



Harvard Family Research Project

Heather B. Weiss, Director

April 11, 2011

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington DC 20202

PN—Comments on FY 2011 Proposed Priority

Dear Secretary Duncan,

Harvard Family Research Project appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Register Notice regarding the Promise Neighborhoods Program.

Since 1983 Harvard Family Research Project, housed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well being of children, youth, families, and their communities. Our areas of expertise are early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community engagement in education. Underpinning all of our work is a commitment to evaluation for strategic decision-making, learning for continuous improvement, and accountability. As a member of the National Working Group on Family, School, and Community Engagement, we endorse the comments that were submitted by the Working Group on April 11, 2011.

We commend the Department for recognizing the complex dimensions of student success and the corresponding need to develop a set of comprehensive student results and indicators. We are pleased that the Promise Neighborhood communities have an opportunity to determine their own indicators. We provide suggestions below for ways that the results and indicators in this notice can be strengthened.

I. Align family and community support indicators with education indicators in order to assess how particular strategies—specifically, family engagement and community support—relate to educational results. Given that family and community support indicators and results are intertwined with education indicators and results, we suggest that, whenever possible, results for children and youth contain indicators that illustrate the central role of the family and community in helping students achieve these results. Below are some examples of ways to foster greater alignment of indicators across education and family and community supports. We have organized our

examples by results, rather than leading with the indicators as in the existing Tables 1 and 2 in the Federal Register Notice. The bold-faced type indicates where changes have been made to words and phrases within existing results and indicators, or where we have created entirely new results and indicators.

1. RESULT: Children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school.

INDICATORS:

- a. # and % of children, from birth to kindergarten entry, participating in **high-quality** center-based or formal home-based early learning settings or programs, which may include Early Head Start, Head Start, child care or publicly funded preschool. **NOTE:** *Quality matters in order to achieve the readiness goal. We suggest adding a definition of quality that includes (but is not limited to) accreditation by organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or meeting the criteria set by state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.*
- b. # and % of three year-olds and children in kindergarten who demonstrate at the beginning of the program or school year age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning **and development** (as defined in this notice) as determined using developmentally-appropriate early learning **and development** measures (as defined in this notice).
- c. For children **from birth** to kindergarten entry, the # and % of parents or family members who report that they read to their child three or more times a week.

2. RESULT: Students are proficient in core academic subjects.

(NOTE: *These indicators can also be used for student results regarding transitions from middle grades to high school and high school graduation.*)

INDICATORS:

- a. # and % of students at or above grade level according to State mathematics and reading or language arts assessments in at least the grades required by the ESEA (3rd through 8th, and once in high school).
- b. **# and % of students who attend school regularly (i.e., attendance rates are at least 90–92% from kindergarten through twelfth grade).**
- c. For children in kindergarten through the eighth grade, the # and % of parents or family members who report encouraging their child to read books outside of school. **NOTE:** *This is not a new indicator but has been moved from the result “Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools.”*
- d. # and % of children who participate in high-quality **structured** learning activities during out-of-school hours or in the hours before and after the traditional school day, **including summer programs, at least three times per week.** **NOTE:** *We suggest elevating this indicator from an option in a footnote to a priority indicator. Also, quality matters in out-of-school time activities in order to achieve learning goals. We suggest defining quality features that include, but are not limited to, well-prepared staff, rich and intentional learning opportunities, and appropriate supervision and structure.*
- e. # and % of children who are suspended or receive discipline referrals during the school year. **NOTE:** *We suggest elevating this indicator from an option in a footnote to a priority indicator.*
- f. **# and % of students that show student growth (as defined in this notice).**

3. RESULT: Youth graduate from high school.

INDICATORS:

- a. Graduation rate (as defined in this notice).
- b. For children in the ninth through twelfth grades, the # and % of parents or family members who report talking with their child about the importance of college and/or career. **NOTE:** *This is not a new indicator but has been moved here from the result “Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools.”*

4. RESULT: Students are healthy.

INDICATORS:

- a. # and % of children who have a **certified health provider** where they **regularly** go, other than an emergency room, when they are sick or in need of advice about their health. **NOTE:** *This is to ensure that families access quality health care for dependent children.*
- b. # and % of children who participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.
- c. # and % of children who consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. **NOTE:** *We separated Indicators 13 and 14 for greater clarity.*
- d. **# and % of students who have access to mental health services.**
- e. **Teen pregnancy rate.**
- f. **# and % of students that use illicit drugs (marijuana, crack, cocaine).**

5. RESULT: Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools.

INDICATORS:

- a. **For children from birth to kindergarten entry, # and % of parents or family members who have at least two yearly conversations with an early care and education provider about the developmental progress of their child.**
- b. **For school-aged children, # and % of parents who have at least two parent–teacher conversations about their student’s academic progress during the school year.**
- c. **# and % of students that report having an adult mentor (e.g. a family member, teacher, or community volunteer) who guides their development and educational progress.**

II. Include student results and indicators related to arts and humanities. Since arts and humanities are one of eight priority areas, we suggest that a new student result (and new corresponding indicators) address this topic. For example:

1. RESULT: Students experience and participate actively in the arts and humanities.

INDICATORS:

- a. **# and % of schools that offer arts and humanities programs.**
- b. **# and % of students that attend music, theater, dance and visual arts events.**
- c. **# and % of students that participate in community-based and/or school-based music, theater, dance and visual arts programs.**

III. Include student results that focus on skills that students will need to succeed in a 21st century global economy and society. These include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, creativity, collaboration, self-directed learning, a mindset of continuous improvement, and ability to make ethical and moral judgments. Access to 21st century learning tools—through home, school, and community—is a means for students to develop these important skills, not simply an end result, as currently listed in Table 2. We suggest replacing the existing result, “Students have access to 21st century learning tools,” and its corresponding indicators, with the following:

1. RESULT: Students possess the skills for lifelong learning and productive citizenship.

INDICATORS:

- a. **# and % of students that collaborate with peers for school and/or out-of-school time projects (peer-to-peer learning).**
- b. **# and % of students in sixth through twelfth grades that create and track their learning goals.**
- c. **# and % of students that use digital media for learning and educational enrichment.**
- d. **# and % of students that know how to access books, articles, and information from multiple sources (libraries, internet).**
- e. **# and % of children who participate in high-quality structured learning activities during out-of-school hours or in the hours before and after the traditional school day, including summer programs, at least three times per week.**
- f. **# and % of students that participate in volunteer and community service activities in their neighborhood or in a neighborhood of need.**

We appreciate the opportunity provided by the Secretary and the Department to provide feedback on the Promise Neighborhoods Program. Please feel free to contact me at 617-495-9108 or weisshe@gse.harvard.edu if further clarification on the comment is needed.

Sincerely,



Heather B. Weiss
Founder and Director