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January 7, 2011

Hon. Cory A. Booker
Mayor of Newark
City Hall
920 Broad Street
Newark, NJ 07102

Dear Mayor Booker:

I recently became aware of your efforts to improve education in the city of Newark and of Mark Zuckerberg's decision to help you in that endeavor. As a writer of over ten books on education, I've been aware of the problems that beset American public schools for over forty years and have worked strenuously to find ways to improve the performance of our children. But the greatest obstacle I have found is the educational establishment that refuses to make the necessary changes that would guarantee academic success for all students.

I first became aware of the reading problem back in the 1960s when I was an editor at Grosset & Dunlap in New York. I was invited to become a member of the Reading Reform Foundation's National Advisory Council. It was then that I became aware of the war among educators between advocates of phonics and advocates of look-say, the whole-world or sight method that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese.

I did an investigation of the reading problem and came to the conclusion that the sight method could cause reading disability and dyslexia among many children. I put all of this in my book, *The New Illiterates*, published in 1973. The Establishment response to my findings was zero.

Determined to provide parents with a way of saving their children from such educational malpractice, I created a simple, inexpensive, easy-to-use intensive phonics reading program--Alpha-Phonics--that any parent could use to teach their children to read at home. It has now been used very successfully by thousands of homeschooling parents for over twenty years and has produced wonderfully literate children.

In your press release about Newark's Education Opportunity, it states that "In 2008-2009, only 40 percent of students could read and write at grade level by the end of the third grade, only 54 percent of high school students graduated and just 38 percent enrolled in college."

I can show you how to get all of the children in Newark's schools to become proficient

readers, dramatically increase the rate of graduation, and increase the percentage of students enrolling in college.

I recently received a testimonial from a teacher in Florida who has been using Alpha-Phonics for the last ten years, and he has literally performed miracles with some of the worst readers in his classes. I can state without any equivocation, that I can produce a miracle in Newark if permitted by you to do so. I am enclosing this teacher's remarkable testimony of the power of this program.

The "miracle" that Alpha-Phonics performs is really no miracle at all. It is simply the sensible and proper use of a primary program that puts the emphasis on the development of the right side of the brain, the language faculty. Today's schools force children to use their right brains to perform the functions of the left brain, thereby actually deforming the children's brains. This phenomenon can be seen by extensive brain scans conducted by neuroscientist Stanislas Dehaene, author of *Reading in the Brain*. In other words, common teaching practices in our schools are actually deforming the brains of our children. And that is why the children act out, knowing that something harmful, which they can't understand, is being done to them.

All children are born with a dominant language faculty in their left brains. When the continued natural development of this faculty is thwarted by faulty teaching methods, you get educational problems. You get ADD and ADHD. I would like to show you how it is possible to reverse this process and get kids back into a positive learning mode. I propose a pilot project whereby I am given the worst elementary school in Newark and allowed to demonstrate how it can become the best school in the city in about eight months.

Although I have lived in New England since 1965, I know Newark well. My sister lived there with her husband and children, and as a teenager I spent many pleasant summer weeks on leafy Elwood Place. I know that Newark today is not what it once was: the safest, most pleasant place to live in America. But I am more than willing to do whatever I can to assist you in making Newark's schools the best in the nation.

I hope you will take me up on my offer. This is an opportunity that Newark can't afford to miss.

Sincerely yours,

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

Cc: Governor Chris Christie, Mark Zuckerberg: Startup Education

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161 Great Road Littleton, MA 01460 781-354-2040
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February 12, 2011

Hon. Cory A. Booker
Mayor of Newark
City Hall
920 Broad Street
Newark, NJ 07102

Dear Mayor Booker:

I hope you have had a chance to consider my proposal of January 7th to take the worst elementary school in Newark and transform it into the best school in the city. Here is an outline of the plan to accomplish that academic miracle..

But first, I want to convince you why it should be done. Each year over a million black children enter our public education system eager to learn, yet at the end of the process at least half are functionally illiterate. You and your administration can stop that process of failure, provided the will is there to do so.

Second, this country will not be able to compete with the Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians who are all learning to read and speak English by methods greatly superior to the ones being used in our schools to teach American children to read, write, and speak their own language.

Forty years of experience as a writer and educator have gone into the plan I am proposing. I hope you will be willing to give the "Newark Experiment," as I call it, the backing it will need from the Mayor's office, the highest level of Newark's government. This is how the plan will be implemented:

1. Preliminary Conference: As Plan Designer I would like to confer with you and Dr. Clifford B. Janey, the Superintendent of Schools, and others in your administration on the need to implement the Newark Experiment. Agreement is needed so that the plan can be implemented willingly by all concerned.
2. Selection of School: The selection of the elementary school for this pilot project should be made on the basis of test scores. This should not be difficult to do since each school has published its test scores. Let us select that school with the lowest test scores.
3. School Visit: I would like to visit that school and become acquainted with the Principal and faculty, as well as the students. I would want to examine the materials presently being used to teach the children their basics. It would be essential to bring on board the faculty of the school and for me to explain why they should be willing to take

part in this historic experiment which will have its ramifications throughout the country. Their enthusiastic cooperation would guarantee success.

4. Teacher Training: The summer would be used to train the faculty in the essentials of the plan. A team of trainers would be brought to Newark to share their experiences and practices in using Alpha-Phonics. Obviously, the faculty will have many questions which the training team will be able to answer.

5. Budget Authorization: The Superintendent of Schools should authorize the purchase of the necessary books for the experiment: Alpha-Phonics, the Little Readers, Flash Cards, lined notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers, etc. A budget can be provided outlining the necessary expenditures. Compensation for Dr. Blumenfeld and the trainers, who will be coming from Texas and Florida, should be included in the budget.

6. Parental Input: In September 2011, parents will be informed of the experiment in their children's school. Their cooperation is needed to make sure that their children do their homework, which will help their children succeed.

7. School Testing: At the beginning of the school year, all third- to sixth-grade students in the school should be tested with the Oral Reading Assessment Test in order to create a Literacy Profile of the school. In that way, those students in need of strong remedial programs will be identified. For example, in the third grade you will find some students reading at a sixth grade level and others reading at a first grade level. In the sixth grade you will find students reading at a second grade level and others reading above their grade level. Testing the students will give the faculty the information they need about each student's reading level.

8. The Curriculum: All first and second graders will be taught to read and write with Alpha-Phonics. We expect 100% success. Everyone in the rest of the school will be brought up to grade level in reading and writing. Basic arithmetic will also be taught to all students. We expect 100% success, with extra tutoring for those who are having a more difficult time reaching the desired goal. Other subjects should include Local Geography and History, Elementary Science, English Grammar, and other subjects determined by the Superintendent of Schools. These students will be able to thrive in high school and go on to college.

9. Final Testing: By June 2012, the entire school should be tested to see the results of the experiment. By then the school will be the best in the city and able to celebrate its achievement. Care should be taken to make sure that the school does not revert to its past practices that made it the worst school in the city. The new curriculum should become a permanent part of the school.

10. Final Report: The success of the program should be made public by way of a press release and a news conference and the issuance of a Final Report. The city of Newark should proudly proclaim its success in transforming its worst school into its best school through a unique program that can be duplicated in any city in the country. The Report

should be sent to the nation's leading media and the Mayor and Superintendent should be available for interviews.

As you can see, Mayor Booker, this is an exciting plan that will bring credit to Newark and your administration. Your willingness to try something that has not been tried anywhere before will be seen as proof that the public schools can be reformed to do what they were created to do: produce a literate, intelligent population. The plan is eminently doable. All it requires is the will to carry it out. The Newark Experiment can become a model for the entire country to emulate. It will prove that educational success is possible in core-city environments.

But what it really requires is thinking out of the box. That is the real key to success.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

Cc: Governor Chris Christie, Mark Zuckerberg