the Neighborhood Watch

Welcome

This newsletter is developed by the Promise Neighborhoods team in the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) to share information with communities that helps achieve highly effective schools and strong systems of family and community support.

Needs Assessment Resources

In last month's newsletter, we focused on comprehensive longitudinal data systems (LDS), as well as the goals and costs of the system. Since many Promise Neighborhoods are deep in the process of conducting the needs assessment, this newsletter shares promising practices and a few resources to support the process of conducting a needs assessment. The first webinar of the Promise Neighborhoods Institute (PNI) focused on gathering and using data for the needs assessment, and included presentations from Jennifer Comey of the Urban Institute and Steve Spiker of the Urban Strategies Council. Additional resources and lessons learned regarding need assessments and data collection from such initiatives as the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership are also on PNI's website. As mentioned in the previous *Neighborhood Watch,* Patrick Lester, author of the Building Neighborhoods Blog, provided a needs assessment guide based on review of the current literature, interviews with several experts, and interviews with six of the 21 Promise Neighborhoods grantees. Also check out page 4 of this newsletter for needs assessment promising practices from the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood and the Indianola Promise Community.

Community of Practice in Massachusetts

The three Promise Neighborhoods planning grantees in Massachusetts, the Community Group, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, and the United Way of Central Massachusetts, have been working closely together since the Promise planning grants were announced in September 2010. First they met under the direction of Mitchell Chester, the State's Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to align their efforts across the state, and then continued to connect by phone.

A likely result of their building a community of practice and connecting as a group with state resources is a recent announcement of a State early learning grant opportunity that will support the efforts to engage "hard-to-reach" families. The grant opportunity is limited only to the three PN planning grantees. On April 9, the three organization will also participate in a Boston Promise Convening to explore the important role of community in making positive change in urban neighborhoods .

F.A.Q. CENTRAL

Q: May a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant be used to plan to "scale up" existing cradle-through-college-to-career activities beyond the geographic area that an applicant is currently serving?

A: Yes. An applicant that has been serving children, and has already achieved significant results with those children, in a target geographic area prior to applying for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant may propose to use planning grant funds to develop a plan to expand services and scale up beyond this initial area to serve children in a new neighborhood. An applicant proposing to plan to "scale up" existing activities in a new neighborhood must partner with at least one organization or entity that provides at least one of the solutions from the applicant's proposed continuum of solutions in the geographic area proposed to be served.

TIP OF THE MONTH: Promise Neighborhoods teams may volunteer time to help with graduation and other school-related activities. This activity supports community engagement and increases awareness of Promise Neighborhoods

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Why Do Students Drop Out?

There is a consensus that these four indicators are the most telling:

- **GRADE RETENTION - BEING "HELD BACK" OR OVERAGE**
- **MULTIPLE ABSENCES**
- **MULTIPLE SUSPENSIONS**
- **FAILURE OF CORE ACADEMIC COURSES**

Questions or Concerns?
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Diploma: It's More Than A Piece Of Paper

A drop out factory is a high school where no more than 60 percent of the students who start as freshmen make it to their senior year. Most drop out factories exist in large cities or rural areas where poverty rates are high. A majority of the Promise Neighborhoods include schools that have higher than average drop out rates. In fact, according to a 2009 study conducted by America's Promise Alliance, the graduation rates vary significantly in cities that are home to some Promise Neighborhoods grantees and the surrounding suburbs. The city–suburb difference is considerable in New York (28.6%), Boston (22%), Philadelphia (21.6%), Los Angeles(19.7%), and Atlanta (18.1%).

Last month, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) released a report titled Destination Graduation:

Sixth Grade Early Warning Indicators for Baltimore City Schools--Their Prevalence and Impact. Why should we pay attention to what a Baltimore study reveals? The Baltimore Public Schools had the second largest disparity in graduation rates at 40%.

BERC also identified sixth grade as being a crucial intervention point whereas many drop out programs are geared towards eighth and ninth graders.

America's Promise Alliance recently launched Grad Nation which is a holistic effort to end the high school drop out crisis in the U.S.

Many Promise Neighborhoods grantees have ideas about how to address drop outs. As you work towards ending the cycle of poverty in your neighborhoods, reach out to one another and share your best practices. Kids that drop out impact more than just your own neighborhood.

Resources For Results

Your guide to opportunities for funding, collaboration, and outreach with Federal, state, and local providers

TWO NEW OPPORTUNITIES SUPPORT STUDENT FINANCIAL LITERACY

2011 National Financial Capability Challenge

With the goal of increasing financial literacy, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Treasury have created a 40-question voluntary online test that measures the financial knowledge of high-school students across the U.S.

25 students will be selected by lottery from the top 10 percent of scorers, and will receive a $1,000 scholarship from the Charles Schwab Foundation. Five of the students are guaranteed to be from low-income schools (where at least 50% of students receive free or reduced lunch). The Charles Schwab Foundation will also award $1,000 grants to each of the 25 schools that the winning students represent, in recognition of the important role that these educators play in advancing financial literacy.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "If we are going to be competitive globally, we have to make sure all our students graduate high school ready for college and career...Part of that readiness is being able to make smart financial decisions, including whether to invest in higher education and how to pay for it."

The test taking window closes on April 8. Students can register here and an educator toolkit can be found here.

NCUA Financial Literacy Event

The National Credit Union Administration (NCUA), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), and U.S. Department of Education are working together to facilitate partnerships among schools, financial institutions, federal education grantees, and other stakeholders to provide effective financial education; increase access to safe, affordable and appropriate accounts at federally insured banks and credit unions; and encourage saving. In an effort to increase awareness, the NCUA is hosting a series of free youth financial education and savings events across the country.

Registration information can be found here.

ING To Reward Unsung Heroes

ING is accepting applications for the 2011 Unsung Heroes awards. Are you an educator with a class project that is short on funding but long on potential? Do you know a teacher looking for grant dollars? ING Unsung Heroes could help you turn great ideas into reality for students. More information can be found here.

Community Schools and SIG Team Up

A few weeks ago, the Coalition of Community Schools conducted a webinar to explore how the community schools strategy supports the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) School Improvement Grants (SIG) efforts to turn around low-performing schools. The webinar outlined key elements of SIG guidelines related to the community schools approach. The presenters also discussed why and how a school district is using the community school strategy to turn around low-performing schools. PowerPoint and audio files can be found here.

Federal Council Offers Resources, Strategies to Improve Housing Stability, Prevent Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), in partnership with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), would like to host a conference call for Promise Neighborhood grantees and community schools to discuss strategies for building housing stability and homelessness prevention into their local design. The purpose of the call would be to share information and give more organizations ideas about how to attack the problem of student mobility by dealing with the root cause of housing instability. USICH would open the call with a brief summary of the role of Promise Neighborhoods and schools in *Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.* USICH and ED would identify a couple of model programs or agencies that are doing a lot of work in this area. It would be open for all grantees or schools to ask questions or share ideas. If you are interested, contact Jennifer Ho, Deputy Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, Jennifer.Ho@usich.gov.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROMISING PRACTICES

The Amherst Wilder Foundation and partners recently wrapped up the needs assessment of their Promise Neighborhood in the Summit-University and Frogtown communities of St. Paul. Many neighborhood residents expressed their appreciation to the Promise Neighborhood team for their efforts.

The team organized the needs assessment data in three categories—1) demographic and other social data (race and ethnicity, health, safety, etc.); 2) school data (number of students, achievement levels, attendance, etc.); and 3) survey data to collect indicators not already available. All indicators required in the FY10 Promise Neighborhoods Notice Inviting Applications and additional information considered important by the community are included in these three categories. Results of the assessment will be used to:

1) Assist Solution Action Groups, made up of community residents and service providers, to identify the most important needs of children and families in the Promise Neighborhood area, the assets now available to address those needs, additional services and supports needed, and the best solutions for supporting educational success.

2) Serve as a baseline to assess progress on indicators of success.

Research staff gathered census and administrative data in the first two categories from local school district, police and health departments, and the Census Bureau. More than 650 surveys of neighborhood residents, conducted by Wilder staff and neighborhood residents, collected data in the third category. Survey participants were randomly selected from a list of all residential addresses in the Promise Neighborhood. These households were screened for eligibility (at least one child age 18 or younger in the household). Surveys occurred by phone or in person. Respondents received a $10 gift card.

Obtaining school data was challenging. Due to school choice in St. Paul, many elementary-age students who live in the community do not attend their neighborhood schools; in addition, the neighborhood does not have its own junior or senior high schools. However, Because Minnesota has required unique student identification numbers for several years, Wilder was able to obtain K-12 education information at the student level. This education data and the other indicators in the needs assessment will ultimately be a part of a longitudinal data system. Although most of the needs assessment student data is currently at the aggregate level, Wilder Research Executive Director Paul Mattessich is "cautiously optimistic" that partners in Promise Neighborhoods will ultimately all work together to ensure that the data system includes indicators at the student level so they can be used to create a picture of how children are better served and making educational and social progress through this new model.

An important next step in the needs assessment process is to share the data with the community in four ways:
- **Promise Neighborhood Solution Action Groups**
- **Community Meetings**
- **User-Friendly Report**
- **Local Media**

Overall, residents reacted positively to being surveyed. Some folks with concerns or frustrations about their neighborhood appreciate having representatives from the Promise Neighborhood staff listening to them. Other residents, said Mattessich, take pride in their neighborhood and were grateful that Wilder is organizing information in this way and sharing it with the community. "They want a tool like this and they're glad we're doing it."

The Promise Neighborhoods team at the Delta Health Alliance in Indianola, MS are deep into their needs assessment. Their strategy was slightly different from St. Paul. Below is an overview of the needs assessment plan developed by the Southern Research Group, the key partner conducting the assessment.

Indianola Promise Community Needs Assessment

Objectives 1 & 2
Develop list of community resources
Identify key community informants
Review of appropriate community service levels
Key informant discussion groups

Objective 3
Literature review of child well-being indicators
Identify secondary data sources
Access and compile secondary data
Evaluate and refine baseline indicators in RFP
Synthesize secondary data with data from Indianola

Objective 4
Develop survey instrument
Develop sampling plan
Recruit interviewers
Interviewer training (Delta State students)
Interviewer training (Indianola residents)
Survey in field
Quality control and verification
Data entry
Frequency tables developed

Objective 5
Segmentation analysis
Generate graphs and tables
Combine results from project components