

Boosting Post-secondary and Career Success A two-generation approach for the Promise Neighborhood

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Rocky path to higher ed for Central Cleveland Promise Neighborhood kids and their parents

Too few neighborhood students are enrolling in post-secondary education. Of those that do enroll, very few are receiving a degree. Only about half (52 percent) of Central students who graduated from Cleveland Metropolitan School District schools in 2005 enrolled in post-secondary education and none had received a degree within five years. Of adults in the neighborhood, more than a quarter (28 percent) lack a high school diploma or equivalent degree, and 25 percent are stuck with some college experience but no degree. Very few (13 percent) have attained an associate's or higher level degree. The path to post-secondary education is broken not just for students but for their parents as well.

What is a two-generation approach?

Parents have a big role to play in preparing their children for post-secondary and career success. Mothers are particularly important partners. There is a strong, well-documented link between maternal education and children's academic readiness and achievement. Family stability and social connectedness set the stage for student success.

While intensive, holistic support is needed to overcome the kinds of generational and historical obstacles to opportunity that persist in the Promise Neighborhood, programs designed to address the family unit are not the norm. Typical programs that support early development and school-readiness focus on parenting skills and address parents primarily as facilitators of the child's development. Similarly, programming designed to boost family income by connecting adults to work only address children as obstacles to work or training. This is despite the fact that parents' educational attainment is the best predictor of children's economic mobility.

A multi-generational approach knits together services for kids with training and career opportunities for their parents, so that both children and their parents are striving for post-secondary and career success. Their successes become mutually motivating and reinforce the investments made by community partners.

Eliminating hurdles: state strategies

The state has a policy role to play in helping Ohioans, including Promise residents, access post-secondary education opportunities. The cost of post-secondary education, the potential pitfalls of the student loan system, and the personal time and resource burden of managing work, school, and family often pose barriers to degree completion. The cost of higher education is particularly steep for someone maintaining a household on a poverty-level income. The prospective student not only must cover direct costs of attendance but often the cost and complications of arranging and purchasing childcare, transportation, housing and food for a family. Ohio can tip the balance of these competing demands towards education and help support the development of two-generation strategies by

increasing need-based financial aid.

According to one community college's Net Price Calculator, a single student with one, non-college aged, dependent earning less than \$30,000 per year would need an additional \$2,136, aid to cover expenses. The estimate includes an extremely modest \$930 for "other expenses," such as transportation, childcare, and emergencies. In 2009, the neediest students at community colleges lost access to an additional source of help, the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG). OCOG is the only state source of need-based grant aid. The grant supplements federal financial aid to make post-secondary education more affordable. OCOG currently provides a range of maximum awards depending on the institution of enrollment. Students enrolling in two-year public institutions are not eligible for the grant.

Reopening OCOG to community college students would be a step in the right direction, for CCPN residents and the state. An investment of \$84 million would fully restore OCOG to its pre-recession level of funding. Eligibility could be expanded to students at 2-year public intuitions with a \$20 million investment.

Creating opportunity: two-generation partnerships in the neighborhood

Bridge programs, accelerated and stackable credentials, integrated training modules, and industry recognized in-demand credentials are only effective if students can get and stay in. To achieve this, many CCPN residents have to balance the responsibilities of being a parent, a sole provider, and a student. Many are starting from a point of having little to no support network to draw upon. Reinvigorated investment in need-based aid would help; CCPN could further tip the balance toward education by partnering with post-secondary institutions and workforce development organizations to reduce some information and financial barriers.

The CCPN is partnering with a variety of organizations to build these links for young students; expanding these connections to their parents would foster a whole-family culture of learning. Using a two-generation approach to connect Promise parents to programs targeting GED completion and supporting retention in higher education will generate educational achievement for both the parents and their children. Addressing these particular challenges to post-secondary success while delivering services to kids can improve short- and long-term outcomes for the entire family unit. Better outcomes are possible for CCPN residents and better pathways out of poverty can be built for Central students, if supportive programing addresses the interconnectedness of child success and whole-family stability.