

# Promise Neighborhood **Site PROFILE**

## Northside Achievement Zone

**GRANTEE ORGANIZATION:**

Northside Achievement Zone

**LOCATION:**

Minneapolis, MN

**FEDERAL PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD GRANT:**

*Date of grant award:*  
December 2011

*Date grant agreement with U.S. Department of Education executed:*  
December 2011

*Total projected investment:*  
\$55 million (\$27.5 million federal grant with a 1:1 nonfederal match) over five years

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT/ TARGET POPULATION

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) serves a contiguous 13-by-18-block area in North Minneapolis, selected because it encompasses a region with the highest concentration of negative indicators related to poverty, violence, and low educational achievement in the area. More than a third of NAZ residents (36 percent) live in households with incomes below the federal poverty level.<sup>1</sup> Public schools in the Zone identified 25 percent of students as homeless or highly mobile during the 2008–2009 year. In 2010, just 29 percent of children entering kindergarten living in and near the Zone met literacy benchmarks on tests of kindergarten readiness.

According to the 2010 census, almost 15,000 people live in this geographical area, including more than 5,600 children. NAZ plans to enroll 1,000 households, including 2,500 of these children, when the Promise Neighborhood reaches scale. Nearly half of the neighborhood residents are African American, 20 percent white, 18 percent Asian, 8 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent multiracial or other ethnicities, based on 2010 census data.

### KEY PARTNERS AND THEIR ROLES

NAZ partners with nine schools and approximately 30 anchor partner organizations (see sidebar, page 2). Partner schools include four in the Minneapolis Public Schools district, three charter schools, an alternative school, and a parochial school. Due to school choice policies, students who live within NAZ's geographical boundaries can attend schools throughout the district or even in other districts nearby. The majority of the partner schools are located near to but outside NAZ boundaries, and staff report that about 25 percent of NAZ-enrolled students attend nonpartner schools.

Action teams of partner organizations with expertise in a content area work together with NAZ leaders and staff to create evidence-based solution plans—blueprints that guide the services provided in each major area of NAZ's continuum of support. Solution plans are developed and refined as part of a continuous improvement process known as the NAZ Seal of Effectiveness. The process begins with developing goals and forming the action team, which reviews literature on best practices in addition to drawing on members' own expertise. The research-based solution plans undergo peer review from independent experts before being adopted. Implementation of the plans is monitored to ensure fidelity and assess progress toward outcomes, and the plans will be revised over time to improve services. Each action team meets with NAZ leaders annually as part of the site's Results-Based Accountability process.

Anchor partners lead and participate in these action teams, implement the resulting plans in providing services to NAZ enrollees, and have access to the NAZ Connect data system. Referral partners also provide services to NAZ families and use the solution plans to inform their work, but have not signed a formal agreement with NAZ and do not use NAZ Connect.

Importantly, NAZ considers enrolled families to be full and equal partners. NAZ provides support, resources, and opportunities, but families are ultimately responsible for their own progress. In this way, NAZ supports families in coming to see themselves as powerful agents of change in their own lives and in their community, rather than as perennial recipients of social services. NAZ also refers to all children it serves as "scholars" to reinforce the expectation that all children will achieve academic success.

**Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Anchor Partners**



**Early Childhood**

- Bright Water Montessori School
- Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery
- LaCreche Early Childhood Centers, Inc.
- Minneapolis Public Schools Early Childhood Education
- Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency
- New Horizon Academy
- Northside Child Development Center
- Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
- The Family Partnership
- Think Small Way to Grow
- YWCA of Minneapolis

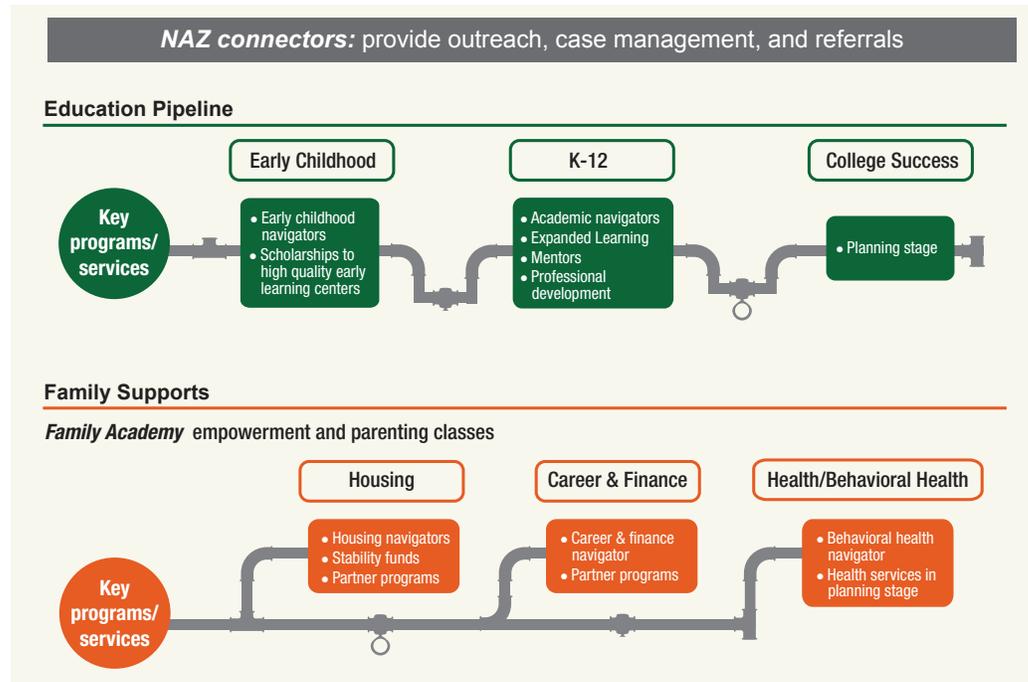


**K-12 Schools**

- Ascension Catholic School
- Elizabeth Hall International Elementary School
- Harvest Preparatory School and Seed Academy
- KIPP North Star Academy
- Nellie Stone Johnson Elementary School
- North Senior Academy
- Patrick Henry High School
- PYC Arts & Technology High School
- Sojourner Truth Academy Elementary School

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**Figure 1.** Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Pipeline Components



Source: Site visit interviews conducted in 2014.

Note: This figure highlights key activities in each area; it does not list all the programs and services the Promise Neighborhood offers.

**THE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE**

Major pipeline components and activities in the NAZ “ecosystem” are displayed in Figure 1. Each family that expresses interest or is referred to NAZ is assigned to a connector, who builds a relationship with the family beginning with the recruitment and enrollment process and remains their main point of contact with NAZ. Connectors assist families in developing achievement plans, identify their needs and resources to address them, and follow up with enrolled families on a regular basis to check in on family needs and overall well-being. Navigators specialize in a content area—such as early childhood or housing—and are called in by connectors as needed to provide advice and referrals in a specific area. NAZ connectors and navigators are located on site at all nine partner schools and at other key partner locations, to facilitate information flow and maintain strong partnerships.

- **Programs.** In the early childhood area, NAZ distributes scholarships (using Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and state funds) for children to attend high quality early learning centers administered primarily by NAZ partners. Early childhood navigators

help families identify providers, assess eligibility for scholarships or other resources to defray the costs, and determine related needs, such as transportation for the child to attend.

For school-age children, NAZ offers supports within partner schools and during out-of-school time. Academic navigators located in the nine partner schools build relationships with students and work individually with them to support progress toward their goals. Six partners provide academically focused expanded learning opportunities after school and during the summer, including one program that primarily serves NAZ-enrolled students who do not attend partner schools during the day.

College solutions are still in the planning stage. An action team including representatives of postsecondary institutions, such as the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis Community College, completed in late 2014 a solution plan to support students’ transition to and graduation from college.

- **Families.** Additional services are offered in the areas of housing, career and finance, and health/behavioral health to support academic achievement by bolstering enrolled families’

**Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Anchor Partners**  
(continued)



**Expanded Learning & Mentoring**

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Twin Cities  
Bolder Options  
Cookie Cart  
Juxtaposition Arts  
Kwanzaa 21st Century Academy  
Plymouth Christian Youth Center (PCYC)  
YMCA Nellie Stone  
Johnson Beacons



**College**

Minneapolis Community and Technical College  
University of Minnesota



**Health/Behavioral Health**

The Family Partnership  
Northpoint Health & Wellness Center  
Washburn Center for Children



**Career & Finance**

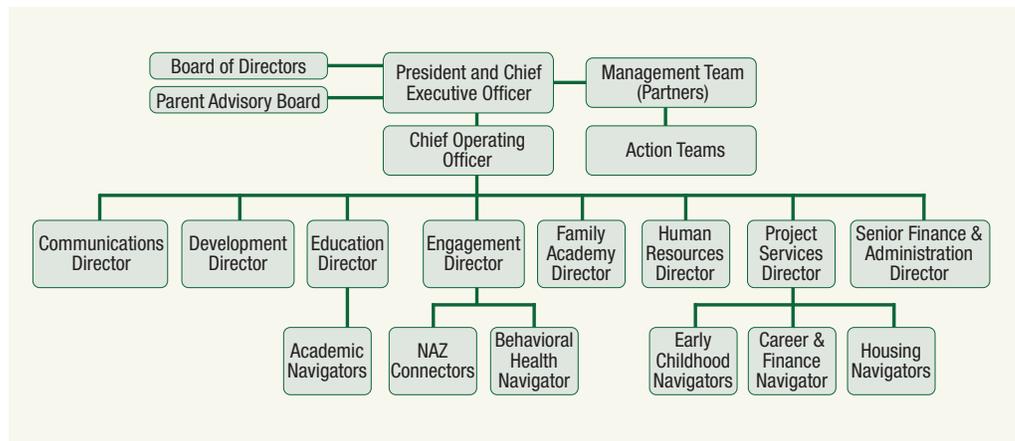
Emerge  
Twin Cities RISE!



**Housing**

Project for Pride in Living  
Public Housing Authority  
Urban Homeworks

**Figure 2.** Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Organizational Structure



Source: Background documents from Northside Achievement Zone.

stability. Navigators in each of these areas work with NAZ-enrolled families to identify supports to meet their needs in that content area. These supports range from providing short-term financial resources through two housing stabilization funds to connecting families to services provided by partners such as Emerge and Twin Cities RISE, which offer career development and job training programs.

NAZ’s Family Academy offers several series of classes, including a 13-week College Bound Babies series for parents of children age birth to 3 years, which was completed by 30 parents in 2013 and 48 parents in 2014. Other Family Academy series include Ready to Succeed, for parents of children ages 4 and 5, and Foundations empowerment training for parents of all ages. A fourth series, College Bound Scholars, for parents of school-age children, was piloted in late 2014. NAZ provides meals, child care, and transportation to facilitate participation in Family Academy.

The NAZ Connect data system enables families to share their goals and other information across all partners, instead of having to fill out another form or start over in sharing their story each time they interact with a new partner. It also enables staff members of various partners to communicate with each other. Combined with NAZ’s co-located staff, this shared data system facilitates a consistent and seamless support for families, regardless of which partner organization they are working with at any particular moment.

**ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND STAFF ROLES**

The initiative is overseen by multiple levels of leadership, including a board of directors consisting of representatives from foundations, local government, and partners; a management team of NAZ staff and lead partners; and an 11-member parent advisory board (PAB). PAB participants are members of enrolled families and are nominated for the PAB by their connector. The PAB provides feedback and guidance to the management team and board of directors, which keeps all of NAZ’s work grounded in the experience of enrolled families. Figure 2 provides an organizational chart for the initiative.

NAZ directly operates Family Academy, and the NAZ connectors and navigators are NAZ staff. Partners plan and deliver all other programs and services, consistent with the relevant solution plans. More than half of NAZ connectors and navigators are located at partner organizations, including schools, early childhood centers, and workforce development and housing agencies. NAZ connectors and other staff are hired from within the community to the extent possible.

**PROGRESS/ ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- **Enrollment of families in NAZ.** As of early 2015, NAZ serves 739 enrolled families with 1,735 children. This is more than halfway to NAZ’s overall target of enrolling 1,000 households and 2,500 children, approximately 45 percent of all children living within the Promise Neighborhood boundaries.

- **Solution plans developed to guide work.** Action teams developed solution plans in eight content areas: family engagement, early childhood, academic navigation, mentoring, expanded learning, family academy, career and finance, and housing.
- **Promising early outcomes of some programs** (based on data compiled and analyzed by NAZ evaluation partner, Wilder Research):<sup>2</sup>
  - › The Beginning Kindergarten Assessment administered in fall 2013 indicated that 59 percent of NAZ-enrolled kindergartners were ready for kindergarten, compared to 35 percent of kindergartners in the geographical area.
  - › Fifty-five percent of elementary grade students in expanded learning programs achieved at least one year of growth in reading in four months of participation after school and during the summer. On average, students' reading level improved 0.8 of a year in four months.
  - › Based on a test of parenting knowledge and behaviors, 77 percent of active participants in NAZ Family Academy were proficient at the end of the session, compared with 24 percent of control group members.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- **Turnover impedes relationship building.** Staffing has been a challenge as NAZ expands “from a tiny office with six staff” to more than 10 times that number. One partner reported that staff transitions to new positions within NAZ can be disruptive.

Although many anchor partner organizations have been involved since “before the beginning,” some have joined more recently. In addition, there are been staffing changes within partners. One action team leader noted that she is the only individual who has been on the team since its inception. She voiced concern that newer members might feel less ownership of solution plans developed earlier. Turnover among frontline staff implementing the solutions means that NAZ and its partners must offer staff training continuously.

- **Limited use of data system by partners.** All NAZ staff—including those co-located at

partner sites—use the NAZ Connect data system to track participants and outcomes. They appreciate that “everything is there,” and noted that it helps link NAZ staff and partners. However, some noted its user-friendliness could be improved, and one called it “a work in progress.” Staff noted that the system has evolved since it was first introduced, and that user feedback is “taken and used.”

As of spring 2014, partners were only beginning to explore NAZ Connect. For example, in the early childhood area, NAZ staff (either those co-located at partner sites or central office staff) entered the data from the first round of progress monitoring into NAZ Connect, but partner providers will enter the data after the second round. Early childhood partners track participation data in spreadsheets and upload the information into NAZ Connect monthly. Additional trainings for partners were planned, but most already have their own data systems. Staff also noted that partners that are new to working with data can be discouraged when the first data they look at show low levels of performance.

- **Connecting the disconnected.** Many NAZ families face multiple challenges that no single agency can solve. One partner noted that the depth of need—in all areas—of the families that NAZ has brought to programs makes them more challenging to work with than the populations some organizations are accustomed to serving. However, this is seen as an indication of the success of NAZ's outreach in recruiting formerly disconnected families.
- **Complex collaborations take time.** NAZ is a complex initiative involving collaboration between many different organizations. As one NAZ staff person said, “The biggest piece of learning for me has been that things take time.” In the past year, she has seen a significant shift from philosophical agreement and commitment to fuller integration of resources and staff.

## LOOKING FORWARD

- **Additional solution plans in development.** Action teams for college success and behavioral health recently completed solution plans in those areas and will begin implementing them in 2015. The action team for anchor schools expects to complete its solution plan in 2015.

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## ABOUT PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS CASE STUDIES

The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at Policy Link (PNI) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct in-depth case studies of five selected Promise Neighborhoods, including NAZ. For these case studies, Mathematica gathered and analyzed data from documents, telephone interviews, and three-to-four-day site visits to each selected Promise Neighborhood at the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

- **Sustainability planning underway.** NAZ launched a task force of members from the board of directors and the community, including representatives of local government (city, county, and school district) and funders (including the United Way and the General Mills Foundation), to focus on sustainability planning. They also hired three staff people dedicated to development. Key to their strategy is diversifying funding sources by working with state and local government, private foundations, and individual donors to secure ongoing funding for the initiative. As an example of a success in this area, the Minnesota state legislature provided \$350,000 to support NAZ's family engagement efforts in 2014 and committed an additional \$400,000 for NAZ over the next two years. Hundreds of individual donors have provided smaller amounts.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006–2010 (5-year estimate), Table C17002: U.S. Census Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey. Aggregation of 18 census block groups, five of which are only partially within NAZ.

<sup>2</sup> Northside Achievement Zone, "Northside Achievement Zone 2013 Annual Report," available at [http://northsideachievement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-NAZ-annual-report\\_Web.pdf](http://northsideachievement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-NAZ-annual-report_Web.pdf); and Wilder Research, "2013 NAZ Dashboard Data Summary," available at <http://northsideachievement.org/i/2013-NAZ-Outcomes-Dashboard.pdf>.

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