

Leadership Needed To Transform Services In Distressed Neighborhoods

Promise Neighborhood Grant Provides Jump Start Opportunity

Executive Summary

To transform services for families in distressed neighborhoods based on the Harlem Children's Zone, the Governor, Baltimore City Mayor and Prince George's County Executive need to appoint a top official who will identify an incubator and bring together the various sites interested in replication. This will also strengthen the likelihood of the State winning a Promise Neighborhood planning grant.

Background

Maryland is spending a fortune on services for families in a small number of neighborhoods.¹ This is not only expensive, but the services are fragmented, reactive, received too late and largely ineffective. This issue brief discusses how Maryland can seize on a unique opportunity to transform services for families.

Harlem Children's Zone

Across the country, states and cities are trying to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone, a model program which revolutionized the way services are delivered to families in 100 square blocks, with significant results. The concept has a few essential components:

- There is a focus on all families in a specific geographic area;
- A community-based organization oversees the initiative, with a strong local leader;
- Trusted, trained members of the community reach out to families;
- A conveyor belt of services for children are available from birth until college;
- The services prevent problems from occurring; they do not wait for a crisis to occur; and
- Both parents and children are served.

Challenges To Replication

The Harlem Children's Zone is a large, complex undertaking which was developed and expanded

¹ Advocates for Children and Youth, *The High Cost of Bad Outcomes in Ten Neighborhoods* (Nov. 2008).

somewhat organically over 20 years by a charismatic leader, Geoffrey Canada, who received substantial financial backing from private sources. Despite thousands of visitors to the Harlem Children's Zone and hundreds of participants in a training program, no one has yet to fully replicate the Harlem Children's Zone.

The challenges include:

- Identifying a community-based organization which is respected in the neighborhood and has the capacity to oversee the planning and implementation. It may require creating a new entity or significantly enhancing the ability of an existing organization, and this requires intensive external support.
- Identifying a community-based leader. No one is likely to have all of the talents of Geoffrey Canada, but someone is needed who is trusted by the community, a good administrator, able to raise funds and knowledgeable about the political situation. Most likely, the person will need intensive training and coaching.
- Getting the support of public agencies which control the public resources. These agencies must agree to shift money and collaborate with each other, and they are resistant to either change. The involvement of the public schools is particularly important, but difficult to secure. The Harlem Children's Zone had to create its own charter school.
- Securing private funding. Substantial seed funding is needed and may be needed for a considerable period of time, until the public sector redirects funds for sustainability.

Geoffrey Canada Is Coming to Baltimore!

Founder of the Harlem Children's Zone will be keynote at the Distinguished Speakers Luncheon of Advocates for Children and Youth, October 14, 2010

For more information, see www.acy.org



Promise Neighborhoods

The Obama Administration wants to help groups replicate the Harlem Children's Zone. Through the Promise Neighborhood initiative, 20 groups will get \$500,000 planning grants this year. The President proposed \$210 million in next year's federal budget, for more planning grants and implementation grants. There is considerable interest in this initiative across the country, and competition for the planning grants will be fierce. The Request for Proposals will likely be released soon, with proposals due within a few months after release.

Particularly strong applications will have already begun to overcome the predictable obstacles and be able to demonstrate a clear ability to overcome other obstacles (see above). This is a bit of a Catch 22, as the purpose of a planning grant is to give time and resources to put in place the elements needed for success.

Opportunities and Challenges in Maryland

Numerous groups in Maryland are working on efforts to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone and compete for a Promise Neighborhood planning grant. Five different teams went to an informational conference in New York City. Most of the focus is in Baltimore City, but at least one group in Prince George's County is interested.

Multiple applications from Maryland will most likely be a negative in trying to win a Promise Neighborhood grant. Given the level of competition, a state the size of Maryland can hope to win no more than one planning grant. Moreover, multiple competitors may be a red flag that there is a lack of commitment from state and local agencies officials to the effort. As reflected in the chart above, at least 28 other efforts already have the support of significant elected officials.

What Will It Take To Win?

1. Secure the involvement of the Governor, the Mayor of Baltimore City and the Prince George's County Executive.² They can jointly identify a point person empowered to help with the submission of one strong application from Maryland.

² The current county executive cannot run for re-election, so it will help to consult major party candidates.

Promise Neighborhood Efforts With Significant Support Of Local Elected Officials

Albany, New York
Allentown, Pennsylvania
Austin, Texas
Boston, Massachusetts
Camden, New Jersey
Charleston, South Carolina
Chicago, Illinois
Columbia, South Carolina
Durham, North Carolina
Jacksonville, Florida
Kansas City, Missouri
Meriden, Connecticut
Miami, Florida
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Newark, New Jersey
Oakland, California
Orlando, Florida
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Richmond, California
San Bernardino, California
San Diego, California
San Francisco, California
Savannah, Georgia
Somerville, Massachusetts
Tampa, Florida
West Palm Beach City, Florida

2. Identify one lead site, with a clear plan to expand to the other interested sites. This prevents a clash among different groups in Maryland. It also demonstrates a plan for expansion beyond the initial community, which could be a significant plus in the application.
3. Establish a Promise Neighborhood incubator that can support the community-based organizations and train the local leaders. This is a clear sign that Maryland understands the obstacles and is helping to overcome them.
4. Secure the support of one or more major business leaders who will be willing to help raise the private seed funding.