



## A Results Focus for the *Promise Neighborhoods* Initiative

The attached framing document, *"Focusing on Results in Promise Neighborhoods: Recommendations for the Federal Initiative"* is a discussion paper jointly authored by the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), PolicyLink, and The Center for the Study of Social Policy, with contributions by Child Trends. This draft is being released at the *"Changing the Odds"* conference to advance the discussion about how a focus on results would contribute to the federal initiative.

The document recommends that the central focus of *Promise Neighborhoods* be on achieving a core set of results for poor children and families. These overarching results should drive the planning, design, start-up activities, program implementation, and evaluation of the individual sites and the overall initiative. The paper describes the partnership between the three organizations and the research we commissioned Child Trends to conduct on the results for children and families that most contribute to the overall goals of *Promise Neighborhoods* as well as the availability and usefulness of data to track progress against those results.

A summary of this research and a suggested results framework are included in the paper. The framework is built around four overarching results for *Promise Neighborhoods*: 1) *children are healthy and prepared for school entry*; 2) *children and youth are healthy and succeed in school*; 3) *youth graduate from high school and college*, and 4) *families and neighborhoods support the healthy development, academic success and well-being of their children*. The tables attached to the paper recommend an approach of identifying core results for the initiative, to be pursued by all sites, and optional results, which could be selected based on local need, capacities and priorities.

We hope that this document sparks discussion of the importance of a strong results focus in *Promise Neighborhoods* and will be helpful to the development of the federal initiative. A final version of the paper will be available on the Harlem Children's Zone ([www.hcz.org](http://www.hcz.org)), PolicyLink ([www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org)), and The Center for the Study of Social Policy ([www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org)) websites by mid-December.

The draft report from Child Trends titled, *"Outcomes and Indicators for Children: An Analysis to Inform Discussions about Promise Neighborhoods,"* was an important source of information for the above discussion paper. It is a synthesis of research about the factors contributing to children's healthy development, academic success, and college graduation. It also contains a literature review and a list of references that supports the research. When final, that paper will be available at: [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org).

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# **FOCUSING ON RESULTS IN *PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS***

## **Recommendations for the Federal Initiative**

*A Discussion Paper*

*by*

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## **FOCUSING ON RESULTS IN *PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS***

### **Recommendations for the Federal Initiative**

*Promise Neighborhoods* is a proposed federal initiative inspired by the approach and achievements of the Harlem Children's Zone. Its purpose is to help selected local communities dramatically improve outcomes and opportunities for children and families, at scale, in defined neighborhoods. The initiative will necessarily be diverse in its application, reflecting local needs and context. Looking ahead to this variation, and given the importance of what *Promise Neighborhoods* seeks to achieve for so many children, families, and communities, keeping the ultimate, desired results at the forefront of all aspects of the initiative is essential.

To that end, Harlem Children's Zone, PolicyLink, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy have come together to propose that *the central focus of Promise Neighborhoods should be on achieving a core set of results for poor children and families*. Success for individual sites, as well as for the overall initiative, will require that these results drive planning and design, start-up activities, program implementation and evaluation.

Having clearly defined results drive the work of *Promise Neighborhoods* has important advantages:

- The rigorous pursuit of results for children and families is a formidable and sustainable force for change:
  - It allows multiple stakeholders to focus on common goals and aspirations that bridge diverse constituencies and points of view; collaborate across professional and political boundaries; mobilize joint action; and sustain efforts over time.
  - It produces data and information that: (1) let local stakeholders know how and whether the initiatives are making a difference for children, families, and communities; and (2) make policymakers (and public and private funders) more willing to invest.
  - It allows comparison of progress among interventions, over time, and among sites, making it possible to select the programs and strategies that are most likely to produce positive outcomes in a specific context.
  - It creates incentives for local initiatives to identify and characterize the populations that need to be reached and served in order to achieve, ultimately, community-wide and population-level changes for children.
  
- Driving with results for children and families means:
  - **Measurement matters.** Measurable goals are identified that are clearly stated, meaningful and ambitious.
  - **Data matter.** Data systems are in place, with the capacity to capture, store and access data for community planning, decision-making and accountability.

- **Performance matters.** Initiatives are judged by the results achieved, not merely by good efforts.

This approach places accountability for improving the well-being of children and families at the center of all aspects of the initiative. It aims to assure that:

- Results-based accountability is used as a framework for initiative planning proposals.
- A focus on the desired results – and “mapping backward” from those results to choose evidence-informed program strategies – is the frame used for assessing the likely strength of proposed interventions.
- Federal investments will build local capacity to implement a results-based approach. To achieve desired results for children and families over a decade, communities need: (1) broad-based alliances of public and private stakeholders sharing a commitment to the same results (including local government, community-based organizations, schools, business, philanthropy, parents and other partners); (2) capacity to collect, analyze and use data; (3) ability to coordinate multiple funding sources; and (4) capacity to mobilize public will. Federal support for strengthening communities’ capacity in these and other ways will not only contribute to *Promise Neighborhoods’* success, but can help create each community’s “platform of capacity” to achieve results that will be a lasting legacy of the initiative.
- Evaluation of *Promise Neighborhoods* will augment on-going, real time tracking of progress toward results and reflect each community’s choices of the priorities and sequence of results they elect to work on, within a national framework.

The remainder of this paper describes in more detail the implications of this approach for the conceptualization and development of *Promise Neighborhoods*.

### **A Results Framework for the Initiative**

We recommend that *Promise Neighborhoods* define and use a results framework that is anchored in four overarching results. These results are the central statements of what the initiative will achieve for children and families. They reflect a “pathway” or “pipeline” for children’s healthy development and academic success. They culminate in the ultimate goal of college graduation (or success in obtaining another rigorous post-secondary credential). And, these four overarching results, we believe, communicate simply and clearly what *Promise Neighborhoods* strives to achieve – assuring that:

- ***Children are healthy and prepared for school entry***
- ***Children and youth are healthy and succeed in school***
- ***Youth graduate from high school and college, and***
- ***Families and neighborhoods support the healthy development, academic success, and well-being of their children.***

These four overarching or end results must be further supported by more specific results statements, some defined as “core” and others viewed as “optional”, but all of which are strongly linked to the overarching results.

1. **Core results for all sites:** A core set of results would be established that would be used by all communities selected as *Promise Neighborhoods*.
  - **These results would be those that are most central to achieving the initiative’s overarching, long term goals and are within the initiative’s purview**, that is, assuring that children served by the initiative, and eventually all children in the defined community area, are healthy and prepared for school, succeed in school, and graduate from high school and obtain a college degree or other rigorous form of post-secondary credential.
  - These results would be **selected based on what is known about the factors that most contribute to children’s overall healthy development, academic success, and success in adult life.**
  - The results framework would include **results related to family well-being, since research and experience have shown that children’s well-being is inextricably linked to families’ parenting capacity and economic security.** This approach recognizes that addressing family needs – supporting the two generations (or more) within a family – can be an important avenue for ensuring children’s healthy development and school success.
  - The core results to be used by all local initiatives would be **a manageable number.** Experience indicates that communities do better when their efforts are oriented to fewer, clearly-defined results, around which strong consensus can be forged, rather than an unmanageable laundry list of desirable outcomes.
  - The core results would have to be **achievable and measurable by indicators**, through which both long-term and interim progress can be regularly tracked.
2. **Additional results, chosen by sites:** In addition to the core results to be used by all *Promise Neighborhoods* communities, local sites could select other results based on local priorities and needs. These additional results should also meet the test of having a demonstrable link to contributing to *Promise Neighborhoods’* goals of promoting children’s healthy development, school success, high school graduation, and completion of post-secondary education or credentialing.
3. **Indicators and measures of progress toward the results:** To enable communities to gauge their progress toward achieving results, to provide a basis for program improvement, and to promote cross-site evaluation, federal guidance would suggest indicators, of two types. The first would be indicators that allow communities to track progress year to year (and in shorter increments of time as well). The second would be indicators of *capacity to achieve the results* (for example, an indicator to assess quality of teaching would be a *capacity indicator*, known to be of critical significance in improving students’ academic success). In addition to indicators specified by federal guidance, sites could propose additional indicators that reflect local needs and data sources.

4. **Setting targets for success and closing gaps in results:** Using a results framework allows local communities to set targets for achievement. Targets make a clear statement about a community's aims and ambitions to improve results for their children over a period of time.

It is helpful to express some targets in terms of "closing the gaps in results" that often exist between children and families in *Promise Neighborhoods* and children and families in the city, region, or state as a whole. Attention to closing gaps will ensure that *Promise Neighborhoods* expands opportunities for the children and families who otherwise face the greatest barriers to success. We recommend that as part of initial planning and on-going implementation, *Promise Neighborhoods* sites be asked to analyze their neighborhood data, as well as for the larger jurisdictions and regions within which they are located, and set targets related to:

- Closing the gaps in health, academic success, and college entry/graduation between children and families served within *Promise Neighborhoods* and children and families in the city, the school district, or the region.
- Closing the gaps that exist in terms of racial, ethnic, or language acquisition disparities for children and families in *Promise Neighborhoods*, thereby assuring that all children in the neighborhood area are provided the opportunities and supports needed to succeed.

In some instances, merely closing the gap in results between *Promise Neighborhoods* and the city or county as a whole will not be sufficiently ambitious. For example, educational achievement for children citywide or countywide may not be adequate. In these cases, *Promise Neighborhoods'* targets should exceed the rates of success for the city or county as a whole.

#### **Recommended Results for Promise Neighborhoods**

To illustrate a results framework, and to recommend possible core results for *Promise Neighborhoods*, Harlem Children's Zone, PolicyLink, and CSSP, with essential assistance from Child Trends, took the following steps:

- We reviewed what Harlem Children's Zone, other place-based initiatives, and states and localities have previously found to be important and achievable results for children and families, related to the goals of *Promise Neighborhoods*.
- We identified the four overarching results for children and families stated earlier in this paper. Recognizing that achieving these end results of the initiative will require many years and involve achieving other results along the way, we identified and analyzed a more extensive list of 21 child, family, and neighborhood results that, taken together, would help assure progress toward the initiative's four big goals. Child Trends, a nationally recognized research and policy institute, was asked to review the research related to these results and analyze them with regard to:
  - The "power" of each result, in terms of how strongly it was associated with achieving the four overarching results of *Promise Neighborhoods*, that is, children's healthy early development, academic success, high school graduation, and college entry/graduation.
  - The availability and utility of data to track progress against those results.

- The ability to allow comparison to other standards, citywide or statewide, so that the gaps between children in the target neighborhoods and in other jurisdictions can be identified, as described above.
- The ease and relative cost for local communities to obtain the needed data.

Child Trends' report on these results, *"Outcomes and Indicators for Children: An Analysis to Inform Discussions About Promise Neighborhoods"*, is now complete and is an important synthesis of research about the factors contributing to children's healthy development, academic success and college graduation.

- We consulted about the results framework with a group of practitioners, academics, foundation leaders and experts in child development, education, health, community change and other disciplines. They provided input into which of the "candidate" results seemed most central to the long-term goals of *Promise Neighborhoods*, and we modified the framework accordingly.
- PolicyLink, CSSP, and Harlem Children's Zone staff then recommended, from among the 21 candidate results, 12 which we suggest be considered as "core" results for use in the *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative. These results would be those for which all *Promise Neighborhoods* communities would be held accountable. The remaining results identified in this list could be optional for communities – perhaps part of a menu that could be chosen by local communities as appropriate.
- While all of the results contribute to long-term outcomes for children, experience from Harlem Children's Zone and other initiatives suggests that there will be variation in how much a children-, youth-, family-, and community-focused intervention can influence each of the results. The core results shown in Table 1 are thus those for which there is strong evidence of their contribution to the overarching results of *Promise Neighborhoods* **and** they are considered amenable to the influence of a local *Promise Neighborhoods* effort. For example, the core result related to families' economic security, *families are connected to education, training and income supplements aimed at living above the poverty level*, emphasizes linking families to the services and opportunities that help lift incomes – an achievable result for a local *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative.

Some communities are also well-positioned to address the additional important results included among the optional list shown in Table 2. A community's incorporation of one or more of these additional results is a positive augmentation of their local initiative, as long as it does not dilute or detract from (but instead clearly contributes to) achieving the overarching results for *Promise Neighborhoods*.

- No community should be expected to aim for or achieve all of the core results at the start, since they span a period of child development from early childhood to college graduation. However, over time, as communities put in place the full pipeline of opportunities, services, and supports for children, they would adopt more and more of these core results.

A summary of this research is included in the framing paper as: "Attachment A, Table 1: Recommended Results Framework and Core Results for *Promise Neighborhoods*." The corresponding table lists the overarching results recommended for the *Promise Neighborhoods*

initiative, as well as a candidate list of the core results that local sites should be held accountable for achieving. “Attachment A, Table 2: Optional Results for *Promise Neighborhoods*” describes other indicators of well-being that, while important for children and families, should be optional and not be required results for all local sites. We believe that adoption of this framework will significantly contribute to the successful development of *Promise Neighborhoods*.

### **Local Capacity to Collect and Use Data**

For local communities to use results as outlined here, *Promise Neighborhoods*’ funding and technical assistance should incentivize and support the expansion of local communities’ capacity to collect and use data in a way that supports a results orientation. The ability to analyze needed data at the neighborhood level, continuously track progress of supports and interventions, and “course correct” based on what the data show, requires new data capacity and analytic skills at the local level.

Since data capacity will need to be a core capacity of each *Promise Neighborhood*, support for that capacity should be included as part of *Promise Neighborhoods*’ planning grants and implementation funding. Federal guidance and funding can:

- Help each site **develop the capacity and infrastructure that systems, institutions, and agencies need to collect, analyze, and use data** to gauge progress toward results.
- **Require the disaggregation of data by population groups in the neighborhoods**, so that the progress within the neighborhood can be tracked to ensure that disparities by race, ethnicity, language capacity, and other factors can be addressed and reduced (as described above, in terms of closing gaps).
- **Support training for a wide range of community stakeholders** in the effective use of data and in results-based community planning and program implementation. Training in the consistent, coherent application of a results framework (for example, the Results-Based Accountability approach) equips community leaders to accelerate local planning and implementation.
- **Require annual, public reporting of results and progress** by each *Promise Neighborhoods* to their local constituencies, public and private funders, and other stakeholders, including community residents.

### **Building a Stronger Base for Evaluation**

With local communities using a consistent results-orientation as part of program planning, management and implementation, evaluation of *Promise Neighborhoods* will be richer and more robust. Evaluation is then not an after-the-fact assessment of what succeeded (or didn’t). Instead, evaluation investments can be paired with the investments in local data and learning resources that allow “real time” feedback on the progress of interventions and continuously inform program development and implementation. The combination of continuous tracking of results being achieved for children and families, and of the efficacy of interventions, along with additional process and impact evaluative studies, will yield a more current and complete picture of the effect of *Promise Neighborhoods* investments and more immediate “lessons learned” for other communities.

### **Linking to Other Initiatives and Funding Sources**

*Promise Neighborhoods'* focus on a core set of essential results for children and families heighten the importance of linking to other federal, state, and local initiatives and funding sources. None of the core results likely to emerge for *Promise Neighborhoods* can be accomplished by any one system operating alone or by any one funding source, even as augmented by the federal funding provided directly through *Promise Neighborhoods*.

We recommend that federal guidance for the initiative:

- Require **up-front commitment and alignment of key players** at federal, state, and city levels of government to advancing the work of *Promise Neighborhoods*—specifically, recognizing and signing off on the desired results (that is, the indicators of health, academic achievement, school success, and family economic success that are likely to be part of the core results of *Promise Neighborhoods*).
- Identify and **specify key areas of federal and state funding and policy** where coordinated deployment of funds is important for achieving the results sought through *Promise Neighborhoods*—for example, specific links required with child health programs, employment and training legislation, ARRA funding streams, federal education funding sources, Choice Neighborhoods, etc.
- Develop provisions for **waiver authority to allow blended funding** in support of evidence-informed local strategies for achieving desired results, and outline a process that will **expedite requests from *Promise Neighborhoods*** for changes or exemptions from federal funding or policy constraints, with such exemptions tied to specified results to be accomplished.

## Attachment A

**Table 1**  
**Recommended Results Framework**  
**and Core Results for *Promise Neighborhoods***

*Table 1 below identifies the four overarching results and the twelve core results that are proposed as a framework for Promise Neighborhoods. The core results are those improvements in the well-being of children, youth, families and neighborhoods seen as most central to achieving Promise Neighborhoods' end goals and thus would be required results sought by all Promise Neighborhoods communities. Table 2 includes an additional list of nine results which are also viewed as important contributors for achieving the initiative's goals, but which would be optional for communities.*

OVERARCHING RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE	CORE RESULTS	STRENGTH AS A PREDICTOR OF ONE OR MORE OVERARCHING RESULTS <sup>1</sup>	INDICATORS SUGGESTED BY CHILD TRENDS' ANALYSIS
<i>Children are healthy and prepared for school entry</i>	A. Children have no untreated health conditions or avoidable developmental delays at time of school entry	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of children with selected preventable chronic health conditions or avoidable developmental delays at school entry.</i>
	B. Children are ready for school learning (socially, cognitively, emotionally) at the time of school entry	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of young children deemed "ready" according to local measures of school readiness.</i>  <i>Percent of young children read to frequently by family members.</i>
<i>Children and youth are healthy and succeed in school</i>	C. Children demonstrate achievement of grade level proficiency in major subjects, especially reading and arithmetic at 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade and subsequently	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of students achieving proficiency according to NAEP Assessments at fourth grade.</i>  <i>Percent of students achieving proficiency according to state and local assessments at 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.</i>
	D. Children are not chronically absent from school	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of children missing 3 or more days of school in the past month.</i>
	E. Children and youth are physically, mentally, emotionally healthy	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of students in grades 9-12 who responded negatively to the following indicators:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Felt sad and hopeless for more than two weeks" in the past 12 months</i></li> <li>• <i>Seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months</i></li> <li>• <i>Smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days</i></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>*These assessments of the strength of each outcome in relation to the overarching results are based on review and synthesis of research literature by Child Trends.*

OVERARCHING RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE	CORE RESULTS	STRENGTH AS A PREDICTOR OF ONE OR MORE OVERARCHING RESULTS <sup>1</sup>	INDICATORS SUGGESTED BY CHILD TRENDS' ANALYSIS
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Drank alcohol in the past 30 days</i></li> <li>• <i>Are obese</i></li> <li>• <i>Ate fruits and vegetables less than 5 times a day in the past 7 days</i></li> <li>• <i>Drank soda at least once a day in the past 7 days</i></li> </ul>
<p><i>Youth graduate from high school and college</i></p>	<p>F. Youth graduate from high school</p>	<p>Strong Predictor</p>	<p><i>Percent of 9th-grade class who earned high school diplomas.</i></p>
	<p>G. Youth enroll in college and remain after one year</p>	<p><i>Not analyzed by Child Trends</i></p>	
	<p>H. Youth graduate from college or achieve a rigorous post-secondary credential</p> <p><i>(Note: Discussion is needed here about the acceptable standard of post-secondary credential to assure that it represents the same high expectations as college graduation)</i></p>	<p><i>Not applicable: college graduation is itself an end goal of the initiative</i></p>	<p><i>Percent of youth aged 25-29 who have obtained a 2-year or 4-year post-secondary degree.</i></p>
<p><i>Families and neighborhoods support the healthy development, academic success and well-being of their children</i></p>	<p>I. Families are connected to supportive networks and needed services</p>	<p>Moderate Predictor</p>	<p><i>Percent of children living in neighborhoods that provide social support.</i></p> <p><i>Percent of children participating in organized out-of-school activities.</i></p> <p><i>Percent of low-income families receiving SNAP benefits.</i></p>
	<p>J. Families are connected to education, training and income supplements aimed at living above the poverty level</p>	<p>Strong Predictor</p>	<p><i>Percent of families above the federal poverty threshold.</i></p> <p><i>Percent of families receiving SNAP benefits.</i></p> <p><i>Percent of families receiving EITC or other tax credits.</i></p>

OVERARCHING RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE	CORE RESULTS	STRENGTH AS A PREDICTOR OF ONE OR MORE OVERARCHING RESULTS <sup>1</sup>	INDICATORS SUGGESTED BY CHILD TRENDS' ANALYSIS
	K. Children live in families that provide structure, nurturance, high expectations	Strong Predictor	<i>Percent of families who eat meals together, who have rules regarding television watching, where parents read to the child, and where there is good parent-child communication.</i>
	L. Children and youth are free from abuse and neglect	Strong Predictor	<i>Rate of child abuse and neglect (substantiated victims).</i>

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**Table 2**  
**Optional Results for *Promise Neighborhoods***

*The results shown in the table below, organized by the four overarching results recommended for Promise Neighborhoods, are also important predictors of achieving the end goals of the initiative. It is expected that not all communities will be able to work on these, but for communities that can, these would be regarded as strong additions to the results framework guiding their work.*

<b>OVERARCHING RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE</b>	<b>OPTIONAL RESULTS</b> <i>Important results for possible selection by communities, subject to local priorities and capacity</i>	<b>STRENGTH AS A PREDICTOR OF ONE OR MORE OVERARCHING RESULTS<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>INDICATORS SUGGESTED BY CHILD TRENDS' ANALYSIS</b>
<i>Children are healthy and prepared for school entry</i>	M. Births are healthy and well-timed	Strong Predictor	Percent of births not low birth weight, not very pre-term, and the mother is married and at least 20 years old.
<i>Children and youth are healthy and succeed in school</i>	N. Children are in schools where income- and race-based reading gaps are eliminated by third grade	Strong Predictor	Percent of schools making progress toward eliminating gaps associated with income and race in NAEP reading proficiency at fourth grade.
	O. Youth are active participants in civic life	Moderate Predictor	Percent of youth volunteering in the community.
	P. Children and youth avoid violent mortality	Strong Predictor	Rate of child violent death.
<i>Youth graduate from high school and college</i>	Q. Youth are prepared for or engaged in productive careers	Strong Predictor	Percent of youth ages 25-29 who are enrolled in school or employed.
<i>Families and neighborhoods support the healthy development, academic success and well-being of their children</i>	R. Youth are prepared for parenting before they become parents	Strong Predictor	Percent of parents who are age 20 or older, have at least a high school education, are married, and one or both parents are employed.
	S. Fewer children and youth live apart from their families	Strong Predictor	Percent of children in foster care, or otherwise living apart from their biological/adoptive parents.
	T. Families live in safe and decent housing	Moderate Predictor	Percent of families with children living in unsafe, unstable, or overcrowded housing.

<sup>2</sup>These assessments of the strength of each outcome in relation to the overarching results are based on review and synthesis of research literature by Child Trends.

OVERARCHING RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE	<b>OPTIONAL RESULTS</b> <i>Important results for possible selection by communities, subject to local priorities and capacity</i>	STRENGTH AS A PREDICTOR OF ONE OR MORE OVERARCHING RESULTS <sup>2</sup>	INDICATORS SUGGESTED BY CHILD TRENDS' ANALYSIS
	<b>U. Neighborhoods are safe and free of violence or crime</b>	Moderate Predictor	Rates of violent and property crimes.

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