

Northside Achievement Zone
FY15 SINGLE SOURCE LEGISLATIVE GRANT
Report to the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Legislature
House Education Finance Committee, Rep. Jennifer Loon, Chair
House Education Innovation Policy Committee, Rep. Sondra Erickson, Chair
Senate Education Committee, Sen. Charles Wiger, Chair
Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Richard Cohen, Chair

January 15, 2016

In reference to: Minn. Stat.; 2014 Minn. Laws Chap. 312 Art. 20 Sec. 21 Subd. 2

Education as a Lever to End Multigenerational Poverty in North Minneapolis

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) is both an organization and a collaborative partnership of more than 33 service providers and 10 schools,¹ supported through a public-private partnership, that works in partnership with a growing roster of more than 935 families in North Minneapolis to end multigenerational poverty using education as a lever.

The geographic “Zone” that is the focus of our work is a contiguous 13- by 18-block area in North Minneapolis that is the apex of poverty, violence and low educational achievement in the region. We target enrollment on those families most impacted by Minnesota’s startling achievement gap: nearly three quarters of our families earn less than \$20,000 per year, and nearly 98 percent are people of color.

NAZ-enrolled parents and children move through a pipeline that provides comprehensive and evidence-based support from pre-natal through college to career, instilling belief that success is possible, supporting children to be successful in school, and supporting families in building strong, stable homes so that children show up to school ready to learn.

The power of NAZ’s model is that our collaboration aligns multiple domains of support and the efforts of all our partners behind the same families, in the same place, at the same time, so that each organization’s work reinforces and strengthens all the others. And, because we have staff who bridge across multiple sectors, and who are able surround families with a complete team of support, challenges in one area that are likely to ripple out an impact a family’s—and in turn, a child’s—success in other ways can be identified and addressed early.

For example, this past summer, the oldest son in a NAZ family found out that he had received a prestigious scholarship to attend a local four-year college, but at the same time, his mother learned that a different scholarship that had been supporting her youngest son’s enrollment in an early learning center was ending. To make sure her young son was safe and well cared for, our NAZ mother thought she either had to give up her job—a job that she had held onto through thick and thin for nearly 15 years because she wanted to be a good role model to her children—or ask her older son to give up the college opportunity he had worked so hard for in order to help care for her youngest while she worked. NAZ was able to step up beside the family and support the mother in working through the process to secure an early learning scholarship through newly designated state funding. Thanks to the family’s partnership with NAZ, the mother was able to keep her job and maintain her family’s economic stability, the youngest son

was able to stay enrolled in a program that will help ensure he enters kindergarten ready to learn, and the oldest son was able to head off to college—where he will gain the foundation for his own future success.

Minnesota is a Leader in the National “Education Partnership” Movement

Recognizing the importance of this effort for not only North Minneapolis, but for our entire state, the Minnesota Legislature chose to support NAZ (as well as our sister effort, the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood) with a \$350,000 award during the 2015 fiscal year (July 2014 – June 2015). This decision reinforced Minnesota’s role as a national leader in education, as Minnesota was the first state to provide this type of support for an education partnership effort focused on a continuum of supports for the most at-risk students. The stated legislative intent of the award to NAZ was to reduce multigenerational poverty and the educational achievement gap within a geographic “Zone” of North Minneapolis through increased enrollment of families in the NAZ.

An Effective Investment

We are pleased to report that this investment from the State of Minnesota had its intended effect. Not only was NAZ able to increase the number of enrolled families from 680 to 873 during the grant period—and provide increased support to our enrolled families, but we also gathered increasing evidence that our work is effective and is beginning to drive improved academic outcomes on a broad scale.

We also have evidence that this has been a wise investment for our state as a whole: in February 2015, Wilder Research released a study that projects a societal gain of \$6.12 for every dollar invested in NAZ, with more than \$16.7 million in net benefit to society for each 100 participants. The net return on taxpayer investment is \$2.74 for every dollar invested.²

We’ve seen tremendous appetite among other communities to learn more about our work. During the term of this grant, we hosted more than 22 other communities from around Minnesota and the country for site visits and phone calls, and some of these communities are already implementing elements of NAZ’s strategies. In addition, we are pleased to report that we have continued to build and strengthen our relationship with other communities around the state who are implementing similar initiatives, including St. Paul, Red Wing, and Northfield. We believe that not only will the lessons we’ve learned in Minneapolis be valuable tools and resources for these communities, but that we will all become more effective by working together and sharing information. It is our intention that the work we do in North Minneapolis can be leveraged to improve the lives of children across our whole state.

Increased Enrollment and Support

During the time of our grant, enrollment in NAZ grew from 680 families to a total of 873 families with 1,840 children enrolled. Since the end of this grant term, we have continued to expand enrollment. Today, we have more than 935 families enrolled, and expect to reach our full planned enrollment of 1,000 families with approximately 2,500 children in 2016.

Support provided to these families during the grant term (July 2014 – June 2014) included the following:

- *Achievement Planning*: NAZ-enrolled families are matched with a “family coach” called a Connector who works with the family to set and achieve goals related to supporting their child’s

¹ A full list of all NAZ partners can be found on our website at www.the-naz.org/who-we-are/our-partners/.

² The complete ROI study and a summary can be downloaded from our website at www.the-naz.org/how-were-doing/results/.

academic success through a process called “Achievement Planning.” During FY2015, there were 1,099 children ages 5-18 whose parents were working on an Achievement Plan (67 percent of eligible children in this age range), as well as 345 children ages 0-4 (81 percent of eligible children in this age range).

- *Family Academy*: 93 parents completed one of NAZ’s Family Academy parenting education classes. This series of four classes, each of which meets weekly for either 8 or 12 weeks, is designed to support parents in strengthening the skills and knowledge they need to support their child’s school success.
- *Early Childhood*: NAZ supported the enrollment of 133 children in high-quality early learning programs.
- *Expanded Learning*: NAZ partner programs enrolled a total of 619 children in grades K-8 in after school and summer Expanded Learning programs designed to support accelerated growth toward grade-level achievement.
- *Mentoring*: 52 children were matched with caring adult mentors.
- *Scholar Achievement Planning*: Just as families work with a Connector to set and achieve goals, individual children work one-on-one with “scholar coaches” to set and achieve their own goals related to school success. During the year, 273 children had an active “Scholar Achievement Plan.”
- *Behavioral Health*: 39 adults and 38 children worked with NAZ’s Behavioral Health Navigator to identify and access behavioral health support. (Navigators are NAZ staff members who are subject area experts, and partner with families and their Connector to identify and access resources and opportunities from across all NAZ partners.)
- *Housing*: 234 families worked with NAZ’s Housing Navigator to stabilize their housing situation. Despite a lack of safe and affordable housing on the Northside, 43 percent (100 families) were able to stabilize their housing.
- *Career and Finance*: 99 parents worked with NAZ’s Career and Finance Navigator to strengthen their family’s economic stability. 69 parents completed a goal in this area, and 61 parents were able to secure employment.

Increasing Evidence of Effectiveness

Success at NAZ is gauged by results for child scholars and families, not programs and organizations, and ultimately, by our children’s academic achievement.

Our long-term goal is to reach the following student outcomes:

- An increase in children in the Zone entering kindergarten ready to learn from 28 percent to 80 percent.
- An increase in children in the Zone who are at grade level in reading in third grade from 16 percent to 70 percent and in math in eighth grade from 29 percent to 70 percent.
- An increase in children in the Zone who graduate from high school college-ready from 51 percent to 80 percent.

Based on the availability of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) data from our school partners, NAZ prepares an annual report analyzing performance and outcomes. Data for the 2014-2015 school year is currently under analysis by our evaluation partner Wilder Research, and will be available in March 2016.

However, our external evaluation partners at Wilder Research completed a report in December 2014 that included analysis of our outcomes data for the 2013-2014 school year.³ While this data reflects outcomes achieved prior to the beginning of the grant period of this award, we believe the results are indicative of the quality of the work we are doing.

Highlights from the December 2014 report include the following:

- Kindergarten readiness rates exceeded our annual target for the second year in a row, and we are on track to meet our long-term Kindergarten readiness goals. Based on the results of the 2013-2014 Beginning Kindergarten Assessment (BKA), NAZ-enrolled children were more likely to be kindergarten ready than non-enrolled children in our Zone: 73 percent of NAZ-enrolled children were ready for kindergarten in literacy vs. 59 percent Zone-wide, and 49 percent of NAZ enrolled children were ready for kindergarten in both literacy and numeracy versus 35 percent of children in our zone.
- There is a clear link between kindergarten readiness and enrollment in a high-quality early learning center. Among NAZ children who were enrolled in a high quality early learning center, 61 percent were ready for kindergarten in both literacy and numeracy, versus only 39 percent of NAZ children who were not enrolled in an early learning center. For literacy alone, 83 percent of NAZ-enrolled children who received an early learning scholarship were ready for kindergarten, versus 73 percent of all NAZ children and 59 percent of children Zone-wide.
- Reading proficiency among NAZ-enrolled third graders increased at a rate four times greater than their peers.
- Longer enrollment in NAZ is associated with higher academic proficiency on MCAs for children in grades three through five for the 2013-2014 school year.

In April 2015, Wilder Research also completed a detailed analysis of our outcomes for NAZ-enrolled children enrolled in our Minneapolis Public School “Anchor School” partners. We saw particularly encouraging results for NAZ children enrolled at Elizabeth Hall Elementary, a school where we have been deploying our full coordinated solutions approach (aligning academic and whole family supports behind the same children) for several years now. Among the 55 NAZ-enrolled students at Hall who were assessed using a progress monitoring tool in both spring 2014 and fall 2014, the proportion who tested as on-track for reading increased by 16 percentage points from 31 percent to 47 percent, and the proportion on-track for math increased by 17 percentage points from 38 to 55 percent. The proportion who tested as at risk for not meeting proficiency standards for reading decreased 9 percentage points from 42 to 33 percent, and for math, decreased 19 percentage points from 35 to 16 percent.

As we continue our partnership with the State of Minnesota, we think it is important to note that we are facing a continuing challenge in regard to academic outcomes data.

We have used the Beginning Kindergarten Assessment (BKA) and the MCA as our main academic measures because they were widely considered to be the “gold standard” for measuring academic readiness and proficiency, because the BKA is linked to the MCAs, and because it allowed us to align with Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), a key NAZ partner.

³ The complete report can be accessed online at www.the-naz.org/wp-content/uploads/Wilder-2014-Year-End-Report.pdf.

In fall 2014, MPS modified its BKA. The MCA for third grade reading was revised previously, and, because the BKA is linked to this MCA, the BKA was then altered to reflect those changes. The new version of both the MCA for third grade reading and the BKA were generally considered to be more rigorous—a change we welcomed because ensuring that the bar for proficiency is not too low will better prepare our children for future academic success.

Now, however, MPS has decided to no longer administer the BKAs, as there are questions around its validity, and is still determining what assessment they will use in the future. This obviously has major implications for our evaluations.

In any case, scores from before and after the BKA and the MCA switch cannot be compared. While this does not impact our ability to implement our solutions, it makes it both more challenging for us to clearly see our progress and harder to convey the impact of our work to others. We are currently working with our evaluation partners at Wilder Research to finalize how we will change our benchmark and incremental yearly goals to reflect these new tests.

Using the “Results NAZ” roundtable to drive continuous improvement

During the grant period, we strengthened our evaluation process by implementing a rigorous data review effort called “Results NAZ.” The process involves a roundtable, held on an approximately monthly basis, comprised of NAZ leadership staff, NAZ partners, parents of enrolled NAZ families, and other stakeholders and experts to review each area of our work, and the connections between areas of work, to identify what’s working or needs to change.

For each session, we produce an internal evaluation report so that the discussion will be grounded in data. Recommendations and questions from each Results NAZ are taken back to the appropriate cross-partner team for further discussion, analysis and, where appropriate, implementation.⁴

This process is designed to illuminate what we need to do differently and better in order for parents and children to achieve greater outcomes. It focuses on building a culture of accountability across the entire NAZ “ecosystem,” where partners feel accountable to one another and to families for producing tangible results in their area of contribution.

For example, we held a Results NAZ session focused on K-8 after school and summer Expanded Learning (ExL) in February 2015. For this session, we analyzed progress monitoring data from Spring, Summer and Fall 2014. Our data showed that our ExL programs are having a positive effect overall, with many children making accelerated academic progress, in particular during the summer session. Not surprisingly, the data analysis also showed that higher program attendance rates (which were high overall) were linked to increased academic performance, and within programs, increased dosage of math and reading instruction were associated with increased performance. The session also revealed areas in which inconsistent data collection hampers our ability to draw meaningful conclusions.

Coming out of the session, the ExL team members committed to identifying and implementing strategies to boost attendance; increase student enthusiasm for instructional program elements; support parent

⁴ More information about Results NAZ is available on the NAZ website at www.the-naz.org/how-were-doing/results/.

reinforcement; and increase the quality of shared information through improved data practices. Importantly, all partners agreed to do this together, as a learning community.

Another example of this process at work can be seen in how our Early Childhood partners have used the Results NAZ process to identify strategies to increase their effectiveness in supporting school readiness. During the July 2015 Results NAZ session focused on Early Childhood, data that showed that children were doing better in pre-numeracy than pre-literacy led the group to conclude that parents and teachers need additional strategies and tools to support and promote pre-literacy skill development in young children. Based on this data-driven conversation, all eight participating early childhood centers agreed that they should enhance and deepen their pre-literacy strategies, and are now taking action to implement these strategies. We believe that this action commitment would not have been made or even identified as a need without the cross-partner, data-driven discussion of Results NAZ.

Strengthening results based accountability across our collaboration

We are excited to report that our ability to collect and use data to drive results across our multi-sector/cross-agency collaborative, as well as the entire Northside community, is being strengthened even further. NAZ was one of only two Promise Neighborhoods across the country selected this past summer to participate in an effort to increase capacity to implement results based accountability (RBA) across our collaboration and community through results based leadership development provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in partnership with the Promise Neighborhoods Institute at Policy Link.

It's an 18-month experience, and will continue through 2016. The process will reach more than 100 people implementing work across NAZ and those responsible for systems and policy, including the NAZ Parent Advisory Board, Board members, leadership and staff from partner organizations, and policy makers, and focuses on bringing the capacity-building experience into the community.

Moving Forward

While we have much to celebrate, we know that there is much more left to do. We are honored to be continuing our partnership with the State of Minnesota, and other parallel efforts across the state, over the coming years.

We face a particular challenge at the end of 2016, which marks the end of our federal Promise Neighborhood grant. This grant is providing \$26 million over five years as seed money to help us bring our work to full scale, and has enabled us to develop high quality programming, refine our operating model, build infrastructure, and deploy additional staff to achieve positive early outcomes. The grant currently represents about 60 percent of our annual budget.

From the moment we were awarded the Promise Neighborhood grant we began planning for sustainability in 2017 and beyond. We convened a Sustainability Task Force of local and regional leaders. We set a diverse and ambitious fundraising plan, and have realized a more-than-doubling of funding from local and national foundations, corporations, individuals and other government sources over the past three years. We're working with our colleagues at Hennepin County to explore strategies to align the vast amount of resources the county is already investing in North Minneapolis to ensure their effectiveness. In addition, in spring 2015, in collaboration with Boston Consulting Group, we completed a business plan that lays out a plan to ensure that we will have the resources we need to continue implementing NAZ. We are also

currently working with Boston Consulting to devise a contingency plan for our operations if, despite our best efforts, we do face funding shortages.

As 2017 approaches, we are making tremendous progress. We are leaving no stone unturned as we work to fill the gap that will be left by the end of the Promise Neighborhood grant.

We know that the core asset we are leveraging to ensure our long-term fiscal sustainability strategy is our evidence of effectiveness, both in terms of results for families and children and in terms of return on investment for support invested in us.

We are grateful for the commitment the State of Minnesota has made to our continued work, and know that the state can feel confident that their investment is a wise one that will bear dividends for our state long into the future.