

for Michigan's Children

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Keeping the Promise: Wrapping Communities Around Schools

Michigan is facing a nearly unprecedented economic crisis, the result of more than a decade of job losses (nearly 750,000 since 2000) and continued erosion of the state's economy. Once one of the wealthiest states in per capita income, Michigan was ranked 35th in 2009 and state revenues are now below 1971 levels. There has never been a more critical time to make sure that young people get the support, education and training they need to help drive economic recovery.

More than 35,000 young people in Michigan, one in four students, did not graduate after four years of high school in 2009. In 2007, 155,000 young adults aged 18-24 did not have a high school diploma. In addition, one of every five babies in Michigan is born to a mother without a high school diploma or GED. The economic, social, and fiscal consequences of dropping out of school are profound. These consequences translate to communities as forgone tax revenue, as well as higher social costs. Michigan's economy is dependent on making sure that more young people are well prepared for work and life.

Educational and workforce success are outgrowths of successes and failures within many systems that have been built over the course of young people's lives. For children to successfully navigate school and life, they must be born healthy and remain healthy; they must feel safe and secure; they must feel supported and cared for; they must be challenged and inspired to achieve; and they must be engaged and connected in their learning, in their communities, to their future, to extracurricular activities, and at home. Resources addressing these areas must be coordinated to change educational outcomes for young people.

A 21st century commitment to education starts at birth. Without investments in young children, the state's attempt to improve schools will not succeed. With over a third of Michigan children entering kindergarten unprepared, communities must ensure that all children begin school ready to learn. Without investments in these same children once they enter the school doors, attempts to improve schools and increase educational achievement will fail, AND without investments in these same young people who struggle to stay engaged with school or have already become disengaged, the state's attempts to expand access to higher education and modernize its economy will not work.

While reforming the education system itself is critical, alone it is not enough. Schools must develop relationships with community resources that strengthen curriculum and instruction; increase parent involvement; and meet children's health, developmental and social needs. Families, students, schools and communities often face layers of challenges and will need a coordinated approach that leverages the resources within all sectors of the community to fully support children and youth. Communities and schools must work together to ensure that all children have access to resources that ensure that they are healthy, their families are strong, and they live in safe homes and supportive neighborhoods.

Community-School Partnerships and the Promise Neighborhoods Program

Promise Neighborhoods seek to create a comprehensive pipeline of educational and community supports to make certain children reach their full potential. The Promise Neighborhood program is a powerful, community-based model that encompasses *shared* goals explicitly framed around educational outcomes

that prepare young people for post-secondary studies and living-wage work. Education is the single most effective way to end the cycle of inter-generational poverty. Being prepared for college and career is the key to earning a living wage and entering (and staying in) the middle class. A college graduate can earn 75 percent more than a high school graduate and over twice as much as someone who fails to make it even that far¹. And, as current tough times demonstrate, those with less than a high school degree lose jobs at dramatically higher rates than those with a high school or college degree.

Promise Neighborhoods, established under the legislative authority of the Fund for the Improvement of Education Program (FIE), provides funding to support schools, community based agencies and universities that are working to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in distressed communities, including urban neighborhoods, rural areas and American Indian tribes.

The promise Neighborhood program focuses on the following goals:

- Improving academic success and life outcomes for poor children
- Creating a college-going culture in poor neighborhoods
- Building a continuum of academic programs from the cradle through college and career
- Integrating existing programs in neighborhoods, filling gaps, and breaking down agency silos
- Sustaining and replicating what works
- Building capacity in local communities by supporting a lead organization that collaborates with local governments and others to deliver effective programs
- Undertaking rigorous evaluation to measure progress towards improving the life prospects of poor children.

The Promise Neighborhoods program was inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone nonprofit model and aims to replicate the model in 20 cities across the country. The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ)² is a New York City-based nonprofit that has developed a holistic approach to combating intergenerational poverty that includes the provision of a comprehensive set of academic programs, and family and community supports designed to dramatically improve students' academic outcomes.

Among the results of the HCZ model to date:

- 100% of third graders at Promise Academies tested at or above grade level on the math exam, outperforming their black and white peers throughout New York City and State.
- Of the 190 four-year-olds entering the Harlem Gems in the 2009-2010 school year, 16.5% had a school readiness classification of delayed or very delayed. By the end of the year, there were no students "very delayed" and the percentage of "advanced" had gone from 21.3% to 41.6%, with another 6.8% at "very advanced," up from only 2%.
- 254 high school students were accepted into college for the 2010-2011 year, representing 90% of HCZ high-school seniors.

Federal Funding of Promise Neighborhoods

In 2010, over 300 organizations across the country submitted applications for Promise Neighborhoods planning grants including: 260 community based agencies; 62 institutions of higher education; and 17 from other sectors including tribal nations, cities, and municipalities. The vast majority of the applicants (270) focused on improving urban communities, while 48 targeted rural areas. That year, the U.S. Department of Education awarded \$10 million in grants of up to \$500,000 to 21 nonprofit organizations

¹ Howard, D. & Stone, N. (2009). Realizing the Promise of Promise Neighborhoods. The Bridgespan Group.

² <http://www.hcz.org/images/stories/HCZ%20White%20Paper.pdf>

and institutions of higher education working throughout a diverse set of communities, including major metropolitan areas, small and medium-size cities, rural areas, and one tribal nation.

Clearly the need far outweighs available resources. The Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011 included funding for a second round of Promise Neighborhood grants with \$30 million in funding to be divided between a new set of grantees. This second round of grants will be made available to non-profits, institutions of higher education and tribal agencies.

Federal legislative proposals affecting future Promise Neighborhoods are currently being discussed. The President's FY 2012 budget includes \$150 million for Promise Neighborhoods. The House and Senate are still debating their proposed budgets. A recent bill introduced by the Chair of the Senate committee covering education issues, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), would authorize renewable five-year grants for Promise Neighborhood initiatives. This bill is expected to be included in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind and is contingent upon appropriation for Promise Neighborhoods in the FY 2012 budget.

Although funding of programs is challenging and politically polarizing, there has been bipartisan cooperation on the reauthorization of ESEA. Following years of significant reductions in school funding at the State and Federal levels, as well as cuts to programs improving school readiness, child and adolescent health, high school completion, and college and career access, there is more need than ever for communities to embrace cooperative models of service delivery to improve outcomes for children.

Community-School Partnerships in Michigan

Michigan is poised to make great strides in improving the educational success of all children. The unprecedented attention and engagement of the private sector, supporting research, innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and renewed public sector attention provide an opportunity. Michigan's comprehensive system helping communities around the state support parents with young children, getting more kids ready for school and getting more schools ready for kids provides an opportunity. We must make a commitment to invest in our children and take advantage of these collaborative opportunities.

Out of the seventeen Promise Neighborhood applications that came from Michigan, one project was selected to be funded: the River Rouge Promise Neighborhood Initiative, a collaborative effort between The Guidance Center, and the City of River Rouge. Furthermore, communities across the state have been engaged in community-school partnerships for many years to improve outcomes for Michigan children. Further dialogue is needed to strengthen and expand school-community partnerships throughout the state.

For more information on current advocacy efforts that impact vulnerable children and families, visit Michigan's Children's website at <http://www.michiganschildren.org>. For more information on the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, visit the Promise Neighborhood Institute at Policylink at <http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org>