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*Serving Newark's Youth for 40 Years*

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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**NEWARK GROUP TACKLES ISSUE OF ABSENTEE FATHERS**

Newark (4/9/09) - Organizations concerned with the impact on children of absentee fathers met yesterday in Newark to explore ways to address this long-standing and sensitive issue. Marnie G. McKoy, Principal at Link Community School in Newark, in collaboration with Mr. Kamaal Bennett, Executive Director of the New Jersey Education Consortium co-moderated the meeting, held at the Newark Regional Business Partnership office on Broad Street.

Ms. McKoy, after participating in the MSNBC documentary, *A Father's Promise*, and after working, as an educator, with many students living without an involved father, was inspired to bring the challenge directly to the community. The documentary, which aired this past February, focused on three children born in Newark, one of whom is a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at Link, and how their absentee fathers have affected their lives. In the documentary, Ms. McKoy was part of a roundtable discussion on the issue, a panel including Newark Mayor Cory Booker, former NFL football player Tiki Barber and others, moderated by NBC's Al Roker.

“We realize that powerful organizations in Newark are addressing the issue of absentee fathers in various ways,” said Mrs. McKoy, “but I feel it’s important to approach the problem collectively -- to identify the available resources and perhaps pool them to help strengthen programs or create new ones.” “We need to help and to find ways to

proactively empower fathers to invest in the lives of their children and to help children cope with the lack of their biological father in their lives so they can be whole,” she said.

The group, confronting the very real needs of the impacted youth, was enthusiastic about the opportunity to address the issue and focused their discussion on the economic, legal and relationship issues that are obstacles to paternal involvement. Participants inventoried some of the ways they might engage other organizations and community leaders in the effort to find solutions to help the impacted children, to encourage and engage the absentee fathers and educate the teachers and the community about the issue.

Besides Ms. McKoy and Mr. Bennett, those attending this initial meeting were: Ms. Dale Anglin, Program Officer, Victoria Foundation; Dr. Joelle J. Tutela, Director of Teacher Education at Rutgers, Newark, Department of Urban Education; Mr. Michael Bagley, Director of Project U.S.E.; Ms. Solangel Maldonado, professor of law at Seton Hall University; Mr. Michael Riccardelli, Media Relations, Seton Hall Law School; and Ms. Laura Bryant, Trustee, National Alliance on Mental Health.

After the meeting, Ms. McKoy stated, “This was an impressive start to actively engage organizations on this topic. We have farther to go, and plan future meetings to bring other associations and community leaders who face the challenge of fatherless children on board. The issue is large, but we will pursue it because things won’t change unless we do something.”

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