

**Evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise
Working Paper #2**

**Working
Paper**

2

**RESPONSE FROM
COMMUNITY GROUPS**

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Executive Summary

The Kalamazoo Promise scholarship program is expected to effect change throughout the school district and the broader community. Designing an evaluation of the degree and impact of such change has been a challenging and interesting process. Using a number of diverse data collection methods, our evaluation seeks to describe and measure change both within the school and across the community. The focus of this particular working paper is the community's response to the Promise.

To gauge the extent of the community response to the Kalamazoo Promise, we conducted interviews with a diverse array of key informants from the local community and observed public Promise-related events over the past year. In addition to these sources of data, this report relies—to a lesser extent—on the results of a survey we conducted with high school students and content analysis of public documents. Key informants in the community were selected from officials in the city government and representatives from neighborhood associations, churches, and nonprofit organizations. A key limitation is the restrictive scope of community input that has been collected thus far. Over the next year, we will continue to conduct more interviews with key informants from throughout the community.

Our hope in releasing timely working papers on the progress of the community response is that KPS and the larger Kalamazoo community can use our findings to target support and refine and better coordinate their efforts. We understand that choosing such a reporting strategy has its limitations (i.e., the findings must be seen as tentative rather than conclusive), but we think it is the most meaningful way to provide formative feedback that can help improve and strengthen the community support provided to students, families, and schools.

A number of broad evaluation questions guided the data collection and helped us describe the outcomes expected as a result of the systemic change¹ promoted by the Kalamazoo Promise. The findings are organized around five key topic areas: (1) programmatic changes due to the Promise, (2) changes in students and parents, (3) impact of community efforts, (4) obstacles in responding, and

(5) suggested changes to improve community response and the success of all students.

Changes by Community Organizations Due to the Promise

When asking about organizational change since the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise, we heard a range of responses. A number of organizations increased their support for students through new programming, such as tutoring or through expanding existing programs that serve children.

Another direct change due to the Promise came in the form of an influx of tutors and mentors across different community organizations. In a few cases, entirely new groups formed to provide tutoring for KPS students. In other cases, such services grew in response to both the needs of students and the increased interest in supporting those students from the general community. Big Brothers Big Sisters, for example, had 1,200 mentors in 2006, almost doubling the number of mentors from previous years. Kalamazoo Communities In Schools (KCIS), the nonprofit that coordinates volunteers and services for many district schools, saw a 134 percent increase in hours of volunteer service as compared with the school year when the Promise was announced. KCIS is reaching 92 percent more students now than it was in the year preceding the announcement of the Promise.

Some organizations clearly articulated that they had implemented changes because the Promise inspired them to do so. About an equal number of community groups reported little to no change. In many cases, the Promise spurred community organizations to review their purpose and objectives to ensure that they were in line with student needs. However, a number of groups that were already providing support to students were reluctant to credit programmatic changes they had made to the Promise.

Perceived Changes in Students and Parents

The community representatives we interviewed said they noticed some changes in parents and students after the announcement of the scholarship. In general, they reported that they perceived more

change in parents than in students. Parents were telling the community leaders that they have a greater focus on their children's academic work and are enforcing more academic and social discipline. To a lesser degree, improvements in students' aspirations for higher education also were observed by interviewees. Overwhelmingly, though, we learned that most people think that without more directed remedies and supports, those students that are behind will remain behind, and those students that are already ahead will benefit most from the Promise.

Evidence of Impact

We sought to know if the efforts from community groups were deemed to be having an impact. Unfortunately, many groups represented in the interviews did not have a systemic way of measuring their impact. This is not uncommon among community-based nonprofits, which typically are limited in resources, time, and personnel. Typically, their evidence related to impact included anecdotes and parent or teacher testimony. Concerns were expressed by some informants about the accountability of community groups to ensure that the services they provided were effective. Another related notion of accountability that was mentioned by a few respondents was that community groups should be held accountable for the services they had pledged to provide.

Obstacles in Responding to the Promise

Interviewees generated a rich list of obstacles that they believed stood in the way of helping all students utilize the Kalamazoo Promise. One of the major areas of concern was the gaps in support for students and families, including these:

- A lack of focus on those who are bound for vocational postsecondary institutions, even though the Promise scholarship designates that funds may be used at such institutions.
- A lack of support for homeless children in Kalamazoo who need assistance preparing themselves to take advantage of the scholarship.
- A perceived deficit in community support for the Asian and Hispanic communities, although there have been recent attempts to address this.

- In addition to additional academic support, community leaders spoke of the need for more social services for the children of Kalamazoo.

Another major obstacle in responding to the Promise is the lack of coordination of the community response and unclear leadership with regard to community volunteerism.

The third area in which obstacles lie is the perceptions from the community of color. A belief that was reported to be prevalent among many African-American families is that the Promise was not intended to serve or address their needs. The report details events and factors that were shared that support such conclusions. Most important seems to be the repeated claims in the media and by a few community leaders that the Promise is intended to attract middle class families and help stave off "white flight." Such perceptions were also based on incomplete information about decisions made by the district or city officials. This latter finding speaks loudly of the need for more effective communication and sharing of more information.

Suggested Changes That Could Facilitate a Better Response

Finally, interviewees provided recommendations for changes that would facilitate a better response from the community. Community leaders called on local higher education institutions to play a larger role in helping to prepare students for postsecondary options and generally provide more support and services to help students in poverty.

Interviewees also suggested strategies for community volunteerism management, though there was substantial variation in their recommendations.

There was a smaller degree of variation in how interviewees advised the larger Kalamazoo community to deal with the existing racial and class tensions. According to key informants, the first step is to acknowledge this tension. We also heard ideas such as holding community conversations and providing widespread diversity training.

Addressing these obstacles will require better communication and sharing of information as a means to reduce misunderstanding and build trust. There are considerable misunderstandings about who has responsibility or authority for coordinating the

community response. However, a number of factors unite the community and are working in its favor. These include the following: (i) widespread and clearly articulated commitment to children, (ii) tremendous goodwill and generosity; (iii) widespread agreement with the approach and practices of the new superintendent, and (iv) the Promise's effectiveness at leveraging volunteerism.

The report contains plenty of information and ideas shared by informants regarding gaps in services, obstacles that need to be overcome, and possible solutions. Specific to community groups, we raise the following suggestions that might be considered as a means of helping these organizations respond to the Kalamazoo Promise:

- Support and technical assistance are needed to ensure that community groups can plan, monitor, and evaluate their services.
- Community groups would meet more student needs with access to funding or the assistance of grant writers to help them secure external funding.
- Better coordination and communication among community groups would allow them to share experiences and lessons learned.
- It needs to be recognized that community-based groups alone cannot solve the deep-seated issues that divide the broader community.

Conclusion

Our findings point to several areas where further study is warranted, including whether centralized leadership is necessary, further understanding of the different dimensions of community support, and continued monitoring of the gaps in support. We intend to continue to examine the community's response to the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship by conducting further interviews with key community informants in the coming year.²

Our findings also demonstrate that the issue of leadership and coordination of the community response are critical, and solutions regarding the current situation are far from being resolved. Reflecting on what we have heard and learned from

our interviews, the issue of leadership and coordination of the community response will benefit from a deeper understanding and appreciation of the balance among *responsibilities*, *authority*, and *resources*. If any group or organization is to succeed in playing a role in providing leadership and coordination, its *responsibilities* must be clearly communicated, it should be given *authority* by elected bodies or a coalition of community and key stakeholder groups, and it must have *resources* in order to follow through on the responsibilities with which it is charged.

The response from the community to support students and families so that more students can benefit from the Promise has been impressive. Nevertheless, there is widespread consensus that much more needs to be done. Addressing obstacles that hinder community response—whether perceived or real—is going to be important. More extensive communication and sharing of information is also critical to address misconceptions and to build trust and better coordination of services. Going forward, it also is important for groups and individuals to appreciate what has been accomplished since the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise.

The Kalamazoo Promise has increased awareness and focused attention on the disparities that exist within the community. While some see this as a negative consequence, the Promise itself can be viewed as a potential tool to address and resolve longstanding divisive issues. Our theoretical framework suggests that the design of the Kalamazoo Promise should encourage shared ownership and responsibility across all sectors of the community. Some groups perceive that the Kalamazoo Promise is not intended to serve them. Yet a great opportunity exists if the entire community views the Promise as a tool designed to highlight and address the obstacles that stand in the way of assisting all students prepare for college.

Systemic change results when all parts of the system are aligned and all stakeholder groups are focused on the same outcome. The community response to the Promise is a critical part of the systemic change that holds the potential for lifting the district, and its students and families, as a whole.

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Evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise: Response from the Community

Background

The announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship program set off a series of changes that we anticipate will affect many areas of life in Kalamazoo, both in the school district and in the community. Boosting this effect is the synergy created by the shared ownership that was promoted by the fact that the donors to the program are anonymous. Because one person or group cannot be named as the responsible party, the entire community is expected to acquire a sense of common ownership of the program and the success of the students in Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS). Although not a requirement of the anonymous donors, many expected that the generous gift would inspire other community groups and organizations to respond in kind. The extensive national attention given to the Kalamazoo Promise after it was announced helped highlight its uniqueness and importance. Within days of its announcement, community groups began declaring plans to start new programs or expand existing programs to support students and their families.

Generally speaking, community ownership of the Kalamazoo Promise has manifested itself in a number of ways. As could be expected, the announcement of the scholarship program motivated many citizens to assist KPS students, which especially affected increases in volunteerism. Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, the nonprofit organization that coordinates support for students in 10 of the district schools, facilitated more than 51,000 hours of volunteer services in the 2006-2007 school year.³ The Volunteer Center, which organizes people for nonprofits throughout the county, received so many inquiries after the announcement of the scholarship that a separate section of its Web site now caters to people who want to plug in to a volunteer outfit around the Kalamazoo Promise.⁴ As one educator said, speaking at a public forum, “Everywhere I go people ask me about the Promise.”⁵ It has permeated all parts of Kalamazoo and reached far beyond our local community. While everyone can agree that the

program has changed the community, there is still divergence on the nature and extent of that impact.

Purpose of the Working Paper

The purpose of this working paper is to report on the community’s initial response to the Kalamazoo Promise. The paper summarizes and reports mainly on the interview data that we have collected thus far, which has focused largely on community organizations and groups, though other data collection activities are also included. The paper is intended to be a work-in-progress, revised periodically to reflect the changes in the community and our evolving understanding of the community response to the Promise as we gather more information about the depth and breadth of community support. The timeliness of this and other working papers, we hope, will help ensure that the evaluation results can be used for formative or improvement purposes.

Evaluation Questions

This working paper focuses on the community response to the Kalamazoo Promise. Our evaluation is based on the theory of systemic change in the school district in response to the Promise. Therefore, we are interested in the community response only as it relates to the direct or indirect support of students, families, and schools. Our evaluation is not examining the impact of the Kalamazoo Promise on community or economic development unless this is linked to support for the public education system. Specific questions addressed in this paper include the following:

- How have community groups and organizations responded to the Kalamazoo Promise in terms of changes in the way they support students, families, and schools?

- What changes have community informants seen in students and parents as a result of the Kalamazoo Promise?
- What has been the impact of community groups' efforts on students and families, and how is the impact determined?
- What obstacles or barriers exist for community organizations in terms of their desire to do more to support students, families, and the schools?
- What changes are recommended by community informants regarding the work of the school district and the broader community to ensure that more students benefit from the Promise?

Our interviews with community informants and representatives from community organizations covered a lengthy list of questions that go beyond the key questions listed. Nevertheless, we narrowed our attention to the five questions noted above in this particular working paper. Our intention is that in reporting responses to these general evaluation

questions, community groups and the school district will be able to refine their efforts to support student achievement and use of the Kalamazoo Promise.

Overview of the Working Paper

In the next section of this paper, we describe the theoretical framework for the evaluation and how the question of the community response fits into this framework. Notably, we will discuss the outcomes logic model to illustrate how we hypothesize the Kalamazoo Promise will serve as a catalyst for systemic change within the district and broader community. The section also details the methods for data collection and analysis that were used for this report. Following the theoretical framework and methods, we present our findings on each of the five key evaluation questions highlighted earlier. The final section of the report provides a discussion of the implications of the findings as well as a summary of key issues for further study.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

We envision the Kalamazoo Promise acting as a catalyst for systemic reform within the school district and the Kalamazoo community.⁶ That is, the implementation of the scholarship will likely alter and align all parts of the school environment, from teachers to tutors, principals to custodians, in a way that other, more traditional efforts of school reform, such as professional development seminars, cannot. We created a program logic model (see Figure 1) that depicts the impacts and effects of the scholarship's implementation that we expect to see. The Kalamazoo Promise was funded anonymously, and no expectations or objectives were stated explicitly by the donors. However, we can anticipate many outcomes from the large body of research on systemic reforms in education. This report comments on the current status of one short-term outcome expected to emerge within the first two years of the scholarship's announcement: increased community support for students. Note that the logic model does not describe processes or any particular theory of action. In fact, the model in no

way is prescriptive of the changes that need to occur in the district.

Program Logic Model

Substantial literature exists to demonstrate the impact community groups can have on the varying facets of children's lives, from increasing GPA scores and social networks to decreasing tendencies toward crime.⁷ Particularly for children in urban settings, community support for students can buffer the stresses from the environment and, in exchange, offer increased access to social capital and networks that help set the stage for socioacademic success.⁸ At the very least, community programs often take place during the hours of peak juvenile criminal activity and expose students to structured, positive settings.⁹ At their best, quality community-school connections increase student attendance, improve grades, and provide foundational pathways to success as productive adults.¹⁰

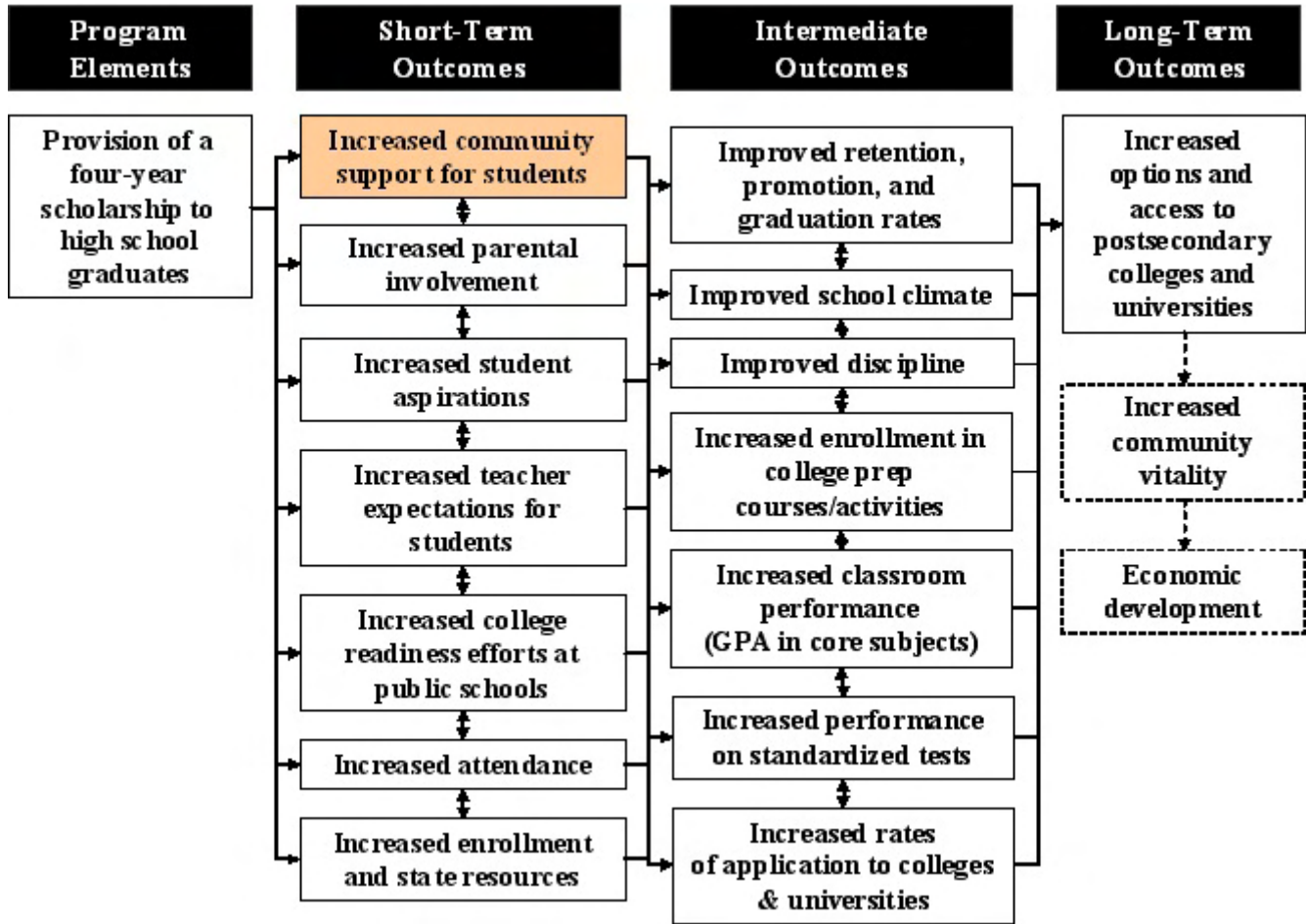


Figure 1. Logic Model for Evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship Program

We expected that the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship would inspire the community to respond in such a way as to increase support mechanisms for students to better enable them to be prepared for an array of tuition-free postsecondary options.

Community response, as we discuss it here, appears in both direct and indirect forms. That is, student access to postsecondary institutions is supported directly by some organizations, such as those that tutor students, and indirectly by other organizations, like those that provide housing assistance to families. In either format, the community is ultimately assisting students to succeed in school. Researchers have long known that the relationship between schools and their community is interrelated

and interdependent.¹¹ Although we are aware that the public school district supports the community in a number of different ways, for the purpose of our study, we are focusing on the unidirectional relationship related to the community support of the students and the schools they attend.

Methods for the Collection and Analysis of Data

Data for this report came from four general sources: confidential interviews with key community members, observations of public events around the Promise, content analysis of newspaper articles and publicly available documentation and, to a lesser extent, survey responses from high school students.

The four data sources serve to support and validate one another. Primarily, this report is based on interviews with key community members. The 16 interviewees were selected both purposefully and using a snowball method to help us understand how community groups have changed since the Promise scholarship program was announced. We identified potential interviewees by (1) reviewing our collection of newspaper clippings for stories about community groups and (2) using our knowledge of the community in which we live. Generally speaking, the interviewees were city officials, leaders of nonprofit organizations, clergy members, and directors of neighborhood associations.

Our interviews were confidential; therefore, the quotes used in this report are not sourced. However, quotes or items taken from public forums, such as printed in the local newspaper or uttered in an open community meeting, are cited appropriately. We also interviewed several community members on an informal or confirmatory basis, including two who asked to be included in our report. In those cases, we cited the sources by name.

When analyzing the interview data, we identified a number of response categories. Some of these stemmed from our logic model, and others were added as we began examining the interviewee responses.

- Student aspirations
- Parental involvement
- Group/program growth
- Impact of community groups
- Obstacles to utilizing the Promise scholarship
- Gaps in student and family support
- Recommended changes

Responses initially were coded by domain and then further broken down into themes within each domain. For example, “Obstacles to utilizing the Promise scholarship” were noted by time frame—past, present, or future. Then responses were grouped and synthesized by theme, and comparisons were made across themes and informants. We conducted a substantive significance check to illustrate the degree to which our interviewees agreed across our general findings. It is very important to point out that not all questions asked in our interviews

with key informants are discussed in this report. Additionally, some topics emerged in nearly every interview even though we did not ask about them. Those are included in the report, and the consistency with which these unanticipated topics arose in our interviews highlights their significance to our interviewees and the need for further research in those areas.

Limitations

We acknowledge that this report is incomplete and represents a work in progress. One obvious limitation to the purposive sample methodology we selected is that there may be group efforts in the community that are not reported in the media and that we are not aware of. To get around this issue, we utilized a snowball sampling technique, in which we asked our interviewees to recommend other community members who should be involved in our evaluation. We then contacted those who were recommended and invited them to participate. Yet, in the end, we received many more recommendations than we had time to interview this year. One example is the Community Advocates for Parents and Students mentoring and tutoring program at Interfaith Homes; that group was recommended frequently by interviewees and no doubt would have contributed significantly to this evaluation. We were not able to include this group in our schedule of interviews this year, but we intend to invite it to participate as we begin another cycle of interviews with key community members, the findings of which will be published as part of our working paper series.

Similarly, though we believe we have accounted for the changes in most community groups since the Promise was announced, we have missed a number of organizations that already were providing services before the announcement of the Promise; and it is entirely likely that we may have missed some of the new organizations that have emerged more recently in response to the Promise. This was unintentional, and their absence from this report does not reflect their lack of activity in supporting KPS students and families. Furthermore, we stopped our initial round of data collection at the second anniversary of the Promise; new developments within the community could have begun after that date and are not captured in this report.

Other limitations for the findings presented in this report also stem from the sample. The size of our sample population is relatively small at this point in reporting. Although we chose our initial sample from those groups highlighted in the local media as involved with the Promise, it is apparent that we oversampled from some geographic sections of town and undersampled in others. For example, because the African-American community has the most community organizations involved in supporting

families, we ended up largely interviewing representatives from these organizations. Correspondingly, while we have triangulated our data by using a variety of data sources, we have not at this point gauged the accuracy of our data by informant group. Although many of our informants were raising the same issues in their interviews, our conversations with employees and students within the Kalamazoo Public School District also will help clarify what community members have observed.

Response by the Community of Kalamazoo

In this section, we discuss the varying responses to the implementation of the Kalamazoo Promise by community groups. We grouped and summarized the responses depending on whether the community groups indicated that they had changed or expanded services or whether they reported little or no change in services since the announcement of the Promise.

Changes by Community Groups Due to the Promise

The announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship caused some existing community groups to rethink their programming and priorities and to rearrange their resources to emphasize those that specifically serve children in Kalamazoo. Community response has taken a wide range of forms. Huntington Bank, for example, announced a special loan program for homebuyers in Kalamazoo shortly after the scholarship was made public. The bank retains the loans, which allows it to be flexible in awarding money to prospective homebuyers. So far, the program has assisted 16 families, including 5 loans made the day the program was announced.¹²

In one case, programming for children had been subject to continuous budget cuts each year; but now the service to children has been underscored by a larger allocation of funding and the hiring of new staff. Another organization responded in a very different way. To assist students in completing K-12 education so that they are eligible to utilize the scholarship, one group recognized the need to deal with the “serious problems in Kalamazoo: infant mortality, poverty, teen pregnancy. So we said we have to walk alongside parents to help them confront these stresses . . . We have a parents’ group, a

network of older women who come alongside the teen mothers and help them with whatever they need: clothes, formula, babysitting, parenting ideas, anything so they can balance that and stay in school.” A map of community groups that actually altered their organization in some way around the Promise is included in this report (see Appendix A). Again, we apologize if we have missed an organization; we are looking forward to expanding the map as our evaluation progresses.

In one case noted above, some funding beyond that which was reallocated was needed to support the children-focused services conducted by the organization. Those extra monies were garnered through the philanthropy of an anonymous benefactor. We do not know whether this donor also is among those who created the endowment for the Kalamazoo Promise or whether this donor would have chosen to contribute funding and to do so anonymously without the precedent of the Promise. However, Kalamazoo has benefited from the generosity of anonymous philanthropists to a more obvious degree since the Promise was announced. Beyond the organization discussed here, the donation of \$5 million to Western Michigan University by a hidden source made front page headlines in our local paper.¹³ Indeed, the Kalamazoo Promise has inspired similar philanthropy in about 40 other cities, though donors in these other communities are not anonymous.

According to our interviewees, in at least four cases organizations created new staff positions to respond to the needs of scholarship beneficiaries. All of these positions serve students directly (rather than indirectly by, say, providing workshops for parents) and focus specifically on the Promise. A common

feature among these organizations, and others that changed some aspect of their programming, was a focus on serving high school students. Representatives from these four organizations had mixed perceptions of the Promise at this early stage. They also spoke more willingly about coordinating their services with other community groups to facilitate some type of core strategic leadership around community volunteerism than others we interviewed who have been established for quite some time.

Another direct change due to the Promise came in the form of an influx of tutors and mentors across different community organizations. In a few cases, entirely new groups formed to provide tutoring for KPS students, such as Community Advocates for Parents and Students. Some existing organizations have researched and created innovative mentoring styles to reach children in more meaningful ways. In other cases, such services grew in response to both the needs of students and the increased interest in supporting those students from the general community. Big Brothers Big Sisters, for example, had 1,200 mentors in 2006, almost doubling the number of mentors from previous years. Staff said this was partly due to the Kalamazoo Promise.¹⁴ The City of Kalamazoo initiated a program that provides release time to employees to allow them to mentor in the local schools.¹⁵

Kalamazoo Communities In Schools (KCIS), the nonprofit that coordinates volunteers and services for many district schools, saw a 134 percent increase in hours of volunteer service as compared with the school year when the Promise was announced (though not all hours of service were devoted solely to tutoring and mentoring). KCIS is reaching 92 percent more students now than they were pre-Promise, in the 2004-2005 school year.¹⁶ A list of KCIS' community partners is included in this report as Appendix B, although not all of them have become partners since the Promise was announced.

At the higher education level, one example is Kalamazoo Valley Community College. It accepted the largest number of KPS Promise beneficiaries as college students and established the Student Success Center to best support them and its entire student body. The Student Success Center uses a one-on-one counseling format to assist students in the range of issues that can impair success at the college level. At the school district level, KPS beneficiaries attending

Kalamazoo Valley Community College have been matched with current KPS students as mentors to help them prepare for the changing demands of a college setting. Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo College also have expanded some of their services to KPS students and families since the announcement of the scholarship program (this is illustrated in Appendix A).

Community Groups Reporting Little to No Changes Due to the Promise

Although one community member observed in an interview that “Every organization has ramped up, partnering more, [having] more outreach,” such a phenomenon doesn't seem to actually have happened in every organization. Many community groups participating in interviews and some we contacted at the Youth Services Fair during Promise Week 2007 said they did not change their programming due to the Promise. They frequently reported that they had reviewed their priorities to ensure they were aligned with those of KPS and found they needed to continue doing what they had always done and try to do it well. For some, the Promise is used informally as a strategy to “push kids,” highlighting the allowance in the scholarship's guidelines to delay use of the funds for up to ten years as a way to garner student buy-in to academic work. Some groups that had started new programming were hesitant to directly credit it to the Promise, insisting instead that “The Promise helped do it,” that “it gave some focus,” but that ultimately the changes would have happened anyway. As one person put it, “The Promise is the target, but it's more about helping children.”

Others we interviewed spoke a bit more strongly against the need to change in response to the scholarship program. A number of nonprofit groups were adamant that they should not jump to rearrange their work. “Our mission is the whole county. The services we support are helping needy families, and we were already funding programs to help. And that is supporting the Promise. We can't just ditch all that and go with some newfangled program focused just on the Promise. That would be a disservice to the capacity that we have built up.” As this quote implies, it is important to note that the specific community groups that thought they shouldn't change their programming were characterized by long and reputable histories of youth service in Kalamazoo.

They tended to work directly with KPS students already and served the widest range of ages.

A few community groups indicated that they would like to have grown or expanded their services to KPS students and families, but they have been held up for one reason or another. In two organizations, the leadership is young and preoccupied in dealing with other programmatic issues. Other organizations had experienced difficulties engaging with the other

partners to get their ideas off the ground. Two community organizations that had placements located inside various KPS schools had to relocate out of KPS facilities due to the district's growing enrollment and subsequent pressures for available building space since the Promise began. This also may have impacted the ability of these groups, and others considering support, to foster further partnerships with the schools directly.

Community Impacts on Students and Families

This section focuses on the community's view of how students and families have responded to the Kalamazoo Promise. Student views of community involvement are also discussed, as well as the lack of accountability in most community groups for the impacts they hope to make in their services to students and families.

Student Response and Its Impact

Our interviewees generally perceived some positive changes in some students, but they were noted from an informal and anecdotal level. One interviewee said, "The Promise has caused a change in every kid. Every kid says I am going to college." A leader who volunteers in schools reported an increase in the skills and aspirations of students at the elementary level. Others said they have noticed that now "students do more than the minimum to get by." Another interviewee thought that "more students are on to college, more who weren't sure before. Students have said that they have a new focus, see a target, an opportunity." But these observations typically came from leaders who worked indirectly with children. That is, their primary employment duties do not include contact with kids in schools or outside of school, such as in after school programs.

People who were employed in direct contact positions had a different view of students, discussed below. When interviewees of either employment type were asked to speak about their own children, some said they knew their kids were talking more about college with their peers. Overwhelmingly, however, the children of the interviewed community leaders were planning to go to college before the Promise was announced. Most of the interviewees already had

been saving money and expected their children to attend college. They spoke of the scholarship program having little impact on their families, other than one less bill to pay and a prompt to the children to focus on in-state postsecondary institutions.

Commonly, interviewees reported that they are not seeing as big a change in the students as one might have expected; "not like you would have thought," one said. Some also cautioned us that it was too early to measure any impacts of the scholarship program. As one community leader explained, "The kids that would go to college anyway will continue to be focused and have self-discipline and parental discipline. But these kids [we serve], they have obstacles and adversity, the traditional obstacles like poverty, violence, abuse of all kinds. And it has been generational, which makes it difficult to change those to focus on continuing education, getting up on time and getting to school." Many interviewees expressed similar observations, that those who were already ahead would benefit but that those who are behind will remain behind. Another interviewee talked about stronger reactions from students, saying, "Some students are tired of hearing about it. [The overemphasis on the Promise] encourages them to drop out because they are already ten credits behind and they have some adult talking to them about the Promise half the day."

Several leaders said the parents were more affected by the announcement of the scholarship than the students. It may be, as one interviewee noted, that some students are aware that they are lacking exposure to experiences that would have prepared them academically and socially to utilize the scholarship and attend postsecondary education.

Other students, including the children of the interviewees, were not as affected because they had been planning for college for quite some time. It is anticipated that, as time goes by, fewer children will be underprepared and more will fall into the latter category of those for whom college attendance is a standard value; but such a shift will not come without substantial work.

Beyond the reasons given above for a lack of student change due to the Promise, both poverty and school violence emerged as major themes in our interviews. Several key community informants pointed out to us that some students, particularly the ones they worked with, were more worried about basic survival than preparing for college attendance. "I mean, they don't even have socks to wear," one interviewee told us. The effort to meet one's basic human needs overshadows the drumbeat of the Kalamazoo Promise. Although some community groups, such as Warm Kids, are attempting to meet this gap in student support, Kalamazoo has more needs than are being filled right now. Moreover, a targeted assessment of which need should be filled is lacking; and language barriers and social stigmas still stand in the way of matching services.

Even when basic needs can be met, sometimes the threat of violence that students encounter in school undermines their desires for attending class. One interviewee stated that "Some kids don't want to go to school because they are afraid. That will keep them from college." Another interviewee confirmed that "They go to school to settle scores and be physically violent." In another particularly poignant incident, an interviewee told of a student at one of the high schools, two years away from graduation and academically performing well, who was attacked by peers. The student was moved to another high school outside of Kalamazoo. In other words, the student was academically on track to graduate and make use of the Promise to pursue higher education, but the turmoil in the school kept the student from doing so.

Interestingly, those groups working closest with at-risk students of color had a variety of expectations for student success. At one end of the spectrum, there are groups that state they have always had expectations for their students to attend two year universities. Groups hoping to assist children in just reaching a minimum GPA represent the other end. For example, one interviewee said, "We have to

influence kids so they say they do want to work for that 2.0 GPA, so that it will click for them and we can hold them there in that school until they get responsible on their own and don't need us over their shoulder." We also heard from some who aim to see students at the 3.0 GPA level. Yet another stated that the expectation for students was the goal of attending a small college, "not the U of Ms." Based on the perceptions shared by several key informants, one might be concerned by what they reported as a pattern of diminished expectations for at-risk students of color. Yet our interviewees also expressed the need to remain realistic about the opportunities for the particular students under their care, given their lack of preparation for college. While such realism may be true at this time, it is a fine line to walk in offering a set of lowered expectations for selected students.

Finally, one general concern of adults and students¹⁷ regards student stress related to the increased expectations and opportunities under the Promise. Many students now have the option to attend college as the first members of their families to do so. First generation college students face considerably more obstacles to degree completion.¹⁸ In some cases, attending college can put students in a tense family situation. "They have a fear that their families will disown them, or they'll feel alienated, as if they are trying to be better than their other family members . . . [So] success is a traitor, but failure lets down their family... [And] they're afraid of looking stupid. They have a lack of confidence. It's scary to dream because what if you blow it?" For those who come from families where college aspirations are not common, the choice to take up the challenge posed in the Promise can be an unwelcome contribution of stress.

Students' Perceptions of the Community Response

We did not include student interviews in this portion of our data collection. However, in the spring of 2007 we administered a survey to KPS high school students. The survey covered a broad range of topics, but of interest here is the students' report on questions related to the community. Students were asked a number of questions about parent and community-school relationships, which are standardized items from a nationally normed School Climate Survey. This standardized scale allows us to compare the

responses of KPS students with those of a national sample.

When measuring against the national sample, KPS students reported weaker or less developed parent and community-school relationships. In our experiences evaluating urban school districts, the KPS score in this area is typical. It also is important to note that of the four questions in this scale, one asked about parents and not the community. The three questions about community and the KPS students' responses are listed in Figure 2.

In the first two survey questions, about one-quarter of the students agreed or strongly agreed with each of the two items. A little more than a third were neutral. The largest percentage of responses fell under "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Positive responses to the last question were more frequent, 45 percent. While it might be easy to say we expected the sense of community relations to be a bit higher than the national norm, particularly given the swell of response after the announcement of the Promise, we will have to look at responses to these questions from before the Promise to determine whether the rating from our KPS students has improved.

When we sought to determine whether community engagement perceptions differed by the race, class, or gender of the students, we found nothing significant. In other words, no single subgroup of students (defined by their race, class, or gender) reported particularly one way or another about the community response. On the whole, the responses from high school students to questions about the community are rather unremarkable. Further analysis of this and other scales dealing with school climate will be examined in detail in subsequent working papers.

Parental Response and Its Impact

The leaders of the nonprofit groups we spoke with had heard about certain benefits for parents stemming from the Promise, such as having more disposable income, but said it wasn't happening in the populations they served. Though such an effect is one of the immediate anticipated intermediate outcomes from the Kalamazoo Promise, extra income that was tied up in college savings now exists in families that had money to save for college in the first place. Typically, these families are not the ones that use the services of the key informants we interviewed. Our

interviewees said the parents they knew reported they were pushing their children's academic focus more and "explaining the benefits of college." Parents told the community leaders that the efforts are working; their children are completing their homework and not fighting as much in school. But nearly everyone acknowledged that many of the problems facing some KPS students today are inter-generational in nature, meaning the solutions have to be large and more accessible in scope.

Regardless of the nature of some of the deep-seated issues facing the community, most community leaders said the scholarship program gave families hope. That hope was quickly followed by a series of reality checks. According to several interviewees, some families have a history of low expectations. "Some of [the parents] are afraid because their kids are behind. There have been low expectations placed on children. There's a history of [the parents] not pushing, and now they are in the spotlight. It will take several years to move them to where they need to be." Mothers and fathers are being asked to help their children with reading when some of them cannot read themselves. "They're saying they're in over their heads." Not only are some parents in the uncomfortable position to have to push their children more, they aren't always aware of the load.

The general consensus among those working with low-income parents, especially low-income parents of color, is that they do not know what a student needs to get into and thrive at college. "Parents thought it [the Promise scholarship] was paying everything. Many of them didn't go to college, so they had no idea of the cost of college. They didn't know how to plan." Interviewees reported that parents experienced a strong letdown after they learned about the extra college-related costs like housing, books, and transportation, a realization that may make the Promise irrelevant for some families for whom these extra costs are unaffordable. Further, "financial aid isn't even on their radar." Acclimation to the world of financial aid can be daunting for those who have never done it before. Nevertheless, those low-income families that are most likely to benefit from financial aid, are also the ones most concerned about debt. The Promise was easily summarized by some as "free college," when, in fact, college would be tuition-free but other expenses remain.

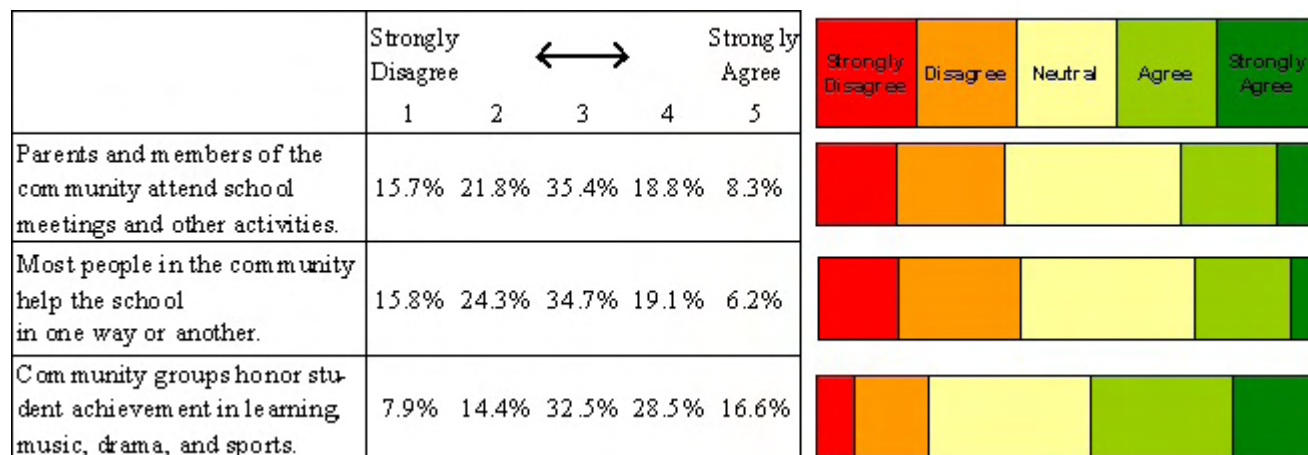


Figure 2. Distribution of Responses from High School Students Regarding Their Perception of Community Involvement and the Community Response

Accountability and Follow-Through by Community Groups

The groundswell of community support after the Kalamazoo Promise was announced logically would have made an impact on its target population: students and families in Kalamazoo. Yet, most of the organizations we visited did not have structured monitoring or evaluation processes in place to track services provided and determine what impacts they were having. They were able to provide a general sense of how things were working and could share scattered parental testimony to demonstrate that they are making a difference to the students they serve. “Impact is the big question, the critical issue,” one community leader said. “People are working hard, and the trick is not to slap them in the face, but to ask if we have any way apart from gut feeling [to know] that we are having an impact. We have impressions.” Among the small community nonprofits, only a few had the capacity to track the number of inputs (i.e., number of volunteer hours, number of children served), but not the impact of those inputs. Largely, this is due to the limited budget, personnel, and

relevant training or expertise available for such tasks. One potential resource is the Greater Kalamazoo United Way, which coordinates many nonprofit groups and has an accountability model that could be useful. They also conduct workshops on training nonprofit organizations to formulate outcome measures and gather and report data.

While accountability for services delivered is critical, so too is it necessary for organizations to be accountable for services promised. Some we spoke with say we owe it to the students to have some kind of system to hold groups accountable for what they said they’d do in the rush after the scholarship was announced.

Some interviewees were clear that, as a community, we need to better organize the response to the Kalamazoo Promise to ensure that nonprofit and for-profit groups and organizations have clear objectives to serve students and that they follow through on those objectives. Yet, not everyone is in agreement that such organization would be useful. This issue has emerged as one of the most widely discussed obstacles we found during the course of our data collection.

Obstacles in Responding To The Promise

Community leaders reported an array of explanations for what, in their eyes, stands in the way of assisting students to succeed in school and utilize

the Promise. Some hurdles relate to the gaps in support for students and families that nonprofit organizations say they need help to fill. Economic

obstacles, like the difficult state budgetary situation, were also commonly cited by interviewees. Sociocultural obstacles, which are the most complex and difficult to address, were often discussed at length by people we interviewed.

Gaps in Support for Students and Families

Interviewees mentioned several student subgroups that they thought were slipping by everyone's notice. One group of particular concern is the noncollege bound. The Promise scholarship designates that funds may be used at vocational postsecondary institutions. This feature, in fact, is one of the main differences between the scholarship program in Kalamazoo and the way it appears in most other cities that have replicated the idea. Yet, many interviewees noted that the communal focus seems to be on achieving four-year degrees to the exclusion of students who do not want such a path. "There are students who don't care or have hope about the Promise," one leader pointed out. "What are our strategies for them? There is life after high school, not only college. We have to set up stuff with trade schools and entrepreneurship." During a panel presentation at a Promise Week 2007 event, new KRESA superintendent Ronald Fuller also echoed this question, noting the gap in vocational training, training which he recommended should be provided as early as middle school.

According to one interviewee, there are 1,000 homeless children in Kalamazoo (900 of whom are school-age¹⁹), who certainly can utilize the Promise but need assistance preparing themselves for postsecondary options. Homeless children make up 4 percent of the KPS student population.²⁰ Sometimes families are too embarrassed to ask for help, noted one interviewee, so as a community we need to find proactive ways to reach them and assist them in their higher education pursuits.

Perceptions also surfaced that the Hispanic and Asian communities in Kalamazoo do not appear to have the visible network of support that the African-American community has built. Interviews with community informants who are Hispanic confirmed such observations. For example, one interviewee stated that "If you evaluated what Hispanic parents knew about the Promise right now, 98 percent won't know any of the details or how to support their kids."

Some nonprofit organizations serving the Hispanic community have existed for a long time, such as the Hispanic American Council, though their services to students are indirect and sporadic. New Latino Visions, among other projects, has been running an after-school program at one area elementary, though most of the children served in that program are African American.

The recent establishment of a Southside Ministerial Alliance, modeled after the existing and accomplished Northside Ministerial Alliance, might prove to be a step in the right direction for Hispanic and Asian people living in that part of town. Further, Ujima Enterprises Incorporated has reached out to the Latino community to work together to provide parent education services. These developments certainly can help struggling students and families of Latino and Asian descent in those geographic areas, but it remains to be determined how much more support is needed and in what specific forms it should be provided. In that regard, New Latino Visions is planning to conduct a needs assessment of the Hispanic population in Kalamazoo, the results of which can guide targeted community response.

Observations of gaps in academic support to all students in KPS were offered both in interviews with community leaders and in public forums during Promise Week 2007. One concern often heard regarded the cultural competence of school staff. "We do have personalized instruction and contagious enthusiasm, but we need to be multicultural and world class and we have work to do there . . . Right now diversity is not a priority." This perceived mismatch between staff competence and student needs also might contribute to other issues related to school climate. Similarly, curricular relevance was questioned by a number of informants.

Though community leaders had concerns about academic issues, they also were quick to tell of the social services that nonprofit organizations need to provide for children. Many interviewees emphasized that children need quality nonacademic activities to complement what they are learning in school, and they wondered about the role they play in supporting students. One person said he envisioned "programs like tutoring, anti-bling programs, transportation help, so we can get kids there and help them be comfortable at school: free breakfast programs,

backpack programs, safe spot, homework help.” While some of these services are provided in parts of town, they are not available everywhere.

The Kalamazoo Promise has allowed community groups the space to dream. This is illustrated by the wide array of ideas and suggestions. It is also supported by the plans for creating or expanding support services. But some groups that want to grow haven’t yet been able to do so. They cited the frustration they experienced in getting information from the district that would have facilitated a smooth partnership. Some organizations also discussed the financial circumstances contributing to their limited ability to provide services, a common concern in the nonprofit sector that is even more of a struggle in our current regional economic condition.

Ultimately, some leaders noted that there were lots of ideas, but little action. Many interviewees seemed a bit frustrated by the excessive willingness to throw around ideas for means of student support, when little of it actually has come to fruition. Yet, in public events, we observed a few community leaders behind a microphone asking for more ideas from the general public. Circumstances such as this underscore the critical issue of leadership and coordination. Whose charge is it to listen to and gather ideas and then select the right ones to fund and flourish?

Community Volunteerism Leadership

The needs for organizational accountability and the coordination of ideas were mentioned repeatedly in our interviews. Everyone seems to know there is an abundance of willing volunteers to rally around KPS children and that linking volunteers with the right programs, in the right schools, with the right students is an unwieldy task. But whether it is actually possible to coordinate the entire community is a question that has no easy answer. As one interviewee put it, “Schools themselves are large and complex, but at least they are a single institution. There are thousands of combinations of community groups, organizations, and individuals. It isn’t one single institution that can be easily coordinated. But it has to lead to organization and coordination. We just aren’t there yet.” When we asked community leaders whether the coordination of volunteerism around the Promise should be centralized and focused, we heard divergence in terms of responses, with some

suggesting more centralized leadership and others indicating that this would not work.

Issues of collaboration. Several leaders of nonprofit organizations stated that a unified volunteer effort was unlikely because other community groups (not theirs) would never join under one umbrella due to differences in perspective. Issues of egos, turf, and control were cited as obstacles to getting everyone on the same page, even though one interviewee referred to the Kalamazoo Promise as a “unifying event.”

Several interviewees were lukewarm about the notion of coordinating services, expressing a desire for a map of community services, but not management. But the common concern we heard was that some nonprofit groups are organizing volunteers to help students focus on academics, others are providing social activities, and still others are assisting with housing for families. It could be a struggle for one centralized organization to encompass all of that. One interviewee suggested that the best we might hope for is to have everyone register in one place so that prospective volunteers can find the appropriate outlet for their skills.

We are lucky to have rich diversity in Kalamazoo, but it will be challenging to bring everyone into alignment. A few community members were clear that they would welcome leadership to assist with their development, including fund-raising, but that “we aren’t waiting for a grant. We do it and then we find the money to enhance it.” Others also expressed doubt about the ability to coordinate all community groups in Kalamazoo, explaining that not everyone wants to go forward in the same way. Some people will always hold back and resist change, they said, but it should not bring down the efforts for communitywide collaboration. Those leaders expressing cautionary willingness tended to be with organizations that had implemented specific changes in response to the Promise. The group of nonprofits that did not introduce new programs were more likely to be longstanding with experienced leadership. Not unsurprisingly, this latter group typically expressed that investment should be just in those community groups that have an established reputation for success and that doing so would save the trouble of reinventing the wheel. Despite the range of responses we heard in our interviews, some community members have gone forward with propositions of how

the response from community groups should be organized and coordinated.

Saturday morning group. Around the first anniversary of the Kalamazoo Promise, newspaper articles told of a group known as Building on the Promise, comprised of leaders in business, government, and education.²¹ The group convened in the early days after the announcement of the scholarship to “see the state of the community on the Promise, who is helping, what they are seeing, [and] how they can collaborate and give leverage to one another.” Commonly referred to as the Saturday Morning Group, they have developed a vision statement and—at an earlier point in time—broke into subcommittees to work on several tasks. Our interviewees, some of whom are a part of this group, reported that little or slow progress has been made within the subcommittees. Considerable work went into draft reports prepared by some of the committees, but nothing concrete has resulted. Cited as possible reasons for the lack of progress by this group included “the group is too informal and loose-knit” and perhaps that it lacks the legitimacy of a publicly appointed/selected group.

A number of community organizations representatives raised questions about the Saturday Morning Group related to membership, transparency, and information. They were not able to ascertain how the group was selected, what they were aiming to do, or whether they represented the diversity that exists in the community. We obtained answers to some of these questions during the course of our interviews. We learned, for example, that questions about representation were raised by members of the Saturday Morning Group early on and that the group had relatively broad membership representing many sectors of the community.

The effort by the Saturday Morning Group highlights the perceived need among community and civic leaders to establish some level of community leadership and coordination regarding the community response to the Promise. While questions arose regarding the representation and legitimacy of this group, we were less likely to hear questions about the purpose or rationale for the Saturday Morning Group, which may suggest a broader understanding that there is in fact a need for a group to steer or coordinate the community response.

District-led strategic planning process. In one of his first tasks in office, Dr. Michael Rice, superintendent of KPS, formulated a plan to create a set of expectations, academic and social, for all parts of the Kalamazoo community. Parents, community members, teachers, and students would receive a set of recommendations and objectives created by a public board of volunteers, which would act as a catalyst to propel students toward higher academic achievement.

Dr. Rice and Ms. Patti Sholler-Barber, current president of the school board, extended invitations to the general public to become a part of the proposed strategic planning subcommittees, both in print and public presentations. The committee that will direct and oversee the 5 subcommittees is comprised of 23 persons, including the presidents from the 3 local institutions of higher education, a number of other public officials, representatives from the private sector, and representatives from neighborhood and community organizations.

Formal meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee started in November 2007, and the subcommittees are expected to draft reports by March 2008 that will be considered in the overall planning process. Although it is just getting off the ground, this strategic planning process represents another hopeful effort to identify needs and coordinate community supports and services.

Perceptions from the Community of Color

During the course of our interviews, we were hearing strong and repeated descriptions from people of color expressing skeptical perceptions of the Promise, KPS, and the larger Kalamazoo community that seemed to overshadow and run through our data collection activities. Kalamazoo, as a whole, has obvious segregation by housing and noticeable differences in demographic composition among the schools. Overall enrollments in Kalamazoo Public Schools are skewed toward African-American students, in large part because of the higher proportion of white families that are sending their children to private or parochial schools or to Paramount Academy charter school. While not a majority in the school district, African American students comprise 48 percent of district enrollments which makes them the largest ethnic group.

According to our interviewees, both African American and white, Kalamazooans historically have not addressed the disparities and divisions in our community to any effective degree beyond one-day events aimed at celebrating diversity.

It generally has been acknowledged in our community interviews that key informants believe the Promise is going to help those white middle class students who “already had it going on,” but that those who have been struggling will continue to struggle. The interviewees who talked most clearly and extensively about the race and class dynamics in the community were those closest to children—the leaders of community organizations that provide services directly to students. Officials from the city or other public institutions connected to the schools were not as likely to bring up this subject.

Speaking to the design of the scholarship, while one interviewee saw the Promise as a vehicle specifically intended to help children of color, others said there is a considerable group within Kalamazoo that thinks the scholarship program has unanticipated outcomes that will impact the community of color negatively. For some people, it can be puzzling why anyone would feel pessimistic about the generous philanthropy surrounding the Kalamazoo Promise. To explain this perspective as it was shared with us in interviews, we can use centering²² to provide sociopolitical context to explain how the view might have been shaped by community events.

To begin, the Michigan budget crisis often was blamed by interviewees for creating a situation in which businesses were wary about relocating to the area, an initial hope extended from the universal scholarship.²³ The lack of jobs currently available and the slow trickle of new employment make for high poverty rates and general dissatisfaction. As several people stated, there are no jobs for people “on the bottom” who are already struggling.²⁴ Moreover, new employers that have come to Kalamazoo have publicly expressed the hope to rehire laid off Pfizer employees, which is a largely white, middle class segment.²⁵ Poverty and unemployment are concentrated in areas primarily populated by people of color. The economic development continually lauded as a by-product of the Promise doesn’t seem to be extending to people who need it the most. Furthermore, the city has experienced a surge in violence among black youth, including five homicides

in 2007. Some informants stressed that the local government’s response to increase policing efforts may have impaired the opportunity for citywide problem solving and exacerbated racial tensions already present because it was the only approach taken.

As noted earlier, when parents first heard about the Promise, some had soaring hopes, which were soon deflated when they learned that parts of the college experience weren’t covered by the scholarship. Some nonprofit organizations said they try to be up front with parents about additional costs, which could have contributed to a sense of negativity about the scholarship program if the comments were misinterpreted. Better and more complete information on financial aid is critical since most low-income families can seek financial aid that could cover most or all of the additional costs of college beyond the tuition and fees covered by the Promise.

Further questioning in our interviews brought to light a number of relatively recent events that may have affected the African-American community and helped reinforce suspicions that the Promise was not intended for them. These issues are summarized below:

- There have been repeated claims that the Promise is intended to attract middle class families and help stave off “white flight.” These claims have been shared by public officials at times, and they regularly have been highlighted in the local newspaper.
- In early 2007, there was a proposal to help remedy the achievement level of high poverty students by reducing class size in elementary schools with the highest proportion of students living in poverty. There was a public outcry from white parents which was covered by the media. A number of African-American persons we interviewed indicated that they perceived this event to be harsh and antagonistic.²⁶
- Some in the African-American community have expressed concern about the location of the new elementary school, which is replacing a current facility on the west side of town. The new facility is being built in a predominantly white area, which currently is experiencing growth in terms of new homes. [The reasons and rationale for the location of this new facility are sound but have

not been adequately communicated with the broader community.²⁷]

- Many informants perceived that the influx of people relocating to Kalamazoo to take advantage of the Promise has been mostly white middle class thus far, contributing to the perception that newer white students are seen as coming for free college that some black students, who have been here all their lives, aren't receiving due to inability to meet admissions standards or other associated costs.²⁸

The manner in which the media has framed and reported on race issues was cited by a number of interviewees as contributing to the suspicions about the Promise within the African-American community. It is notable that the local newspaper, the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, has shown a pattern of overemphasizing the benefits of the Promise for the white middle class. For example, in an article written on October 5, 2006, the *Gazette* stated that “among the scholarship program’s goals is curbing the long-term trend of ‘white flight’ from the district.”²⁹ Similar assertions include a September 12, 2007 article that states, “One of the goals of the Promise was to increase the district’s middle class enrollment.”³⁰ In fairness to the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, it ran an editorial a few days after the announcement of the Promise that noted the importance that “not just the middle class take advantage” of the scholarship program and the

concurrent obligations of the community—including the newspaper itself—to ensure this not take place.³¹

If the result of the scholarship program is a population influx that would raise the average income level in Kalamazoo rather than build up the existing population base, discouragement reportedly felt by African Americans may be warranted. Even though careful consideration of the benefits and potential threats of the Promise would reveal that opportunities for higher education may be the best strategy for addressing poverty and existing inequities, the displacement fears reportedly are prevalent in the minds of many people within the African-American community.

At public Promise-related events, this gap in perception was reinforced by a pattern in which people who voiced concerns over racial tensions in Kalamazoo that directly related to the Promise regularly had their comments dismissed or ignored.

Finally, it is worth sharing concerns raised about the community-marketing materials presented at an event during Promise Week 2007. Both white and African-American participants at the event pointed out that people of color were not represented in any of the promotional materials and that such a lack of diversity doesn't provide children with good role models. This event was illustrative of some of the many examples raised by informants to illustrate why people of color in the community have concerns about the Promise.

Suggested Changes That Could Facilitate a Better Response

Suggestions included in this section are derived from the input of interviewees and general citizen commentary at public events. The many diverse changes recommended varied in their intensity and detail.

Support for the Creation and Expansion of Services

The Promise Week 2007 event on the potential collaboration of business and education elicited many suggestions that would strengthen the success of students and their families and could be adopted

relatively easily. Such strategies could help meet some of the gaps identified by interviewees as far as subgroups of students who would benefit from outreach. One suggestion was for mentoring and tutoring assistance that could be provided by members of organized labor and service organizations, a partnership that also would expose students to career options. The Kalamazoo Downtown Kiwanis Club recently donated dictionaries to every third grader in Kalamazoo Public Schools, a gift it plans to supply annually.³² This is a good support and is illustrative of the type of contributions that organizations can make.

Another suggestion that surfaced at the same time as the Promise Week 2007 event was a type of Flexible Employee Assistance Program that would allow employee-parents to have more time to support their children-students. A prominent business leader on the panel said that such a program would help people be better parents and balance the demands of work and family.

Several nonprofit leaders explicitly asked for more tutoring assistance and participation from Western Michigan University (WMU) during our interviews. Such an arrangement, they noted, would not only help the academic and social goals of KPS students, but also would encourage university students to see themselves as part of our community. Although WMU has several links to KPS and the Promise (see Attachment A), it seems to exist in isolated pockets of involvement, running through specific instructors and staff on campus and their personal contacts in the schools and nonprofit groups. Based on formal interviews and informal conversations with campus colleagues, we became aware of a number of individuals and groups that proposed or wished to propose ideas to either support students in the community or Promise scholarship recipients that were enrolled at WMU. Some of the ideas received support and even funding from WMU, while others remain unfulfilled due to lack of support or ability to reach cooperative agreements with the district or external sponsors.^{33 34}

The ideas and topics covered in this section are only illustrative of the wide and varied suggestions for where more services or supports might be provided. As was very apparent from the interviews, the perceived needs are very great in terms of the support and services that might be provided to help students in poverty. An abundance of research demonstrates that when children are well fed and rested, they are more productive students and happier people.³⁵ The expansion of services that has occurred since the announcement of the Promise is impressive, but is still far from what is going to be required.

Leadership and Coordination of the Community Response

The question of whether Kalamazoo needs its grass-roots volunteer force to be organized and coordinated was a common topic of interest for interviewees. In part, the responsibility for the task

has already been assumed or assigned to several different groups and organizations, confounding the question even further. Contrary to what some might believe, the office of the executive administrator of the Kalamazoo Promise does not have this charge. The job description of the sole administrator does not include volunteer coordination, though he does volunteer in high schools when time permits. The Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo is one organization that currently organizes volunteers but isn't in schools directly, though it does recruit for other nonprofit organizations that work in schools. A representative from the Chamber of Commerce announced at one of the Promise Week 2007 events that the Chamber was also serving as a hub for other organizations seeking to support students and that persons wishing to volunteer should sign up with it.

A nonprofit partner of the school district, Kalamazoo Communities In Schools (KCIS), exists as a primary funnel for community volunteerism in schools. District officials initially stated that KCIS would serve as the facilitator for community volunteerism around the Promise. KCIS has expanded its services in recent years, but its role as the key facilitator for community groups wishing to work with KPS overstates its current capacity and resources.

KCIS may have several obstacles to address before it could be in the position to facilitate further communitywide collaboration. These obstacles include funding and lack of partnership agreements in all of the district schools. Given its tremendous growth in service hours since the announcement of the Promise, the organization lacks fiscal resources to adequately address the needs of the students in the schools it currently serves. KCIS is currently leading a capital campaign, named "A Promise in the Making," cochaired by Promise-broker Janice Brown, which hopes to raise \$2.7 million so that the organization can continue its work and hopefully extend its reach. Each district school can choose to partner with KCIS. This commitment involves funding a site coordinator. Currently, only 10 of the 22 district schools have a partnership agreement with KCIS to operate as a full service school.

In addition to KCIS which helps to coordinate community volunteers that work in KPS partner schools, we are aware that many schools directly facilitate and coordinate community volunteers and directly partner with community groups.

A group of community leaders arranged a study visit to the Harlem Children's Zone. Persons we interviewed who were involved in this study visit indicated that they were still talking internally about how to present to Kalamazoo what they had learned. Nevertheless, it was suggested that Harlem Children's Zone may provide a model or relevant ideas for Kalamazoo. In the structure they witnessed, there is an overarching umbrella of leadership with many organizations under it with a specific aversion to battles over turf or control and a clear focus on meeting the needs of children and families. One of the major differences between the model in Harlem and our case in Kalamazoo is that the Children's Zone has an impressively large budget. As we mentioned earlier, service organizations in Kalamazoo are experiencing budget crunches.

From the diverse interviews conducted, we were able to see that opinions varied considerably about whether centralized leadership is necessary for the community response. Some community leaders are further ahead in the conversation regarding leadership for the community response, some even proposing ideas about who might lead an organization and whether the person should come from inside or outside Kalamazoo. Others are thinking of a more loosely knit coalition of groups, and still others are questioning whether any leadership or increased coordination of services is even necessary.

Addressing Issues Related to Race

The widespread commentary we heard in our interviews about the racial tensions in Kalamazoo was not something we had originally anticipated. It was not a question or topic of discussion in our interview protocol. Yet, its prevalence in our interviewees' responses clearly demonstrated to us that it is not a subject that can be ignored.

According to key informants, a good place to begin looking for solutions to deal with communitywide and historically ingrained issues of discrimination is to become aware of the issue as it appears locally. They stressed that acknowledgment might be a wise counterstep in what has otherwise been a pattern of dismissal. Because this situation is not necessarily unique to Kalamazoo, a wealth of resources is available.³⁶ Even the wide range of resources that can be accessed does not mean the

schools or the community will be struggle-free in addressing this issue. "There's a perception that change is easy and it's not. It will not be. It will be messy."

A few interviewees suggested diversity training programs for everyone in the school district, saying that so far efforts to gain social awareness have been nothing more than "moving deck chairs on the Titanic." More pressing, though, is the repeated observation we heard from community leaders that "The Promise is allowing us to open our eyes as a society to the conversation we need to have." Another interviewee referred to the Promise as a "conversation bomb," hoping that it would encourage us to talk about and confront our "social ills."

Factors That Support Solutions

A number of elements unite the community and work in its favor. One is the widespread and clearly articulated commitment to children. It was common to hear from persons we interviewed that their work is for the children. This commitment can further unite the diverse community groups and help it to overcome differences.

There is tremendous goodwill and generosity in the community. Some of this already appears to be mobilized, but much more potential remains to be tapped.

The Promise itself should be seen as an asset since this has proven effective at leveraging volunteerism. Hopefully it will be used to leverage funding for organizations that are working to create or expand supports and services for students and their families in the community that require assistance.

One unanimously positive area in our interviews was the widespread agreement with the philosophy and practices of new superintendent Michael Rice. Even though we did not ask about the superintendent in any of our interview questions, he was mentioned persistently as a focal point for hope for change. His plan to create a set of academic and social expectations for all parts of the community has garnered much interest. As one interviewee put it, "Rice's vision will transform." Such across-the-board support could simply be part of a honeymoon phase because he is relatively new to the position; or it could be due to efforts to engage the community, which continues a pronounced practice of his

predecessor. His attendance and speeches at Northside Ministerial Alliance meetings have reportedly won him supporters within the African-American community. Agreement with and support of the superintendent provide an opportunity on which

to build. At a Promise Week 2007 event, when the education coordinator queried the audience about whether they would be willing to attend a second parent meeting at the local church, Rice's hand immediately shot into the air. Other hands followed.

Conclusion

Past superintendent Brown recently said to a reporter that in order for the Kalamazoo Promise to be successful and worthwhile, "Every single citizen that you stop on the street and ask 'What are you doing for the Kalamazoo Promise?' must have an answer."³⁷ When we began thinking about how the scholarship would operate, we also expected to see changes in all parts of our community, both inside the schools and within the larger community. In a general sense, that assessment is correct, whether the support is direct or indirect. However, the people we interviewed revealed a wide range of impacts. Most interviewees reported that they were observing positive reactions to the Promise; nevertheless, a large number of informants also acknowledged that the universality of the Promise and its widespread influence have increased attention on community disparities and heightened existing tensions. Informants also stressed that these communitywide issues needed to be addressed.

Responsibilities, Authority, and Resources Related to the Leadership of the Community Response

Aside from the many suggestions and ideas regarding how the community response might be better coordinated, larger questions remain, such as whether something should be done to organize and coordinate the community response. Some informants question whether central steering or coordination is necessary and whether it might stifle grassroots initiatives.

Moving forward, the issue of leadership or coordination of the community response likely will have to be addressed. Reflecting on what we have heard and learned from our interviews, addressing the issue of leadership and coordination of the community response will benefit from a deeper

understanding of the balance among *responsibilities*, *authority*, and *resources*. First of all, any group or individual that seeks a leadership role or is asked to take a leadership role will need to communicate clearly the responsibilities they have assumed.

Second, the issue of *authority* is critical. Because the organizations and agencies involved in the community response are so diverse and span both public and private spheres, it will be difficult for any group to be given authority for overseeing the community response. It may be possible for adequate authority to be established by a coalition of community organizations already involved in the response to the Promise. Regardless of how authority or legitimacy is established for the group(s) that are involved with leadership and coordination, it is important to recognize that organizations that assume or are given responsibilities must be seen to have the authority to pursue these responsibilities.

Finally, the issue of *resources* is also critical. Based on our interviews, it is apparent that many community organizations are strapped for resources. They may be able to solicit considerable effort from volunteers, but still they require resources for leases, supplies, and salaries for core staff. If any group or organization is to play a role in providing leadership and coordination, it must be realized that without resources the responsibilities they are charged with and the authority they are granted are not sufficient. To be successful, resources are also required.

In moving forward, the issue of trust among community organizations may need to be improved. Factors that undermine trust appear to be the recognition that many groups are competing for the same dollars. There also may be issues of groups protecting turf. Apparent from the interviews were also interpersonal factors and past experiences that organizations and individuals will need to let go.

The issue of leadership and coordination of the community response is critical, and solutions regarding concerns about the current situation are long from being resolved.³⁸

Issues for Further Study

As underlined in the previous section, leadership for community volunteerism and the coordination of the community response are areas that emerged from our first round of data collection that need to be explored further. With all of the discussion about whether or how to manage community volunteerism, accountability is one issue that must be investigated further. Our interviewees mentioned a gap between what was said just after the Promise and what actually came into being. We need a better understanding of the types of groups that initially vowed to work toward the success of students, what kept them from fulfilling their intentions, and what is needed to help them follow through. This is a topic we will want to consider further in our data collection.

Our evaluation team also needs to continue its efforts to understand the different dimensions of community support and the existence of gaps in support. Related to this, interviewees mentioned subgroups of students that need specialized attention: non-African-American communities of color, homeless children, and those students who prefer vocational education. While our data collection has allowed us to learn from a number of organizations in the African-American community, further attention in our data collection will need to be given to organizations working with other subgroups of students.

Closing Remarks

Our logic model outlines the anticipated outcomes of the Kalamazoo Promise and reflects the notion that the scholarship will be a catalyst for systemic change both in the schools and the surrounding community. Our interviews with community members indicate that the community has changed in response to the Promise. Some organizations and nonprofit groups have altered their programming and services to serve KPS students and their families better, and our knowledge of those groups at this point has been included in this report

(see Appendix A). Other groups have not changed at all, but still acknowledge that the Promise has impacted their work, at least causing them to think about their mission and its alignment with the hopes pinned to the scholarship program. Community leaders reported changes in students and families, though these reactions have been mixed.

Ultimately, many organizations and nonprofits would like to provide more services and help more students succeed in school, but say there are many obstacles in the way of getting everyone to buy in to the idea, including issues on the individual, organizational, and sociocultural levels. Addressing these obstacles will require better communication and sharing of information as a means to reduce misunderstanding and build trust.

Going forward, it also is important for groups and individuals to appreciate what has been accomplished—and not dwell as much on what has not been accomplished—since the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise in November 2005.

As evaluators, we look forward to continuing to document and report on the growth and evolution of the community's response to the Kalamazoo Promise and the impact of this support on students. The next phase of our data collection involves interviews within Kalamazoo Public Schools. No doubt the comments of teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and students will bring to light some of the topics raised in this report and will inform other outcomes we expect to see as a result of the Promise.

Endnotes

- ¹ Our first working paper on the evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise presented a logic model and comprehensive description of how the Promise is likely to serve as a catalyst for change both in the school district and in the community <www.wmich.edu/evalctr/promise>.
- ² We have also enlisted the assistance of the Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations, located at Western Michigan University, to conduct interviews with parents in the community and report on these findings as they related to needs for community support, perceived obstacles, and suggested solutions for addressing obstacles that may limit the community response.
- ³ Kalamazoo Communities in Schools Annual Report Card 2006-2007," Kalamazoo, MI: Author.
- ⁴ J. Huth, personal communication, November 26, 2007.
- ⁵ C. Warfield, keynote speaker, Parent Celebration Event during Promise Week 2007, November 14, 2007.
- ⁶ See Miron, G., & Evergreen, S. (2008). *The Kalamazoo Promise as a catalyst for change in an urban school district: A theoretical framework for the evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise*. Working Paper #1. Kalamazoo: The Western Michigan University Evaluation Center. www.wmich.edu/evalctr/promise
- ⁷ See Munoz, M. A. (2002). *Outcome-based community-school partnerships: The impact of after-school programs on non-academic and academic indicators*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (ED468973); Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 219-227; and Nettles, S. M. (1991). Community involvement and disadvantaged students: A review. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(3), 379-406.
- ⁸ Bryan, J. (2005), cited above.
- ⁹ Munoz, M. A. (2002), cited above.
- ¹⁰ Sheldon, S. B. (2007). Improving school attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), 267-275.
Nettles, S. M. (1991), cited above. Bryan, J. (2005), cited above.
- ¹¹ For some articulation of this theory, see Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712; Sheldon, S. B. (2003). Linking school-family-community partnerships in urban elementary schools to student achievement on state tests. *The Urban Review*, 35(2), 149-165; and Sanders, M. G. (2001). The role of "community" in comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102(1), 19-34.
- ¹² S. Curry, personal communication, October 12, 2007.
- ¹³ Davis, P. M. (2007, December 14). Anonymous donor pledges \$5 million to WMU. *Kalamazoo Gazette*, p. A1.
- ¹⁴ In addition to interviewees, this was confirmed by A. Kuchta, personal communication, November 26, 2007.
- ¹⁵ In addition to interviewees, this was also found in Mack, J. (2007, October 9). City workers help students. *Kalamazoo Gazette*.
- ¹⁶ "Annual Report Card 2006-2007," Kalamazoo, MI: Author.
- ¹⁷ Students were not included in interviews at this time. Reports of student stress come from Davis, P. M. (2006, September 4). KPS grads start college ready to fulfill Promise. *Kalamazoo Gazette*, pp. A1, A2.
- ¹⁸ See McCarron, G.P., & Inkelas, K.K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 534-50.
- ¹⁹ Mack, J. (2007, August 23). Back-to-school fair helps children in need. *Kalamazoo Gazette*, pp. A1, A2.
- ²⁰ KPS Department of Homeless Liaison, personal communication, November 21, 2007.
- ²¹ Mack, J. (2006, October 15). Kalamazoo to recap first anniversary of Promise. *Kalamazoo Gazette*.
- ²² Davis, S. (2008). Centering the folder. In M. Morris (Ed.) *Evaluation ethics for best practice: Cases and commentaries*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 100-112.

²³ In addition to interviewees, this also was stated by J. Bland in a community conversation about marketing the Promise during Promise Week 2007, November 16, 2007.

²⁴ In addition to interviewees, this also was stated by K. Nacci in a community conversation about marketing the Promise during Promise Week 2007, November 16, 2007.

²⁵ Nixon, A. (2007, October 24). R&D drug company to locate here. *Kalamazoo Gazette*, pp. A1, A5.

²⁶ In the end, the school board decided to adjust mean classes sizes in the elementary schools at a level that favored schools with predominantly African-American students. Class sizes in the predominantly white schools were affected very little and have remained substantially lower than the size negotiated with the teachers union.

²⁷ The new school building is intended to replace Chime Elementary School which has long been considered a substandard facility. Chime is a small former private school, that had additions patched on over time. The school also depends on 3 portable units for the classes. Because of the intended plans to replace, rather than repair this facility, the school has not received investment in its infrastructure, which is why it has remained substandard. Finally, it is also worth pointing out that the district had plans to replace this school building that pre-date the Kalamazoo Promise.

²⁸ While the actual percentage of new students moving to the community from outside is relatively small, it has added to the perception of displacement or growth by addition instead of bolstering what is already within. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the 1,200 new students that have enrolled in KPS in the last few years have come from within the district due to transfers from private schools or charter schools. The growth in enrollment is explained by reduced dropout rates and decisions by more families that might otherwise have left Kalamazoo—due to employment or other reasons—to remain in Kalamazoo. Finally, it is important to point out that the distribution of KPS students by ethnic groups has not changed since before the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise. While it is important to recognize and understand perceptions since they influence behavior, it is fair to say that the available evidence does not support the notion of displacement of minority or low-income families in the community.

²⁹ Mack, J. (2006, October 5). KPS' Promise may be curbing "white flight." *Kalamazoo Gazette*, pp. A3, A4.

³⁰ Mack, J. (2007, September 12). School counts vary. *Kalamazoo Gazette*, pp. A1, A2; also see Mack, J. (2007, September 30). Five elementaries surpass 500 mark. *Kalamazoo Gazette*.

³¹ Making the Promise a reality [Editorial]. (2005, November 16). *Kalamazoo Gazette*.

³² Mack, J. (2007, November 27). The good news free: (adj) Price of kids' dictionaries. *Kalamazoo Gazette*.

³³ One such example was a plan from the history department to create an online archive of oral histories about the scholarship, which then could be mined by other researchers and community leaders wishing to better understand the program. [Martini, E., personal communication, December 11, 2007]

³⁴ Another example is a proposal submitted by a transdisciplinary team of university faculty members to establish a settlement house on the east side of town. It aimed to provide social and academic supports free of charge through the time donated by students in a variety of fields such as nursing and education. This proposal is still being promoted but has yet to receive support or funding.

³⁵ Kozol, J. (2005). *Shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

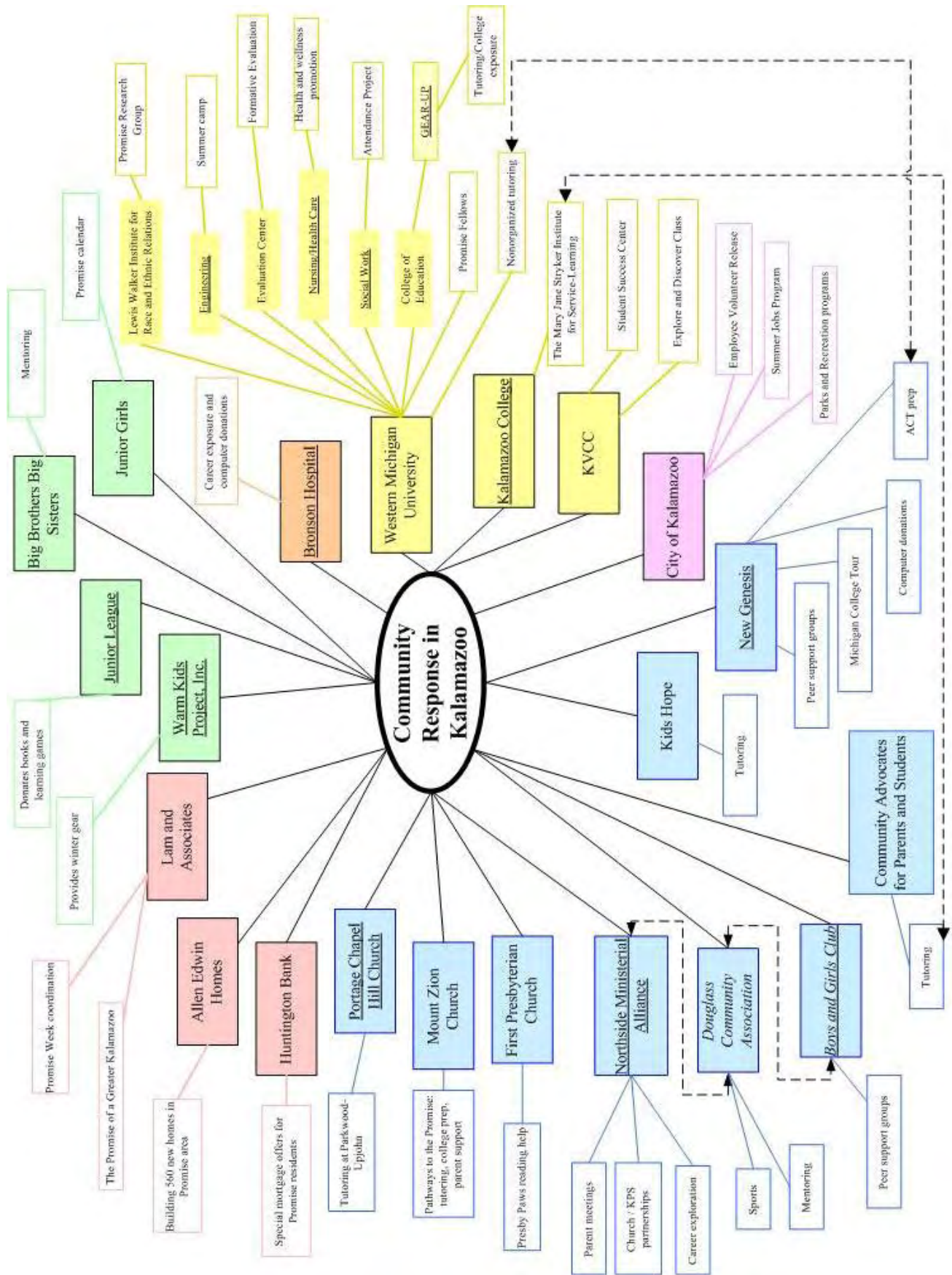
Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. New York: Teachers College Press.

³⁶ For a lengthy list of resources for a wide variety of audiences, see especially Tatum, B. D. (1995). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books. The book itself is a rich resource with an appended discussion guide in the updated version.

³⁷ Ignatius, J. (2007, November 7). 'Promisekeeping: Developer of the Kalamazoo initiative cautions that a Promise is no quick fix. *River Cities' Reader*.

³⁸ On a related note, a few community activists, including Robert and Julie Kaufman, have drafted a community volunteer plan to organize response efforts, originally naming the city of Kalamazoo as the responsible party. Their document, "Rings of Stewardship," has been presented to the city commission and other groups.

Appendix A Map of Community Organizations That Have Created or Expanded Services in Response to the Kalamazoo Promise



Italics indicate an organization that is at least partially funded by Greater Kalamazoo United Way; Underlining indicates KCIS collaboration.

Appendix B
Kalamazoo Communities In Schools
List of Community Partners

Adams Outdoor Advertising	Junior Achievement of Southwest Michigan
Air Zoo	Junior League of Kalamazoo
Alpha Phi Alpha	Kalamazoo Area Asthma Coalition
America Reads	Kalamazoo Area Math & Science Center
American Association of University Women	Kalamazoo Area Medical Alliance
American Red Cross	Kalamazoo Chapter of the Links, Inc.
August Optical	Kalamazoo College
Bead Venture	Kalamazoo College Basketball
Big Apple Bagels	Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
Big Brothers, Big Sisters	Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services
Binky Patrol	Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Dental Clinic
Borgess Medical Center	Kalamazoo County Family YMCA
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kalamazoo	Kalamazoo Deacon's Conference
Breakfast Optimist Club of Kalamazoo	Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes
Bronson Health Foundation	Kalamazoo Public Library
Bronson Methodist Hospital	Kalamazoo Regional Educational Services Agency/Homeless Liason
Catholic Family Services –the ARK	Kalamazoo Table Tennis Association
City of Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Department	Kalamazoo Youth Development Network
Edison Business Association	KVCC School of Nursing
Edison Neighborhood Association	Kampus Kidz
Elizabeth Upjohn Community Healing Center	Kids Hope
Family & Children Services	Klein's Bagel Beanery
Family Health Center	Let's Talk About It
First Day Shoe Fund	Lightening Kicks
First Presbyterian Church	Mad Science of Greater Kalamazoo
First United Methodist Church	Mary Jane Stryker-Underwood Service Learning Institute
Fontana Chamber Arts	Memories Bridal and Evening Wear
Food Bank of South-Central Michigan	Michigan Communities In Schools
Galilee Baptist Church	Michigan State University Cooperative Extension 4-H
Gazelle Sports	Milwood Area Business Association
Girl Scouts of Glowing Embers	Milwood Christian Reformed Church
Greater Kalamazoo Girls on the Run	New Genesis, Inc.
Greater Kalamazoo United Way	Northside Business Alliance
Gryphon Place	Northside Ministerial Alliance
Hispanic American Council	One on One
Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan	Panera Bread
Housing Resources, Inc.	
Jeters Leaders	
Joanne Baker, DO	
John Rybicki	
JP Morgan Chase	

People's Church
Pfizer Animal Health
Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church
Portage United Church of Christ
Prevention Works
Professional Development & Training Center
Professional Image
Rave Motion Pictures Cityplace 14
Rx Optical
Safe Kids Kalamazoo County
SCOPE
Senior Services, Inc.
Specialized Language Development Center
Spring Arbor University - Kalamazoo Campus
State of Michigan Department of Human
Services
The Adventure Center
The River
Third Reformed Church
Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo
WE. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
Warm Kids
West Michigan Glass Society
Western Michigan University College of
Education
Western Michigan University Counseling
Education & Counseling Psychology Dept.
Western Michigan University Family &
Consumer Sciences Department
Western Michigan University Football
Western Michigan University GEAR UP
Western Michigan University Haworth College
of Business
Western Michigan University Men's and
Women's Basketball
Western Michigan University Occupational
Therapy Department
Western Michigan University Psychology
Department
Western Michigan University School of
Engineering & Applied Sciences
Western Michigan University School of Music
Western Michigan University School of Social
Work
Western Michigan University Bronson School of
Nursing
Westwood United Methodist Church
YWCA of Kalamazoo