

## **Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education**

### **Health and Mental Health Services for School Age Children**

#### **Testimony of Bronwyn Mayden, MSW, Assistant Dean University of Maryland School of Social Work and Executive Director, Promise Heights**

Dr. Kirwan and Commission Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the work the University of Maryland School of Social Work in the five Baltimore City Public Schools in the West Baltimore community of Upton/Druid Heights.

The University of Maryland School of Social Work has been the lead entity for the cradle-to-career place-based initiative called Promise Heights since 2009. Alongside community residents, schools, partner organizations, and faith-based institutions, we have spent the last nine years planning, creating, and implementation a place-based strategy to significantly improve the education and development outcomes of children and families in the West Baltimore neighborhoods of Upton/Druid Heights (U/DH). A group of residents, researchers, ministers, social workers, and educators met to review the educational and health data for students who attend the five public schools in U/DH, located less than one mile from the University.

#### **NEED**

The data shows that U/DH ranked 55<sup>th</sup> of Baltimore City's neighborhoods for many of the indicators tracked by the Baltimore City Health Department. According to the American Community Survey 2011- 2015, 62% of U/DH children live below the poverty line, about 28% of adults lack a high school diploma, and nearly six out of 10 adults were either unemployed or not in the work force. The median income for families in U/DH is \$15,000 and for residents who reside in public housing around \$9,000 per year. Children in U/DH are exposed to many risk factors including high rates of violent crime, poor health, housing, and financial instability.

The group agreed one organization could not significantly improve the academic and developmental outcomes and agreed to create a sustained, coordinated commitment to a collective impact process to serve vulnerable children and their families.

#### **RESPONSE**

Promise Heights (PH) became a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhood in 2012 with the vision that all children growing up will have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.

Inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Heights' main goals are: engaging parents to strengthen their ability to support their children's achievement, improving schools and the education experience through a continuum of services, and providing whole family wrap-around support to stabilize families and households and remove barriers to learning.

We work with five schools—three elementary, one middle and one high school (FLT, Historic Samuel C. Taylor Elementary School, Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School, Booker T. Washington Middle School and Renaissance Academy High School) to support youth and their families. In total, 1,700 students attend the five schools and all five schools have higher than average rates of low-achieving students, chronic absenteeism, truancy, and academic failure.

## **STRATEGY FOR CHANGE**

PH turned each school into a community school—a strategy for organizing school and community resources around student success. It represents a holistic or whole child approach to tackling barriers and promoting opportunities for student learning and growth. The Community Schools’ integrated focus on academics, services, supports, and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

The ultimate goal is to end intergenerational poverty in West Baltimore by creating a continuous cradle-to-college network of support for participating students and their families. As part of this process PH works with a team of leaders, community partners, and dedicated staff to reach its goals.

We work with about 40 partner organizations to provide a variety of supports and services to students. Work with partners is done at the five public schools which we call anchor schools.

The Community School Coordinator (CSC) is the school leadership team member responsible for the design, implementation, and supervision of a set of programmatic preventions, interventions, and enrichment activities designed to support the holistic development of students. The CSC works under the daily guidance of the Principal, but direct supervision comes from PH, the lead agency to co-design, develop, and supervise all community school programming in the school including:

- Attendance support and interventions
- Family support services
- Family engagement and community-building
- Health and wellness services
- Enrichment activities including those that occur during the school day, after school, and summer

## **Comprehensive Services-**

Our pipeline of services covers four domains: Early Learning, Pre-K—12, College and Career, and Family and Community Services.

## **Early Childhood Education Services for Parents and Children**

Consists of pre-natal and post-natal programs, parenting education, and early education programs so that families receive early interventions. We believe that the first step to college and career success is a healthy pregnancy and birth.

Promise Heights begins its pipeline with **B'more for Healthy Babies**, a program designed to improve birth outcomes and maternal and child health. Our Resource Moms and Dads conduct community outreach, spread messages about healthy pregnancies, and lead parent groups. They identify pregnant women, assess their needs, and link to services.

**Parent University I**—for parents of children 0—3; aims to foster early literacy, numeracy, and positive discipline skills. The class also provides children with developmental screenings.

**Parent University II**—for parents of children in Pre-K; helps to prepare children for kindergarten and to create parent groups.

**Mental Health Consults** for children in Pre-K and K—assesses individual children, facilitates social-emotional learning groups in classrooms, supports Pre-K and K teachers with classroom management strategies, and leads parent education groups.

**Provide mental health supports and professional development for teachers** so they are able to conduct individual assessment to more children to make sure all developmental needs and social-emotional learning is addressed.

## **Community Schools Services**

### **Staffing**

Anchor Schools: One Full-time MSW as the Community School Coordinator at each of the 5 schools that partner with PH. (5 total)

PromiseCorps: Two full-time AmeriCorps (PromiseCorps) Members who work under the supervision of the Community School Coordinator on attendance supports and interventions (10 Total)

MSW Interns: Two at each school who provide social/emotional supports and counseling to high need students and families who have experienced trauma. Feedback from principal interviews and research indicate that students cannot learn and achieve without support after experiencing trauma. Each intern provides 16—24 hours per week of clinical interviewing and evaluation, motivational interviewing, problem-solving therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy in individual student sessions or small family or student groups. (10 Total)

Extended School Time: PH funds after school and summer programming for 460 students. PH pays BELL and Child First Authority to provide academics, enrichment, meals and physical activity. Staffing: Program Director and three teachers (20 Total)

Social emotional learning supports: PH provides trauma responsible training on social-emotional learning strategies to teachers, school staff, and school partners.

Mentoring: Four full-time male mentors for Renaissance Academy High School and Five full-time mentors at Booker T. Washington Middle School. The program is an intensive one-on-one and group mentoring program. The mentors each have 20 boys using weekly goal setting, attendance check-ins, and classroom support and coaching to positively impact students'

academic performance, attendance check-ins, mental health, substance abuse issues, employment needs and family concerns. (9 Total)

Physical Improvements to schools:

- Built two playgrounds
- Remodeled Teacher's Lounge
- Renovated Community Room

Provides Family Supports at all 5 schools:

- Food Pantries, coats, and personal hygiene items
- Financial education and emergency assistance (rent, utilities, beds, etc.) for students and families
- Employment; assists students to register for summer employment—applications, interviews, and clothing

## **Health**

A collaboration with PH and University of Maryland Medical, Dental and Nursing schools for health supports:

Dental Services – At one elementary school provide exams, fluoride treatment for all Pre-K, K and 1<sup>st</sup> grade students.

Nursing Students: Provide support with puberty, body changes, hygiene issues and immunization

Breathmobile: monthly asthma screening, treatment and medication to elementary students with asthma or suspected with asthma.

Midtown Hospital: Connect students to medical home, “Ask the Doctor” workshops

## **Indicators of Progress**

Promise Heights is a relatively new initiative; many indicators relate to services provided rather than milestones toward outcomes or longer-term goals.

Decreased infant mortality to same as Roland Park, decreased pre-term and low birth weight babies.

Parent University I & II: 175 families graduated with a significant increase in responsive parenting behavior.

School Readiness: All three elementary schools outscored Maryland students demonstrating school readiness: EM (30%); FLT (35%) and HSCT (38%) versus Maryland (20%) SY 16-17

Out of School Time: 460 students participate from 5 schools.

Decrease in chronic absenteeism rates.

Mentoring: 63% of boys enrolled in Seeds of Promise had an average increase of 48% in GPA from SY 14 -15 to SY 15-16.

Health: Through treatment, education, prevention and control of dental caries the percentage of the percentage of screened children who had cavities changed from 51.6% of children screened in October 2016 to 20.5% in June 2017.

Approximately 500 children followed by the Breathmobile last year. Data showed a 66% decreased Emergency Room visits, 60% decrease in hospitalizations, and 59% decrease in missed school days.

Financial Education: 2,979 tax returns prepared for free in partnership with Baltimore Cash Campaign, resulting in over \$4.25 M in federal and state tax returns to city residents' tax years 2013 through 2016.