmezzi Foundation has invested in organizations and initiatives that have helped people in America's most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities to improve their lives revive their neighborhoods and create a better future for themselves and their children.

In 2006, to honor the passing of Thomas Elmezzi, we decided to focus the majority of our energies and funding on the community in which Tom grew up: Astoria and Long Island City (LIC). As part of this new direction, our board decided that the most empowering and respectful way to begin serving the community is to take the time to learn about its strengths, its challenges and its unique spirit. After months of community conversations, expert contributions, and in-depth research on best practices in community assessment initiatives, we created the Project 126 initiative.

As part of the initiative, we spent 18 months exploring the priorities, needs, and assets of the LIC/Astoria community. Focusing on the highest-risk zip codes of 11101, 11102 and 11106, we sought to engage participation from all members of the community and identify its strengths as well as the challenges its members face.

This report summarizes our findings, and reflects the beliefs, insights and experiences of those who study, work, raise families and make their homes in Zone 126. We collected the input of 3,000 residents, resulting in the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken in this area. Through the Project 126 initiative, the community has spoken, and its voice is captured in these pages. The results paint a

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picture of courage and commitment in the face of considerable adversity. Despite the fact that Zone 126 is one of the least funded, most overlooked “high-need” region in all of New York City, it is also a community of passionate, hard-working, admirable people, motivated to see change happen, and generous with their time, effort, and patience. Most importantly, they care deeply about the success of the community’s children, whether they are parents or not. They recognize that the children represent the future of their community, and they are committed to safeguarding that future by focusing their energies and resources on creating greater opportunities and better supports for the young people of Zone 126. Overwhelmingly, they chose education in particular as their top priority.

This commitment to the next generation, and to the restorative vision of the community as a whole, will drive the future direction of The Elmezzi Foundation. We are committed,

now and for the future, to the mission of equal opportunity for the children of Zone 126.

We hope the depth and breadth of this report inspires nonprofits and community-focused funders in this region to work together more closely, to coordinate efforts to serve the needs of this community more effectively; and to focus on the priorities clearly expressed by the 3,000 residents surveyed as part of Project 126. The information gathered and lessons learned from this initiative will not only serve to guide The Elmezzi Foundation’s efforts, but has also become a rallying point for residents, community leaders and government officials. Together, we can honor the unique character of this remarkable community while making it stronger, and ensure its young people are supported in achieving their true potential.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. We hope you enjoy it, and we welcome your input.

**When given the opportunity, low-income students have attained high achievement levels in music, chess, karate, leadership development, and many other areas.**

# Education

A quality education is the foundation for financial and social success as well as better health. Just as important, education allows individuals to fulfill their potential and make a meaningful contribution to society.

When survey respondents chose education as the top community priority, they demonstrated their commitment to a better future for their children and the community.

Unfortunately, thousands of children in Zone 126 grow up without the chance to benefit from a strong educational foundation. From a very early age, they face challenges that prevent them from accessing the educational resources and supports they need to break the cycle of poverty and underachievement.

The Project 126 Community Survey results, along with educational outcomes for the area, tell a distressing story of lost opportunities among the young people of Zone 126. Intellectual stimulation in children aged five and younger is critical to later success, yet parents report that economic pressures, language barriers and their own educational limits hinder

them in taking a more active role in their children's cognitive development. The scarcity of early childcare programs and reading resources compound the problem further, with the vast majority of children's care and educational needs remaining unmet.

As these children progress to elementary and middle school, the effects of poverty, bullying and violence in the schools, and a lack of respect for educators and education jeopardize their chances of academic success further.

Scarce extracurricular options also put the children in Zone 126 at far higher risk of underachievement. Summer enrichment and after-school programs could help these children avoid the effects of summer learning loss, improve academic performance and reduce involvement in delinquent and criminal activity. Unfortunately, despite strong community

Nearly 9,000 children in Zone 126 do not have access to educational supports such as extracurricular programs.

support, far too few of these supports exist: according to the Project 126 Community Survey, close to 90 percent of parents believe in the value of extracurricular program. However, nearly 9,000 of their children do not have access to the educational supports they need.

And at every developmental stage, the lack of academic resources, support and guidance are greatest among African American or Latino children.

The outcome of these educational inequalities is all too predictable: close to one in four children do not graduate high school, and of those who do, less than half are eligible to apply for college. With college degrees predicted to become an essential requirement for more and more jobs in the future, the gap between the children of Zone 126 and their peers will continue to widen year after year.

When the majority of a community's youth do not earn postsecondary qualifications, the result is devastating: an entire generation must cope with significantly lower earnings and higher rates of unemployment and incarceration. Education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and underachievement and restoring a community's dignity and self-sufficiency.

This section of the report explores survey findings, current research and best practices in these key areas:

- » Parental Involvement
- » Early-Childhood Care & Education
- » Learning Environment: Elementary & Middle Schools
- » Summer Learning Loss
- » After-School Supports
- » High-School Dropouts & College/Career Readiness
- » Value of Bachelor's Degree

## Parental Involvement

***Parental involvement is a powerful predictor of academic success, but the Project 126 Community Survey results show that parental involvement is low.***

Parents can influence their children's educational success in many ways. They can create a positive home environment that encourages learning through high expectations. They can also model and reinforce good behaviors and habits, and directly instruct their children in various academic topics.<sup>14</sup> Studies show that children whose parents are highly involved in their education earn higher test scores and grades than children with less involved parents.<sup>15</sup> Studies have also found that test scores at any level of schooling predict success at both the next level of education and in the labor market.<sup>16</sup> The findings are clear: a community-wide culture of strong parental involvement has the power to positively affect the success of its children.<sup>17</sup>

The Project 126 Community Survey shows that:

- » One out of every three respondents are "sometimes," "rarely," or "never" involved in their child's homework; and
- » One out of every three respondents "sometimes," "rarely," or "never" talk to their children about what they are learning in school.

With parental involvement so critical to academic outcomes for youth, the moderately low level of parental involvement within Zone 126 has serious implications for the future of youth in the community. Even though a majority of parent respondents (77 percent) believe that their child's school offers easy ways to get involved, only half of parent respondents actually volunteer at their child's school.



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***Poverty plays a significant role in reducing parental involvement in children’s education.***

Statistics on parental involvement in education demonstrate that, on average, poor parents are less likely to be actively involved in children’s education compared with parents living above the poverty line.<sup>18</sup> Poverty and associated conditions can prevent parents from actively participating in the education of their children. For example, parents under economic stress are likely to lack the time and resources needed to participate adequately. The LIC/Astoria area is particularly vulnerable to this effect because of the high percentage of single-parent households. Between 28 and 39 percent of households are headed by single parents,<sup>19</sup> most of whom (95 to 98 percent) are single mothers raising children on half the income while shouldering twice the responsibility compared to two-parent households.

Other detrimental effects include the language barriers that are more prevalent in low-income urban communities where refugees and other immigrants make up a higher percentage of the population. Schools in low-income communities may also lack the necessary resources to properly engage parents, especially those who do not speak English.

And finally, parents with low educational attainment may not have the skills to assist their children with academic pursuits. The *Project 126 Community Survey* responses support this assumption, demonstrating that education level is directly correlated with parental involvement; respondents with lower levels of education reported lower involvement in their children’s education, and vice versa.

## **Early-Childhood Care & Education**

***Early-childhood care and education improves academic performance.***

Early-childhood care and education—any program that nurtures a young child’s physical, cognitive, social, and/or emotional development up to the age of five—prepares children for school entry and improves a child’s chances for success later in life. Early-childhood care and education is critical because it promotes children’s healthy development during an important time: in fact, 85 percent of a child’s brain is developed before age five.<sup>20</sup> Studies have shown that high-quality early-childhood care and education improves vocabulary skills, literacy skills, and school readiness.<sup>21</sup>

***Early-childhood care and education is a cost-effective approach.***

Cost-benefit analyses show that for every dollar spent, high-quality preschool care returns \$7–\$16 to society at large.<sup>22</sup> Providing low-cost, quality early-childhood care and education for low- and middle-income families is one of the most cost-effective ways to help narrow the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students.<sup>23</sup>

***The high cost of childcare makes it inaccessible for both low- and middle-income families.***

New York is the least-affordable state in the country for childcare. The cost of full-time care for an infant in a New York childcare center represents 53 percent of the total median income for single-parent families with children.<sup>24</sup> Because the cost of childcare is so high, and because there is so often a shortage of slots for children in public child-care programs (such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and Universal Pre-Kindergarten), children in low-income families are frequently unable to attend a certified childcare center.

Early-childhood care is important because 85 percent of a child’s brain is developed before the age of five; high-quality care improves vocabulary and literacy skills, and school readiness.

New York has the least affordable childcare costs, with full-time care representing 53 percent of the total median income of a single parent.

**There is great, unmet need in LIC/Astoria for greater access to affordable, quality childcare.**

Within LIC/Astoria, the unmet need for low-cost, high-quality early-childhood care and education is staggering:

- » In Astoria, where 4,428 children under age six live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), less than five percent of children’s childcare needs are met by the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS)<sup>25</sup>
- » In LIC/Queensbridge, where 3,930 children under age six live below 200 percent of the FPL, less than one third of children’s childcare needs are met by the ACS.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, although all children aged four are eligible for pre-kindergarten in New York City, there are not enough slots to accommodate the great need. The New York City School Pre-Kindergarten directory shows the number of applicants and available slots for each pre-kindergarten school<sup>27</sup> in Zone 126:

Pre-K Availability in Local Public Schools			
School	Slots Available	Applicants	Students Turned Away
PS 17	36	147	111
PS 76	54	80	26
PS 111	36	56	20
PS 166	72	179	107
PS 171	64	84	20
PS 234	36	166	130

ELA Failure Rates of Third Graders 2009–2010

School	Failed ELA %
PS 112 Dutch Kills	62 %
PS 111 Jacob Blackwell	75%
PS 171	67%
PS 17 Henry David Thoreau	55%
PS 76 William Hallet	70%
PS 166 Henry Gradstein	45%
PS 234	25%

**Lack of early-childhood care and education results in lower test scores.**

A child’s environment and developmental success before age five impacts their success in elementary school and beyond.<sup>28</sup> The high failure rate of Zone 126 children on the third-grade English/Language Arts exam<sup>29</sup> (see table above) suggests that Zone 126 children are not developmentally ready to succeed when they enter elementary school:

The lack of adequate childcare supports among these children leads to higher rates of failure. Even more concerning, research shows that test scores at any level of schooling predict success at the next level,<sup>30</sup> which foreshadows the continuing challenges these children will experience in high school and beyond.

**Reading is an essential component of early cognitive development.**

Data show that reading to young children is one of the most critical components of early-childhood care and education. It is not only one of the best activities to stimulate language and cognitive skills, but also builds motivation,

curiosity, and memory.<sup>31</sup> Research shows that the more words parents use when speaking to an eight-month-old infant, the greater the size of their child's vocabulary at age three.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, when children are not read to, it can seriously impair their vocabulary and literacy. One study on language development documented that children from low-income families hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers before the age of four.<sup>33</sup>

***Lower-income families and non-Caucasian families are less likely to read to their children.***

In New York State, only 42 percent of families living below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) read to their children aged five and under daily. Among families at 400 percent of the FPL or greater,<sup>34</sup> that figure rises to 59 percent. Fifty-eight percent of Caucasian children (ages zero to five) are read to daily, whereas only 38 percent of non-Caucasian children and 34 percent of Latino children are read to daily.<sup>35</sup>

There are many reasons why a majority of low-income families are not reading to their children. First, work responsibilities among low-income families make it difficult for parents to find the time to read to their children.<sup>36</sup> Second, the prevalence of television, video games, and other modern distractions compete for children's attention. Third, low-income families often lack the money necessary to buy new books or gain access to libraries. In fact, 61 percent of low-income families have no children's books in their homes.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, parents who were not read to as children may not realize the tremendous value in reading to their own children.<sup>38</sup>

## **Learning Environment: Elementary & Middle Schools**

***Elementary and middle school-level poverty adversely affects school learning environments.***

Studies show that low-income children in high-poverty neighborhoods face greater educational and developmental challenges than low-income children in higher-income communities. School-level poverty has been shown to have a range of negative effects on the learning environment: for instance, teachers expect less from their students, while students do less homework, avoid more rigorous subjects and feel less safe in school.<sup>39</sup>

***Zone 126 schools demonstrate a high rate of school-level poverty.***

School-level poverty is reflected in the rates of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches (FRPL). Within Zone 126, at least three-quarters of all students attending public schools are eligible for FRPLs. In some schools, such as PS 111 and PS 112, nearly all of the students (98 percent and 95 percent, respectively) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.<sup>40</sup>

Within Zone 126, there are 10 public schools serving elementary and middle school students. Low-income students residing in Queensbridge and Ravenswood Houses mostly attend: PS 112, PS 76, PS 111, and IS 204, and those residing in Astoria Houses mostly attend PS 171 and IS 126. The table above lists public elementary and middle school in Zone 126, along with grades served and total enrollment.

***Zone 126's high rate of school-level poverty has negative implications for students' academic outcomes.***

Children who are already behind in earlier grades struggle to catch up with their peers in later years, which is why performance on English Language Arts (ELA) and math exams

**Three quarters of Zone 126 students rely on free or reduced-price lunch programs, indicating high levels of poverty. Poverty is directly linked to poor academic performance and low high-school graduation rates.**

Eighth-grade students with low ELA exam scores have a four-year graduation rate of only 38 percent.

### Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Rates among Zone 126 Schools

School	Student Eligibility	Grades Served	Total Enrollment
PS 111 Jacob Blackwell	87%	PK–8th	404
PS 112 Dutch Kills	95%	K–5th	492
PS 17 Henry David Thoreau	93%	PK–5th	643
PS 171 Peter G. Van Alst	93%	PK–5th	592
IS 126 Albert Shanker	93%	6th–8th	625
PS 76 William Hallet	89%	PK–5th	547
PS 234	89%	PK–5th	652
IS 204 Oliver W. Holmes	94%	6th–8th	756
Young Women’s Leadership School	73%	6th–9th	335
PS 166 Henry Gradstein	76%	PK–5th	1004

is so closely examined when assessing student achievement. Even more telling, academic outcomes are inversely related to the poverty levels among the school’s students. For example, Jacob Blackwell School has the poorest ELA and

math passage rates for fifth graders compared to the other public schools in Zone 126. In fact, less than half of their fifth graders passed the ELA exam in the 2008–2009 academic year.

The table on the left shows ELA and math passage rates for fifth graders in the district of Queens.<sup>41</sup>

The table on the following page shows ELA and math passage rates for eighth graders.

Sadly, the very low passing rates among these students are a predictor of their future success. Research shows that students who score very low on the ELA exam in the eighth grade have a four-year graduation rate of only 38 percent.<sup>42</sup> By comparison, those eighth graders who have moderate to high ELA scores have a graduation rate of 83 percent, and for very high scores: 94 percent.<sup>43</sup>

### Fifth Graders Passing ELA & Math Exams (2009–2010)

School	ELA	Math
PS 112 Dutch Kills	41 %	65 %
PS 111 Jacob Blackwell	22 %	35 %
PS 171 Peter G. Van Alst	34 %	51 %
PS 17 Henry Thoreau	37 %	45 %
PS 76 William Hallet	43 %	73 %
PS 166 Henry Gradstein	56 %	73 %
PS 234	55 %	75 %

## Eighth Graders Passing ELA & Math Exams (2009–2010)

School	ELA	Math
PS 111 Jacob Blackwell	5 %	20 %
IS 204 Oliver W. Holmes	36 %	38 %
IS 126 Albert Shanker	14 %	22 %
Young Women’s Leadership School	62 %	80 %

**A high percentage of Zone 126 students do not feel physically or emotionally safe in their schools.**

A 2009–2010 New York City School Survey within a sample Zone 126 school<sup>44</sup> demonstrates that students do not feel physically secure:

- » 33 percent of student respondents do not feel safe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms at their school;
- » 36 percent of student respondents do not feel safe on school property outside their school building;
- » 45 percent of student respondents observe or experience threatening or bullying in school “some of the time”;
- » 38 percent of student respondents observe or experience harassment or threats based on race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, gender, or disability, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or disability “some of the time”;
- » 24 percent of student respondents observe or experience alcohol or illegal drugs while at school “some of the time”;

- » 27 percent of student respondents believe that there is gang activity in their school “some of the time”; and
- » 23 percent of student respondents observe or experience physical fights at school “most of the time.”

**Student respondents also did not feel emotionally secure or supported by their classmates:**

- » 39 percent of student respondents generally believe that most students in their school do *not* treat each other with respect;
- » 39 percent of student respondents believe that most students in their school do not help and care about each other; and
- » 50 percent of student respondents believe that most students in their school only look out for themselves.

**In addition, local students have a lack of respect for teachers and for students who get good grades:**

- » 17 percent of student respondents stay home because they do not feel safe at school “some of the time”; and
- » 30 percent of student respondents believe that most students in their school do *not* treat teachers with respect.<sup>45</sup>

**Lack of physical and emotional safety among students contributes to poor academic performance.**

Students’ ability to focus on learning requires that they feel physically and emotionally secure. Studies have shown that elementary school students in an urban public school setting who self-report poor school conditions such as broken windows and equipment, weapon possession, and drug and alcohol abuse perform

**More than one in six students stays home because they do not feel safe at school some of the time.**

**Two thirds of academic achievement gaps in reading and language among high school students can be attributed to summer learning loss during primary school years.**

lower on reading and math assessments.<sup>46</sup> Violence in classrooms negatively affects academic performance by diverting teachers from instruction and reducing effective class time. Additionally, aggressive peers encourage adolescents to stay home from school or cut class, impacting regular attendance. According to a drawing from a national probability sample of middle and high school students, these trends are consistent with lower grades. The effect is particularly noticeable among males, African Americans, high-school students, school lunch recipients, and urban students.<sup>47</sup>

## Summer Learning Loss

***Summer learning loss erodes children’s academic progress.***

Summer learning loss describes the loss of students’ academic skills and knowledge over summer vacation. A full two thirds of the academic achievement gap in reading and language found among high school students can be attributed to the learning loss that occurs during the summer months of the primary school years.<sup>48</sup>

***Low-income children are more likely to be affected by summer learning loss.***

Summer learning loss disproportionately affects low-income children, as they are generally without sufficient access to an enriching, educational summer environment. In fact, low-income students are anywhere from 13 percent to 62 percent less likely to be enrolled in out-of-school learning programs compared with high-income students.<sup>49</sup> In Zone 126, there are a limited number of summer enrichment programs with very limited capacity, which means that only a fraction of the thousands of children that live in Zone 126 can benefit from them. The rest of these children will remain at high risk for summer learning loss.

## Summer Youth Programs in Zone 126

Goodwill Industries

Long Island City YMCA

HANAC

Jacob Riis Settlement House

NYPD Explorer Program

Variety Boys & Girls Club of Queens

## After-School Supports

***Lack of after-school supervision poses a significant danger to young people.***

The hours between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. are prime time for violent juvenile crime. In particular, it is a time when children are most likely to become victims of violent crime. After-school hours are also a time during which children are likely to be involved in accidents, experiment with drugs or alcohol, or become pregnant.<sup>50</sup> In fact, experts claim that high rates of juvenile violence and risky behaviors after school can be explained by low rates of supervision and large periods of unstructured time.<sup>51</sup>

***Access to after-school programs improves children’s academic outcomes.***

Studies have shown that elementary-school students who regularly attend high-quality after school programs exhibit improved academic performance, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during after school hours.<sup>52</sup> Other positive effects of regular participation in after-school programs include improvements in attendance and engagement in learning, as well overall health and wellbeing.<sup>53</sup> After-school programs have also been shown to



reduce drug use initiation and to decrease the probability that children will become victims or perpetrators of violence.<sup>54</sup>

***There is a significant unmet need for after-school supervision among children in Zone 126.***

A high percentage of children in Zone 126 are not supervised during the critical after-school period. Forty percent of parent respondents reported their children are typically unsupervised between the hours of 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.

There are a limited number of organizations offering after school programs with enough slots to serve local youth (see table below). In fact, City Year reports that “in 2005, a total of 8,700 students had a need for afterschool services that went unmet” in Community District 1.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, “the need for elementary school afterschool services was the seventh highest among New York City’s 59 Community Districts.”<sup>56</sup>

After School Programs  
in Zone 126

Goodwill Industries

Long Island City YMCA

HANAC

Jacob Riis Settlement House

NYPD Explorer Program

Variety Boys & Girls Club of Queens

***The lack of after-school programs in Zone 126 denies low-income children access to enrichment activities.***

Because of the lack of sufficient after-school programs, students at IS 204 Oliver W. Holmes Middle School frequently do not have access to

programs of interest. According to the 2009–2010 NYC School Survey:

- » 39 percent of student respondents were not offered art as an out-of-school activity;
- » 64 percent of student respondents were not offered music as an out-of-school activity;
- » 84 percent of student respondents were not offered dance as an out-of-school activity;
- » 89 percent of student respondents were not offered theatre as an out-of-school activity;
- » 87 percent of student respondents were not offered a foreign language as an out-of-school activity;
- » 40 percent of student respondents were not offered a computer skills/technology as an out-of-school activity;
- » 33 percent of student respondents were not offered sports teams or clubs as an out-of-school activity; and
- » 40 percent of student respondents were not offered tutoring/enrichment activities as an out-of-school activity<sup>57</sup>

***Community support for after-school programs is very strong.***

With few working parents able to supervise their children from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., parents in Zone 126 recognize the importance of investing in community after-school supports. Almost nine out of every 10 parents in Zone 126 (88 percent) believe that low-cost, quality after-school programs would be a good solution to ensuring that youth in the community are kept in a safe and positive environment.

**Nearly nine out of 10 parents in Zone 126 support low-cost, quality after-school programs as a way to keep youth safe.**

Zone 126 has the 9th highest annual dropout rate in the U.S., with 14 percent of students leaving school each year.

## High-School Dropouts & College/ Career Readiness

### **Many factors affect dropout rates.**

The most commonly cited causes of high dropout rates are a mix of personal and academic challenges. In a national survey conducted among high school dropouts ages 16-25, participants included boredom, inadequate elementary and middle school academic preparation, and supporting or raising a family as major reasons for leaving school.<sup>58</sup> While the reasons for dropping out of school are varied, students who drop out have common characteristics: low attendance rates, high likelihood of repeating the ninth grade, and consistently low test scores and achievement levels.<sup>59</sup> These students generally enter the school system behind their peers<sup>60</sup> and never catch up, which eventually leads to a decision to give up on school altogether.

### **The dropout rates among students attending New York City high schools are very high.**

In New York City, the four-year graduation rate has been abysmal for over two decades.<sup>61, 62</sup> Within the 2001 student cohort (students who entered high school in 2001) less than half

graduated within four years,<sup>63</sup> and 22 percent dropped out altogether and never graduated.<sup>64</sup> Since 2001, the city’s four-year graduation rate has improved by more than 12 percentage points (see table below) but still hovers at only 59 percent.<sup>65</sup> These low graduation rates have serious implications for the future of these young people: students who drop out are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated. In fact, more than 75 percent of America’s prison population consists of high-school dropouts.<sup>66</sup>

### **Among those students who graduate, few qualify for further study at colleges and universities.**

New York State schools administer a test called the “Regents Exam” to graduating seniors. Students who pass the test receive the “Regents Diploma,” the standard required by most colleges and universities. The current city graduation rate of 59 percent is not an indication of potential college entry, because it combines the number of students who receive a local high school diploma (those who have tested poorly on the Regents Exam) with those who receive the Regents Diploma. For example, within the 2005 cohort, only 44.6 percent of students in the 2005 cohort received a Regents Diploma (see table on the right).<sup>67</sup>

### **Students who do not graduate become “disconnected youths” in LIC/Astoria.**

In LIC/Astoria, there is a four-year graduation rate of 59 percent and a six-year graduation rate of 65 percent, overall slightly higher than city graduation rates.<sup>68</sup> However, among New York City’s 32 school districts, LIC/Astoria (District 30), has the 9th highest annual dropout rate, with 14 percent of students leaving school each year.<sup>69</sup> Students who drop out are often categorized as “disconnected youth,” or 16–19 year olds who have not graduated high school, are not

NYC DOE High School Graduation Rates  
4-Year Outcome of Cohorts (2001–2005)

Cohort	Regents Diploma (CR)	Local Diploma	Still Enrolled	Dropped Out
2001	30 %	16.6 %	28.5 %	22 %
2002	33.7 %	15.4 %	29.2 %	18.5 %
2003	37.1%	15.6 %	28.9 %	15.8 %
2004	40.9 %	15.5 %	27.8 %	13.5 %
2005	44.6 %	14.4 %	25 %	11.8 %



attending school, and are not in the labor force. Without education and structured support from an academic setting, disconnected youth are at a higher risk of exposure to a variety of negative influences within their environment. The Project 126 Community Survey shows that approximately 10% of youth in the 126 Zone fall into this category. These and other statistics rank LIC/ Astoria among districts with moderate high risk for youth according to the Citizen’s Committee for Children of New York, Inc.’s annual “Risks to Child Well-Being” data comparisons.<sup>70</sup>

**Graduation rates are disproportionately low among African American, Latino and English language learner students.**

Although the city’s graduation rate has improved in recent years, African American and Latino students—who are also the poorest—continue to struggle. Their drop-out rates are higher than any other ethnic group, and they earn the fewest Regents diplomas, making it almost impossible for them to gain admission into college.<sup>71</sup> For example, although the number of students graduating with Regents diplomas has increased across the board, the achievement gap between each group remains relatively constant, with African Americans and Latinos earning Regents diplomas at about half the rate of their Asian and Caucasian peers.<sup>72</sup> Of all the demographic groups, however, English language learners have the most difficulty earning a Regents diploma and, therefore, are often unable to attend college upon graduating high school.<sup>73</sup>

**Better support for Zone 126 students could improve graduation and college eligibility rates.**

There are very few programs in Zone 126 that support college or career readiness for youth (see table below). Studies show, however, that most students drop out only after years of struggling and falling behind.<sup>74</sup> This suggests

NYC Regents Rates, within Race/Group  
4-Year Outcome of Cohorts 2001–2005

Cohort	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	English Learners
2001	53.6 %	21 %	20.4 %	50.5 %	9 %
2002	57.4 %	25 %	23.4 %	54.9 %	8.6 %
2003	63.1 %	29 %	26.6 %	57.7 %	11.1 %
2004	66 %	32.8 %	31.2 %	61.2 %	17.7 %
2005	69 %	37.3 %	35.7 %	63.3 %	21.7 %

High School/College-Related Programs in Zone 126

- Catholic Charities-Flowers with Care
- CUNY College Alliance for Transitional Career Help
- East River Development Alliance
- Queens Library-LIC
- Jacob Riis Settlement House
- Variety Boys & Girls Club of Queens

that there is time to reach out and engage them before they make poor decisions that could affect them for the rest of their lives.

Across the U.S., full-time employed college graduates made 53 percent more than high school graduates in 2008.

## Value of a Bachelor's Degree

### ***Youth who do not earn a college degree face dwindling opportunities and unemployment.***

Employment opportunities for low-skilled labor continue to quickly decline, while those requiring postsecondary education are projected to have the fastest growth.<sup>75</sup> This trend has serious implications for high-school dropouts and high-school graduates who cannot gain admission to college. In the next decade, there will be a mismatch in education background and skills required in the workplace.<sup>76</sup> By 2018, America “will need 22 million new workers with college degrees—but will fall short of that number by at least 3 million postsecondary degrees,” according to a Georgetown University report.<sup>77</sup> As well as causing individuals to miss many workforce opportunities, the lack of a college degree puts them at increasing risk of joblessness. Recently, figures show that 15.1 percent of high school dropouts are unemployed; the comparable number for college graduates is 4.2 percent.<sup>78</sup> Even those with a high-school diploma but no college education are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a college degree.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Youth who earn a postsecondary degree achieve more for themselves and for society.***

Investment in a college degree, especially for those students in the lowest income brackets, is a significant financial burden. However, the long-term benefits to individuals, as well as to society overall, far outweigh the costs.<sup>80</sup> Education repays individuals through higher earnings, and repays society through lower unemployment rates and a greater tax base.<sup>81, 82</sup> Studies show that an increase in education levels correlates with an increase in income earnings.<sup>83, 84</sup> In 2008, it was estimated that a college graduate made about 53 percent more than a high-school graduate working full time.<sup>85</sup>

### ***Better supports are needed to ensure that more low-income youth successfully graduate from college.***

While there is work to be done to increase high school graduation rates in New York City—especially for Latino and African American youth—it is also essential that more be done to ensure success for those students who qualify for college. For example, of NYC high school graduates enrolled in one of the City University of New York’s two- or four-year programs in 2007, nearly half (46 percent) needed remedial courses and four in 10 (40 percent) dropped out within two years.<sup>86</sup> This is a problem that disproportionately affects low-income students whose parents may not have achieved a postsecondary degree. Many high-school graduates who take remedial courses do not have the skills and habits needed for successful learning.

# Children & Their Families

When children benefit from effective parenting or guardianship strategies and a stable, healthy home environment, it confers a wide range of benefits, including better physical health, better mental and emotional health, better performance in school, fewer behavioral problems, and a decreased likelihood that they will become involved in criminal activity.

In keeping with their commitment to the future of their community, the respondents of the Project 126 Community Survey chose “Children and Families” as the second most important issue after “Education.”

The children and families of Zone 126 face unique challenges in building supportive, nurturing home environments. Many factors that undermine a healthy family life disproportionately affect this community. Zone 126 has a high rate of teen pregnancy, and inadequate prenatal care for these new and inexperienced mothers. The community also has very high numbers of children living in poor,

single-parent families or in foster care and kinship care arrangements. Domestic violence against children and other family members is also prevalent, with 67 percent of survey respondents identifying the issue as a serious problem in their community.

Many of these issues disproportionately affect poor families, and others are more common among specific ethnicities: instances of foster care and kinship care arrangements are more prevalent among African American families, and rates of domestic abuse are highest among African American, Latino and South Asian families.

The teen pregnancy rate for the ethnic groups most prevalent in Zone 126 was almost six times higher than that of Caucasians in New York City.

The survey results reflect the community’s deep commitment to providing a better foundation for their children through prenatal support, family supports and parental skills-training programs, with 92 percent of respondents reporting that the community would benefit from a parenting program.

This section of the report will explore survey findings, current research and best practices in these key areas:

- » Teen pregnancy
- » Prenatal care
- » Single-parent homes
- » Effective parenting strategies/parental involvement
- » Foster care and kinship care
- » Domestic abuse

## Teen Pregnancy

The risk of teen pregnancy is higher in low-income and ethnic communities.

Young people growing up in disadvantaged economic, familial and social circumstances are more likely than their wealthier peers to engage in risky behavior and have a child during adolescence.<sup>87</sup> Compared with higher-income women, poor women are five times as likely to have an unplanned birth.<sup>88</sup> There are also

significant differences in teen pregnancy rates among various ethnicities nationwide. Latina and African American teen girls are more likely to become pregnant at least once before age 20.<sup>89</sup> These differences are likely due in part to different rates of sexual activity between different ethnic groups: 65 percent of African American high-school students reported having ever had sex, compared to 49 percent of Latino students and 42 percent of Caucasian students.<sup>90</sup> There are also ethnic disparities in the use of condoms among high-school students: 63 percent of Caucasians said they used a condom the last time they had sex, compared to 62 percent of African Americans, and 55 percent of Latinos.<sup>91</sup>

**Teen pregnancy rates are six times higher among the ethnic groups most prevalent in Zone 126.**

The teen pregnancy rate within LIC/Astoria is about five percent, which is lower than the eight percent rate for New York City. However, the teen pregnancy rate for the ethnic groups that are most prevalent in Zone 126 — African American and Latino teens — was almost six times higher than the rates for Caucasians in New York City.<sup>92</sup> Within LIC/Astoria (zip codes 11101 through 11109), teen pregnancy rates are generally higher for the 18–19 age group than the 15 to 17 age group. The table below provides greater detail on the teen pregnancy rates in LIC/Astoria between 2000 and 2007.<sup>93</sup>

Pregnancy Rates* per 1,000 Females in LIC/Astoria (2000–2007)								
Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Ages 15–17	44	49	38	43	45	44	35	29
Ages 18–19	103	100	96	106	100	85	93	76
Ages 15–19	69	71	63	70	68	61	59	49

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### **Babies with teenage mothers face great health risks.**

Babies born to young mothers are more likely to die in the first year of life than babies born to women in their twenties and thirties. The risk is highest for babies born to mothers under age fifteen; in 2006, 18.14 out of every 1,000 babies born to women under age fifteen died, compared to 6.68 per 1,000 babies born to women of all ages.<sup>94</sup> Teens are least likely of all maternal age groups to get early and regular prenatal care, which unfortunately places their infants at further potential risk. Teenage mothers cite reasons such as revealing pregnancies to their parents and lack of financial resources for health care for delaying or forgoing prenatal care.<sup>95</sup> Teenage pregnancies have been associated with higher rates of pregnancy-induced hypertension, anemia, caesarian delivery and preterm births. Comprehensive prenatal care is essential for early detection of pregnancy complications, and decreases such risks.<sup>96</sup> Between 2000 and 2002, an average 7.1 percent of mothers under the age of 20 received late or no prenatal care, compared to 3.7 percent among mothers of all ages.<sup>97</sup>

### **Prenatal Care**

In the LIC/Astoria neighborhood, the rate of mothers who receive late or no prenatal care is 35 percent, which is above the city-wide rate of 28 percent.<sup>98</sup>

Prenatal care is vital for the health of both infant and mother. During prenatal visits, mothers may learn about important health issues, such as diet and nutrition, exercise, immunizations, weight gain, and abstaining from drugs and alcohol.<sup>99</sup> They may also learn about important best practices regarding nutrition for their newborn, the benefits of breastfeeding, and how to monitor for health-compromising conditions.<sup>100, 101</sup>

The lack of or delay in obtaining, prenatal care has serious health consequences for the baby. Mothers who do not receive prenatal care are three times more likely to give birth to a low-weight baby, and their baby is five times more likely to die.<sup>102</sup> Infants born at a low birth-weight are also at increased risk of long-term disability and impaired development.<sup>103</sup>

### **Single-Parent Families**

A high proportion of children in Zone 126 live in poor, single-parent, female-headed households, which presents them with a host of social and economic disadvantages.

In New York, 63 percent of children in poor families live with a single parent.<sup>104</sup> Among Project 126 Community Survey respondents, single-parent families account for almost three quarters (71 percent) of those families surviving on less than \$10,000 per year. By conservative estimates, at least 4,400<sup>105</sup> children live in low-income public housing, where the vast majority of single-parent households are headed by females: 98 percent of single-parent households in Queensbridge Houses are headed by females; 97 percent of single-parent households in Astoria Houses are female-headed; and 95 percent of single-parent households in Ravenswood Houses are female-headed.

### **Foster Care & Kinship Care**

Zone 126 is affected by high rates of foster care and kinship care, two domestic arrangements that can place emotional and financial stress on the family unit.

The prevalence of foster care situations among LIC/Astoria children is very high. At least 232 children in Community District 1 were in foster care, a number that is five times as high as that of children in foster care in Queens, and

**In Zone 126, 71 percent of families living on less than \$10,000/year are headed by a single parent.**

**In 2009, the Administration for Children's Services investigated 1,179 cases of child abuse and neglect in the Zone 126 area.**

twice as high as that for New York City overall. Of those children placed in foster care, an overwhelming majority are African American.<sup>106</sup>

Kinship care—where youth are cared for by relatives other than their parents—is also more prevalent in Zone 126. In New York City, 34.5 percent of the foster care population is in formal kinship care. For Queens, the figure is slightly higher, at 34.6 percent; in Community District 1, that figure is higher still at 34.8 percent.<sup>107</sup>

According to the 2000 Census, there are at least 822<sup>108, 109, 110</sup> instances of kinship care arrangements in which grandparents are caring for their grandchildren in Zone 126.<sup>111</sup> This type of kinship care can present challenges for the children and the caregivers. Many grandparents find themselves unexpectedly called on to care for their grandchildren as the result of an unexpected family crisis: substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, economic hardship, divorce, domestic violence or teen pregnancy. However, the challenges of age, such as health issues and low, fixed incomes can make it difficult for grandparents to fulfill the parental role adequately.

Despite the challenges of this type of kinship care, it is a very common form of child-rearing: statistics show that grandparents informally care for about 12 times as many children as the nation's foster care system.<sup>112</sup>

## Domestic Abuse

***Domestic abuse has a profound and widespread effect on families and communities, especially women and minority ethnic groups.***

Domestic violence is defined by the U.S. Department of Justice as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.”<sup>113</sup> According to the National Coalition Against Domestic

Violence (NCADV), one in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime;<sup>114</sup> this translates to 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes every year.<sup>115</sup> According to the New York City Health Department, poor women and African American and Latina women suffer the highest rates of domestic abuse in the city.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, nearly half (44 percent) of all women murdered in New York City between 2003 and 2005 were killed by intimate partners.<sup>117</sup> Even though domestic abuse often does not involve public discourse or action, the issue is important because it destabilizes families and communities.<sup>118</sup>

***Zone 126 survey respondents report that domestic violence is a serious problem in their community.***

In the LIC/Astoria neighborhood, there were 574 domestic violence arrests in 2007.<sup>119</sup> However, domestic violence is chronically underreported nationwide, according to NCADV, with “approximately one-quarter of all physical assaults, one-fifth of all rapes, and one-half of all stalking perpetuated against females by intimate partners.”<sup>120</sup> Sixty-seven percent of Project 126 Community Survey respondents reported that domestic abuse is a serious problem in the community. A greater proportion of female respondents believe that domestic abuse is a serious problem in their community—71 percent of women compared with 61 percent of male respondents. Given that women represent 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence nationwide,<sup>121, 122</sup> it is unsurprising that the female community members are more conscious of its impacts.

***Domestic violence disproportionately affects the South Asian community and other immigrant communities in Zone 126.***<sup>123</sup>

There is a large South Asian presence in Zone 126. According to the U.S. Census, in 2000, almost

## Substantiated Child Abuse and/or Neglect Reports

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
In CD #01 Astoria	1264	1445	1242	1179	1179
In Queens	14,443	17,315	16,108	17,885	15,794
In NYC	74,086	99,360	90,998	93,930	93,988

half of the Zone 126 population was foreign-born (48 percent),<sup>124, 125, 126</sup> and this population continues to grow. Extrapolating from the rapid growth of foreign-born residents in Queens,<sup>127</sup> we can assume that the percentage of foreign-born residents in Zone 126 is also on the rise.

Local leaders of the South Asian community have cited domestic violence as an important issue for their population. In the South Asian community, domestic violence survivors may face the cultural stigma and shame of divorce, and feel a duty to keep both the marriage and family together despite abuse.<sup>128</sup> A study by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) found that 51 percent of intimate-partner homicide victims in New York City in 1995–2002 were foreign-born, compared to 46 percent who were born in the U.S.<sup>129</sup>

### ***Domestic abuse has significant, long-term implications for children’s health and wellbeing.***

According to the American Psychological Association, in households where domestic abuse occurs, an estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence against their mothers or female caretakers each year.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, older children who witness domestic violence often attempt to protect their mothers.<sup>131</sup> Both witnessing and experiencing domestic violence create severe risks for a child’s development.

Witnessing domestic abuse lessens a child’s ability to socialize with other children, increases anxiety, lowers the child’s ability to empathize with others, and increases the likelihood that they will exhibit violent behavior in future.<sup>132</sup> However, escaping from domestic abuse carries its own negative consequences; half of all homeless women and children come from abusive households.<sup>133</sup>

### ***A significant number of children in LIC/Astoria are the victims of domestic abuse and neglect.***

The victimization rate for children 17 and under in Community District 1 is 10.4/1000.<sup>134</sup> In the LIC/Astoria neighborhood, there were 1179 cases of child abuse and neglect investigated by the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in 2009 (see table above for more details).<sup>135</sup>

## Effective Parenting Strategies / Parental Involvement

### ***Parenting programs can be effective in improving parent-child relationships and children’s behavior.***

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a meta-analysis of 77 articles that evaluated parenting programs aimed at



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**In Zone 126, 92 percent of parent respondents report that they believe the community, and especially new parents, would benefit from a parenting program.**

training parents of young children, ages 0–7.<sup>136</sup> They found the following components were most likely to be successful in improving parenting skills and behaviors: teaching parents emotional communication skills, teaching parents positive parent-child interaction skills, and requiring parents to practice with their children during program sessions.<sup>137</sup> They also found the following components were most likely to be successful in reducing children’s externalizing—aggressive, noncompliant, or hyperactive—behaviors: teaching parents correct use of the “time out”; teaching parents to respond consistently to their child; teaching parents to interact positively with their child; and requiring parents to practice with their child during program sessions.<sup>138</sup>

***Nearly all parent respondents believe Zone 126 would benefit from a parenting program.***

Effective parenting strategies are critical to promoting positive outcomes for children, and parenting programs can encourage positive parent-child relationships and children’s healthy social and educational development. Parenting programs that offer parents skills-training interventions have led to reduced child-behavior problems and fewer dysfunctional discipline practices, as well as a greater sense of parental competence.<sup>139</sup> Support for a parenting program in Zone 126 is strong, with 92 percent of parent respondents reporting that they believe the community, and especially new parents, would benefit.



# Health & Nutrition

Children’s mental and physical health is integral to their ability to learn, grow and succeed. Studies have found that hunger,<sup>140</sup> physical and emotional abuse,<sup>141</sup> and chronic illness<sup>142</sup> can lead to poor school performance.

Project 126 survey respondents ranked the issue of “Health & Nutrition” third in importance among community concerns.

Children living in low-income, urban communities are more likely to experience conditions that adversely affect their health, including poor nutrition, fewer opportunities for physical activity and more environmental pollutants.<sup>143</sup> These factors result in higher incidences diseases such as obesity<sup>144</sup> and asthma.<sup>145</sup>

Low-income communities generally, and Zone 126 in particular, also have a higher incidence of mental health problems and substance abuse. The effects on the children in these communities is both direct and indirect: they are more likely to be adversely affected by the experience of living in a household with an adult who has mental health or substance abuse issues, and

they are also at higher risk of developing mental health or substance abuse issues themselves.

While experiencing greater barriers to maintaining good health, the children of Zone 126 must also cope with less access to health insurance. In fact, the neighborhood of Northwest Queens is home to the second fewest number of insured individuals,<sup>146</sup> and ranks in the bottom 10 of all 42 New York City neighborhoods when it comes to disease prevention and access to medical care.<sup>147</sup>

Poor health is linked to school absenteeism and reduced learning capacity,<sup>148</sup> and the health issues explored in this section of the report all have the potential to inhibit academic performance and limit children’s potential.

To realize equal opportunity for the children of Zone 126, their health needs must be better served. This includes increasing access to more nutritious food and physical fitness activities,

Today in the U.S., children are likely to be a part of the first generation with life expectancies shorter than those of their parents—due mostly to the effects of obesity.

providing better preventive health supports (especially for sexual and mental health and addictive behaviors) and ensuring more eligible children and adults are enrolled in a health insurance program.

This section of the report explores survey findings, current research and best practices in these key areas:

- » Overweight/obesity
- » Asthma
- » Sexually transmitted diseases
- » Mental health issues
- » Substance abuse
- » Health insurance

## Overweight/Obesity

***Adult obesity is on the rise everywhere, but low-income and minority ethnic groups are particularly affected.***

Obesity and overweight disproportionately affects low-income adults and minority racial groups (particularly Latino and African American populations).<sup>149</sup> Obesity and diabetes rates are rising faster in New York City than in the country overall.<sup>150</sup> Between 2006 and 2008, New Yorkers gained 10 million pounds.<sup>151</sup> In Northwest Queens, 36.6 percent of the population is overweight, and more than one in five (20.7%) is obese.<sup>152</sup> These conditions increase the risk of many serious diseases, including coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancers, hypertension, high cholesterol and sleep apnea.<sup>153</sup>

***Parents' eating and physical activity habits impact the health of their children.***

Studies have shown that a child's risk of obesity greatly increases if one or more parents is overweight or obese.<sup>154</sup> An overweight

adolescent's chances of becoming overweight or obese as an adult increases from 70 to 80 percent when one or more parents has one of these conditions.<sup>155</sup> When parents neither exercise nor eat healthy foods, they are unable to model healthy living styles for their children. In general, people in the same family tend to have similar eating patterns, maintain the same levels of physical activity, and adopt the same attitudes toward being overweight,<sup>156</sup> so it is important to address childhood obesity through programs that target both parents and children.

***Childhood obesity is a growing health crisis for communities across America.***

In 1999, 13 percent of children ages six to 11 and 14 percent of adolescents ages 12 to 19 in the United States were overweight. The prevalence of obesity has nearly tripled in the past two decades.<sup>157</sup> This fast-growing issue is affecting children in communities across the nation, with children who are overweight or obese showing multiple negative developmental outcomes, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem as well as a variety of physical ailments.<sup>158</sup> According to the Surgeon General, today's children are likely to be a part of the first generation with a shorter life expectancy than their parents, due almost exclusively to the rise in obesity.<sup>159</sup>

***Neighborhood-level factors affect residents' obesity levels.***

Neighborhood-level factors, such as poverty, the "built environment" (e.g., barriers to outdoor physical activity) and access to healthy food have been found to contribute to the continuing obesity epidemic.<sup>160</sup> Studies have shown that low-income, urban neighborhoods have higher rates of obesity, and that residents experience barriers to physical activity such as daily walking and reduced access to stores that sell healthy foods.<sup>161</sup>

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***Zone 126 families have poor access to healthier foods.***

For many low-income residents of LIC/Astoria, access to healthy foods is affected by actual household distance to fresh fruits and vegetables. Of most concern to Zone 126 is that one in four respondents who live in Astoria Houses (25 percent) and almost one in five Queensbridge resident respondents (18 percent) report having to walk more than 20 minutes to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables may partially account for the snack choices of residents in Zone 126. Financial constraints also prevent residents from making healthier food choices. In fact, more than four out of five survey respondents (81 percent) report that if healthy foods were cheaper, they would buy more nutritional foods.

Only slightly more of the respondents (48 percent) reported snacking on fruits and vegetables, compared to those who report snacking on chips, cookies, cakes, doughnuts, candy, ice cream, or pudding as their snack of choice (40 percent). African American survey respondents are much less likely to maintain a healthy diet, with only about a third (31 percent) reporting snacking on fruits and vegetables, and 60 percent reporting snacking on chips, cookies, cakes, doughnuts, candy, ice cream, or pudding as their first choice.

***Many parents in Zone 126 don't have time to prepare healthy meals.***

Limited time in the home prevents many parents from preparing healthy, nutritious meals for their children and for themselves. As a result, many low-income families rely on cheap and convenient foods that are high in calories.<sup>162</sup> The problem is especially prevalent among working single parents, a group that forms a significant percentage of the survey respondent population. Twenty-three percent of survey respondents report

eating fast food two or more times per week, behavior which greatly increases their risk of diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes.

***Adults in Zone 126 are largely inactive, which adversely affects their children's activity levels.***

Only 18 percent of adult survey respondents reported exercising regularly. Low-income adults and children are typically less able to sufficiently exercise than the more affluent. For people living in low-income housing, the common perception that the neighborhood is unsafe at night inhibits regular physical activity, especially for women.<sup>163</sup>

This has serious implications for the children of Zone 126: children whose parents are inactive are almost six times less likely to be physically active than children with active parents.<sup>164</sup>

***Increasing amounts of sedentary time for children is contributing to childhood overweight and obesity.***

Instead of being physically active, children younger than six are spending an average of two hours per day in front of a television screen. Older kids and teens spend almost four hours per day watching TV, DVDs, or videos, a number that rises by another hour and a half when computer use and video games are factored in. As the amount of time children spend in sedentary activities grows, their risk of becoming overweight increases: studies show that children who watch a screen for more than four hours a day are more likely to be overweight compared to kids who watch for two hours or less.<sup>165</sup>

**In Zone 126, only eight percent of adults reported exercising regularly. Children whose parents are inactive are almost six times less likely to be physically active themselves.**

In Zone 126, asthma was the most common cause of hospitalization for children 14 and under, and caused them to miss between 10 to 30 days of school per year.

## Asthma

***Asthma is a major health issue for children, and one that disproportionately affects those from low-income and minority communities.***

Asthma is a prevalent and debilitating disease among children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “on average, in a classroom of 30 children, about three are likely to have asthma.”<sup>166</sup> In New York City, asthma is a leading cause of school absences among children. In fact, children suffering from asthma often at least 10 school days per year, while children with severe asthma miss up to 30 days per year.<sup>167</sup> Asthma hospitalization rates for children 14 years and younger in LIC/Astoria are 6.23/1,000,<sup>168</sup> making it the most common cause of hospitalization. Considering that asthma hospitalizations are completely preventable, this rate is unacceptably high.<sup>169</sup> By reducing or eliminating environmental triggers such as secondhand smoke, insect and rodent matter, and air pollution, asthma rates among children can be reduced.

However, low-income communities in urban areas such as LIC/Astoria face greater environmental health risk factors than do higher-income communities.<sup>170</sup> For various reasons, the likelihood of illness and death due to asthma is disproportionately high in low-income populations and for minorities compared to the general population.<sup>171, 172</sup> In particular, poor air quality, household contaminants and second-hand smoke are more likely to affect children in low-income, urban communities.

***Children in Zone 126 breathe some of the most polluted air in the country.***

Heavily-polluting factories and other facilities are more likely to exist in low-income communities than in affluent areas.<sup>173, 174</sup> Environmental Defense has ranked Queens among the worst 10 percent of all US counties in terms of its exposure

to air pollutants.<sup>175</sup> The LIC/Astoria area houses numerous power plants, many of which do not comply with the Clean Air Act,<sup>176</sup> and generates over 80 percent of New York City’s electricity.<sup>177</sup> Currently, there is no limit to the number of power plants that can be constructed within a district.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that the area has some of the most polluted air in the country. This type of air pollution has been shown by several reports to increase the severity of asthma in children.<sup>179, 180</sup>

***Children in Zone 126 are exposed to household pests and contaminants that exacerbate asthma.***

In the Project 126 Community Survey, the majority of survey respondents in the three public housing developments said they have trouble with household pests. More than seven in 10 respondents from the public housing projects said that they or their neighbors have problems with cockroaches.<sup>181</sup> The number of respondents who reported being affected by rodent problems varied between the three housing projects, but a significant problem exists in all three developments.<sup>182</sup>

Exposure to pests such as cockroaches and mice is shown to increase hospitalization rates, missed school days, and positive skin allergy tests in children with asthma.<sup>183</sup> Additionally, cockroaches and mice, particularly in residents’ bedrooms, were strongly associated with higher rates of asthma, especially in housing for senior citizens.<sup>184</sup> Cockroaches, mice, and rats are more common sources of asthma allergens for low-income, inner-city residents than they are for residents living elsewhere.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, problems with building maintenance and low-quality housing units are more likely to affect low-income residents and immigrants, because they are groups with less power to take action against building owners or to change their housing.<sup>186</sup>

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***Children in one third of homes in Zone 126 may be affected by second-hand smoke.***

Roughly one third (32 percent) of respondents reported that they or someone in their household smokes. The presence of second-hand smoke increases the risk of asthma. Children exposed to cigarette smoke, either in utero<sup>187</sup> or in their homes are at great risk for asthma; one out of three children and adults with asthma is exposed to second-hand smoke regularly.<sup>188</sup> Unfortunately, one quarter of adults in Northwest Queens smoke.<sup>189</sup>

## **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

***Low-income youth, and especially young women, are at high risk of STDs in Zone 126.***

About 71 percent of survey respondents consider sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to be a serious problem in the community. In particular, STDs are perceived to be a more serious issue by residents of LIC/Astoria's low-income, public housing complexes: about 83 percent of Astoria Houses residents and 76 percent of Queensbridge residents consider STDs to be a serious problem. Statistics show that young people are especially at risk of contracting STDs; youth ages 15 to 24 represent almost half of all new STD cases, but only a quarter of the sexually active population.<sup>190</sup> Young women, in particular, are the most at-risk population. According to some studies, they are about twice as likely to have an STD as men.<sup>191</sup>

***Youth in Zone 126 are not using adequate protection against STDs.***

In Queens, only two thirds of high school students (67 percent) used a condom during their last sexual encounter.<sup>192</sup> This is concerning, since there are several STDs that infect youth disproportionately. For instance, females ages 15

to 19 and males ages 20 to 24 have the highest gonorrhea infection rates.<sup>193</sup> Other prevalent STDs include genital human papillomavirus (HPV), now the most common of all STDs and a leading cause of cervical cancer,<sup>194,195</sup> and HIV/AIDS, the fifth leading cause of death for people between the ages of 25 to 44.<sup>196</sup> HIV/AIDS is a disease of particular concern in Northwest Queens, where at least 755/100,000 people live with AIDS.<sup>197</sup>

## **Mental Health**

***Depression and stress affect many people in Zone 126.***

Poor mental health is the leading cause of disability for those aged 15 to 44, and costs society more than \$190 billion in lost earnings per year.<sup>198</sup> These facts have serious health and economic implications for Zone 126, where more than half of survey respondents (56 percent) reported that they themselves or others in their household are depressed "sometimes," "most of the time," or "always." For unemployed respondents, the prevalence of depression is six percentage points higher.

Stress affects an even greater proportion of the community, with three quarters of all survey respondents (75 percent) and 85 percent of Caucasian respondents reporting that they themselves or others in their household are stressed "sometimes," "most of the time," or "always."

***Parents' mental health profoundly influences that of their children.<sup>199</sup>***

Parents in Zone 126 are statistically more likely to experience poor mental health for a number of reasons, and their mental state can adversely affect that of their children, including children's ability to develop and learn effectively. Parents experiencing economic hardship, such as a cancellation of or break in phone service or

**In Zone 126, 56 percent of respondents report they or relatives are depressed at least sometimes.**

**In Queens, nine percent of high school children attempted suicide in 2009.**

skipped meals due to the cost of food, are almost three-and-a-half times more likely than those not experiencing hardship to report symptoms of poor mental health.<sup>200</sup> Women (the most common caregivers in Zone 126) experience rates of depression that are 1.5 to three times higher than that of men.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, single parents who are not living with a partner (another widespread trend in Zone 126) are two times more likely than married parents to report symptoms of poor mental health.<sup>202</sup>

***Lack of social ties in low-income communities can contribute to poor mental health among children and adults.***

Social ties have been called “buffers” to stress and also help increase access to mental health treatment.<sup>203</sup> Unfortunately, many low-income communities lack the recreational, intellectual, and creative opportunities that engage youth and parents in common social endeavors. In Zone 126, more than three quarters of respondents (75.7 percent) said they would like to get to know people outside of their circle of friends, and three fifths (59.3 percent) expressed interest in joining a group where people provide each other moral support, information, and advice on shared experience.

***Children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are disproportionately affected by mental health issues.***

Across the nation, one in five low-income children ages six through 17 (21 percent) have mental health problems.<sup>204</sup> Children and youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are at increased risk of poor mental health. Half of children and youth in the child welfare system have mental health problems,<sup>205</sup> and a shocking 67 to 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder.<sup>206</sup>

***Children’s needs for mental health services are not being met.***

America’s children are not receiving the prevention, counseling, and treatment that they need for their mental health issues. One in 10 youths have severe mental health problems that impair their function at home, school, or in the community,<sup>207</sup> yet 75 to 80 percent of American children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them.<sup>208</sup> That figure climbs to 85 percent of children and youth in the child welfare system who do not receive the services they need.<sup>209</sup> In Queens, a disturbing 9.0 percent of high-schoolers attempted suicide in 2009, with more females (10.1) than males (7.8) represented in this figure.<sup>210</sup>

## **Substance Abuse**

***Substance abuse negatively affects the community in many different ways.***

Substance abuse has a direct effect on the substance-abusing individual and an indirect effect on others in the individual’s life, such as their children or spouse. For the individual user, the abuse of substances such as recreational drugs and alcohol critically impacts physical and mental health, and can even lead to death. In fact, drug-related death rates are higher in Northwest Queens than in Queens overall.<sup>211</sup> Substance abuse is also attributed with triggering chronic mental disorders such as major depressive disorder, and elevating risk of later substance dependence and antisocial behavior.<sup>212</sup> Drugs can impair cognitive development, and have an especially significant impact on adolescents who are still in their critical, formative years.<sup>213</sup> Teens are more vulnerable to drug abuse, which puts them at risk for cognitive deficits, coordination problems and damage to memory.<sup>214</sup>



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***Low incomes, low education levels and high stress put the residents of Zone 126 at higher risk for substance-abuse issues.***

While substance-abuse affects all people, it is related to many factors that are common among low-income individuals, such as low educational attainment, untreated psychological disorders, and unstable family/interpersonal relationships.<sup>215</sup> The link between higher educational attainment and lower rates of substance abuse is supported by a 2008 survey showing that among adults aged 18 and up, the rate of illicit drug use was lower for college graduates (5.7 percent) than it was for those with only some college (9.4 percent).<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, the rate of illicit drug use was higher for unemployed persons (20 percent) than for those who were employed full time (8.0 percent) or part time (10.2 percent).<sup>217</sup>

High levels of stress have also been shown to be associated with high levels of substance abuse,<sup>218</sup> and three fourths of the Project 126 Community Survey respondents (75 percent) reported that they are “sometimes,” “most of the time,” or “always” stressed. While stress alone can cause substance abuse, it is also one of the most powerful triggers for relapse, even after prolonged periods of abstinence from drug abuse.<sup>219</sup>

***Substance abuse by their parents and peers can affect children’s future success.***

When parents abuse drugs and alcohol, this impacts their children’s health and chances for success. Studies have shown that children from families with substance-abusing parents are more likely to have problems with delinquency, poor school performance, and emotional difficulties than their peers from homes without substance abuse.<sup>220</sup> Studies have also shown that substance abuse by parents increases the likelihood that their children will grow up to be users. Finally, youth who live in communities with a high number of substance-using peers are more

likely to use drugs than other youth.<sup>221</sup> In the Zone 126 public schools that were surveyed, between 38 and 50 percent of middle-school student respondents<sup>222</sup> observe or experience alcohol or illegal drugs, even while at school, “some of the time,” “most of the time,” or “all of the time.”<sup>223, 224</sup>

***The children of Zone 126 are at higher risk of alcoholism and associated problems.***

Statistics show that children of alcoholics are three to four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves, which makes the adult rate of binge drinking in Northwest Queens, which is higher than the city-wide rate,<sup>225</sup> an area of particular concern in terms of the effect on children in this area.<sup>226</sup>

Binge drinking impairs individual job opportunities, and can lead to a downward spiral: those who binge drink are less likely to obtain or maintain a job and those without jobs are more likely to binge drink. Binge drinking is not only responsible for poor employment outcomes, but for many preventable illnesses, injuries, and deaths by motor vehicle crashes, liver disease, and cancer.<sup>227</sup>

***The children of Zone 126 are particularly vulnerable to the effects of smoking and second-hand smoke.***

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in New York City,<sup>228</sup> and the leading cause of cancer in the country.<sup>229</sup>

Approximately one out of three survey respondents (32 percent) reported that someone in their household smokes. This has serious implication for children, as statistics show that youth with parents who smoke are twice as likely to smoke themselves.<sup>230</sup> It may help to explain why nearly one in three high school students currently use some kind of tobacco product nationwide.<sup>231</sup> By the young age of 13, 11 percent of NYC public school students will already have tried smoking.<sup>232</sup>

**In Zone 126, 38–50 percent of middle-school student respondents either witness or participate in the consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs at school.**

In LIC/Astoria, 25 percent of adults and 55 percent of children who are eligible for public health insurance are uninsured.

Second-hand smoke also has the potential to seriously affect children. It can cause sudden death and low birth weight in infants,<sup>233</sup> and it accounts for one in 10 tobacco-related deaths nationwide.<sup>234</sup>

## Health Insurance

***Lack of health insurance disproportionately affects the poor, the uneducated and those with language barriers.***

Poor people are far more likely to be affected by a lack of health insurance.<sup>235</sup> In Northwest Queens, for example, about 37 percent of individuals living below the poverty line are uninsured. Additionally, statistics for New York City show that those making under \$25,000 per year in New York City are twice as likely to be uninsured compared to those making over \$50,000 per year.<sup>236</sup> Those without health insurance are typically undereducated and have language barriers. Foreign-born residents living in Northwest Queens, in particular, are more likely to be without health insurance compared to those born in the United States.<sup>237</sup>

***Many adults and children in Zone 126 lack adequate health insurance.***

Northwest Queens is the second most uninsured neighborhood in New York City.<sup>238</sup> More than half (55 percent) of children who are eligible for public health insurance are uninsured in Community District 1,<sup>239, 240</sup> along with about one in four adults.<sup>241</sup> One major factor leading to low insurance program participation is the simple fact that children and their parents often do not realize that they are eligible for free or affordable public health insurance. At least 34 percent of children and 66 percent of adults<sup>242</sup> in Community District 1 are eligible for, but not enrolled in, public health insurance,<sup>243</sup> resulting in the highest rate of eligible, uninsured residents compared to other community districts in

Queens. It is therefore no surprise that Northwest Queens ranks in the bottom 10 of all 41 New York City neighborhoods in terms of disease prevention and access to medical care.<sup>244</sup>

***Lack of access to health insurance has serious consequences for children, the community and the taxpayer.***

Lack of health insurance has serious consequences for both individuals and society. Children and families that lack health insurance are less likely to access preventive health services.<sup>245</sup> In fact, the uninsured are four times more likely (41 percent vs. 11 percent) to go without care as a result of financial constraints.<sup>246</sup> As a result, they are forced to wait and use the more expensive emergency department when their conditions worsen, which leads not only to a serious health and financial cost to the individual, but also a cost to society. In fact, uninsured adults and children's uncompensated emergency room care totaled \$40.7 billion in 2004<sup>247</sup>—a burden shouldered largely by taxpayers. Most importantly, the health consequences for children are dire: uninsured children admitted to the emergency room are 60 percent more likely to die than insured children.<sup>248</sup>



# Jobs & Economic Security

The employment status and overall economic security of the adults of Zone 126, particularly those who are parents, heavily influence outcomes for youth because they determine many factors that affect a child's life: housing; neighborhood; quality of school; access to health care; and social, educational, and employment opportunities.<sup>249</sup>

Nationally, low-income households are associated with a variety of risk factors for youth, their families, and their communities. The persistence of childhood poverty affects outcomes all the way through to adulthood.<sup>250</sup>

The families and children of Zone 126 are particularly vulnerable to a range of financial challenges, including high rates of poverty, low rates of employment and lack of financial literacy. Nearly one third of all households in Zone 126 are living on an income of \$10,000 per year, and this level of poverty disproportionately affects African American, Latino and Asian families. Close to one quarter of residents are unemployed and looking for work; another

challenge that affects minority ethnic groups more than Caucasians.

Better access to education and job training are key to helping members of this impoverished community to find stable, better-paying work, and greater financial literacy will help them achieve financial self-sufficiency.

***This section of the report will explore survey findings, current research and best practices in these key areas:***

- » Poverty
- » Chronic unemployment
- » Lack of financial literacy

In Zone 126, more than half of all households subsist on a family income of \$20,000 or less—far below the NYC self-sufficiency standard of \$65,943.

## Poverty

### **Rates of poverty among children are high—and on the increase.**

According to the National Poverty Center, children make up a disproportionate share of the poor in the U.S.<sup>251</sup> Although they are 25 percent of the total population, they make up 35% of the poor. In fact, about one in five children in the US (20.7 percent) is now living in poverty, and poverty rates among African American children increased from 34.7 to 35.7 percent from 2008 to 2009.<sup>252</sup>

### **The majority of children in Zone 126 are living in poverty.**

One way to assess poverty levels among a community’s children is to look at student eligibility for **free and reduced priced lunches (FRPLs)**, which are available to schoolchildren

## Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Rates, by School

School Name	Student Eligibility
PS 111 Jacob Blackwell	87%
PS 112 Dutch Kills	95%
PS 17 Henry David Thoreau	93%
PS 171 Peter G. Van Alst	93%
IS 126 Albert Shanker	93%
PS 76 William Hallet	89%
PS 234	89%
IS 204 Oliver W. Holmes	94%
Young Women’s Leadership School	73%
PS 166 Henry Gradstein	76%

## Household Income Level

### Project 126 Community Survey Respondents

Less than \$10,000	33%
\$10,000–\$19,000	22%
\$20,000–\$29,999	15%
\$30,000–\$39,999	12%
\$40,000–\$49,999	7%
More than \$50,000	11%

with household incomes below 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level, respectively. Among Zone 126 schools, eligibility for these programs is very high, ranging from 76 to 98 percent eligibility.

### **Many families in Zone 126 are living far below the “self-sufficiency standard.”**

In New York City, a “self-sufficiency standard”<sup>253</sup> is used as the baseline income necessary to meet a family’s basic needs. In Queens, the self-sufficiency standard for a family with one adult, one preschooler, and one school-age child is \$65,943 per year.<sup>254</sup> Among Project 126 Community Survey respondents,<sup>255</sup> one third (33 percent) have a household income level below \$10,000, and more than half (55 percent) have a household income below \$20,000. The survey results also reveal that the percentage of households with incomes below \$10,000 per year is twice as high for African American, Latino, and Asian families as it is for Caucasian families.

In addition, 2009 New York City Housing Authority Resident Data show that average gross income of households from low-income, public housing in Zone 126 ranges between \$22,970 and \$26,842, with the average family size reported to be around three people. When

## Income and Rent for Public Housing Residents

	Average Gross Income	Average Gross Ren
Queensbridge Houses	\$22,970	\$387
Ravenswood Houses	\$26,436	\$413
Astoria Houses	\$26,842	\$458

compared to the New York City self-sufficiency standard, in which the household income for three should be around \$66,000, the income figures show that public housing residents are far below the self-sufficiency standard.

### ***The need for income supports is growing among Zone 126 residents.***

Public programs are designed to provide temporary support to children and families in times of need. In 2009, about 25 percent of the Community District 1 population received income supports such as cash assistance, supplemental security income, and Medicaid.<sup>256</sup>

Queens Community Board 1 statistics show that enrollment in public health insurance and in food stamps benefits has been on the rise since 2006:

The figures show that there are increasing numbers of families and children in Zone 126 who are in serious financial need.

## Chronic Unemployment

### ***Unemployment affects many residents of Zone 126, especially ethnic minorities.***

Within Zone 126, at least 23 percent of survey respondents reported themselves as “unemployed and looking.” This figure is especially disconcerting since a majority of the respondents are low-income and likely to be “asset poor,” which means they risk becoming financially unstable after three months without income.<sup>257</sup> Generally, low-income households face greater consequences from unemployment compared to higher-income households.

In New York City, the unemployment rate is relatively high (10 percent),<sup>258, 259</sup> and it is even higher for people of color. For example, while unemployment for Caucasians in New York City rose steadily from the first quarter of 2008 through the first three months of 2009, the number of unemployed African Americans in the city rose four times as fast.<sup>260</sup> In the Project 126 Community Survey, respondents

**At least 23 percent of Zone 126 respondents reported being unemployed, compared to a 10 percent unemployment rate in NYC.**

## Public Assistance, by Queens Community Board # 1

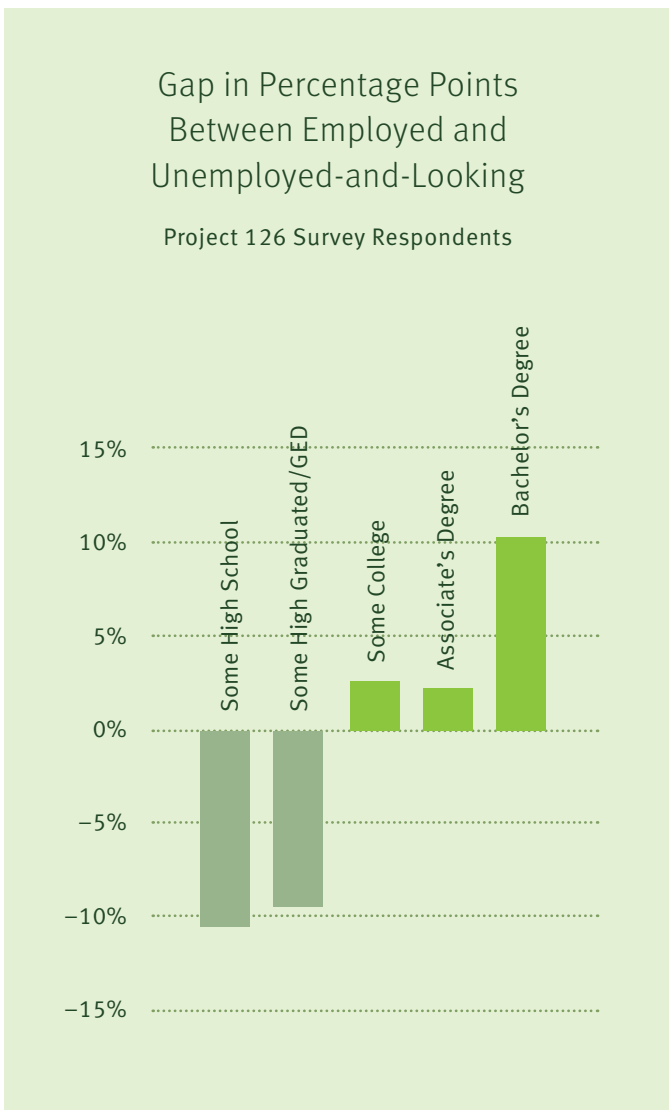
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Persons Enrolled in Public Health Insurance	53,745	52,658	51,609	50,774	53,022
Persons Receiving Cash Assistance	5,020	4,357	3,646	3,321	3,430
Persons Receiving Food Stamps	16,048	14,966	15,176	17,372	24,853

About 70 percent of Zone 126 respondents expressed an interest in accessing free vocational and skill-building classes.

representing ethnic minorities were more than twice as likely as Caucasian residents to identify themselves as “unemployed and looking.” The unemployment rate in Zone 126 is highest for Latinos (29 percent), followed by African Americans (27 percent) and Asians (25 percent), with Caucasians reporting a 12 percent unemployment rate.

### Gap in Percentage Points Between Employed and Unemployed-and-Looking

Project 126 Survey Respondents



### **Enhanced education is the key to breaking the systemic lack of employment.**

The Project 126 Community Survey re-affirmed what is already conventionally known—that education is directly correlated with income. The higher the level of education, the higher the household income level. Conversely, for Zone 126 survey respondents, unemployment is remarkably concentrated among the least-educated. For those who did not earn a high-school degree, unemployment rates are higher than 50 percent.

### **Job training and skill building could help improve employment rates and self-esteem among Zone 126 residents.**

The vast majority (about 70 percent) of survey respondents reported an interest in attending a free vocational and skill-building class in the community. At the community level, job training provides a larger pool of potential employees for local businesses, as well as opportunities for partnerships.<sup>261</sup> Offering job training may also serve to ease the assimilation of disconnected youth and individuals (especially residents with disabilities) into the working population, reducing the local strain on public services such as welfare.<sup>262</sup> Job training not only provides the necessary skills and networks to obtain in-demand jobs; it also helps individuals increase their self-esteem by gaining a positive self-identity and sense of accomplishment.<sup>263</sup>

### **Lack of Financial Literacy**

#### **Financial literacy can help families open bank accounts, save money, and ultimately improve financial wellbeing.**

Evidence shows that financial education can improve financial literacy and, even more importantly, change financial behavior for

the better.<sup>264</sup> In effect, financial education is a necessary element for reducing poverty. Financial literacy programs can help families save money and assets and can also help direct families along a path to becoming “banked” households—households with access to a bank account. In a recent federal survey, banks listed financial education as the best way to reach out to the unbanked population.<sup>265</sup> Holding a bank account and being financially literate are important indicators of financial well-being. According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), “access to a basic bank account and financial services is fundamental to economic self-sufficiency. This is because banks provide individuals with the opportunity to save, borrow, invest, and build a credit record.”<sup>266</sup>

***Zone 126 residents have high rates of financial illiteracy, and would benefit from outreach and education in this area.***

Within Zone 126, less than two-thirds of Project 126 Community Survey respondents (64 percent) have a checking account at a bank or credit union. Financial literacy has also helped to improve people’s ability to pay bills on time.<sup>267</sup> This is particularly relevant to Zone 126, where nearly half of survey respondents (45 percent) claim to pay their bills late “sometimes” or “most of the time.” Late bill payments on credit cards can be particularly damaging for low-income card holders. Because creditors often approve higher credit limits than people’s incomes justify, and subject low-income people to very high interest rates, low-income families tend to be at high risk of credit card debt. At least 12 percent of survey respondents have at least three or more active credit cards.

***Financial literacy would have a positive effect on Zone 126 youth.***

The youth of Zone 126 also stand to gain much from financial literacy programs. For example, a high-school financial literacy program found that nearly 60 percent of participants improved saving habits and that 86 percent increased their understanding of positive financial behavior.<sup>268, 269</sup> Perhaps the most important finding in studies of youth financial literacy is that high-school students who participated in financial literacy courses had substantially higher rates of savings as adults.<sup>270, 271</sup>

**At least 12 percent of Zone 126 respondents have three or more credit cards, putting them at increased risk for late bill payments and high interest rates.**



# Crime & Safety

Issues of crime and safety don't just affect the day-to-day lives of the children in Zone 126. They also affect their ability to develop academically and socially and achieve life success in the future.

Although crime in the Queens area decreased slightly from 2005–2009, crime statistics are still high for Community Board 1, and areas of Zone 126 are home to some of the highest crime rates of all neighborhoods in Queens. In addition, crime is probably underreported in these neighborhoods: half of all Project 126 Community Survey respondents said that there are some crimes they would feel unsafe reporting.

Crime and lack of safety has a greater impact on vulnerable low-income and minority communities and their children. Whether they become perpetrators or victims, children in high-crime neighborhoods are affected by an environment of violence and fear, making it less likely that they will fulfill their potential in life.

Survey respondents identified drug abuse as a top safety issue and cause of crime in their

community. Queensbridge Houses, in particular, are affected by entrenched drug dealing and violence. Drug abuse and gang violence have a destabilizing effect on the neighborhood, contributing to high rates of domestic violence, personal injury and death.

The prevalence of drugs in the community has a profound effect on youth. Young people who do not use drugs are affected by the overall culture of violence that drug use creates, and those who use drugs are vulnerable to a host of social and psychological problems that follow them into adulthood, include delinquency, poor health, deteriorating family relationships and poor school performance.

Drug-related gang violence affects the children of Zone 126 at a very young age. By the time they reach middle school, many have already been

**Areas of Zone 126 have the highest crime rates in Queens, and many crimes go unreported—half of survey respondents feel unsafe reporting some crimes.**

exposed to violence and the availability of drugs. This early exposure reduces the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.

***This section of the report will explore survey findings, current research and best practices in these key areas:***

- » Public safety statistics
- » Neighborhood crime
- » Drug abuse and gang violence

## Public Safety Statistics

***Crime rates in Zone 126 are high, and probably underreported.***

The population served by Queens Community Board 1 comprises at least 211,092 people,<sup>272</sup> which is approximately twice the population size of Zone 126. According to Community Board 1 statistics, overall crime decreased by 50.95% from 2005–2009 in Zone 126’s local precinct, the 114th Precinct.<sup>273</sup> However, crime statistics have stabilized in the past two years<sup>274</sup> and are still relatively high for such a small area. On average, in 2010, there were more than one burglary per day, a felonious assault more than two out of every three days, and more than one grand larceny convictions per day.<sup>275</sup> Overall, there were more than five major felony crimes committed per day on average in 2010.<sup>276</sup>

Compared to other neighborhoods in Queens, Zone 126—particularly the area near 59th Street/Queensboro Bridge—has some of the highest crime rates and is therefore considered to be among the least safe neighborhoods in the borough. Websites that plot crime data on maps reveal that crime often concentrates near the bridge,<sup>277, 278</sup> Broadway Ave.,<sup>279</sup> and subway stops in the area.<sup>280</sup> Crime also occurs in the 114th Precinct more frequently than in surrounding precincts.

Finally, it is worth noting that these crime rates, as high as they are, are certainly an underestimation of actual crime. Half of all survey respondents reported that there are some crimes they would feel unsafe reporting.

## Neighborhood Crime

***Crime is more prevalent, and exerts the greatest negative impact, on low-income, minority communities.***

Neighborhood crime has a negative effect on a community’s wellbeing. It puts all residents at risk of victimization, and it diminishes chances for future prosperity.<sup>281</sup> Low-income, urban neighborhoods, in particular, tend to suffer from higher crime rates and, therefore, also suffer from its negative effects. This disparity is reflected in the different concerns expressed by low- and high-income communities. More low-income New Yorkers than middle and high-income New Yorkers consider public safety (crime, guns, drugs, gangs, violence) as their top worry.<sup>282</sup>

***Children in low-income, minority communities are more likely to be involved in crime.***

Children in low-income, minority neighborhoods face a higher risk of becoming either victims or perpetrators of crime than do Caucasian children and children from middle- or upper-class families. These risks significantly impact children’s likelihood of academic and general life success, and prevent them from accessing the same opportunities as children in safer communities.

Many of the issues affecting low-income and minority communities increase the likelihood that children in these communities will become involved in crime. At the community level, predictors of crime may include: socioeconomic status, community disorder, and community cohesion. At the family or household level, predictors of crime may include household



composition, parent-child relationship, parent characteristics, and family stress. At the individual level, strong predictors of crime include prior delinquency, poor academic attitude and performance, substance abuse, prior psychological condition, and poor social ties.<sup>283</sup>

***High crime rates and poor neighborhood safety affect children’s access to community resources.***

Addressing the issue of crime and safety is critical to creating a safe and supportive environment where children may learn and grow. High crime rates in LIC/Astoria, coupled with the community’s legitimate fear for their safety and security (as reported by survey respondents) contribute to an overall reluctance to access community resources, such as after school programs, local parks for exercising, or parent association meetings. Fear of crime and violence is preventing children in low-income communities from benefiting from educational and recreational resources that could make a difference in their future success.

## **Drug Abuse & Gang Violence**

***Drug abuse has serious health consequences for the Zone 126 community and their children.***

Drug abuse leads to a number of negative health consequences, including increased violence, personal injury and death. The death rate related to drugs was 65% higher in Northwest Queens than in Queens overall.<sup>284</sup> More than 75 percent of domestic violence survivors report that their assailant had been drinking or using illicit drugs at the time of the incident.<sup>285</sup> One in 10 NYC hospitalizations is drug related,<sup>286</sup> and unintentional drug overdose is the fourth leading cause of premature adult death before age 65 in New York City.<sup>287</sup>

***Drug abuse is a top crime and safety issue in the community.***

Among all survey respondents in Project 126, drug abuse was chosen as a top “crime and safety” issue. The recent drug raids in Queensbridge Houses demonstrate the extent of the drug problem within these public housing complexes. In April 2004, the 114th Precinct identified the Queensbridge Houses as the most entrenched drug dealing location in their precinct; in February 2005, a series of drug and weapon arrests were made.<sup>288</sup> Most recently, in February of 2009, police raided 14 housing units and made 59 arrests for drug-related activities.<sup>289</sup>

***Drug abuse affects health, socialization and academic performance among youth.***

Drug use is especially damaging to young people, because they are in the critical, formative years of their cognitive development.<sup>290</sup> Unfortunately, the powerful effects of peer pressure during the adolescent years increases the availability and attractiveness of drugs. Juvenile drug use is related to recurring, chronic, and violent delinquency that continues well into adulthood, and is also strongly correlated with poor health, deteriorating family relationships, worsening school performance, and other social and psychological problems.<sup>291</sup> Even youth who successfully abstain from drug use are impacted by an environment in which drugs are common, because neighborhood users are more likely to be violent.

***Gang violence diminishes youths’ quality of life and their chances for future success.***

Young people in low-income communities are exposed to gang violence early in their lives. According to the New York City School Survey’s results from local middle schools IS 204 and IS 126,<sup>292</sup> between 40 and 48 percent of respondents believe that there is gang activity in their middle school “some of the time,” “most

**In April 2004, the 114th Precinct police department identified the Queensbridge Houses as the precinct’s most entrenched drug dealing location.**

**The low-income children of Zone 126 face a higher risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime.**

of the time,” or “all of the time,” and this number is likely to rise by the time the children are in high school. Gang association not only affects young people’s lives today, but affects their future as well; studies have shown that gang association is linked to early school dropouts.<sup>293</sup> In neighborhoods with low levels of high-school graduation, such as Zone 126, gangs also tend to be more prevalent and active.<sup>294</sup>

***Three factors that increase the likelihood that a youth will join a gang are:***

- » A youth’s disbelief in his/her chances of succeeding in the education system and in life,

- » Lack of positive adult role models, and
- » Lack of out-of-school enrichment programs aimed at engaging youth’s interest in arts and sports and keeping them safe in the after-school hours.

These three factors are also those most likely to affect children in low-income communities such as Zone 126.

According to one police officer, whose family lives within Zone 126, “[Gang and youth] violence is so widespread... This weekend, we had a gun battle in Astoria [Houses]. Every other night, children on their way back from school are being beat up and robbed.”<sup>295</sup>

# Technology: Access to & Proficiency with the Internet

Internet access and competency for all children is essential in ensuring equal opportunities for success in the twenty-first century.<sup>296</sup> However, low-income communities such as Zone 126 are falling behind in terms of access to and use of these technologies, with 40 percent of survey respondents reporting that they do not have access to the Internet at home.

A number of factors stand in the way of more widespread adoption of web-based technologies for families in Zone 126. Affordability is a major issue, as are educational and language barriers. Unfortunately, it is these impoverished, poorly educated and language-challenged individuals who have the greatest need of the resources available online.

Without reliable access to the Internet, children have greater difficulty completing assignments and keeping up with their peers. They are also indirectly affected when their parents are unable to participate in healthy social and economic activities online, or access the critical government resources that are increasingly available on the Internet.

Libraries and support organizations can help connect low-income residents with the online access they need: however, high demand, limited hours and lack of privacy make this solution less than ideal. Additionally, dwindling public budgets will make it more difficult for these organizations to meet the needs of their communities, implying that the children of Zone 126 could fall even further behind their more privileged peers.

***Statistics show that Internet access for low-income communities is very low.***

In low-income communities, access to and competence in using the Internet is limited.

**40 percent of Zone 126 respondents do not have Internet access at home.**

National statistics show that broadband adoption rates rise with income. In 2010, the broadband adoption rates by household income are as follows:<sup>297</sup>

U.S. Broadband Adoption Rates (2010)	
Household Income	Adoption Rate
Less than \$30,000	45%
\$30,000–\$49,999	67%
\$50,000–\$74,999	79%
\$75,000+	87%

Due to high costs, parents in low-income communities may not be able to afford the purchase of a computer or the monthly fees for Internet access. In Zone 126, only 40 percent of Project 126 Community Survey respondents reported that they had access to the Internet in their home. However, the majority understands that the Internet has the power to improve their daily lives:<sup>298</sup> more than three-quarters (78 percent) of respondents reported that the Internet is or would be useful in their daily lives. Moreover, nearly seven in 10 respondents (69 percent) reported that they would likely attend a free training program for using computers and the Internet, indicating both a general lack of community Internet proficiency and a desire to gain those skills.

**Internet access offers considerable educational and economic benefits for children and youth.**

Studies show that home computer and Internet access is associated with higher academic performance.<sup>299, 300</sup> Especially in cases where public school resources are lacking, the Internet

can also facilitate self-education, including informal learning processes and self-education efforts, such as research and information exchange via web browsing.<sup>301</sup> E-learning opportunities have dramatically increased over the past few years, and for students facing situational barriers to consistent school attendance (a bigger problem in low-income communities than in higher-income ones), web-based learning may provide a suitable complement or an alternative to classroom learning.<sup>302</sup>

**A number of barriers prevent access to the Internet for low-income families.**

Affordability is the most obvious barrier to Internet access and proficiency.<sup>303, 304</sup> In the US, less than two-thirds of families (64 percent) with household income below \$30,000 per year use the Internet.

Education can also prevent people from using the Internet: only about half (52 percent) of adults without a high school diploma use it.<sup>305, 306</sup>

Immigrants and people for whom Spanish is a primary language are less likely than other groups to use the Internet. About 78 percent of Latinos who are English-dominant and 76 percent of bilingual Latinos use the Internet, compared to only 32 percent of Latinos who are Spanish-dominant.<sup>307</sup> When parents who do not speak English do not have access to the Internet at home, their children (who typically do speak English) lose out on the ability to benefit from home Internet access. Students for whom English is a second language lose an invaluable resource for writing, reading and communication practice when they are not provided with Internet access.<sup>308</sup>

Given the number of poor, under-educated, minority and English language learner residents in Zone 126, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of survey respondents reported that they either do not have access to the Internet at home (40 percent), or are not able to access the Internet whenever they want or need to (34 percent).

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***Lack of Internet access and proficiency affects daily life for children and their families.***

As well as cutting children off from a powerful knowledge base and educational aid, the lack of Internet access prevents low-income parents from participating in healthy social and economic activities.<sup>309</sup> For instance, government application processes for unemployment benefits, health insurance and tax refunds are not only readily available on the Internet, but are processed at

a much faster pace for those submitting online. Many federal and local government agencies that provide opportunities and resources<sup>310</sup> for children and their families have migrated information and services from paper to online format, potentially shutting out under-resourced populations who lack regular Internet access and/or proficiency.<sup>311</sup> The resulting shift from in-person and paper-based service to online delivery has added to the creation of a digital divide between those who utilize the Internet and those who do not.<sup>312</sup>

**69 percent of Zone 126 respondents expressed an interest in free training programs for computers and Internet use.**

# Civic Engagement

Promoting civic engagement is an effective way to foster community networking, internal support and skill development. Through joint civic aims, residents build their community and individual civic talents, increase tolerance and support collective action on common goals.<sup>313</sup>

Civic engagement can confer a range of specific benefits on children and youth, including increased likelihood of academic success and employability, lower rates of depression and higher levels of happiness and self-esteem.

Children also benefit when adults in the community spend time tutoring or mentoring them as part of civic outreach activities; these interactions can improve graduation rates and reduce the chances that children with incarcerated parents will themselves go to prison.

However, civic participation rates in Zone 126 are low. One reason for this may be that a lack of economic self-sufficiency prevents residents from spending time engaged in activities that don't benefit them financially. They may also simply not be aware of opportunities to volunteer, or

may not think they have the skills or education to make a difference in their community. Based on Project 126 Community Survey responses, the barriers to civic participation may be greatest among immigrants.

***Civic engagement benefits youth who volunteer their services to the community.***

Youth who engage in civic outreach activities, such as volunteering in a soup kitchen, tutoring or mentoring a child, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting,<sup>314</sup> enjoy a number of personal benefits. Volunteerism reduces despair and depression,<sup>315</sup> and may increase happiness; adolescents who identify their primary motive as helping others

**Only 30 percent of Zone 126 respondents participate in civic activities, and participation rates are even lower—46 percent—among immigrants.**

are three times happier than those who lack such altruistic motivation.<sup>316</sup> Youth who volunteer also tend to be more socially competent and have higher self-esteem.<sup>317</sup> Some studies even show that the long-term health benefits of participating in community activities equal those of increased exercise and physical fitness activities.<sup>318</sup>

Youth who volunteer are also more likely to complete higher education and be more employable. They are almost twice as likely as non-volunteers to report that they are “very likely” to graduate from a four-year college.<sup>319</sup> During and after college, the connections and networks accessed through civic participation are more likely to lead to employment than presently existing networks of friends and family.<sup>320</sup> In fact, employers often seek non-academic qualities gained through civic engagement, such as the ability to participate in group work and to communicate effectively.<sup>321</sup> Furthermore, youth that are civically engaged are much more likely to be engaged as adults, and will have greater comfort with and skill in civic participation.

There are social benefits to individuals who are civically engaged, too, such as expanding social networks. About 80 percent of Project 126 Community Survey respondents reported that they would “like to get to know more people outside of their current circle of friends.” Enhanced social networks can be of great benefit to adults and their children; better connectivity assists parents in job searches and positive mental health, which in turn provides their children with a more positive home environment.

***Civic engagement benefits the youth who receive volunteer services.***

Studies show that children who are the recipients of civic engagement activities also benefit greatly. Children in disadvantaged circumstances who receive tutoring and mentorship from volunteer youth and adults can improve their school test scores and their chances of graduating successfully.<sup>322</sup> Children

whose parents are incarcerated may be less likely to go to prison themselves if they meet with a mentor once a week.<sup>323</sup>

***Civic participation rates in Zone 126 are low, with a number of barriers to participation among low-income residents.***

Despite the numerous benefits of civic engagement, the rate of civic participation within Zone 126 is low. Only 30 percent of survey respondents reported that they volunteered in the past three months, and only 24 percent are part of a local community group.

***There are several barriers to participation that may prevent residents from volunteering.***

Economic self-sufficiency is a prerequisite for volunteering, because low-income adolescents and parents will logically and of necessity spend their spare time working or seeking paid work, instead of volunteering. Also, civic opportunities may only be advertised in more affluent neighborhoods, preventing lower-income residents from finding and apply for them. And finally, lack of education or skill sets among low-income residents can lead them to believe that they are unable to offer a significant volunteer contribution.<sup>324</sup> There is, in fact, a direct correlation between higher education and higher levels of civic engagement.<sup>325</sup> Civic involvement may be especially challenging for immigrants: nearly half of immigrant survey respondents (46 percent) reported that “being an immigrant makes it difficult for me to get involved in local organizations in my community.”

Better educational opportunities, combined with greater access to financial security and civic opportunities, may help low-income individuals and the immigrant population become more involved in their communities.



# The Arts

The arts—visuals, music, dance, and theater—play a major role in promoting equal opportunity for children.<sup>326</sup> Arts programs are associated with improved academic test scores, critical thinking skills and future employability.

The arts yield the greatest benefits for the most disengaged youth; those with low academic achievement or low attendance, and English Language Learner students.

The arts and cultural programming also help to build healthier communities by increasing civic engagement, increasing neighborhood desirability and quality of life, and introducing new sources of community revenue, such as new jobs and improved property values. Despite the many benefits the arts offer to children and the community at large, public school students living in Zone 126 lack access to the arts, due in large part to city budget cuts.

Without adequate funding for the arts, the Zone 126 community risks losing touch with

some of their most disaffected children and youth, impairing academic performance and reducing economic benefits to the community.

***The arts and creative programs greatly benefit children's academic performance and future employability.***

Involvement in the arts is positively correlated with high academic achievement that becomes more pronounced over time.<sup>327, 328</sup> Practicing the arts leads to increased cognition and ability to pay attention.<sup>329</sup> Specifically, prolonged participation in some artistic endeavors, such as playing an instrument or participating in a theater production, has been linked to higher math

**Both Zone 126 middle schools do not offer adequate arts options, with one quarter of students lacking a visual arts option and more than two thirds lacking access to theatre programs.**

and reading levels.<sup>330</sup> Also, students involved in arts programs develop advanced skills that are often not taught or tested directly in school. These abilities include problem-solving, thinking creatively, and communication,<sup>331, 332, 333</sup> all of which are invaluable in life and when competing in the job market.<sup>334</sup>

***Arts programs are particularly effective in engaging at-risk and disconnected youth.***

Studies show that arts programs have a great ability to reach disengaged or “disconnected” youth in the community,<sup>335, 336, 337</sup> and that these at-risk youth are highly likely to sustain attendance in these programs.<sup>338</sup> For low-income students, arts engagement increases rates of college matriculation and later success in securing employment.<sup>339</sup> The attractiveness of arts programs to otherwise disengaged youth may be due in part to their ability to engage students in positive social interactions, as well as the fact that arts programs are relatively unthreatening and carry less stigma than other academic options.<sup>340</sup>

***Arts programs facilitate the development of a culturally rich, healthy and more economically viable community.***

In a community as diverse as Zone 126, the arts and cultural programming can be used to facilitate integration and acceptance amongst youth as well as adults.<sup>341</sup> For youth struggling with language and communication problems, especially those who are foreign-born (or whose parents are foreign-born), the arts can greatly aid cognitive and linguistic development.<sup>342, 343</sup> Also, arts programming serves as a gateway for civic participation, as those involved in the arts are more likely to perform community service or join a local interest group.<sup>344, 345, 346</sup> The benefits in terms of neighborhood economic growth are also evident: a high presence of arts and cultural programming is strongly related to a perceived

“excellent” quality of life and increased property values,<sup>347, 348</sup> while arts endeavors create new jobs and sources of local revenue.<sup>349, 350, 351</sup>

***Zone 126 is lacking arts programs for residents, and especially for youth.***

Arts instruction in New York City public schools is severely lacking.<sup>352</sup> In 2008, only four percent of New York City elementary schools met the state requirements for arts education.<sup>353</sup> Much of the lack can be explained by city budget cuts—since the 2006-2007 school year, spending on arts supplies decreased by 68 percent, or \$7.2 million.<sup>354</sup>

In Zone 126, the story is much the same. Despite the fact that Zone 126 has a significant legacy in the arts, (such as a thriving film industry and connection to jazz music, and has seen extensive recent development in arts institutions, local arts and cultural programming) responses among focus groups demonstrate that efforts to engage the local population—especially youth—are still lacking both in and out of school. According to the 2009–10 New York City School Survey, the two middle schools in Zone 126 (including IS 126, a school for visual and performing arts) do not provide adequate opportunities for arts education. About a quarter of students (25–27 percent) do not have a visual arts option and well over two-thirds (69–88 percent) do not have access to theatre programs at their school. The availability of out-of-school opportunities is even lower.<sup>355, 356</sup>

# Conclusion

Zone 126 is a unique and historic area with tremendous potential, but its residents are affected by many issues that hinder their health, wellbeing and ability to contribute meaningfully to their community.

The Zone 126 community as a whole suffers from inadequate access to such essentials as education and health care, while coping with high levels of crime, addiction and other destabilizing influences. However, these privations and challenges tell only one part of the story. The community of Long Island City/Astoria, built on the rich history of the Western Queens area, is also vibrant, multicultural and multi-ethnic. It has the potential to become something extraordinary: a cultural and artistic center that enriches the entire New York City region.

As nonprofits and community-focused funders, we now have the opportunity to make a real difference in this troubled area, and to help shape a better future in a way that supports the residents' own vision. They have offered a surprisingly unified voice on the issues that

affect them, and have made their priorities clear: they want to see the children given the opportunities that they themselves never had. They want them to benefit from a stable family life, a healthier lifestyle, quality education and better access to medical care. They want them to feel safe, supported and cared for. And they want them to be given a chance to fulfill their true potential.

Through the Project 126 initiative and this report, we at The Elmezzi Foundation have been able to share the voice of the community with you. Now we invite you to see this diverse community first-hand. We would be more than happy to arrange a tour of the area and introduce you to residents and nonprofit leaders who are working tirelessly to make a difference. These active community members welcome

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your interest, and are open to and eager for new ideas and new collaborations. A meaningful, face-to-face conversation could spark the beginning of something truly rewarding.

We hope this report will help you to envision the tremendous potential in this area, and inspire you to help realize it through strategic investments and innovative partnerships. Please

contact us by visiting [www.elmezzi.org](http://www.elmezzi.org) and giving us a call to learn more or arrange a visit.

With your help, we can revive the neighborhoods of Long Island City and Astoria, turning them into supportive environments that will help the next generation fulfill their personal potential and achieve the American dream.

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Conducting a grassroots, comprehensive needs assessment is no easy task; and The Elmezzi Foundation could not have reached its goals without a talented staff, a passionate group of interns, and a committed circle of volunteers from the LIC/Astoria community.

It is only through the collective efforts of these individuals that we were able to survey over 3,000 residents, conduct numerous focus groups, interview dozens of leaders, and host a successful community celebration.

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Sincerely,



Christopher Cutter  
Program Officer

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