"If You've Got a Good Harness on Your Kids…":

Models of Child Well-Being and Learning Among Jacksonville Residents

A FRAMEWORKS RESEARCH REPORT

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I.   Introduction

This is the second report in a larger multi-year, multi-method research project sponsored by the Northeast Florida Children's Mental Health Coalition with its grantees and partners — The Jacksonville Children's Commission and the Partnership for Child Health as part of the Kids 'N Care Initiative. The goal of the larger project is to develop a "core story" — a narrative framework of interwoven values, metaphors, and principles — that can help broaden the public conversation about children's rights, needs, and well-being in Jacksonville. The project will train stakeholders across a variety of institutional settings in the application of this messaging platform and provide advocates with a set of tools to use in building a more productive public conversation about improving the systems and programs that serve all of Jacksonville's children.

This communications work accompanies the development and implementation of an integrated system of care for Jacksonville's children and their families. As such, the research is intended to provide community representatives with a way to talk about the functions and benefits of an integrated system in ways that connect to all parts of the community and build consensus and support for the changes currently being envisioned in Jacksonville.

This study follows up on a previous research report, "Development and Disparity: A Meta-Analysis of FrameWorks Research on Children's Issues".[1] This earlier report analyzed and synthesized the full scope of FrameWorks' national research around children's issues. The earlier report identified a set of cultural models that FrameWorks' research has found to play a dominant role in Americans' understanding of children, child health, learning, and development. Cultural models are those deep and implicit patterns of understanding that members of the general public rely upon to reason and process information.[2] This current report explores the degree to which these broad cultural models identified in FrameWorks' past research are, in fact, used by Jacksonville residents as they think about children's issues.

As described in that earlier report, the American public's cultural models are often at odds with how advocates and experts understand the factors that shape children's outcomes — what explains why some children do well and others don't and what can and should be done to improve outcomes for all children.[3] In particular, while experts are attuned to the importance of community-wide and population-level risk and protective factors for children, and to the role of public policy in addressing those factors, Americans are largely unaccustomed to thinking about children's well-being from those broader vantage points.

The contrast between expert and public thinking sets up a central challenge — how to build public support around those policies that stand the best chance of improving child well-being. Understanding the public's cultural models is a key step in addressing this challenge. Locating these models allows child advocates to see what they are "up against" as they move messages out into the public sphere in efforts to build systems and create social change. Understanding these models also sets the stage for subsequent reframing efforts by

identifying specific elements of public understanding that undermine efforts to create broader social change.

To that end, the earlier report also described the set of strategic communication tools that FrameWorks has developed and tested to help child advocates communicate more effectively with the national public. These tools include metaphors and values that have been shown to move public thinking in constructive directions and create greater alignment with the policies and understandings advocated by experts.

As a follow-up to that earlier national report, the current report sets its focus squarely on the city of Jacksonville to discuss more specifically how Jacksonville residents think about children's issues. As will be described below, Jacksonville residents talk and think about children in ways that are largely consistent with FrameWorks' broader national findings, employing a comparable suite of cultural models to understand and think about why children do or do not do well, how they learn, and what can and should be done to promote their well-being. While these cultural models are situated in the particular landscape of Jacksonville, as people talk about the city's neighborhoods and history, they are embedded in assumptions and ways of understanding that are not unique to the city itself. The end result is a striking parallelism between the Jacksonville data and our broader national findings, one that suggests that many of the research tools already developed by FrameWorks will be important tools for the coalition as it strives to reframe the conversation around children's development and well-being in Jacksonville. To that end, FrameWorks is currently completing analysis of a series of 40 On-the-Street Interviews, conducted in June 2013, to establish the effectiveness of existing framing tools. A forthcoming video will demonstrate the power of those tools in moving public understanding in constructive directions.

In the report that follows, we first provide a brief description of the methods used to gather and analyze data. We then present the findings, using quotes from Jacksonville informants to illustrate specific cultural models. More detail about the cultural models identified here can be found in the project's first report, Development and Disparity: A Meta-Analysis of FrameWorks Research on Children's Issues. Finally, we provide a set of conclusions and areas for future communications research in the city.

II.   Research Methods

FrameWorks anthropologists conducted a set of 30 one-on-one, two-hour Cultural Models Interviews with Jacksonville residents from December 2012 through February 2013. Consistent with methods employed in psychological anthropology,[4] Cultural Models Interviews use a set of open-ended questions to elicit ways of thinking and talking about target issues and, through close analysis of transcripts, identify shared patterns of reasoning. Using this method over the past 10 years, FrameWorks has learned a great deal about how Americans understand issues related to the Coalition's interests. Therefore, the goal of these specific interviews was to explore whether what FrameWorks already knows about how Americans more broadly think about these issues – child mental health, child development, education, child poverty, race, and government – is also true of how Jacksonville residents think about these same issues. The process of triangulating past research with the current set of interviews allows FrameWorks to develop hypotheses about which of the existing FrameWorks' communication tools are likely to be effective or ineffective in the Jacksonville context. Identification and testing of these tools has begun and will continue in subsequent stages of this project.

Participants were recruited by a professional market research firm in Jacksonville to represent variation in ethnicity, gender, age, educational background, and self-reported political identification. Among the 30 interview participants, 17 were women, and 13 were men. Twelve self-reported as African-American, three as Hispanic, and 15 as white. Eight described themselves as "conservative," 10 as "middle of the road," and 12 as "liberal." The mean age across the 30 participants was 43, extending from six participants in their 20s to four in their 60s. Nine were high school graduates; eight had some college education; 10 had college degrees; and three had some postgraduate education. Twenty were married, 10 were single, 12 were parents of at least one child, and 18 had no children. With informants' verbal and written consent, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

III.   Findings

Anaylsis suggests that Jacksonville residents draw on a complicated set of intersecting cultural models to think about children's development, well-being, and learning. These models represent the most readily available ways to *define* what it means for children to do well, to explain what *factors* shape children's well-being, to explain *why* some children do better than others, and to think about *who* is responsible and *what should be done* to improve outcomes for children across the city.

Below we present the cultural models that emerged from the research and organize these patterned understandings around a set of seven questions.

I. What is child development and how does it happen?

1. **The *Life Journey* Model:** Jacksonville informants thought about child development through the idea that every child is on a journey through life, where the trajectory and direction can change at any moment, and where progress should be measured in relation to a standardized set of milestones. The ideal destination of this journey is a morally right, socially skilled, self-reliant adult who functions effectively in the world.

> **Interviewer**: What is child development? What does that mean?
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> **Participant:** Child development? I would think that would be the necessary milestones. It's like from newborn all the way up to I guess 18. […] and then there's also educational stages that they're supposed to meet, as well.
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> **Interviewer**: If you hear that a child is doing well, what does that mean to you?
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> **Participant:** That they're striving, and they've got learning ability. They're not on any specific medications. They're just meeting the milestones, you know, that children should be meeting.
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> **Interviewer:** What does it mean to say an adult is doing well?
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> **Participant:** Well you can take a well-rounded childhood and use that to…come up with a well-rounded adult or what a well-rounded adult should look like. And to say that an adult is doing well is to say that they're law abiding. They understand the rules of society.

2. **The *Black-Box of Development* Model:** By and large, Jacksonville residents do not have a solid understanding of the *process* of development: it remains a black-box. Instead, thinking is focused on the *content* of development — learning language skills and developing a moral compass. Viewed through this lack of understanding of process, much

of development is understood to happen *automatically*, as a natural course of growth and physical maturation, or to be *predetermined* by genetics.

> **Participant:** Development's inherent in just human's development, and we call it turning the corner. Remember that old adage when you're in school, "He'll turn the corner" or "she'll turn," and they do. And then all of a sudden one day, it does.
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> **Interviewer:** Is the general process of development the same for every child?

> **Participant:** Negative. No way. I don't think it's the same for every child because we're all individuals and we're controlled, in my limited scientific ability, by genetics. And genetics plays a big part in our development. Whether or not we have all the chromosomes or have a few missing can make us act differently to different stimuli.

Implications:

- The *Life Journey* model has mixed implications. On the one hand, it is has the potential to constructively draw attention to the ecology that surrounds a child on that journey, including the supports, risks, obstacles, and other features of the path and landscape through which they travel. On the other hand, because of its focus on each child's *individual* journey, it can easily default to a heightened focus on the personal factors (drive and will-power, for example) that make or break any given journey.

- The *Black-Box of Development* contributes to a lack of understanding about the contextual contingency of the developmental process, and affects people's ability to understand *how* policies and programs shape development and developmental outcomes.

II. What is child mental health and how can it be improved?

Jacksonville residents think about child mental health in terms that mirror broader national trends.[5] Two compartmentalized models — of mental *health* and mental *illness* respectively — dominate thinking.

> **Interviewer:** What about mental health? Is that the same or different from mental illness?

> **Participant:** Well, mental illness would be you've been diagnosed with something. Mental health I mean some people might not have a major issue…they might just need to go see a psychiatrist to be able to open themselves up. So there's people who need for to be able to go and talk to somebody that is an outsider that has no clue who you're talking about…let you express yourself like that. So I think mental health is separate from mental illness.
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Participant: I think mental health may be something that kids grow out of, and mental illness is something you don't grow out of, and you just carry along your whole life.

1. The *Mental Health = Emotional Control* Model: This model recognizes that early negative experiences for children can have lasting emotional impacts, but attributes to each child the ability and responsibility to take control of those emotions — to "buck up" — in order to establish positive mental health.

Interviewer: If I said, "child mental health," what do you think about?

Participant: Child mental health? I would say like either they're happy or they're not happy.

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Participant: That goes kind of relating to what we've been speaking of. The development of a child mentally. I mean mentally and emotionally what are they dealing with? Are they getting that attention that they require to mentally develop without fear or you know, to have a regular feeling mentally about life?

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Participant: I think that mental health is a thing that happens as you grow…it's how you're able to learn how to deal with things. I like to hold things in that hurt me, whereas somebody else can just cry in front of five hundred people. I'm not like that. I would rather swallow my pride and not do anything.

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Interviewer: So, what's, like what's good mental health for a child?

Participant: Their behavior, if they are good kids…always happy…never sad from temper tantrums, things like that…they're just well-rounded.

2. The *Mental Illness = Genetics* Model: This model holds that mental illness has its roots in genetics, premised in the linked assumptions that mental illness results from chemicals gone awry in the brain, that those chemicals are genetically determined, and that genes are themselves "set in stone." As such, it is a strongly deterministic model, in which the only therapy is pharmaceutical management of the associated symptoms.

Participant: I would figure that would be the only thing that would [be] a high factor in that situation, would be mental illness…because some people can't help it. You know, they have something that's in their brain that's not right.
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Participant: I think mental illness is kind of, you know you can take medication but I think it's — mental health can be more corrected than mental illness. You know? Maybe a change of scenery or a maybe a little encouragement or a little extra love can create a better mental health…music can put you in a good mood, certain foods

can put you in a good mood, you know...a better mental health. But mental illness...it's like not your fault. At a young age something's happening because of decisions your parents decided or an incorrect birth or something like that. Maybe you don't get enough oxygen to your brain or something like that. But as far as mental health, I think you can correct mental health, whereas mental illness is almost definitely...a longer problem and which maybe there's not one particular cure.

Implications:

- The *Mental Health = Emotional Control* model loads responsibility for mental health on the shoulders of the individual child and mutes attention to the importance of contextual determinants and institutional supports. From the other side, the determinism of the *Mental Illness=Genetics* model depresses attention to contextual, systemic, and institutional factors.

- More broadly, the false compartmentalization between health and illness contributes to a default in thinking *away* from mental health as a contingent factor that results from a developmental process, making it either about predetermined chemicals in the brain or damaged emotions that require willpower and self-therapy.

- People consistently lack a way to conceptualize mental health as well-being and functionality, and understand it as being promoted by distinct conditions and resources that interact with and support the individual's developmental trajectory.

III. What factors shape development and wellbeing for children in Jacksonville?

1. **The *Family Bubble* Model:** Among the most dominant models emerging from FrameWorks' research in Jacksonville, this model is the consistent default for explaining why children are in the condition they are. It focuses nearly exclusive attention on the role played by parents in determining their children's state of well-being and assumes no connection between parents and the contexts in which they are embedded.

> **Interviewer:** Why does it happen that some kids do well and some kids don't do well?
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> **Participant:** If a child has the right type of parental attention...they're going to do well...because that's guidance, good guidance you're gonna do well.
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> **Participant:** I see some children that walk to school and they don't have the proper clothes on for the weather. They don't have their hair brushed. Again I think it comes back to home life and how much attention that the parent gives to that child, raising them with good morals and responsibility.

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Interviewer: What are the things that explain why a child is doing well?

Participant: Basically, parental guidance and, if they don't have parents, someone in their lives that have positive thinking and motivation to want the child to do good in life. So it's built off the foundation of love. And it's built off of good guidance.

2. **The *Structured, Stable, and Safe* Model:** This model posits that children need to experience home, school, and neighborhood environments that are structured, stable, and safe if they are to develop well. Predictable and structured routines, in particular, are thought to be essential. Discipline is held up as a must, with a strong focus on parents' need to set strict boundaries for their children.

Participant: Having a stable home is key. Feeling safe is really important. That's definitely something that's really, really important. Never feeling uncomfortable or scared in any environment whether it's school or at home or your neighborhood or the city you live in. I think that's really important.

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Participant: I think it's very, very, very important to have boundaries where kids feel secure in those boundaries. They know their limitations. They know what they can get away with and they know what they absolutely can't get away with. I see too many people with children that are just running crazy because they don't have any boundaries. And they don't feel…it makes them feel secure.

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Participant: Why do children need structure? It keeps them in their routine. It keeps them with an expectation of what comes next. I think it takes away a little bit of the unpredictability where they're going to maybe react in a skewed fashion… It just keeps a flow.

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Participant: It's important that these kids get structure. They need structure and that's the parents' only way to get these kids to do really well. And if you don't have parents, if you don't have a good family, you're gonna do bad — you're gonna do really bad.

3. **The *Environments Matter* Model:** Despite the dominance of the *Family Bubble* model, there were times when informants became attuned to the importance of children's environments beyond the home — to the sites, experiences, and conditions they experience in their schools, neighborhoods, and broader communities. However, this model is typically less about the formal institutions that surround a child and more about the informal exposures that children have to other people, cultures, and influences. Nested within this model is a more specific model targeted at Jacksonville and other large cities in the U.S.

3a. The *Two Kinds of Environments* Model: This is a binary assumption about two kinds of environments that different populations of children experience, and is

structured in terms of a contrast between stereotypical depictions of the poor and largely black "inner city" (e.g., "northside") and the richer, whiter, "nicer" suburbs that surround the downtown.

Participant: [You're] a product of your environment. I mean there's rare cases where you see people who go over and beyond what their environment is, but if you live in a low income and high crime-infested and drugs...then the chances of your becoming a product of your environment is very high. But if you come from a nice town that practices humanities, you know just Church and just positiveness, I just think your environment has a lot to do with it.
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Participant: There's just more outside influences that have you going all over the place...and if you live in a bad neighborhood and it's like gunshots, it's graffiti, it's rap music, it's drugs...you know you're not walking down Harvard Avenue with libraries and messages that education is power, or with quotes from great thinkers or explorers or mathematicians or scientists. Its' different.
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Participant: History shows that northwest Jacksonville has a high percentage of crime. Particularly violent crimes and murders. You see that those schools are failing when it comes to basic test scores. FCAT scores, both at the middle school [and] high school levels. You see the dropout rate in those particular areas are higher than they would be, say in this neighborhood, the Riverside-Avondale area.
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Participant: I don't see how [the situation in Jacksonville] can get much worse. There's so much lack of responsibility, and more and more people are becoming dependent on somebody else. And that's not a good sign. That's not the right direction for households in Jacksonville. And it just seems like a downward slope unless they all of a sudden want to support themselves, which most people in those cases don't. Once they get what they want, they're satisfied with that little bit that they have, and they don't ever feel like they need to accomplish anything for themselves. [Kids] grow up around that, so they think that's normal, so why wouldn't they turn out to be the same way, unless they had somebody in their life that influenced them in a different direction?
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Participant: The guy standing on the corner of the street throwing dice, gambling, selling drugs, whatever they're doing. Those are things where children are thinking that's how I'm supposed to behave. It's a vicious cycle.

4. The *Cycle of Poverty* Model: In conjunction with the *Two Kinds of Environments* model, Jacksonville informants' talk about children and well-being was often loaded, especially among white participants, with both class and racial connotations about parental competencies. Poor, black parents are judged to lack the ambition, discipline, and knowledge to appropriately raise their children, resulting in a "cycle" and a new generation of parents who will in turn lack the ability to raise their children. According to this model, the cycle of poverty repeats generation after generation because the people involved lack

the motivation and personal character to "escape" from it. Exceptions to this cycle are acknowledged and are thought to prove the rule for the broader population.

> **Participant:** Well, going through what would be called I guess the "hood" here in Jacksonville, you have a lot of adults that instead of using their time to guide the children, teach them things, are just sitting on the porch...eating, stuffing their faces, talking...but usually about trivial things like, what she said he said. They're not discussing important things that affect their life, except, what do I need to do to go collect food stamps today and that kind of thing. And children are being taught that's normal, and those children are going to grow up expecting not to provide for themselves.
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> **Participant:** I think a lot of it is their upbringing. I think some maybe just don't care [...] The mother is on welfare, and the daughter goes on welfare. And their children go on welfare. It's like there's a pattern and nobody's trying to break it...nobody's trying to better themselves.
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> **Interviewer:** What causes those differences [between children doing well and children not doing well]?
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> **Participant:** I think it's the income first. A lot of those parents probably don't have college education...probably started off working at a young age without finishing school...probably sexually active at a really young age and the result of that is a child who's going to grow up in an unstable family with parents who aren't very educated. So if you have parents who don't have a strong college education, who don't have value on what's right and what's wrong, and don't really care, that influences their children's life because to them it's just normal. Compared to somebody who grows up over here...whose parents are alumni from a major university. They grew up in a stable household, both a mother and a father. They go to church. They grew up in programs such as athletic associations or Boy Scouts, or they had nice parks. You're not hearing about murders or gang violence.
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> **Participant**: What side of the town they live in influences that [children's outcomes] because your surroundings have a lot to do with how you develop. If you grow up in a crappy neighborhood you are not going to see yourself beyond that. But then nature or nurture comes in. If you are brought up and educated and shown how to get away from that, then it can happen. So overall, lazy parenting is my biggest pet peeve. Just because somebody is from somewhere doesn't mean that they are going to grow up a certain way. Nurturing has to play a part to make sure that the child ends up growing to be a well-balanced member of society.
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> **Interviewer:** What about different parts of Jacksonville? How's a kid going to develop differently if they grow up in the northside compared to the southside?

Participant: I think that goes to the parent. If you've got a good harness on your kids, you can send them to activities outside of your community. So that goes to the parent.

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Participant: I feel that at a lot of schools in the poor communities, they haven't been able to see the benefit of an education. So therefore they don't value it as much. And then you have the opposite of what I had at my high school, where you have teachers who know that the children value education, and then students that value education, and that makes for a great mix. But at those [other] schools you have the opposite. You have to work that much harder to make them see the value and really believe that it exists.

5. The *Self-Makingness* Model: Jacksonville residents also have a model that explains the children who manage to "escape" the cycle of poverty. They are understood to do so because they take control of their lives, seize those opportunities available to them, choose an alternative life, and pull themselves up by their bootstraps. In this model, will, determination, and hard work are understood to bring success to any child who claims them.

Interviewer: What about when the surroundings and the experiences aren't so great, aren't optimal? What does that kid turn out to be like?

Participant: There is still potential for them being responsible, well-liked, and successful. There is always the chance of that still happening and hopefully everybody learns the difference between right and wrong and should be able to make smart choices.

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Participant: You got some prejudice here [in Jacksonville]. So it would keep things to a certain degree divided and separated. But I can't see that people would allow that to hold you back. You are who you are, do what you got to do. Accept me or not, I've done it.

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Interviewer: What do you wish that people understood about what it's like to grow up on the northside? What do you wish people understood that it seems like people don't understand?

Participant: Don't underestimate us. We are diamonds in the rough, and we do need to be polished. Once we polished, we're ready for sale. We are ready for sale… Don't ever underestimate us… You never know what your future going to be… I told her, I said, "I'm a survivor. I'm living proof that you can make it. So before you go saying what people can't do, look at me."

6. The *Stress Does the Body Good* Model: As has been evident in FrameWorks' national research, Jacksonville residents also invoke the idea that "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," believing that stress toughens children up for the trials and tribulations of life. In this model, adversity results in a *reverse response* — actually propelling self-determining children into better arenas of life and improving outcomes.

> **Interviewer:** What if everything goes wrong? I mean, what if you have really bad experiences?

> **Participant:** They can end up in the justice system, or I think sometimes bad experiences show people a way that they don't want to be. And it could turn around and send them in the right direction, or seeking out positive influences. They're not necessarily what they've experienced...they could turn it into something good.

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> **Participant:** I could always leave my door unlocked and just have that security that hey, I'm safe. But maybe in neighborhoods where you hear guns firing you know, maybe you just feel like, you know, nothing's safe and all you want to do is figure out a way to get out of that environment. And that's what creates go-getters.

Implications:

- Taken together, the *Family Bubble, Cycle of Poverty, Self-Makingness*, and *Stress Does the Body Good* models provide ready-made, top-of-mind ways for explaining *why* some of Jacksonville's children are not doing as well as others. As highly individualistic causal models, these ways of thinking block perspectives about how the different quality of supports and access to resources for children and families across the city influence differential child outcomes. All told, these models present a fundamental challenge to Jacksonville-based organizations seeking to build public support around population and systems-level initiatives that serve the interests of the city's most at-risk children.

- While the *Environments Matter* model, and its embedded *Two Kinds of Environments* model, have the potential to draw attention to environmental factors like institutional supports, systemic risk factors, and the like, they are overwhelmed by people's strong default to racial and class stereotypes that land firmly back in the *Family Bubble* and *Self-Makingness* models, attributing final causal agency to parents and individual children themselves.

IV. Why is education important?

1. The *Education = Success* Model: Reasoning with this model, Jacksonville residents hold up individual success — particularly financial success — as the goal of education, and education is understood as a primary reason why some children are successful and others are not.

Interviewer: What does it mean to say that a child is doing well?

Participant: To say that a child is doing well is to say that a child is meeting all your expectations as a parent. They're doing well in school, they're doing well socially, and they have good communication skills.

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Interviewer: What does it mean to say a child's doing well?

Participant: Good grades, good behavior...I guess good health also.

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Interviewer: Picture a child that's doing well in your head. Could you describe what that child is like?

Participant: The description of a child would probably be ... usually the light comes on with the child maybe around six years old or something like that. And I think from six on up you can just about picture any child, male or female, and one that has good behavior, good communication...one that is obviously, hopefully interested in school.

Implications: While this model highlights the importance of education, its highly individualistic nature (education is for individual benefit) obscures notions of education as a public good with collective benefits. This can impede communications about the importance of improving the public system of education in Jacksonville, as well as the need to provide publicly funded informal learning opportunities.

V. How does learning happen and how can it be improved in Jacksonville?

1. The *Sponge* and *Container* Models: Using these models, informants explained that children "soak up" or get "filled up" with learning content. In both models, the focus is on the *content* of learning (the "stuff" being learned), not the process itself, which is assumed to happen largely automatically and with the child playing a largely passive role as information is handed down from a parent or teacher.

Interviewer: And why is birth to three so important?

Participant: That is time when a child is nothing but a sponge...and they're going to soak in — whether it's good or bad, they're soaking in information. That's what they're doing. They're just taking in.

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Participant: If you come up in an environment, in a household where nobody read books, nobody looks at culture events, nobody listened to classical music, nobody listened to a violin, nobody could appreciate a violin or pianist, a classical guitarist, classical pianist. But the earlier you expose children to that, the more well-rounded

they'll be; the more they'll be able to appreciate more than one kind of music. But if you just expose them to one kind, then they'll be more one dimensional. You don't want them to be one dimensional.

2. The *Caring Teacher* Model: In this model, the single most important indicator of quality education is a teacher's level of caring and love for her students. Reasoning from this model, Jacksonville informants explained that the way to improve education is to hire more teachers who really care about their students and fire those who are just "in it for the paycheck."

> **Participant:** We have some students that are underachieving. You have some students that excel. Well, what's the big difference? To me it's always the teachers. Your child wants to be that person and emulate that person. If that person has good moral fiber then that will emanate and your child is gonna get some things from their teacher that's gonna make them grow and contribute to society.
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> **Participant:** The whole purpose of being a teacher is to teach and be there to help. Teachers to me don't do it for the money. They do it for their love of children, and when you start saying they can't do this, they can't do that, then I think they get lost in the structure.

3. The *Small Classes = Quality Education* Model: Jacksonville informants consistently invoked the need for smaller classroom sizes in public schools, and pointed to the success of private schools with small classes as exemplars of high-quality education. In this cultural model, small classes (along with caring teachers) are understood as primary measures of educational quality.

> **Participant:** I think teachers need to have smaller classes so they can spend more time with each kid, because that's where they spend most of their time. I think that because teachers are overwhelmed in their classrooms. They don't actually get to do that, especially here in Florida.
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> **Participant:** I think even with the cutbacks and everything and some of the things they're able to do in budgetary restraints. I think good teachers create the situations for a happy child. But when your class size swells from eighteen to forty, it's kind of hard to do that.

4. The *Back to Basics* Model: Jacksonville residents point to the importance of getting "back to the basics" as a way to improve the educational system and learning outcomes. In this model, the "3R's" and other features of the traditional curriculum (like discipline) represent a tried-and-tested recipe for providing children with the skills they will need to find their way in the world. This model is highly nostalgic and induces skepticism of more

innovative approaches to curricular development wherein such "new" approaches are seen as threats to "the basics."

> **Participant:** [Schools] put way too much emphasis on things that are not important. They really need to teach the basic skills to where your child can get a job and support themselves. They don't seem to be worried about that anymore.
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> **Participant:** The requirements have been lowered way too much. The priorities of what's being taught is all out of whack. They need basic skills.
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> **Interviewer:** Why do we have schools? What are they for?
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> **Participant:** I have always thought of school–I mean, it is definitely there to teach the basics of what you need to get by in life, how to read, how to write, how to communicate, how to do math, things that you are going to need later in life.

5. The *Family Bubble* Model: The *Family Bubble* model (see above) also asserts itself in the way that Jacksonville residents think about education — placing parents at the center of people's thinking about how to improve the educational system. Even when asked how *schools* could do a better job educating children, Jacksonville informants tended to invoke the need for parents to improve their parenting, explaining that "education starts at home."

> **Interviewer:** Do the schools here do a pretty good job of preparing kids for life after school?
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> **Participant:** I think so. I think the problem here is that parents nowadays are not involved like they should be. Maybe they're not educated enough to even help their kids with homework. And I think what's happening. It's really the parents' responsibility to make sure that the kid goes to school, stays in school, and is properly disciplined if they break the rules. And I think parents nowadays are too lenient or they don't want to take responsibility for how well their children are learning or at what level. I think teachers are doing the best they can, but there's time limitations, and there's discipline limitations. Maybe some kids need to be yelled at.
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> **Interviewer:** How do you think education could be better in your community?
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> **Participant:** I wish that some of the parents were a little more hands on. I knew growing up that my parents loved me, but when it came to homework, they'd help me a little bit, but they were winding down for the day. So a lot a times I had to ask my older brother. I figure like that, with the time limitations, the teachers can only do so much so education needs to be at home.

Implications:

- The *Sponge* and *Container* models situate children as passive learning agents, and impede an active perspective on learning and the importance of creating environments and experiences that facilitate that process from a learner-centered perspective.

- The *Caring Teacher* and *Family Bubble* models mute attention to the importance of a whole range of other contextual, institutional, community, and policy-level factors that influence educational outcomes.

- The *Back to Basics* model is problematic in that it structures zero-sum thinking, wherein efforts to innovate and improve classroom learning are seen to come at the expense of "traditional" skills and curriculum.

- The *Small Classes* model has mixed implications. On the one hand, the model focuses attention to the funding challenges that many public schools face, and on the need to direct attention and resources to reducing class sizes. On the other hand, the strength of the model makes it the "go-to" solution for how to improve education, muting attention to other systemic and structural reforms necessary to improve educational outcomes.

VI. Why are there learning disparities?

1. The *Inner City = Bad / Suburb = Good* Model: Consistent with the *Two Kinds of Environments* model described above, Jacksonville informants had a neatly compartmentalized way of thinking about school and educational quality. This model works with two prototypes: the bad "inner city" school, and the good "suburban" school. In this set of prototypes, the former are poorly funded, often dangerous, and populated by students who come from homes where education is under-valued; while the latter are well funded and safe, and populated by motivated students from education-focused families. In Jacksonville, "northside" schools served as the exemplars of the bad inner city school, while "southside," "Ortega," and "beaches" schools serve as exemplars of good school areas.

> **Participant:** Things are taught at the northside that on the southside are not being taught. These southside schools are teaching a lot more, I'll put it that way... [kids on northside] are disruptive and they bring their street stuff to the class…. [a friend uses] a friend's address so that the kid can go to the southside to go to school so that they can get a better education.
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> **Participant:** In our area, the northside is considered the bad side of town. And we have teachers who fall out of good graces in the southside who become northside material...and they're shipped to the northside. They're shipped to the northside because they're presumed to be problem people.
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Interviewer: Are there racial disparities in education?

Participant: I think so, because I know the schools in the predominately lower income [areas], which are also predominately African population, those schools don't do that well on FCATS or in general testing. They have a very large, very high truancy rate and just not many kids really even going to school and those that do, they do it because they want to learn and they know that's the only way there are going to make something of themselves. But they spend more time focusing on the kids who don't give a damn and not really recognizing what the good kids are doing. Because of that, their schools, they usually have the teachers that draw the short stick or teachers who really don't care and are like "Crap, I have to work at this school! I got to put on my bulletproof vest…"

2. The *Tangible Triad* Model: Consistent with the *Caring Teachers, Family Bubble,* and *Self-Makingness* models described above, this model lodges primary responsibility for learning outcomes with three agents: parents, teachers, and students. According to this model, it is the level of caring, drive, and discipline of these agents that is understood to determine educational outcomes. The wide range of other factors that shape student outcomes are excluded from this model.

Participant: You have kids that can't study at home because there's too much confusion. You might have, and I can only speak of black kids, you might have five or six kids in one room. How can you study? You can't study outside because it's too distracting…too much confusion. They're partyin', smokin', drinkin', so sometimes kids are left behind because they can't grasp what they need because they're not getting it in school, because they're not getting the time, or the teacher's too busy worrying about the smart kids instead of the kids that are being left behind. And it's not their place to figure out what's going on at home.

3. The *Every Child Is Different* Model: Public thinking in Jacksonville is weighted strongly towards the idea that, "every child is different," and that children only learn effectively when instruction is delivered in their particular optimal "learning style." This model serves as a ready-made explanation for why some children do better than others, and is often invoked to explain educational disparities, even at the population level.

Interviewer: Does education happen the same way for every child?

Participant: No I don't think so. I think that it's similar but I think that our experiences affect a lot of that and every home experience, every school experience is different for every child. And even the way that they process the same experience is different. So it would have a different effect on them.

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Participant: I believe every kid is unique, as is every single person. Some kids, no matter what, will be behind, just based upon genetics or stuff like that. But I definitely think that a kid that is lacking in areas, that will have issues, can be helped

by taking that one-on-one time, taking that time that is needed to work with them directly. That parent, that family…Someone showing interest.

Implications: All three of these models provide Jacksonville residents with ready-made explanations for why some children do better than others within a school and educational system. Importantly, none of the models draw attention to systems-level differences in resources, supports, funding, or staffing across different schools and districts, or to the ways that economics, race, and the balance of risk and protective factors impinge upon children's lives outside of school and shape learning outcomes.

VII. Who is responsible for the well-being of Jacksonville's children?

The dominance of the *Family Bubble, Caring Teacher,* and *Self-Makingness* models, in particular, set people up to think about responsibility as a highly personalized or, at best, family endeavor. Four other dominant cultural models further reinforce these defaults to individual responsibility, while a fifth model opens up space for Jacksonville residents to think about collective responsibility, although the potential to use this model to reframe children's issues is limited because of its lack of depth.

1. The *Consumerism* Model: This model was active across Jacksonville informants and is grounded in the idea that our society is a competitive marketplace of products and services where some people outperform others because of their talents, work ethic, and motivation. The model sets up an understanding that children, as the *natural course of things*, will have access to different levels of learning and health, and that therefore differential outcomes are "natural."

> **Interviewer:** Is the opposite true? Kids where a lot of those environment things are messed up--do they mostly turn out not so great?
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> **Participant:** I feel like the majority of 'em don't reach their full potential. Maybe not mean or evil or villains…but they're not all they could be. Maybe it's not their fault. It's almost like a head start, it's a race to the finish. And if you start off in a fast car you'll probably be fast, but if you start off with a beater you might not catch up with that guy who's been going fast the whole time.
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> **Interviewer:** What does it mean when you say an adult's doing well?
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> **Participant:** I think it's social status, friends, relationships…and economic. Everything's based on money. It's sad to say that money is such a measuring stick, but it is. A lot of people are socially accepted if they have money or if they even have a job. Some people just don't have a job or health insurance, but at the end of the day if I had to consider the difference was between somebody doing well and somebody who's not doing well… I would think money.

2. The *Separate Fates* Model: Jacksonville informants recognized vast differences across the city in how well different populations of children are doing. Notably this recognition is *not* accompanied by a sense that those differences matter for the city and everyone in it. Put another way, there is a deep assumption of *separate* rather than shared fates in the city. However sad or regretful, what happens for the children of the "northside" is not seen to affect those living in other, more privileged sections of the city.

> **Participant:** I think the children are doing fine. I mean the city is a great place to raise kids, that's why we've stayed here. There are still going to be people who are killed, who are robbed, who are abused, who are assaulted or whatever the case may be. So, I'm not ignorant to think that…everything is not hunky-dory all the time here. But I'm much more of an optimist than a pessimist.
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> **Participant:** I believe [Jacksonville] is trying to change. And it has changed to a certain degree. It really has done some changing, but just not enough. And then the negative, for some reason, always to me, pulled the positive down lower. And I'm sure you have some people like me who are willing to help these lower areas to hopefully educate them so that they can come up. And I've often said, if I only get one person out of the deal who made a change, that's good enough for me because that's all I could do… I'm back to this; I think [the rich have] given what they could, and you [the poor] didn't come and get it, and I can't do anymore. You know, you're responsible for yourself and you don't want to help yourself.

3. The *Fatalism* Model: Underlying much of the talk about the challenges facing the city, as can be seen in many of the quotes provided above, was an undercurrent of fatalism, a sense that poverty, crime, poor health, poor educational outcomes, and other problems will always characterize some parts of the city. This fatalism was often linked to the *Cycle of Poverty* model, and, among some of our white informants, to stereotypes about poor and black families, parents, and individuals.

> **Participant:** It goes back to, unfortunately, race…and just because of the way people see lines in this part of the country, that's how they see it. They say, "Well, there's no hope for this issue so we'll just keep to ourselves." But, from a child's standpoint, it's difficult because, like I say, how do we get out of this cycle?

4. The *Opportunity Exists* Model: This model is closely tied to the *Self-Makingness* model described above. It holds that the resources necessary for success are available to all in Jacksonville, but that differences in outcomes arise from the fact that many people do not choose to take advantage of them. The way to improve things in the city, from this perspective, is simply to make people more aware of the opportunities they have to self-improve and motivate them to "grab" these opportunities.

> **Participant:** I think in that part of town, it's just so ingrained in their culture -- this is the status quo, and this is what we do. But if you did have somebody that was that insightful and wanted better, I think there probably are resources available.

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> **Participant:** I find that disparity come from people that just don't care.
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> **Interviewer:** So the problems is that people...
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> **Participant:** Lack or lose the will to want to do better. For one, [you need to] have an open mind as just what I can do better today or what can take this in or do something else. Or you're already probably loaded with problems that keep you stressed. So you're giving yourself less opportunities.

5. The _It Takes a Village_ Model: Jacksonville residents have a model of a community taking action in service of children, and people are fond of the idea that "it takes a village to raise a child." However, the specifics of just what constitutes "the village" and how the village should support its children is missing from the model, and there is an overarching _vagueness_ to this model in people's thinking. Jacksonville residents share an understanding that there is a connection between community and child well-being, but they do not have a working understanding of what this connection is—of _how_ community affects child well-being and how this connection can be used to improve child outcomes.

> **Interviewer:** I wanted to ask you a little more about which adults are responsible for [child well-being]...
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> **Participant:** Oh all of them. Any adult, not just parents. Back to the village. Any adult that's in the — that children are in their midst, it's their responsibility. Any adult. I don't care who you are. Black, white, green, gold, young whatever. If you're an adult, in an adult status and the child's around you, you should make some type of contribution toward that child.

Implications:

- The _Consumerism_, _Separate Fates,_ and _Fatalism_ models all direct attention away from the need to act on behalf of all children's well-being and success. The _Consumerism_ model naturalizes disparities as a regular part of a world that is implicitly understood as a competitive marketplace in which some people win and others lose. The _Separate Fates_ model structures thinking in a way that makes the misfortunes of other people's children just that — unfortunate, but not ultimately "my" concern. The _Fatalism_ model suggests that efforts to constructively engage problems facing some children are doomed to fail. All three models naturalize and explain away disparities across populations of children.

- The _Opportunity Exists_ model further reinforces an individual's responsibility for his or her outcomes — that we all need to take the initiative to learn about and seek out the opportunities that await us. In so doing, this model mutes attention to the very real differences in opportunities and resource-access that many children face.

- Finally, the _It Takes a Village_ model has mixed implications. Its implied association between child well-being and community may serve as a starting point in getting Jacksonville residents to see collective approaches to helping children. However, the

vagueness and glib quality of the phrase and sentiment mute engagement with the concrete specifics of building a formal public policy infrastructure that serves the most at-risk children. People are often satisfied to make the initial link between community action and child well-being, but rarely are able or willing to think further about what these connections might be, how they would work, and how they could be leveraged to improve outcomes.

Conclusion

The FrameWorks research presented here was designed to help Coalition members and partner organizations in the *Kids 'N Care* Initiative better understand the most dominant, "top of mind" cultural models used by Jacksonville residents to think about children's well-being, and whether and how those models support or undermine the Coalition's work to improve systems of care and support for the city's children. With this improved understanding, the Coalition and its partners are one step further toward being able to effectively reframe those elements of public thinking that threaten to undermine their broader social change goals. Moreover, as the next phase of research proceeds to interview experts in various fields about how systems need to support children and how child development is impaired or promoted by these systems, the problems with these lay models of understanding will be even further sharpened.

Along these lines, two of the report's findings stand out as particularly important.

There is a powerful collection of models that function in concert to mute people's attention to the reality of structural, systemic, population-level factors that work against some children's well-being across the city. While at some level people are aware of broad population-level factors, such as poverty, crime, and poorly functioning schools, these *macro-level problems* often get thought of in terms of *micro-level causality* — as the result of bad parents, unmotivated children, or bad-apple teachers. Repeatedly, people default to stereotypes about a certain kind of person and the ultimate causal understanding of outcomes is lodged at this level.

Perhaps the greatest challenge that emerges from this research is that many of Jacksonville's residents do not envision a shared fate for the people of the city. In short, what happens in Springfield or on the "northside" is unaffected by what happens in Ortega or the Beach communities, and vice-versa. At a deep level Jacksonville residents assume that the fates of the city's populations are largely separate. FrameWorks' research has shown this to be a dominant trend more broadly across the United States in both media and public discourses that implicitly define different trajectories for white and minority populations in our society.[6] In this dominant narrative, minority concerns — and those of African-Americans in particular — are detached from the shared concerns and aspirations of the broader society. In short, whites and non-whites have separate fates. When this model is operative, it is easy for members of the majority public to characterize minorities as the "other," thereby compartmentalizing the concerns of minorities as being "over there" and not of collective importance. This way of thinking has also been found to obscure causal connections between structural arrangements, opportunities, and outcomes. When further linked to the idea that some communities have dysfunctional "cultures," it becomes easy for people to dismiss disparities as (1) not of their concern, and (2) the fault of those "other" people themselves. The recommended solution, then, is for others to get their act together, as both individuals and communities.

Several successive stages of research remain in the effort to build a communications strategy and overall narrative structure that can be used in this reframing work. Currently, FrameWorks is in the process of analyzing a set of 40 *On-The-Street Interviews* that were conducted in Jacksonville in June 2013 to test multiple candidate *metaphors* and *values* as a first step in determining their effectiveness in addressing many of the challenges identified here. The findings from that research and this report will be combined in a comprehensive *Message Memo* summarizing our findings to date and applying it to the work being conducted by Coalition members.

Research will continue next year with a second round of 20 *Cultural Models Interviews* to focus on new content areas where FrameWorks has yet to do research, including public understandings of child rights and the relationship between children, the community, and the institutions that provide services to families and children. Successive stages of research, including further development and testing of metaphors and values, will follow over the next two years, along with a series of both on-site and online training modules and community engagements. The end goal is an evidence-based communications strategy and toolbox that will be shared by community organizations and leaders in Jacksonville, working in a wide variety of institutional settings to consistently explain their work as it relates to the *Kids 'N Care* Initiative.

About The FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is an independent nonpro5it organization founded in 1999 to advance science-based communications research and practice. The Institute conducts original, multi-method research to identify the communications strategies that will advance public understanding of social problems and improve public support for remedial policies. The Institute's work also includes teaching the nonpro5it sector how to apply these science-based communications strategies in their work for social change. The Institute publishes its research and recommendations, as well as toolkits and other products for the nonprofit sector, at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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