



# DISTRIC

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**APPENDIX** 

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# \$7.5 MILLION

of Federal NMTC Financing from AMCREF Community Capital

# \$8.0 MILLION

Federal NMTC Financing from BlueHub Capital

# \$41 MILLION

Total Project Investment

### 100 \$40 MILLION energy-positive school building, estimated jobs supported at savings to JCSD the new school, averaging 94% 'above local living over building's exceeding lifespan LEED platinum standards wage 79% 123,000 2,148 SF of modern of students in rooftop solar PV classrooms. JCSD receive free panel's installed equipment'& or reduced lunch, reflecting need common space



This report assesses the outcomes of \$15,500,000 in federal New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) financing from AMCREF Community Capital (\$7,500,000) and BlueHub Capital (\$8,000,000) provided to the Jones County School District (JCSD), a public school system based in rural Trenton, NC. AMCREF and BlueHub's investment enabled JCSD to construct an innovative new school building, consolidating three separate, deteriorating schools into a single state-of-the-art facility that has generated newfound optimism in this rural LIC. The impacts and outcomes are summarized through four core areas of impact analysis: employment, environment, community, and economy.

The new building features over 2,000 rooftop solar panels, geothermal pumps, real-time energy data and an array of other sustainable attributes that coalesce to make it one of the greenest schools ever built. "This building is in a very elite class of energy-positive buildings," explained Robbie Ferris, CEO of Sfl+a Architects, the lead architect on the project. "There are only a handful of buildings in the world that generate 70% more power than they consume."

This investment in sustainable architecture is not only a new benchmark for eco-friendly school buildings—it represents dramatic economic benefits for this rural LIC, estimated to save Jones County \$40,000,000 in operating expenses over the lifespan of the school, or \$700,000 annually. Recurring costs like school utility bills—typically some of largest expenditures for counties the size of Jones—are effectively eliminated by the building's highly efficient design. By freeing up financial resources for Jones County, AMCREF and BlueHub's investment empowers local officials to combat this community's most pressing challenges: out-migration and, relatedly, a dwindling tax base.

The new school building supports 100 jobs in the community, paying an average of 94% above the local living wage, and at least 90% of staff are hires from the surrounding community. For a rural community that faces major obstacles, the facility signals a new direction. "The new school opened up the doors for other things to happen in our community," said Sheryl Ward, a lifelong Jones County resident. "It's bonded everybody closer."

# COMMUNITY CONTEXT: ABOUT THE LIC

Pictured above: Trenton, NC, the county seat. With fewer than 300 residents, Trenton's population has declined by half since 1970.

Jones County, NC is a rural county of about 10,000, situated a half-hour's drive inland from the North Carolina coast. None of the county's towns have more than 1,000 residents, and there are only a handful of traffic lights. The local economy is predominantly agricultural, although the largest single employer is, in fact, Jones County Public Schools. Local officials have struggled to attract industry and expand the local job base.

"It's a poor county, so we don't have a lot of the resources that other counties have," said Sheryl Ward, a lifelong Jones County resident. As of 2019, 26.4% of Jones County residents live in poverty, more than double the national poverty rate. "Some of our kids don't get much support at home," explained Holly Ball, Principal at Trenton Elementary School. "Oftentimes, coming to school is their safe place." Jones County's challenges intensified in September 2018, when the region suffered an acute blow from Hurricane Florence, the wettest storm on record in the Carolinas. In Trenton, NC—the county seat—84% of households were flooded. A year later, many area residents are still unable to move back into their homes.

Despite persistent challenges, community members expressed a shared belief in the power and importance of investing in young people to build a brighter future. "That is what's important," said Dr. Michael Bracy, Superintendent of Jones County School District. "At the end of the day, we did this for children."

## TARGET AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

# Race: African-American 36% White 61% Hispanic or Latino 3% Two or more races 1% Median Age: 45.5 Bachelor's Degree: 14%





Pictured above: the previous Jones County Middle School is no longer in use now that the new school is operational. A former student described the old school as "falling apart."

The Jones County School District (JCSD) serves approximately 720 students K-12, educating the majority of the school-age population in this rural county of under 10,000 residents. Minorities make up 57% of the student population. Prior to AMCREF and BlueHub's investment, JCSD operated separate elementary, middle and high schools, all built in the 1950s and in various states of decline. The school district was struggling to maintain these aging facilities, cash-strapped due to persistent economic development challenges, a decreasing population and shrinking tax base. In fact, the declining state of the schools was believed to be contributing to out-migration to neighboring counties.

By the mid-2000s, local officials were keenly aware of the need to revamp their local schools and actively searching for a path forward. "This is not something that people just thought of," explained Superintendent Dr. Bracy, who has been with the school district since 2007. "They've been trying to build a new school for years."

Securing any level of financing for the school district proved to be a daunting task. "They never thought they could afford three new facilities," explained Ferris, the architect. "Just to build the new high school they wanted, they would have had to roughly double property taxes." JCSD was already spending \$787,000 each year to operate its three existing school buildings.

Eventually, stakeholders determined that consolidating the three existing schools into one central facility could generate enough efficiencies to make updating the school system feasible. The Jones County School Foundation was established to streamline funding efforts for a new K-12 school. Over several years, the Foundation secured a patchwork of bond financing, grants and state funding to move the needle on the project, but a substantial gap remained. At least one potential lender pulled out over concerns about out-migration from the county and its negative impact on local tax revenue Several officials were concerned the project could be delayed indefinitely.

In December 2017, AMCREF and BlueHub provided a collective \$15,500,000 of NMTC financing to the Jones County School District, filling the project's financing gap and enabling the community to break ground on the state-of-the-art new school building. "This facility could not have been done through the traditional delivery method when you look at first cost, interest cost and electrical cost over 40 years," explained Ferris. "AMCREF and BlueHub stepped in with a very significant NMTC allocation, and we were able to secure low cost financing for the project."

Construction lasted from Spring 2018 through Summer 2019, as contractors worked to ready the building for the Fall 2019 school year. The school features 45 classrooms, a gymnasium, stage, cafeteria, administrative offices, and collaborative areas spanning more than 123,000 SF. The elementary, middle and high schools each have adjacent wings with age-appropriate facilities.

### JCSD PROJECT KEY FIGURES

Project Name:	Jones County School District			
Project Address:	31378 N.C. Hwy 58. Trenton, NC			
Project Size:	123,000 SF			
Total Project Cost	\$41,000.000			
Borrower: J	ones County School Foundation			
NMTC funding (AMCREF/BlueHub): \$15,500,000				
Project Closing:	2017			
Construction Con	npleted: 2019			

At the school's grand opening on August 5, 2019, hundreds of community members, students, staff, media, project consultants and government officials gathered to memorialize the onset of a new chapter for the JCSD. In his remarks, Governor Roy Cooper labeled it "the best school in North Carolina," and encouraged the Trenton community to celebrate its accomplishments. "This building was born out of tremendous need," said Ferris. "It couldn't have been done without all the partners coming together—the city, the county, the state, and private sector entities like AMCREF and BlueHub."



### Sustainable design supporting people, planet and profit.

As one of the greenest schools in the U.S., the new JCSD building's beneficial environmental impact is obvious. The state-of-the-art features will also present enhanced educational opportunities for students, all while supporting the school district's bottom line.





Trenton Elementary School students in the Energy Wise Club serve as 'ambassadors' for the new JCSD building. These students lead tours of the school, explaining the many sustainable design features employed in the building to community members.



### **CHECK OUT THE VIDEO**

Want to get to know JCSD's impact even better? Click above to watch a short video about this investment.

# **EMPLOYMENT**



Holly Ball, Principal of Trenton Elementary School.

**Total of 100 FTEs** at the new school, providing full benefits

90% of jobs supported are local hires, paying an average of 94% above local living wage

Drastically improved working environment for staff previously employed in aging schools

300 construction jobs created















AMCREF and BlueHub's investment in the JCSD supported 100 jobs within the new school, a major impact in a community the size of Trenton. In fact, the school district is the largest single employer in Jones County. Moreover, all of the staff dispersed across the three previous schools were able to keep their jobs and transition into roles at the new facility, according to Holly Ball, Principal at Trenton Elementary School.

The 100 FTE jobs sustained by the investment offer full benefits and average salaries of \$41,363, which is 94% above the local living wage of \$21,276 in Jones County. In addition to these permanent jobs, the construction phase of the building sustained 300 temporary construction jobs in the community.

"I know our teachers are ecstatic to come to work in this space," said Ball. The building is intentionally designed to create an ideal learning environment for students, which innately involves creating the best possible teaching environment for staff. For example, the elementary school features interior glass walls throughout, so that teachers can monitor from inside their classrooms while students engage in collaborative common learning spaces. "Before, teachers felt compelled to always keep their students cooped up in their small classroom," explained Ball. "[The new building] just opens up so many possibilities."

The new school represents a major improvement in the working environment for JCSD staff, from deteriorating 1950s structures to a facility that Governor Roy Cooper labeled "the best school in North Carolina." Before the new school opened, teachers received training on the modern educational technology incorporated inside the building, where students and teachers now utilize new laptops, smart TVs, and other learning tools. Several students interested in STEM careers expressed gratitude for a variety of upgrades—especially modern lab equipment—that better prepare them for competitive college opportunities.

High-performance exterior glass brings daylight to classrooms kindergarten through 12th grade. Nearly every staff member interviewed highlighted the significance of the new full-size gymnasium, an amenity never before experienced by the public school system in Jones County. "School culture will definitely increase—for the staff and the students," said Ball.



# ENVIRONMENT



Jelani, Sophomore Student in the Energy Wise Club.

School's solar installation will generate 70% more power than the school consumes, helping to offset 54,000 tons of CO2e over the project's 40-year life span

State-of-the-art facility exceeds LEED platinum standards. Green features include geothermal HVAC, LED lighting, high performance glass, a super-insulated roof, thermal storage, modern air cleaning systems and more

School will serve as a model for incorporating state-of-the-art green features in future construction projects













Designed with dozens of sustainable features, the new Jones County school building is among the greenest schools in the U.S. and exceeds LEED platinum standards. Beyond the 2,148 solar panels lining the building's roof, the school employs a host of energy-saving technologies like LED lighting, high-performance glass and a centralized geothermal HVAC system, as well as real-time energy data interfaces to help students and staff better understand their energy use. All things considered, architects expect the school's solar panels to generate approximately 70% more power than the school consumes, an exceptional achievement for any building. Due to its energy-positive design, the school will offset approximately 1,350 tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually compared to a similarly sized standard, code compliant facility. According to administrators, the building staff are preparing to host delegations from around the world that have reached out about visiting rural Jones County to tour the school. "This is one of the most exciting buildings in the entire industry," said Ferris, the lead architect on the project.

The building is designed not just for efficiency, but to create the best possible indoor environment for students and staff. Air quality is a challenge in eastern North Carolina due to a high concentration of hog farms in the region, which emit airborne pollutants linked to various negative human health outcomes. So while many contaminate control systems rely on replacing indoor air with outdoor air, engineers sought a better, cleaner option for the new school building. They opted instead for an automated air cleaning system that utilizes a much smaller portion of outdoor air, in addition to installing an air barrier envelop to mitigate the risk of mold and further augment air conditions inside.

What's more, this state-of-the-art sustainable school will double as a living classroom, offering students the opportunity to learn about cutting-edge developments in electronics, data science, architecture, energy and environmental engineering. Teachers are embedding the building itself into curriculums across the elementary, middle and high schools. "These students are being taught about the systems in the building, and they will ultimately be the next generation of architects and engineers," said Ferris. The school is aiming to align its curriculum and extracurricular programs with emerging green industries, future careers for which many students expressed a passion. Solar technician, for example, is the fastest growing occupation in the U.S. and is expected to double between 2016 and 2026, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The building made a special impact on the students of the EnergyWISE Club, an extracurricular program comprised of students dedicated to studying energy efficiency, sustainable design and related subjects. Over the summer, students in EnergyWISE received training on the building's numerous energy-efficient features prior to its public opening. According to Andrew LaRowe, who initially established the group as President of EduCon Energy, there is now a waiting list to get into the club. "When I talk to administrators, most of the time the conversation goes to finance, goes to the budget, goes to money," said LaRowe of the motive behind the building's energy efficient building design. "But when I talk to students and say 'why are we doing this?' almost unanimously they hold up their hands and say 'to save the planet!"

Perhaps most importantly, the school will serve as a model green school building that could help catalyze a deeper commitment to sustainability in future construction projects. "We have groups coming in from around the country to tour the school," said LaRowe. "Our hope is that this building will change people's mindsets as far as what's possible in other school districts."



# COMMUNITY



Student Ambassadors at School Grand Opening.

Investment targets needy youth population, a school district in which 79% of students receive free or reduced lunch

New facility will enable JCSD to offer vocational education to 100% of students, resulting in a more educated workforce for this rural LIC

Modern school will help Jones County attract new residents, combating the flow of out-migration from the area















AMCREF and BlueHub's investment in JCSD provides support to a distressed community deeply in need. Of the roughly 720 students served by the school district, 79% receive free or reduced lunch, significantly higher than the national average of 52% and the state average of 57%. "We have kids who come to school because they get to eat," said Ball, Principal at Trenton Elementary. "Certainly you see that in a lot of places, but here in Jones County, it's very prominent."

Ninety percent of the direct FTEs supported at the school are local hires from the surrounding community, and 40% are accessible to individuals with barriers to employment such as no college degree, disabilities, and/or long term unemployment. The 100 FTEs supported by the project cover the full range of staff employed at the school district, including custodial, maintenance, cafeteria, teacher's assistants and other positions. The new facility will enable JCSD to offer vocational education to 100% of students, contributing to a more educated workforce in this rural LIC. Jones County residents will also be able to utilize the building—including the new gym—for a variety of community events. "With the new school, I think there are more opportunities now," said

one freshman at Jones Senior High, who hopes to launch a theatre club at the new school. "It makes you feel like people care about your future."

A less tangible but equally important impact that unfurled across a dozen community interviews is a deep sense of empowerment facilitated by the new building, especially among youth. According to Jones Senior High Principal Bryce Marquis, one student was so struck by the beauty of the new building that he initially didn't believe he and his peers would really be attending school there. "I'll never forget the sincerity on his face—he had never seen anything like this," said Marquis.

By bringing the elementary, middle and high schools under one roof, administrators hope the school will foster connections and mentorship across age groups, strengthening community identity. In fact, studies published in the American Educational Research Journal suggest that schools with wide age-ranges demonstrate higher test scores and have less bullying when compared with traditional age-stratified models. Several teachers also mentioned the possibility of implementing a mentorship program between high school and elementary school students to facilitate greater cohesion.

Perhaps most critically, Jones County residents expressed hope that the ambitious new school can finally stem the tide of out-migration threatening the community's longevity. "A school as beautiful as this can draw in residents, and there are projections that could happen," said Marquis. One junior at the new high school said that the reality of attending such a state-of-the-art school, especially in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Florence, still had not sunk in. "It feels like High School Musical," she said.



# "WITH THE NEW SCHOOL, I THINK THERE ARE MORE OPPORTUNITIES NOW. IT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOUR FUTURE."



# **ECONOMY**



Michael, Freshman Student at Jones Senior High School.

Facility is strongly supported by County and State officials, who also leveraged funding in support

School is expected to save JCSD \$40,000,000 in operating costs over the life of the building, or \$700,000 each year, alleviating cash-strapped local budget

Officials anticipate school will help preserve local tax base by supporting Jones County's population















Since 2000, Jones County has lost about 7% of its population, rarely experiencing net-positive migration flow in a given year. Like many rural counties across the U.S., Jones County faces an uphill battle in combating cycles of out-migration and corresponding reductions in property tax revenue, which leave local officials without the financial resources to invest in their community's future.

The construction phase of JCSD's new facility, facilitated by NMTCs, created a one-time tax impact estimated at \$6,945,000, including approximately \$2,292,000 generated at the state and local level. Moreover, the facility's state-of-the-art sustainable design—including net-positive energy production—will save the school district an estimated \$40,000,000 over the coming decades (\$700,000 annually), unburdening local government from the typically weighty operational costs of administering a school. According to Superintendent Dr. Bracy, school district expenses such as monthly energy bills are often among the largest recurring expenditures in small, rural counties like Jones.



Taken together, the financial impact of the capital investment parlayed with the hyper-efficient, cost-saving design of the school will help alleviate pressure on the local economy and empower Jones County to invest in the future. "Right now is a great time for our community," said Tamika Jurgens, Assistant Director of the Exceptional Children's Department at JCSD. "We're still recovering from that terrible hurricane, but this new school is truly a bright light for everyone, and we really needed it." The project enjoyed strong supported from local, regional and state municipal leaders, who also leveraged tens of millions of dollars towards the project through various sources.

Administrators are betting that an enhanced educational environment for students will translate into better economic outcomes for Jones County as those students graduate into the workforce. Students will experience hands-on training in areas like solar energy and HVAC, using the building itself as a learning tool. Modern electronics, STEM equipment, vocational training programs and other opportunities at the facility will help close the resource gap often evident between poorer school districts and more affluent ones. Programmatic focuses at the new school include automotive technology, agriculture, masonry, business and computer applications, health and occupational sciences, ROTC, art and music, according to administrators. "Now that we have this new school with all this technology, well this little town in Jones County can keep up with other districts now," said Ward, a lifelong resident. "Our students will have the same resources other children have."



"WE'RE STILL RECOVERING FROM THAT TERRIBLE HURRICANE,
BUT THIS NEW SCHOOL IS TRULY A BRIGHT LIGHT FOR
EVERYONE, AND WE REALLY NEEDED IT."

# Scorecard: Four Pillars COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESMENT

Leading NMTC investors like BlueHub and AMCREF score investments to ensure deep impact and consistency with mission. In this case, AMCREF conducted the analysis on behalf of BlueHub as part of the two CDEs' partnership on the JCSD project.

AMCREF conducts an empirical analysis of all of its investments according to four pillars of community impact. This analysis is a valuable tool that enables AMCREF to organize and analyze business impact metrics and compare and rank potential QALICBs to ensure their focus on businesses that will provide the most benefits for the most distressed communities.

During the Four Pillars Analysis, AMCREF gathers substantial quantitative and qualitative community impact data for each potential transaction through discussions with QALICB management, completion of Intake Forms/ Business Summaries, discussions with Advisory

Board (AB) Low-Income Community (LIC) Representatives, conversations with local Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) and QALICB site visits. The system ranks impacts from 1–10 points in each of four key areas. Potential QALICBs must receive an aggregate score of at least 32 points and cannot receive a score below 6 in any of the four categories.

JCSD scores highly across all four pillars of community impact. Sustaining 100 jobs and dramatically improving working environment for staff earned the project an 8 for Employment. The project scored a 10 in Environment due to a remarkable commitment to sustainable architecture that ranks the school among the greenest in the U.S. In the third category, Community, another score of 10 was justified as a result of the school's role in reshaping the trajectory of Jones County. Finally, long-term financial savings stemming from the building contributed to a score of 8 in the Economy pillar.

### AMCREF'S 4 PILLARS OF IMPACT: Total Score 36/40









POINTS POSSIBLE	10	10	10	10
JCSD SCORE	8	10	10	8

# ABOUT BLUEHUB CAPITAL

BlueHub Capital, based in Boston, is a national nonprofit community finance institution dedicated to building healthy communities where low-income people live and work. Since making its first loan in 1985, BlueHub (formerly Boston Community Capital) has invested over \$2 billion and leveraged another \$9 billion in public and private capital for underserved communities across the United States.

Through its three main affiliates, BlueHub offers a broad range of innovative financial tools united by the common purpose of connecting communities with the resources they need to thrive: The BlueHub Loan Fund finances affordable housing, job-creating economic development projects, childcare centers, youth programs, schools, healthcare facilities, and other vital community resources; BlueHub SUN prevents families from losing their homes to foreclosure; and BlueHub Energy ensures that low-income communities are able to participate in the benefits of solar energy.

The Jones County School NMTC investment is a powerful example of the kind of innovation that BlueHub aims to catalyze in support of low-income communities. By utilizing the latest technology in building design, the new school not only signals confidence about the future in a community that previously had to contend with declining facilities, it embodies one of our core values – that low-income communities have a right to expect the same level of excellence as their wealthier neighbors.

To learn more about BlueHub and the impact of its investments, visit bluehubcapital.org.



# APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS & DEFINITIONS

### ABBREVIATION TERM

### **DEFINITION**

CDE	Community Development Entity	A domestic corporation or partnership which a) has a primary mission of serving or providing investment capital for lowincome communities or persons, b) maintains accountability to residents of lowincome communities through their representation on any of the entity's governing board or advisory board, and c) is certified by the CDFI Fund as a CDE (Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, 2012)
FTE	Job / Full Time Equivalent	In accordance with federal reporting on NMTCs, jobs are calculated by totaling the hours of service paid by an employer for parttime and full-time employees and then divided by 2,080 hours which is the estimated work hours for employees (IRS, 2015).
LIC	Low-income community	A community that meets the NMTC qualification criteria, meaning a census tract with poverty rates greater than 20% and median family incomes that do not exceed 80% of the Metropolitan Area (if applicable) or statewide median family income (IRS, 2014).
nmtc	New Markets Tax Credits	The New Markets Tax Credit Program, established by Congress in the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000, permits individual and corporate taxpayers to receive a credit against federal income taxes for making Qualified Equity Investments in qualified community development entities in order to create jobs and improvements in low-income communities (IRS, 2014).
QALICB	Qualified Active Low-Income Community Business	A Qualified Active Low-Income Community Business is any organization or partnership for which a) at least 50% of total gross income is derived from active business activity within a low-income community (LIC), b) a substantial portion of the use of tangible property of the entity is within a LIC, and c) a substantial portion of services performed for the entity by employees are performed within a LIC (IRS, 2006).
φLICI	Qualified Low-Income Community Investment	Meets the following criteria: "(a) any capital or equity investment in, or loan to, any Qualified Active Low-Income Community Business (QALICB); (b) the purchase from a CDE of any loan made by such entity that is a Qualified Low-Income Community Investment; (c) financial counseling and other services to

# **APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY**

LifeCity offers a community-based assessment designed to capture the social and environmental impact of organizations. LifeCity begins each Impact Report by understanding the needs of each client. Each investor may have his or her criteria when choosing to invest, and these indicators need clear measurement and categories for tracking a return. Next, LifeCity reviews the terms and agreements made for the investment and the history of other investment structures leveraged for a project. This includes review of the Community Benefits Agreement, Sponsor assessments, and discussions with the Investee. LifeCity conducts interviews with a broad group of local community leaders. Formal interviews and a review of community planning initiatives help us evaluate the alignment of the investment with real community needs and existing economic development plans. Next, LifeCity visits the Investee and completes an impact assessment.

This assessment is completed in person and a tour of the facility is made in order to verify data. LifeCity ultimately provides an Impact Report for the investor to summarize results. In addition to this report, LifeCity can create a process to track impact indicators across projects/investments. Furthermore, LifeCity provides recommendations to help ensure Investee health and continue to support business development over time.

This report was designed by YEP Graduate and Mentor Jihad Doucette. <u>www.youthempowermentproject.org</u>

LifeCity, L3C is a certified Women's Business Enterprise





### **COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS**

Sheryl WardLifelongAndrew LaRowePresiderJelaniSophmonCamille + SarahJuniors, 3

Michael Kayla + Ben Sophmore, Jones Senior High Juniors, Jones Senior High Freshman, Jones Senior High 3rd Graders, Trenton Elementai

### **STAFF INTERVIEWS**

Tamika Jurgens
Dr. Michael Bracy

**Holly Ball** 

**Bryce Marquis** 

**Robbie Ferris** 

EC Data Manager, JCSD

Superintendent, JCSE

Principal, Trenton Elementary

Principal, Jones Senior High

Lead Architect Sfl+a