
THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE
An "All Hands on Deck"
Approach to Transforming Education and Community

Betina Jean-Louis

Harlem Children's Zone

Katherine Shoemaker

Harlem Children's Zone

Edmund W. Gordon

Teachers College, Columbia University

INTRODUCTION

For almost 40 years, Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) has been committed to helping disadvantaged and at-risk children secure both educational and economic opportunities. The work is founded on the belief that a critical mass of engaged, effective families combined with early and progressive intervention in children's development can help neighborhood youth achieve these opportunities. Under Geoffrey Canada's leadership, HCZ launched the Harlem Children's Zone Project, one of the largest social experiments in the United States, in 1999. The HCZ Project is a comprehensive, geographically-defined community-building initiative that seeks to create a community in Central Harlem that provides all of its children with the supports and services that are available to children in more affluent communities and produces outcomes that meet or exceed state and city averages in education, health, and social welfare.

Over 10,500 children live within the 97-block area that is served by the HCZ. More than 35% of these children live below the poverty line

and neighborhood public schools lag behind the city of New York in performance on state assessments. To address these challenges, HCZ has set up a seamless system of support from birth to college graduation, implementing best practices at every stage. This network of neighborhood-based programs has had a real, documented positive impact on children and the infrastructure of the community.

As policymakers and other organizations increasingly look to the HCZ model for inspiration and seek to meet or exceed our outcomes, we advise them to become familiar with the five core principles we consider key to our success. For communities seeking to create an initiative modeled after the HCZ Project that is responsive to their own particular needs would do well to replicate our principles—not our programs. As Jeffrey Bradach (2003) notes in “Going to Scale” the “objective is to reproduce a successful program’s results, not to slavishly recreate every one of its features” (p. 19).

The theory of change underlying the HCZ model requires the coordinated application of the following five core principles:

- Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively and at scale. Engaging an entire neighborhood helps to reach children in numbers significant enough to affect the culture of a community; transform the physical and social environments that impact children’s development; and create programs at a scale large enough to meet the local need.
- Create a pipeline of support. It is essential to develop excellent, accessible programs and schools and link them to one another so that they provide uninterrupted support for children’s healthy growth, starting with pre-natal programs for parents and finishing when young people graduate from college. The basic programs should then be surrounded by additional interventions that support families and the larger community.
- Build community among residents, institutions, and stakeholders, who help to create the environment necessary for children’s healthy development.
- Evaluate program outcomes and create a feedback loop that cycles data back to management for use in improving and refining program offerings.
- Cultivate a culture of success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork.

WHY A NEIGHBORHOOD APPROACH?

The Harlem Children's Zone Project focuses its efforts on an entire neighborhood within Central Harlem because the physical, institutional and social environments of a neighborhood directly and profoundly affect child development and because there is a need for large-scale programs in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. HCZ's neighborhood approach is designed:

- To create an environment that will have a beneficial effect on child development. To do so, HCZ surrounds children with positive role models, engaging and effective programs and schools, and messages focused on success. As an increasing percentage of the community becomes saturated with these positive influences, the neighborhood reaches a tipping point (Gladwell, 2000), changing negative norms into positive ones.
- To permeate the neighborhood, focusing on a finite area of 97 blocks and providing intensive services to a majority of the children,¹ including those who are hardest to reach. Staff members aim for children to participate in multiple, age-appropriate programs throughout each developmental stage of their lives, increasing the dosage that each child receives.
- To change the odds for the entire community rather than just helping a few kids beat the odds. With 13 million poor children nationwide, programs must scale up to serving a neighborhoods in order to transform the lives of a critical mass of children.

The Effect of a Neighborhood on Child Development

The physical, institutional and social environment of a community has a profound effect on the people who live in it, and especially on the development of the neighborhood's children. Not only parents and siblings, but also the physical environment, local cultural mores, peers, role models, local institutions and government policies all directly affect the way a child develops, either in a positive or negative way (Bell & Rubin, 2007). As noted in *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), "Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development

¹ In Fiscal Year 2009, the HCZ Project served over 8,000 children and over 5,000 adults through the HCZ Project programs. As an agency, HCZ, Inc. served over 17,000 children and adults through the HCZ project and additional programs located outside the catchment area.

portrays nested layers of influence on children emanating from the family out to the more amorphous realms of neighborhoods, policies, and social values” (pp. 329-330).

In middle and upper class communities, these nested layers of influence are overwhelmingly positive: most children have financial and familial security, receive good quality health care, attend good schools, and participate in challenging extracurricular activities. In addition to having working adults surrounding them, they also benefit from peers who get to school on time, do their homework and aim high with their goals. These young people develop confidence that their futures will include college graduation because everything in their environment teaches them this.

By contrast, in low-income communities, many children often confront a daily barrage of negative influences. They frequently lack familial and financial security, which means that they are sometimes hungry and lacking in nutritious meals; do not always receive appropriate health care; and often are in the midst of some form of family stress. Their educational opportunities can be abysmal both during the school day and after school. As a result of high levels of unemployment in their community, they may not see the value of investing in the education or training necessary to succeed in the job market (Wilson, 1987). Some of the only financially successful people they see are drug dealers and gang members because all too often if their parents have a job, it's a minimum-wage, dead-end position without benefits. Two examples from the research literature follow:

- The negative effects of living in distressed neighborhoods were well illustrated when some families had the opportunity to leave through the Moving to Opportunity demonstration project. In this project, poor families living in public housing were helped to move to more affluent, stable neighborhoods in private-market housing. Researchers documented that the mental health of family members improved dramatically after the move and equated the magnitude of change to “some of the most effective clinical and pharmacological mental health interventions” (Kling, Liebman, & Katz, 2007).
- The Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program resulted from a housing discrimination lawsuit and enabled black public housing residents to relocate to neighborhoods with fewer than 30% black population. Authors Mark Votruba and Jeffrey Kling (2008) find that more advantaged neighborhoods “shield poor black male youth

from the mortality risks they face, especially the risk of homicide” (p. 16). In fact, they estimate that the moves saved 17 lives (of the 2,850 male youth who participated in the program), 80% of which were the result of reduced homicides.

These two examples provide evidence of the impact of a neighborhood on a child's outcomes. However, HCZ's approach differs from these two initiatives in that rather than moving families to new neighborhoods, HCZ's goal is to transform the odds for all the children living in the neighborhood.

Absent sufficient means and resources to improve disadvantaged neighborhoods, the cycle of poverty will continue anew with each generation. Small-scale, uncoordinated efforts produce some results for some people. However, poverty, particularly concentrated poverty, is a large-scale crisis that demands a community-wide, coordinated, holistic approach. Focusing best-practice programs and community building efforts on a single neighborhood enables HCZ to change the social, institutional and physical environment of the community. HCZ's programs replace the tangled web of obstacles for children with a network of support that promotes their healthy development.

In Harlem, HCZ has woven this network by knitting together, strand by strand, efforts including these: (a) creating top-quality early-childhood schools; (b) providing out-of-school-time activities; (c) developing mental and physical health initiatives for more than 8,000 children and youth; (d) hiring, training, and cultivating neighborhood role models; (e) cleaning up playgrounds; (f) building clean, colorful program sites, community centers, and schools; (g) collaborating with faith-based organizations, cultural institutions, and universities; (h) providing parents with financial counseling, legal help, and tax services; (i) helping residents to organize and develop leadership skills; and (j) tackling any and all obstacles that prevent children from achieving their full potential. Without this coordinated, holistic approach, HCZ would still be struggling to change the lives of a few hundred children rather than transforming an entire neighborhood of children and families.

Coordination is not sufficient. Achieving critical mass is also necessary. In our experience, the interventions need to be large enough and inclusive enough to create a tipping point at neighborhood-level scale. What is a tipping point? As Malcolm Gladwell (2000) defines it in his book of the same name, a tipping point is “the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point” (p. 12). By serving thousands of

children in a 97-block neighborhood, the HCZ Project is able to reach that critical mass and help to take the entire community across the threshold that separates dysfunctional from supportive environments. If HCZ served the same number of children across all of New York City, instead of one neighborhood within the city, the impact would be substantially diluted. The community would never reach the boiling point at which cultural norms turn from negative to positive.

HCZ PROJECT PIPELINE

Over time, HCZ has created a fully-articulated cluster of programs with the potential – and intent – of connecting with children from birth



through college graduation (please see the website, www.hcz.org, for additional information about the agency). Our

system of programs seeks to maximize educational outcomes by enveloping students and their parents in a progression of pedagogically-continuous programs that are undergirded by community building, social welfare, and health initiatives.

Early Childhood and School Pipeline

Ideally, children enter into the early childhood education program cluster through their parents' participation in the Baby College, which provides parenting skills and other supports to HCZ residents who are expecting a child and/or raising one between the ages of 0 to 3. The Baby College offers parents hands-on, interactive training to help them to understand child behavior and development; appropriate forms of discipline; child safety and how to make their homes safer; the importance of intellectual stimulation and education and how to engage with their children in ways that foster brain development; how best to advocate for their children in a variety of settings; maternal and child health issues; and how to maximize their use of the health care system. Paul Tough's (2008) book about the Harlem Children's Zone provides

a compelling picture of Baby College, our charter schools, and other initiatives.

After Baby College, families of three-year-old children are encouraged to participate in an early lottery for enrollment in Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy or Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy II Charter Schools.² The early enrollment lottery allows 180 families to secure a position in one of the schools for their 3-year-old children, two years before they will enter the kindergarten class. In the interim, HCZ (the schools' institutional partner) provides ongoing support to those children and parents via the Three Year-Old Journey, Get Ready for Pre-K, and the Harlem Gems programs in turn. (While the majority of children entering into Promise Academy or Promise Academy II join the school as kindergartners, Promise Academy also brought in middle schoolers via lottery from 2004-2005 to 2006-2007 and in 2008-2009. It is unlikely that we will bring any new students into our middle school: as of 2009-2010, students who started attending the school in kindergarten will rise into these slots.)

The Three Year Old Journey (TYOJ) works with parents of students accepted into one of HCZ's Charter Schools through the early enrollment lottery. TYOJ provides an intensive educational program that meets every Saturday for 4.5 months. The parent component prepares adults for effective engagement in early childhood education by discussing psychosocial issues (such as attachment, parental ambivalence, discipline, etc.) and developmental theories and milestones (such as providing information on the knowledge and skills of pre-kindergarten students). The child component introduces children to our staff and acclimates them to a high-quality, stimulus-rich early childhood environment (sessions are held in the Harlem Gems Universal Pre-K classrooms) that prepares them for entry into the Harlem Gems. The parent program focuses heavily on literacy, including workshops on building language skills. Since TYOJ occurs on Saturdays, participants can also attend a pre-kindergarten or daycare concurrently.

Get Ready for Pre-K (GRFP), the next step in the progression, involves children in small and large group activities that are designed to

² Like all New York State charter schools, Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academies are subject to enrollment lotteries if the number of participants exceeds the number of available slots. The charter applications for the two schools include a provision for an early lottery; the NYC Department of Education has permitted the schools to accept applications for children at the age of 3 who will matriculate to either HCZ Promise Academy or HCZ Promise Academy II.

increase socialization skills, build routines, and provide exposure to the complete classroom experience. Whereas Three Year Old Journey engages students for approximately three hours on Saturdays and focuses primarily on socialization, GRFP meets from 8 AM to 5:45 PM every weekday for six weeks. The program has a particular focus on the development of pre-literacy skills and takes place during the summer preceding entry into Harlem Gems.

The Harlem Gems Universal Pre-Ks are HCZ's year-round, extended-day pre-kindergarten programs for four year olds. Harlem Gems promotes the intellectual, emotional, social, physical, aesthetic, linguistic, and motor competence of four-year-old students in a safe and nurturing environment. Each class is staffed by a certified teacher, an assistant teacher, and three Peacemakers (college-age AmeriCorps interns). Harlem Gems Universal Pre-K programs serve 140 children per year. Class size is limited to twenty students, allowing for a child to adult ratio of 4:1. The program operates Monday through Friday, from 8 AM to 5:45 PM. The original Harlem Gems UPK recently concluded its eighth year; the Uptown Harlem Gems UPK concluded its second year.

The Harlem Gems Head Start follows the same model as the Universal Pre-Ks but has a few important differences: 1) 25 of the 57 children enter the Head Start at three years of age and a sizable proportion of the participants receive two years of instruction in the program, (2) because of income guidelines, students in Head Start tend to come from families with even lower socioeconomic status than that of Universal Pre-K participants, and (3) the program must also adhere to Head Start guidelines and regulations.

HCZ Promise Academy Charter School served K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, and 9th grade students in 2008-2009, providing a comprehensive college preparatory educational program with an extended school day and year. HCZ Promise Academy II Charter School served K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade students in 2008-2009. Both Promise Academy and Promise Academy II will eventually include children from K through 12th grades, bringing a strong focus on literacy and mathematics (over two hours of literacy instruction and over 90 minutes of mathematics instruction each day) within a safe, structured and personalized environment to 1,300 and 1,040 students, respectively. At capacity, each of the charter schools will be divided into four smaller "schools" (primary, elementary, middle, and high school) that will emphasize personalized relationships between students, teachers and families.

The academic day runs from 8 AM until 4 PM, approximately 20% longer than the vast majority of surrounding traditional public schools. The academic year consists of 210 days of school, an increase over the 180 days required by law. Students also have the opportunity to participate in after-school programming from 4 PM – 6 PM and Saturday classes in preparation for New York State standardized tests. After-school and in-school staff members make a continuous effort to ensure consistency with the school day; administrative, teaching, and line staff members confer about behavior management strategies, students' areas of strength and weakness (individually and as a group), strategies for working most effectively with particular students and families, daily lesson plans, and other topics.

HCZ also provides a variety of interventions for children and youth who do not attend Promise Academy and Promise Academy II. The organization continues to support the seven public schools in the zone via the Peacemakers, HCZ employees who are placed directly into individual classrooms and provide whatever support their assigned teacher desires. For example, intern activities include making photocopies, engaging individual students or groups in academic work, taking students to the restroom, and assisting teachers with developing lesson plans. In addition to their work in the classroom in support of teachers, Peacemakers have also assumed responsibility for maintaining order during transition periods (the beginning and end of the school day, lunch period, etc.) and for running academically- and recreationally-focused after school and summer programs. Administration of yearly surveys to school staff clearly shows the gratitude and appreciation that school leadership and teachers have for their Peacemakers.

Adolescent (Middle School and High School) Pipeline

The HCZ Project portfolio of programs also includes several academically-oriented youth development programs for those students who do not attend our charter schools. HCZ provides a variety of options for middle and high school students that are designed to meet divergent interests and skill sets. For example, HCZ's TRUCE Fitness and Nutrition Center teaches middle school students about nutrition and fitness; provides a fitness center for aerobic activity and strength-conditioning, including a karate dojo; and engages world-renown chess experts to provide instruction and prepare students for competitive play. Another program, A Cut Above, focuses on fostering work readiness skills while engaging students in multiple activities including homework assistance,

computer-based reading instruction, recreational play, mentoring, and boys' and girls' groups.

HCZ offers multiple high school programs. Initiatives for this age group include TRUCE, the Employment and Technology Center, and Learn to Earn. TRUCE has a media arts focus, teaches students to become critical consumers and creators of media, and offers them opportunities to work with a youth-produced newspaper, theater troupe, and /or cable-access television show. Employment and Technology Center participants learn about using and repairing computers, becoming sophisticated users of multi-media technology. Learn to Earn teaches students work readiness skills within the context of a college preparation program: students are expected to attend college while also learning a great deal about preparing for the world of work.

These recreational offerings are supported by academic case management at each of the programs. Each student advocate has a caseload of 20 students. They oversee each individual student's academic performance and program and school attendance, they identify the need for intensive academic services and arrange for their provision (including one-on-one, small group and classroom tutoring, Regents, and SAT preparation), and provide supports during high school and throughout the college application process (identifying quality schools, preparing for entrance exams, assisting in applying for admissions and scholarships).

HCZ's College Success Office (CSO), in its third year in 2008-2009, offers support for students who attend a variety of schools. When the HCZ Project began, acceptance into college was the agency's ultimate endpoint. Over time, however, the value of a high-school diploma has steadily decreased. As the number of students who had negotiated the adolescent pipeline and entered into college began to swell, we became aware that these students needed the agency's assistance in navigating through their college experience and could leave school if not provided with the proper scaffolding. Many of these students were the first individuals in their families to attend college; as a result, parents could not draw upon prior experience to help their children guard against the range of problems they might face. CSO came into existence to provide academic, psycho-social, and financial counseling to students and families.

In 2008-2009, there were 370 HCZ-related students who were in college and being served by CSO. It is noteworthy that none of these youth had been the recipient of our fully-articulated pipeline since they

are too old to have attended our early childhood programs or our charter schools. We expect that students who have the benefit of our full range of programs will show even better outcomes (for example, more of those students will be expected to attend top-tier schools). Nevertheless, the older students have also derived great benefit from participation in our youth development after-school programs and are on the way to bright futures as successful citizens. HCZ continues to bring older children into this attenuated pipeline because (1) we believe these students are worthy of saving and (2) we realize that adolescents who are engaged in positive endeavors are an important component in building a positive community ecosystem for the younger students in the pipeline.

Family and Community Supports

HCZ's pipeline of youth development programs is supported by several family, social work, health, or community-building initiatives. Community Pride, HCZ's community-building arm, engages neighborhood residents in multiple projects aimed at improving the quality of life in the HCZ Project. Community Pride supports the development and strengthening of block and building associations, neighborhood beautification projects that include community residents, HCZ employees, and corporate volunteers, home ownership through participation in New York City Housing Preservation Department's Tenant Interim Lease Program, and resident partnership with HCZ via participation in the Community Advisory Board.

The Harlem Children's Zone Asthma Initiative is a multi-component project that has determined the asthma prevalence for 0 to 12 year old children who live in the zone or attend a school or program therein and provides services to children with the condition. With our partners from Harlem Hospital and the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, we have determined that 30% of the over 5,000 children whose parents completed surveys have been diagnosed with asthma, thereby establishing the magnitude of the disproportionate burden of asthma in our community (in comparison to a national rate of 7% reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2002). A team of community health workers, health educators, doctors, nurses, social workers, and lawyers have provided a variety of services that have helped families of children with asthma to better manage the disease (resulting in children missing fewer days of school and decreasing the number of emergency room visits, among other outcomes).

HCZ's health offerings also include the Harlem Children's Health Project, a collaboration with Children's Health Fund that provides physical, mental health, educational, and dental services to students in our charter schools and health education and promotion services to all HCZ families. Health programs also include our Healthy Living Initiative, a newer program that is piloting several strategies for addressing the obesity epidemic for children and adults. The Healthy Living Initiative is supported by the organization's focus on healthy foods: our Executive Chef creates healthy meals for participants in school-day and after-school programs, with a particular focus on including fresh, locally-grown, and organic produce.

HCZ's Family Support Center (FSC) undertakes a crucial and difficult aspect of our work. Individuals who receive counseling, educational workshops, and case management from FSC staff represent some of the most fragile in our communities, as participating families are those who are in danger of having the children placed into foster care. By providing a variety of crisis-intervention and extended services over time, FSC strengthens family functioning and attempts to keep children at home with the parents whenever feasible. In the event that a child must be removed from the home, program staff works hard to keep him or her in this community and/or with other family members so as to minimize the disruptions in their lives. Ideally, children who do enter into foster care will benefit from the stability of staying in the same school and attending the same HCZ after-school programs, making their adjustment somewhat easier.

Each of the programs in the Harlem Children's Zone system has been developed using evidence regarding what works for poor children and their parents. The interventions seek to: (1) maximize educational outcomes for poor children by working with children and parents (as with Chicago Child-Parent Centers, Abecedarian, and Perry Pre-school/High Scope); (2) ensure each of the programs in the series is strong and incorporates best practices (Kagan & Neuman, 1998); (3) foster strong linkages across programs to smooth transitions and ensure programs are pedagogically continuous; (4) be local, fully-articulated, and responsive to the needs of the Harlem community (e.g., using directive instruction, incorporating a social component that is responsive to the needs of parents who may not normally feel comfortable in the educational setting); and (5) provide important data for policy-makers and decision-makers who want to maximize growing investments

in early childhood education and other areas pertinent to youth development.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

A strong family creates the best scaffolding for healthy child development. In order to thrive, even the strongest families need the support of a healthy, flourishing community. At HCZ, we work hard to provide support and services for the healthy development of all of our community's children; but we know that our work will only be truly effective if it occurs in the context of building up the entire community. One lone organization cannot effectuate neighborhood change. HCZ is, in every sense, a collaborative community-building endeavor.

We collaborate with residents, stakeholders, and institutions on fundamental issues affecting children—and we have done so from the very beginning. The HCZ Project started with a visioning process in which Harlem residents advised us on local needs and we incorporated their feedback into the roll-out of the initiative. From that point on, community members have continued to work with us and support our growth in myriad ways.

Our principal community-building program, Community Pride, employs four main strategies to repair the fabric of neighborhood life: community organizing, leadership development, neighborhood revitalization, and connection to social services.

- **Community Organizing:** Community Pride helps to organize and strengthen tenant and block associations. Participation in these associations fosters a sense of community among residents and empowers them to address local quality-of-life issues.
- **Leadership Development:** We offer leadership training for community members, particularly the leaders of the tenant and block associations, and we host retreats to bring leaders together to discuss issues of concern in the community. Participants take advantage of these opportunities to learn critical organizing and communication skills and to understand how to navigate complex systems, like government bureaucracies. This enables individuals to deal effectively with a variety of agencies and issues affecting their lives and the life of their community. In addition, we continually recruit residents to serve on the HCZ Community Advisory Board, thus

ensuring that the voice of Central Harlem is always heard clearly at HCZ.

- **Neighborhood Revitalization:** Community Pride staff and local residents together identify areas for neighborhood improvement and execute beautification projects to upgrade the community's physical environment. When residents see a chaotic, unsightly area transformed into an orderly, beautiful space, the physical change creates a psychological change. Community members begin to have a more positive view of the neighborhood, and that new attitude affects children as well as adults. HCZ encourages this new attitude by engaging as many participants as possible in those beautification efforts. We bring young people from HCZ programs together with adult residents and corporate volunteers to work on an array of revitalization projects, including painting, cleaning up streets, and creating and maintaining community gardens. In working together to reclaim a lost neighborhood, neighbors find a new and powerful sense of community.
- **Referrals to Social Services:** Social workers are essential members of the Community Pride staff. They work alongside the community organizers to refer families to needed services like counseling, housing assistance, and emergency food and clothing.

Research has demonstrated that community building enhances both the human and financial resources of a community. Human capital appreciates when residents and stakeholders partner with corporations and their staff members to improve a community. The dollar value of a neighborhood increases when its physical infrastructure is upgraded, its residents live in safety and security, and its needs are addressed promptly and effectively. Community Pride's work aligns with these strategies and outcomes:

- Each year, corporate partners provide volunteers and resources for projects essential to improving life in Central Harlem. Some volunteers help brighten the environment by painting classrooms or building safe playgrounds. Others work with young people, showing them what the corporate world is like or teaching them how to invest resources.
- When they work together in organized groups, such as tenant and block associations, residents gain the skills and the leverage to make

government agencies respond to neighborhood needs, such as a deteriorating infrastructure.

EVALUATION AT HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

HCZ believes children and families are best served when the systems that touch their lives work in concert together in unified, well-considered, and proactive ways. Where such collaborative comprehensive educational efforts for children exist, they are best supported by wide-ranging and interconnected program evaluation efforts. Over time, HCZ has developed an internal evaluation capacity that now includes several evaluators who work closely with external consultants and researchers to collect and analyze data so that the organization can use the information for continuous program improvement.

As the organization has expanded and improved over time, HCZ's evaluation structures have shown a corresponding evolution. In the initial years, as with many agencies, evaluation efforts focused on program process and not outcomes. For example, many of our initial goals related to infrastructure building, focusing on issues such as meeting targets for expanding the amount of staff members hired and training those individuals, identifying and readying appropriate sites, and registering specific numbers of participants. At Baby College, for example, we had set yearly participation targets that would allow us to serve a total number of individuals in our initial 24-block area that would be consistent with serving 80% of the number of 0-3-year-old children who were reported to live in that area (as per the total number of individuals recorded in the corresponding census tracts). We understood that this was an imprecise process because the census numbers were static and did not allow us to take mobility, births, and deaths into account. Nevertheless, setting a numerical target was helpful: it clarified expectations for administrative and outreach staff; created easily understood and measured benchmarks; and emphasized the importance the agency placed on saturating the neighborhood with services (i.e., reaching scale).³

³ It should be noted that HCZ did collect data on participant outcomes from the very beginning, despite the fact that our external goals were participation-related; in this way, we were able to establish baselines and to determine which aspects of our programs worked well and which needed to be revised.

As the programs developed, we started to incorporate more of a focus on program impact while continuing to highlight implementation. Meeting participation targets was still crucial—children could not be assisted if they did not attend regularly and we could not even attempt to achieve the desired community-wide impact without serving a majority of the neighborhood’s children—but we also began reporting on indicators that addressed the desired impact of the programs. Given the wide range of interventions provided, the desired outcomes for each of the individual programs varied a great deal. Internal evaluators met with administrators and program staff to create logic models for each of the programs, identify the most important indicators, and establish systems for tracking those indicators.

Measuring impact became even more important as HCZ experienced explosive growth and wanted to ensure that our programs would continue to improve despite the stressors placed on our organizational infrastructure. Evaluation efforts focused on individual programs, with the vast majority of the investigations considering short-term gain. Baby College provides one example: analysis of Baby College results focused on parents’ performance in individual cycles. At the beginning and end of each of the nine-week cycles administered in a given year, external evaluators administer a survey to the participating parents. In this way, we were able to determine that: parents’ homes were consistently becoming safer after program participation (with parents significantly more likely to possess important items such as outlet covers and window guards after program participation than before); parents were increasing the amount of time they reported singing and reading to their children; child immunization rates were improving; and parents improved their understanding of child welfare guidelines (becoming better at identifying the behaviors that could constitute neglect or abuse as defined by the New York City Administration for Children’s Services).

Over time, we began to consider how we might use evaluation in more interesting ways at the agency, turning our attention to research efforts that encompass longer time spans and involve multiple HCZ Project programs. HCZ reached out to one of this paper’s authors, Edmund W. Gordon, to help us to plan and implement a longitudinal study that would track participants in our early childhood programs, following them into Promise Academy or Promise Academy II and for the next ten to twenty years of their lives. Dr. Gordon invited several top scholars to join an advisory committee that would help HCZ to develop the study and provide feedback as it progressed.

We developed an evaluation plan that would permit us to document the implementation and impact of HCZ's interventions on parents and children's outcomes over time and that would meet the following objectives:

- Determine how well each HCZ programmatic component (Baby College, Three Year Old Journey, Get Ready for Pre-K, Harlem Gems Universal Pre-K and Head Start, and Promise Academy) is implemented over time.
- Determine the impact of each programmatic component on specific desired outcomes.
- Determine the differential impact of programs and activities for male and female children and students.
- Determine what combination of HCZ programs and activities have the strongest long-term effects.
- Correlate implementation quality with observed outcomes.

To address these questions, we determined that external and internal evaluators (and program staff) would work together to collect and analyze information relating to cognitive development (the Bracken Basic Concept Scale and the Woodcock-Johnson III), behavior, school performance, in-school and after-school attendance, and participation in HCZ wrap-around services (such as identification of students requiring intensive intervention and provision of services such as speech or occupational therapy, individual or family therapy; and assistance getting children to school on time or at all), and program implementation.

In the course of developing the study, our advisory group determined that it would be useful to engage in a few interim investigations that would include some children who had not benefited from our full early childhood experience; these data could give us some preliminary data to consider as we continued to build a complete record for the children in the longitudinal study. It was determined that it could be enormously beneficial to focus our attention on the performance of Promise Academy students who were of an age to participate in the New York State testing program (3rd grade or higher). The requirement for a Promise Academy entrance lottery affords an opportunity to compare the achievement of Promise Academy attendees and non-attendees. The elementary school cohort was of particular interest to us, as these students had spent their whole scholastic careers at Promise Academy.

These students' results would only be a partial measure of the effectiveness of the model because many of the children would not have participated in HCZ's early childhood programs. Nevertheless, we still believed that it would be useful to examine the testing data and to consider what the results could tell us about the effectiveness of our schools. We considered how we might be able to access the test score, demographic, and school attendance data for Promise Academy students and their peers who had applied to the school via lottery but who had not been accepted. Truthfully, we were somewhat daunted by the prospect of navigating the New York City Department of Education (DOE) bureaucracy so as to receive the proper clearances to make the desired comparisons.

At around the same time, Dr. Roland Fryer, an economist at Harvard University, approached Geoffrey Canada and expressed a desire to analyze data relating to Harlem Children's Zone and HCZ Promise Academies. Mr. Canada agreed to turn over our lottery information to Dr. Fryer, giving him *carte blanche* to follow the data wherever it might lead. Through his connections with the New York City Department of Education, Dr. Fryer was able to obtain access to the DOE data for all Promise Academy lottery applicants, regardless of their participation status.

In short order, he combined the lottery data HCZ provided with achievement, attendance, and grade retention information from the DOE into a series of regression analyses. Dr. Fryer and his colleague, Will Dobbie, used a variety of statistical models to examine all of these data. Their results were frankly astounding, with Promise Academy and Promise Academy II elementary school students (who had started at the schools in Kindergarten or first grade) and eighth graders (who had started at Promise Academy in grade 6) outperforming the average white student in New York in mathematics. Elementary school students outperformed NYC white students in English Language Arts as well (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009).

Over time, as the study tracking the inputs and outcomes for three cohorts of students in our early childhood programs moves forward, these results will eventually connect with the yearly analyses that Dr. Fryer and his colleagues will undertake. The oldest students in year 3 of our longitudinal study are currently in the 1st grade. In less than two years, those students will take New York State math and English Language Arts assessments. At that point, we will be able to consider their performance on the State tests in light of the baseline cognitive and

behavior data previously collected and our comprehensive understanding of the full-range of services that those children required and received as they made their way through the HCZ pipeline.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

HCZ's agency culture is built from the top down. When we embarked on a program of planned growth at HCZ, we were careful to construct a management structure sturdy enough to sustain the undertaking. We could not do the work that we do, at the scale we do it, without an organizational culture that emphasizes accountability, leadership, teamwork, and a deep, shared passion to improve the lives of the poor. So from the beginning, we have sought to develop and maintain that culture. It serves as both the high standard to which we all aim and the scaffolding that supports all our work.

Today, HCZ has more than 1,400 staff members, two-thirds of whom work part time. Through thoughtful hiring and training practices, reinforced by an open and effective communications framework, we have ensured that each person shares the same core values and ethics and subscribes to and supports our overall culture. We are deeply proud of our Team HCZ culture and the shared values, strong leadership, and teamwork it embodies.

- **Shared Values:** HCZ staff share a passion for helping children and families and placing children at the core of their work; maintaining high standards for themselves, their colleagues, and their clients; holding themselves and others accountable for outcomes; connecting with the community; and upholding the highest ethics in their lives and work.
- **Leadership:** Leaders at HCZ share some general characteristics, including a strong and intense work ethic, the ability to self-manage and to acknowledge mistakes, a can-do/make-it-happen attitude, personal effectiveness, and a buttoned-up demeanor.
- **Teamwork, Communication and Coordination:** At HCZ, teamwork is not a buzzword; it is a way of life. All staff members understand this profoundly, and they describe it well. Asked by Mercer Delta Consulting what teamwork means at HCZ, various staff members responded: "It is powerful cross-organizational collaboration; it's a small-family feeling within a large organization; it's the ability to

leverage the efforts of the entire agency towards accomplishing a single goal; it's the company mindset; and it means always being accessible to families and colleagues."⁴ To ensure consistency in all aspects of our operations, it's necessary for staff to communicate and coordinate easily and effectively across programs. HCZ refers to this as the "glue" that holds the pipeline together. It would be easier if this always developed naturally, but it does not. The intense demands of our work lead staff to focus intensely, sometimes exclusively, on the work at their own particular site. That narrow focus could create silos within the HCZ Project, negating our attempts to build a comprehensive, collaborative system. We have been deliberate about creating the means to ease communication and coordination across sites to break down those walls.

As the HCZ Project model illustrates, we view comprehensive education as requiring three layers: 1) high-quality academics; 2) programs and wraparound services that start at birth and continue through college graduation; and 3) the involvement of all residents in children's healthy development through community-building and supports for the entire family.

This model stretches beyond the school-house door and out into the community surrounding it as we believe that the neighborhood environment has a profound impact on child development. This work cannot be done by schools alone as it is a large scale task. However, they must create strong partnerships with community-based organizations that provide the additional programs for children and families and community building in the neighborhood in order to fulfill this vision.

Many schools in America are embracing school reform models that combine academic and structural innovation with wraparound supports such as after-school programs and health centers. We urge them to build out even further by developing partnerships that support families, community residents and other community stakeholders.

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

Today's Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. originated as Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families (Rheedlen) in 1970 by founder

⁴ Internal report prepared by Mercer Delta Consulting for the Harlem Children's Zone, Inc.

Richard Murphy. Rheedlen's aim was to reduce truancy levels by focusing on the needs of the family through social workers. Over the next two decades, Rheedlen created a number of successful programs throughout Upper Manhattan and Hell's Kitchen. Funders and community members alike thought highly of Rheedlen's programs including Rheedlen's Countee Cullen Beacon Center, one of New York City's first Beacons, which the Clinton Administration visited prior to enacting 21st Century Schools legislation.

In 1990, Richard Murphy left Rheedlen to accept a position as Commissioner of Youth Services under New York City Mayor David Dinkins. At this time, Geoffrey Canada was promoted to President/CEO of Rheedlen. After several years at the helm, Canada sought to make fundamental changes in the organization's approach. While Rheedlen's individual programs were strong and effective, he realized that they were not changing the odds for most of the children in the neighborhood because the programs were disconnected from each other, spread out across several neighborhoods, and did not serve enough children in any one neighborhood to meet the local need.

At a retreat in June 1996, Rheedlen's Board of trustees considered several alternatives for expanding their work to address some of these issues. They decided to focus their attention on organizing residents on one block in Central Harlem (West 119th Street, between Malcolm X Boulevard and Fifth Avenue) where they would create a safe and healthy environment, and then integrate this organizing work with their existing school-based programs to create a comprehensive community-development initiative covering an eight block area of Central Harlem.

This retreat planted the seeds of what is today's Harlem Children's Zone Project. Over the next decade staff at HCZ has translated this initial focus on one block into a neighborhood-wide program that reaches 97 blocks of Central Harlem. Several key milestones offer insight into how HCZ successfully scaled up this neighborhood approach.

In September 1996, Rheedlen staff began a research and planning process to expand the initial vision into concrete goals, considering the stakeholders in the community, the major problems and the assets. By the end of the year, the organization had developed a concept paper, given the new initiative a name (Harlem Children's Zone Project) and developed a work plan.

The following year, 1997, began with the hard work of outreach and organizing by HCZ staff with local stakeholders. Stakeholder input resulted in HCZ staff adding new goals. Ultimately many of these

stakeholders joined HCZ's Community Advisory Board which remains a key asset to the HCZ today. Alongside the neighborhood visioning process, HCZ staff began organizing blocks, assessing and inventorying the neighborhood, sending residents to leadership training, and hiring new staff. By the end of 1997, HCZ and CAB had created a strategic plan with eight major goals for the HCZ Project.

With this strategic plan in hand, Rheedlen opened three new HCZ programs in 1998 (Baby College, TRUCE, and Family Support Center). The HCZ also held its first American Express Volunteer Day project in collaboration with the West 129th Street Block Association, thus beginning a key strategy of combining corporate and resident volunteers on neighborhood beautification projects.

Programmatic growth continued in 1999 with the opening of the Employment and Technology Center. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and his Touchpoints™ colleagues visited HCZ, along with the Robin Hood Foundation, and HCZ and Touchpoints agreed to collaborate on HCZ's early childhood programs. During the same year, resident involvement continued to blossom leading to the first annual HCZ retreat involving both staff and residents. This level of resident engagement at the retreat combined with the sale of the first two low-income cooperative buildings (constituting 44 apartments) from the Tenant Interim Lease program to residents helped cement the community's trust in the staff at HCZ.

As the HCZ Project followed the planned growth from 1 to 24 blocks, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation offered President/CEO Geoffrey Canada the resources of the Bridgespan consulting group to create a business plan for the next stages of growth. This process helped HCZ create concrete year-by-year plans for careful expansion.

The Business Plan was a major turning point for Rheedlen and the HCZ Project. HCZ planned to expand and strengthen the HCZ Project in three distinct phases; created new goals for the number of children and adults served and the development of new programs; restructured Rheedlen's organizational model and added new communication, evaluation and administrative departments, and senior managers for program areas; closed or transferred specific programs that fell outside the mission; and outlined a tremendous growth in fundraising and the budget. In 2000 HCZ's board had adopted the ten-year, three-phase business plan, agreeing to Phase I and possibly Phase II, but noting that Phase III would probably be too great a reach for the organization.

With this new plan and increased funding in hand from several foundations who promised multi-year investments in the plan, Rheed-

len's team marched forward with implementation. On the programmatic front, the HCZ project opened the TRUCE Fitness & Nutrition Center and the Harlem Gems, began the HCZ Asthma Initiative in collaboration with Harlem Hospital and the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, and held a groundbreaking ceremony for the 125th street property that would be the future home of HCZ's Promise Academy Charter School and Community Center.

On the management front, HCZ restructured its management team and hired or promoted leaders for several new departments in order to prepare for future growth. A key part of the Business Plan was that the growth of the management team preceded programmatic growth; management could prepare for future growth instead of being hired afterwards and trying to catch up to it.

As Rheedlen advanced through Phase I of their Business Plan hitting all the major goals and building a brand, a Board Member from the advertising field pushed strongly for the organization to change its name to Harlem Children's Zone as this name provided some immediate explanation of the mission and had become Rheedlen's signature initiative. Somewhat reluctantly, after 32 years building the Rheedlen brand name, the board agreed and adopted Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. as the new name for the entire agency while retaining the name HCZ Project for the specific initiative. With the new name in hand, HCZ, Inc. pressed forward into implementation of Phase II of the Business Plan with strong board and foundation support behind it.

During Phase II, HCZ maintained its disciplined approach to meeting the programmatic and management growth goals. A major goal was achieved when HCZ Promise Academy Charter School was launched in 2004 and opened the doors to its new facility on 125th street in January 2005. The following year, 2006, the Children's Health Fund completed construction of the Harlem Children's Health Project within the new Community Center bringing medical, dental and mental health services along with health education to all the children in the school. That fall, HCZ launched HCZ Promise Academy II Charter School. HCZ made this critical decision to open its own charter public schools after over a decade of providing extensive wraparound supports to traditional public schools without seeing the commensurate academic growth the children needed. We wanted to demonstrate that a combination of structural school reforms (e.g., longer school year, longer school days, principals with the power to hire and fire teachers, and merit pay) and community

wraparound supports would enable children in Harlem to produce top-notch academic achievement.

As the Board looked ahead at Phase III, they knew it would only be feasible if they could build a sizeable endowment that would pay for Phase III in the future and if they had a significant multi-year new investment that would pay for Phase III in the interim. Fortunately, HCZ's Development team and Board obtained a multi-year investment from the Starr Foundation and has been building the endowment up to the requisite level. On the programmatic side, this enabled HCZ to move forward with Phase III, which is currently in progress.

IN CLOSING...

Interest in the HCZ model has grown tremendously over time. In 2005, HCZ opened the Practitioners Institute to create a mechanism to support communities interested in learning more about the model. In its first two years, over 80 communities visited the Practitioners Institute. Two years later in 2007, then-candidate Senator Barack Obama pledged to create 20 Promise Neighborhoods throughout the country inspired by the HCZ model. When he became President in 2009, Mr. Obama followed through on his campaign promise by setting aside \$10 million for planning grants for Promise Neighborhoods. Looking forward, the future looks bright for bringing the promise of the Harlem Children's Zone model to more children and communities in need.

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BETINA JEAN-LOUIS, Ph.D. is Director of Evaluation at the Harlem Children's Zone. She has spearheaded the organization's evaluation efforts since March 2002. In this capacity, she assesses the implementation and impact of a variety of programs that include the HCZ Project and HCZ Promise Academy Charter Schools. Dr. Jean-Louis has built an internal evaluation department that is pivotal to HCZ's noted "culture of evaluation." Most recently, Dr. Jean-Louis has provided leadership in ensuring that HCZ's results and accountability orientation remain central to Promise Neighborhoods, President Barack Obama's national youth-directed community-development initiative modeled after HCZ. Dr. Jean-Louis earned a bachelor's degree from Columbia College and a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from Yale University.

KATHERINE SHOEMAKER is Director of Policy & Special Projects for the President. She joined the Harlem Children's Zone in 1999. In this position, Shoemaker is responsible for liaising with government agencies; providing recommendations to policymakers; serving on advisory boards; coordinating legal work with pro bono counsel; and strategic planning. She has also helped to launch and oversee the HCZ Asthma Initiative; directed the tutoring program for Promise Academy

Charter Middle School; and managed the development of HCZ Promise Academy Charter School building. Shoemaker earned a Master's in Public Policy at Georgetown University and graduated magna cum laude with a B. A. in Government and Economics from Bowdoin College.

EDMUND W. GORDON is the John M. Musser Professor of Psychology, Emeritus at Yale University, Richard March Hoe Professor, Emeritus of Psychology and Education, at Teachers College, Columbia University and Director of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME) at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is also the Senior Scholar in Residence at the College Board. Professor Gordon's career spans professional practice, scholarly life as a minister, clinical and counseling psychologist, research scientist, author, editor, and professor. He has held appointments at Howard, Yeshiva, Harvard, Columbia, City University of New York, and Yale. Dr. Gordon is an elected Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the American Society of Psychological Science, the American Association for Orthopsychiatry and Fellow and Life Member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1968 he was elected member of the National Academy of Education. He is the author of more than 200 articles and 18 books.