INTRODUCTION

The seventh Nelson Chair Roundtable was held on April 9th-10th, 2015 at Boston College’s Lynch School of Education. For the 2015 Roundtable, the Nelson Chair partnered with the Boston Promise Initiative (BPI) and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) to bring together over 50 representatives from 37 organizations with the goal of strengthening ties amongst BPI partners and addressing challenges related to promoting community interventions from the “cradle to career” continuum. Participants learned about the importance of achieving results through collective impact using a common agenda, shared measurement systems, and accountability.

This year marks a pivotal phase in the evolution of the Roundtable from a broader “think tank” to promote a more focused strategic planning meeting of local community leaders. The over 30 years of community-based work by DSNI in Boston made this organization an ideal partner with the mission of this year’s Roundtable. Participants included BPI staff, partners and stakeholders from the Dudley Village Campus (areas surrounding The Dudley Triangle in Roxbury and North Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston), expert consultants from Boston College, as well as representatives from the City of Boston, Boston Public Schools, and the U.S. Department of Education. The event also drew skilled advisors from the Greater Boston area and the Caribbean.

ROUNDTABLE MISSION AND GOALS

The mission of the Nelson Chair Roundtable is to:

• Help programs to work more collaboratively with one another.
• Promote the exchange of knowledge and skills.
• Increase interdependence between programs for resource and expertise.
• Facilitate exchange of best practices.
• Reduce isolation amongst programs.
• Promote peer mentorship amongst programs.
This year’s Roundtable brought together the BPI partner programs with the goal of informing participants about the overall BPI mission and communicating what this work means to residents of the Dudley Village Campus (DVC). In addition the conveners and moderators, Dr. Anderson J. Franklin, Director of the Roundtable, and Sheena Collier, Director of BPI, aimed to familiarize attendees with the national Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, and build strategies for achieving results at the local level. Elson Nash, Team Lead for Promise Neighborhoods and Full Service Community Schools from the U.S. Department of Education (based in Washington, D.C.), and Michael McAfee, Senior Director and Director of the Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink (based in Oakland, CA) reported on nationwide efforts. They stressed the importance of building a “combination of cross-sector solutions that include families, programs, policies, and systems.” One of the primary goals for the day was for the cradle to career workgroups to convene and continue developing their framework. They deliberated and proposed strategies for school readiness, academic achievement, and college and career pathways.

NELSON CHAIR COLLOQUIUM

Building a Cradle to Career Policy Agenda for Every Child

A colloquium featuring four distinguished panelists provided insight into the challenges of promoting and developing diverse policies supporting cradle to career goals. Panel presenters included Rahn Dorsey, Chief of Education for the City of Boston Mayor’s Office, Marie St. Fleur, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children, Bob Giannino, Chief Executive Officer of uAspire, and Libby Hayes, Executive Director of Homes for Families. Dr. Anderson J. Franklin, Director of the Nelson Chair Roundtable, moderated the panel event. Each speaker introduced unique obstacles and policy development needed for public education, households with young children, young adults seeking higher education, and homeless families.

Panel Presentations:

- Mr. Dorsey introduced Chapter 70, the Massachusetts program for distributing K-12 public education funding which is designed to have an equalizing formula. Each school district contributes a percentage of the cost of education based on local tax revenue, while Chapter 70 covers the rest. This means that less wealthy areas receive more aid. The amount a district pays is determined by a foundation budget, a calculation of per pupil spending based on the various demographic groups. The problem identified by
Mr. Dorsey is that the foundation budget is not often a true representation of actual costs. Chapter 70 typically falls short in critical areas, such as ELL, special education, and health insurance. In the City of Boston, Chapter 70 aid has decreased over the past few years. For this reason, Mr. Dorsey advocates for formula adjustments that reflect true cost.

- Ms. St. Fleur addressed the lack of accessible early education and child care for families in Massachusetts, which is a mixed delivery system of both public and private programs. The challenge is that many families cannot afford private programs and there are not enough spaces in public programs to meet the need. Ms. St. Fleur introduced the Put MA Kids First coalition, a group of 30+ early education and after school programs that have come together to ask the state to invest in the children of MA. The coalition is pushing for a universal pre-K system that would ensure affordable programs for child care and early education for all families. In addition, early childhood teachers must be paid fairly to protect the system of private providers and to keep teachers employed.

- Each year two million academically prepared young people in the U.S. will graduate from high school and not enroll in college. Mr. Giannino explained that the investment into quality education from birth through high school will be unrealized if young adults are unable to access higher education since many careers are unattainable without a college degree. Mr. Giannino introduced his organization, uAspire, which provides college affordability and services to over 100,000 young people across the country. Mr. Giannino presented four policy ideas for Massachusetts to address this issue:
  - Promotion of the community college option as a stepping stone
  - Curriculum alignment and remedial education
  - A program to address the gap between high school graduation and fall enrollment
  - Need-based financial aid to make college more affordable

- Ms. Hayes shared the struggles faced by homeless families and youth in Massachusetts. In the U.S. one in thirty children are homeless, and in MA there are roughly 20,000 homeless children at any given time. These children often struggle in school because they feel stress and worry about where they will sleep or find their next meal any given day. Hayes advocates for the creation of more affordable housing, programs for workforce development and economic support, and additional support for the MA Family Shelter System.

Watch the full Colloquium video here: http://frontrow.bc.edu/program/nelson1/

What is the Boston Promise Initiative?

BPI is one of 12 U.S. Department of Education funded Promise Neighborhoods established with the idea to replicate the work of the Harlem Children’s Zone in some of the country’s most distressed neighborhoods. The vision is “that all children and youth growing up in Promise Neighborhoods 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. The purpose of Promise Neighborhoods is to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities.”

(http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html#description)
A key component to the success of each Promise Neighborhood is results-based accountability, meaning that BPI and all other Promise Neighborhoods are required to evaluate and use data to drive results.

Elson Nash and Michael McAfee presented the operating principles and competencies around building communities of opportunity, which were adopted from the Harlem Children’s Zone:

- Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively and achieve population level results
- Create and sustain a comprehensive and integrated continuum of solutions
- Build community among residents, institutions, and stakeholders
- Evaluate results and create a data feedback loop
- Cultivate a culture of accountability and success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork

Initial planning and funding for BPI began in 2009 and 2010. A 2012 Implementation Grant to DSNI provided BPI with funding from 2013 to 2017 with the goal of uniting the Dudley Street neighborhoods into the Dudley Village Campus (DVC) and significantly improving academic and developmental outcomes for DVC youth. (http://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pn/grantee/boston-promise-initiative)

BPI and all other Promise Neighborhoods are meant to serve as “backbone organizations”, which act as dedicated leaders and organizing entities to provide partners, community stakeholders, and families with opportunities to work together to create collective impact. Based on resident feedback, BPI focuses its work on strong schools, families, and neighborhoods within the DVC. One of the central principles that BPI operates under is “Children born to learn; Neighborhoods built to care”. This illustrates the belief that children are born ready to do great things, and that neighborhoods must be built and organized to support them.

As stated in the Roundtable program, BPI’s primary goal is “to create a lifelong infrastructure, built by parent leaders and local partners, providing access to high-quality early childhood and educational opportunities, positive youth development, and college & career pathways in the DVC”.

BPI DATA AND OUTCOMES

Pieta Blakely, Data Director at DSNI, led a discussion on how BPI collects data and evaluates outcomes. It is important for BPI, and for all community programs and providers, to be able to demonstrate positive outcomes from their efforts, particularly for funding acquisition and policy development. BPI collects information at three levels: 1) individuals and families, 2) schools and neighborhoods, and 3) programs. The data are used to produce restricted-use datasets that will eventually be used in a large-scale evaluation of the entire Boston Promise Initiative. These datasets and results are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, and are also shared amongst BPI partners and the DVC community. The data are used to produce performance measures for feedback and program implementation.

BPI uses fifteen indicators of DVC population well-being to help quantify the achievement of BPI’s 10 “Promise Neighborhood results”. These results are tied to the 5 outcomes for which BPI strives. In addition to a technical presentation by Pieta, one of the BPI partners presented a practical method for evaluating program effectiveness, which illustrated the importance of collecting data for individual programs.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PARTNER?

BPI works with local providers, schools, and businesses, as well as Dudley residents, youth, parents, and community leaders. The goal is to build social, political, and human capital. It is important for BPI to define the landscape of the DVC so that partners have a mutual understanding of the population groups who make up their community and benefit from their work. This concept is referred to as “place-based community change” and is an important driver of the BPI mission. The goal is to serve the entire community through a network of services and solutions. Partnership is crucial to BPI implementation because collective impact requires the commitment of a group of participants with a common agenda. BPI needs dedicated partners to create a strong network with collective power, who will in turn gain access to the network, resources, services, and funding.

BREAKOUT: Birth to Five Years

The Birth to Five workgroup differs from the other two groups because they have been working together for a year and have developed an early framework focused on supporting new parents, early learning, and school readiness.

The Birth to Five workgroup supports and collaborates with the Dudley Children Thrive (DCT) initiative, which works with providers who serve families with children between the ages of zero to five. DCT supports parents as “First Teachers” and connects them with community events, learning programs, and early childhood care providers. The Birth to Five workgroup was created to help DCT build partnerships and guide projects related to school readiness.

The goal of the Birth to Five breakout was to review the proposed framework for DCT and to determine whether it could be successfully applied within the context of the DVC. The framework consists of three subgroups with the common goal – For children to enter school ready to succeed and excel:

1. School Readiness Roundtable – focuses on parent engagement and leadership development, connecting parents with early childhood organizations as partners
2. Birth to Five Workgroup – focuses on resources and policy development, building partnerships and aligning resources
3. Early Learning Network – focuses on providers and quality learning opportunities, supporting providers and encouraging leadership development

The breakout participants agreed that the framework was ready to be implemented. In addition, workgroup members felt that a guide to services and resources would be very helpful for DVC parents. A key takeaway from this breakout session was the need to map the landscape of the early learning system in the DVC. This is necessary so that all members of the DCT initiative will have the same understanding of what is available now and what areas are lacking.

BREAKOUT: Kindergarten to Eighth Grade

The K-8 breakout session was charged with familiarizing participants with the work that BPI is doing with the Birth to Five workgroup, which is more established than the others. The hope is to create a similar framework for the K-8 and HS-24 workgroups. The breakout moderator provided a review of the current programs organized
by DSNI that fall in the K-8 age group, as well as initiatives related to homelessness, hunger, and arts and culture.

Some key takeaways from the breakout session include:

- The need to involve parents and keep them aware of all the programs and resources available to their families, and an idea to establish “resource centers” for parents within the schools and on school websites
- The need for parents to feel that they have a voice and power
- The need for community members and parents to hold the school district accountable for providing the resources and opportunities needed by their population
- The need to build more mentoring opportunities for youth and to create more youth-led programs in which youths’ skills and capacities are strengthened, particularly around entrepreneurship
- The need to develop youths’ feelings of competency and skill, especially with regards to linguistic diversity

**BREAKOUT: High School to 18-24 Years**

The primary goal when working with the high school and 18 to 24 year olds age group is to ensure that the youth within this group successfully transition from high school to college or a career. The HS-24 breakout session was charged with identifying the types of data that should be gathered from students, parents, teachers, counselors, and schools using a community input process, in which data and information are gathered and used from the community directly. These data would inform the community on what types of interventions need to be implemented in order to achieve the desired outcome.

The key takeaways from this breakout came from a brainstorming session conducted by the session moderator. Participants shared a list of datasets that would be most helpful for the creation of a system to achieve successful transition from high school to college and career:

- Identify measures of readiness for higher education, including reading, math skills, communication, resilience, and network strength
- Identify the supply and demand of programming for students and youth
- Identify costs of programs for students and youth
- Identify student attitudes: what they think they can get, what they expect to get, what have been formative influences on their attitudes (family, media, cultural influences)
- Identify youth who have dropped out of high school with no credentials or marketable skills, and those who have completed but are not entering post-secondary programs
- Identify the number of students who have been affected by trauma, substance abuse, and court involvement
- Identify the number of programs that are providing training, support services, and any other programs for the youth, as well as collect feedback from people who are utilizing these programs (i.e., are they helpful or not, and why not?)
- Identify colleges students are attending, their completion and job attainment rates, and the job sectors they were trained for and are employed in
• Identify the number of people in the community who are making a living wage and successfully starting on a career path, those who can be role models, and those who can talk to youth about opportunities and options for education and careers

Key Ideas from the Roundtable and Colloquium

Family and Community Engagement

• Many parents are invested in their children’s education, but may not attend all parent meetings at school; parents are invested at the level at which they are comfortable. Programs must meet and support parents at their level.
• Building relationships is the first step in changing a community. If a program is initially able to engage only one parent, the program should celebrate this one parent. People in this parent’s community will start to notice how her child’s education is changing, and more parents will want to become involved.
• Parents and families might appreciate “resource maps” so that they can more easily identify programs, services, and resources within their community.
• Families don’t start out wanting services; they want lives. It is important to ask parents and families what help they want from their community’s programs and services. It is important to ensure that people feel worked with and not worked on.
• Avoid using jargon when talking to families, youth, and volunteers about the work community organizations are doing. Make the language accessible to promote comfort and understanding.
• Schools should promote financial literacy. Teachers and school staff do not often reflect the diversity of their student population. Schools must improve diversity in hiring and place emphasis on professional development and training.

Policy Development

• Since states and cities may never receive enough funding to level out the inequities, policymakers and administrators must examine how the current budget is being spent and whether it could be allocated better to the critical areas of need. There may be more efficient ways to support families without duplicating costs, time, and efforts. Policy makers must adopt an investment mentality – if we invest in youth now, then we will see a return in the form of educated adults who support the economy by growing businesses, buying homes, and increasing tax income for school systems.
• DSNI has the opportunity to become an example of the path forward. The most effective way to bring change will be if BPI partners can organize themselves, develop a clear course of action, and demonstrate positive results in their community.
• Program leaders must collaborate with policymakers and funders. Bring together mayors, city council members, and school superintendents as accountability partners for the purpose of alerting them about the need to remove barriers that community programs face.
• In order to generate interest in policy development, people need to either better understand the economics (e.g. how much it costs tax payers to house a homeless family in one area and transport their kids to school in another area), or issues need to be presented in a more interesting way.
• Policymakers work in silos and policy development is idiosyncratic. They focus on one area at a time, so there is inevitable waste and overlap. If we streamline the services, then could we also streamline policies?

Evaluation and Data Sharing
• Learn from successful Promise Neighborhoods that have negotiated data-sharing agreements with school systems and with each other to enable programs use data to drive results and solutions.
• Explore platforms such as Efforts to Outcomes for longer-term data needs, and the Promise Score Card for shorter-term reporting data.
• Programs are advised to address the important question of how to meaningfully use existing data, and how to make this data accessible to the community and community partners.
• Explore ways of storing data centrally.
• Explore ways of using data to cultivate more partnerships and raise funds.
• Develop protocols that help organizations maintain transparency with parents about data collection and use of data, such as the design of Pre-pilot programs, so that parents don’t feel ‘studied’ or as if the program is trying to change them. The Pre-pilot programs can focus on communicating to parents that the program needs their help to continue to develop.
• Develop innovative ways to collect data from parents. An example of this is the sticker chart that the First Parents program, a BPI partner, asks parents to use to track how often they are reading to their children. This method is successful because it is closely related to the activity being recorded, and because it is something that children can take part in.
• Emphasize the synchronicity between qualitative and quantitative data, since one is not more important than the other. Asking parents to take pictures and videos of themselves reading to their children is participatory action research. Parents are describing the data, thereby becoming researchers. Asking parents to take pictures and record videos offers information about parents’ thinking, and insight into children’s thinking. This kind of data can be more meaningful than test scores.

Sustainability
• Much of the general population is unaware of the issues faced by people living in underserved neighborhoods. A key element is to generate interest and support through initiatives that demonstrate why community programs should be a priority.
• Seek avenues to scale and sustain community work beyond federal grant money since federal grant money is seed money designed to leverage an organization’s current efforts and programs; it is not intended for use from the beginning of the work until the end.
• Create opportunities to take advantage of Boston’s abundance of resources including large numbers of strong partners and foundations with whom to work. This offers sustainability for the work beyond grant-funding. For instance, the potential to partner with Boston College is a valuable asset. Promise Neighborhoods is also encouraging partnerships with Universities. Although Boston is rich in resources, its programs face challenges in aligning and working together. Alignment and collaboration are perhaps the primary challenges in working together.
Creative use of data: Funders ask for rigorous data, but are often excited by qualitative, innovative, and visual data (such as First Parents’ sticker chart). Some organizations have begun preparing one-page documents for the funders that includes results, indicators, a graph displaying where the program is moving on the trend line, short stories, and a mix of the solutions targeting the families, programs, policies, and systems.

Partners should apply for grants as a collective or consortium (several organizations together) rather than individually. This increases chances of getting funding, as well as communicating to funding organizations the message that collaboration is necessary for community work, and that no one organization can do it alone.

Improve grant writing techniques: When writing grants, it is critical to tie whatever is written to the beneficiaries (students and families). In addition, if programs are able to demonstrate the data and how they are collaborating with one another, they will be in a better position to obtain resources. Grant foundations want to see that programs are able to integrate the full range of services and scale them up.

2015 Roundtable Participants

Organizers

BOSTON COLLEGE NELSON PROFESSIONAL CHAIR, LYNCH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,
http://www.bc.edu/schools/soe/nelson.html

BOSTON PROMISE INITIATIVE
http://www.promiseboston.org/

Participants

BESSIE TARTT WILSON INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN
www.btwic.org

BOSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY
www.bostonhousing.org

BOSTON OPPORTUNITY AGENDA
www.bostonopportunityagenda.org

BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION
www.bphc.org

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
www.bostonpublicschools.org

BPE
www.bpe.org
CARIMAN
http://www.cariman.org/

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF ROXBURY
www.csrox.org

CITIZEN SCHOOLS (ORCHARD GARDENS)
www.citizenschools.org
www.orchardgardensk8.org/

CITY OF BOSTON, MAYOR'S OFFICE
http://www.cityofboston.gov/mayor/

CITY OF BOSTON, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/ OFFICE OF JOBS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
http://owd.boston.gov/

COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN
http://www.countdowntokindergarten.org/

DUDLEY CHILDREN THRIVE SCHOOL READINESS ROUNDTABLE

DUDLEY PROMISE CORPS
http://www.bpe.org/schools/promisecorps

DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE
www.dsni.org

FAMILY INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVE
www.fii.org

FAMILY NURTURING CENTER
www.familynurturing.org

FIRST TEACHER
http://www.firstteacher.net/pages/mission

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
www.hms.harvard.edu

HEALTH RESOURCES IN ACTION
www.hria.org

HOMES FOR FAMILIES
www.homesforfamilies.org
JEREMIAH E. BURKE HIGH SCHOOL
http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/787

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE
www.jff.org

KING K-8 SCHOOL
http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/868

ISPRC, LYNCH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, BOSTON COLLEGE
https://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/isprc.html

LATINO STEM ALLIANCE
www.latinostem.org

NURTURY
www.nurturyboston.org

POLICYLINK
www.policylink.org

PROJECT HOPE
www.prohope.org

ROXMAPP
www.rcc.mass.edu

THE FOOD PROJECT
www.thefoodproject.org

THRIVE IN FIVE
www.thriveinsboston.org

TUFTS UNIVERSITY, URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND PLANNING
http://ase.tufts.edu/uep/

uASPIRE
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PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE, OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html

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