

Case Study No. 15

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

The Promise: A Case Study of Say Yes to Education in Buffalo

by ROBERT FRAHM

OCTOBER 2016

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Discipline & Focus	Knowledge	Resources Linked to Results	Effective Grantees	Engaged Partners	Leverage, Influence & Collaboration	Persistence	Innovation & Constant Learning
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Grantmakers for Education's mission is to strengthen philanthropy to improve outcomes and expand opportunities for all learners. We serve as a trusted partner for all education philanthropists as they adapt to the changes impacting our world. To accomplish this, GFE's purpose is two-fold:

1. To provide members with an informal and balanced environment for collaborating, discussing and acting on important issues in public education.
2. To help members identify and prepare for what's next. With our finger on the pulse of our diverse network and eye on the broader horizon, we keep members informed of relevant and pressing issues, and equip members with the tools and knowledge required to shape the future.

Grantmakers for Education developed its series of case studies on effective education grantmaking as reflection and discussion tools. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data or illustrations of successful or unsuccessful grantmaking. In addition, to help make the case a more effective learning tool, it is deliberately written from one foundation's point of view, even though other foundations may have been involved in similar activities or supported the same grantees.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Robert A. Frahm has written about education for more than 40 years for print and online news organizations, including 23 years as the chief education reporter for The Hartford Courant, where he covered topics such as testing, teacher quality, school reform and school desegregation. He has won numerous writing awards, including the nation's top prize for education reporting from the Education Writers Association in 1983 and 1996 and the Master Reporter Award from the New England Society of Newspaper Editors in 1996. He is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin.

FOREWORD

By Grantmakers for Education Executive Director Ana Tilton

As the largest and most diverse consortium of education philanthropists in the nation, Grantmakers for Education has, for more than 20 years, worked with its members to strengthen, deepen and broaden philanthropy's impact on public education. We bring together organizations united by a commitment to improve outcomes and expand opportunities for all learners. We believe that collective insights, shared resources, and constructive collaborations enable grantmakers to invest more intentionally and effectively. We set out to demonstrate the power of networks in affecting greater change. So does Grantmakers for Education member Say Yes to Education.

For 30 years, Say Yes to Education has focused on forming strong partnerships with civic leaders, funders, institutions of higher education and policymakers to help learners achieve postsecondary access and success. Its network of partners has been critical to its ability to grow its reach from 112 public school students in Philadelphia to nearly 140,000 students in three communities across the country over the past three decades.

As a member of Grantmakers for Education, Say Yes to Education is in good company. Grantmakers for Education members across the nation aspire to, or are in the process of achieving, monumental efforts to expand opportunities for learners. Whether tackling postsecondary access and success like Say Yes or countless other important efforts regarding early learning, out-of-school time, teacher training and more, grantmakers are in the process of learning important lessons about how to effectively bring communities together and sustainably build and redefine expectations for education in our nation.

In our work, progress rarely happens without setbacks; yet, it's the setbacks that often teach the most valuable lessons. Say Yes to Education's efforts to sustain its work over the long term by gradually shifting responsibility and ownership entirely to local sources in the communities it serves has been an evolving process. Say Yes to Education has designed and structured its work in its third community (Guilford County, North Carolina), based on what it learned in its first two communities (Syracuse and Buffalo, New York). Say Yes to Education's value proposition – local communities benefit when college-educated young people return to local workforces and bolster a region's civic and economic life – only strengthens as it applies the lessons it has learned.

Like Say Yes to Education, other Grantmakers for Education members often reflect on their work, share their learning internally, and adjust their tasks to reach their intended goals and missions. Grantmakers for Education's case studies go one step further, sharing those reflections for the benefit of all members and those impacted through their work. Case studies are an asset to our members. They bring people and ideas together, and they create forums for discussion and learning.

I want to thank many of our members, like Say Yes to Education, who have been both bold and brave in allowing us to profile their work in case studies over the past 20 years. It's one thing to hold a mirror up within an organization and another entirely to hold it up for the world to see and learn from. You have contributed to a valuable, far-reaching effort over the past two decades to set all Grantmakers for Education members up to be anticipatory, proactive and adaptive in their individual and collective efforts to shape the future of public education and, with it, the future of all learners across the country.

Together, we can go further, faster.

INTRODUCTION

The Promise: A Case Study of Say Yes to Education in Buffalo

By Robert Frahm

Not long ago, college seemed out of reach for Jesse Ashley, a high school senior in Buffalo, New York.

In a troubled school system plagued by low achievement and high dropout rates, Jesse's chronic absenteeism and bouts with depression made his prospects shaky. But Jesse got help, returned to classes and began thinking about college – all under an ambitious program that began with the promise of a college scholarship to any graduate of the city's public schools.

That promise, made by a local partnership with support from the national nonprofit group Say Yes to Education, spurred a community-wide effort designed not only to remove financial barriers to higher education, but to reshape the very nature of Buffalo's public schools and bolster the economic revival of one of the nation's most impoverished cities.

Five years ago, with the pledge of \$15 million from Say Yes as an incentive, the community embarked on a new approach to increasing postsecondary completion. Local civic leaders formed Say Yes Buffalo, securing commitments from city and county governments, local businesses, school officials, parent groups, unions, higher education institutions, churches and others to provide an array of services – such as mentoring, after-school and summer programs, school-based mental health counseling and even legal clinics – and to build a scholarship fund to help students such as Jesse overcome obstacles as they pursue the dream of a college degree.

Say Yes Buffalo, in partnership with Erie County government, also hired specialists at every school throughout the system to help families confront problems that might otherwise interfere with their children's education – anything from medical issues to homelessness to unemployment. At Hutchinson Central Technical High School, family support specialist Joell Stubbe became concerned when she learned that Jesse was piling up absences. Stubbe went to his home, where he told her he felt depressed and tired. "I wasn't coming to school," he said. "I guess I just felt like I hadn't accomplished anything."

Stubbe linked Jesse with a mental health counselor. He began attending counseling sessions two or three times a month.

"This year he's back in school, he's making his appointments," Stubbe said. "His determination to want to finish – and him getting the help he needs – is going to help get him to graduation and go on to college...I'm really proud of him."

Until Stubbe stepped in, Jesse, 18, a fifth-year senior, was destined to become another all too familiar statistic in Buffalo. Of those who entered high school in 2011, four out of 10 had either dropped out or, like Jesse, had fallen too far behind to graduate with their class in 2015. The graduation rate ticked up to 61 percent

last year – a significant 12 percentage point improvement over previous years – but remained far below the statewide average of 80 percent.

Now back on track, Jesse, like a growing number of Buffalo students, sees college as a real option – free of the barrier of tuition costs. He said his family would have had difficulty paying for college on their own.

Jesse credits Stubbe with getting him to think about college and says the counseling made a difference. “That was a help,” he said. “I want to graduate. I missed so much school that I could not pass my classes, so I’m making them up...I’m hoping I’ll go to college to study electrical engineering.”

Without the prospect of a college scholarship, he added, “I probably wouldn’t be able to go.”

THE SAY YES PROMISE

Five days before Christmas in 2011, hundreds of students, parents and civic leaders packed a school auditorium and cheered as philanthropist George Weiss launched Say Yes Buffalo with over 30 local partners. Officials described the scene as electric. “To see the kids literally crying when they heard they would be able to go to college if they graduated, it was just so, so inspirational,” one state legislator recalled.

Weiss, the founder and head of a financial management firm based in New York City and Hartford, Connecticut, has been offering scholarships to economically disadvantaged children for nearly 30 years. In 1987, he promised college tuition to a group of 112 fifth-graders at a Philadelphia elementary school. At the time, Nancy Reagan was promoting her “Just Say No” anti-drugs campaign, Weiss recalled. He decided to call his project “Say Yes to Education.” Later, he opened five other Say Yes chapters in the Northeastern U.S., each offering a variety of support services as well as scholarships, to groups of 50 to 300 students.

According to follow-up studies, students in these small Say Yes chapters were far more likely than their classmates to graduate from high school and earn college degrees. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, 87 percent of students in a chapter created in 1991 completed high school or earned a GED, compared with a district average of 52 percent. In addition, 72 percent earned postsecondary degrees or certificates.

In 2008, Say Yes began a bold, much larger experiment. It extended access to college or other postsecondary scholarships, as well as all the related support services from kindergarten through grade 12, to the entire public school district of Syracuse, New York. And it did so in a way intended to benefit students and their families year after year.

Weiss is enthusiastic about bringing the program to cities such as Syracuse but concedes that expanding the scholarship promise from a few small chapters to a district of more than 20,000 students was not his idea. “I never thought of it,” he said. “That’s a pretty big leap.”

Instead, he credits Say Yes President Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, an education and community development expert, with envisioning the scholarship promise program on a citywide scale.

“George had put together a very common sense approach to creating interventions and enrichment opportunities that enable young people to develop their natural talents,” said Schmitt-Carey, who had worked in the Clinton administration’s education department and later headed New American Schools, an organization devoted to creating innovative “break-the-mold” public schools. She came to Say Yes in 2006.

“When I first took the job, the thing that I did not know is whether or not you could actually bring this work to scale,” she said.

To make the Say Yes strategy work on such a large scale, Say Yes could not rely on philanthropy alone. Nor could it limit its focus to the school system. This would require an entire community. Say Yes officials sought partners from government, education and business sectors to share the financial burden of scholarships and operating costs “to essentially replicate what George had done through his personal generosity,” Schmitt-Carey said.

“What we started in Syracuse... was to build relationships with the county executive and all the commissioners of the major departments, with the mayor’s office...with the school system, the school board, the teachers’ union,” she said.

Building on its experience in Syracuse, Say Yes made serving Buffalo’s 40,000 public and charter school students its second citywide project. In 2015, Say Yes launched a third major community-wide chapter in Guilford County, North Carolina, a sprawling school system of 72,000 students, including those in the cities of Greensboro and High Point.

The fundamental Say Yes strategy, according to Schmitt-Carey, is to act as “an honest broker” working with all community stakeholders toward “a shared North Star of postsecondary degree completion for all students.” Using the local scholarship promise and initial seed money as leverage, Say Yes seeks to spur each community to provide sustained support for an array of academic, social and health services enabling students to progress along a clearly defined pathway to college and career success. The goal is to substantially increase the number of students graduating from high school and earning college and other postsecondary degrees. In turn, over the long term, officials believe many of those young people will return to the local workforce and bolster the civic and economic life of the region.

Schmitt-Carey describes Say Yes as an effort to bring together groups and individuals across political lines to “a space where you can begin to weave the fabric of the community in new ways.”

In Buffalo, the Say Yes national organization has invested about \$11 million from its foundation into the program so far – an investment that, to date, has leveraged about \$15 for every dollar contributed – but the goal is to sustain the project over the long term by gradually shifting responsibility entirely to local sources and making the scholarship promise a permanent fixture – owned and operated by Buffalo itself.

The Buffalo project, said Schmitt-Carey, “is the best we’ve ever done it,” and yet it remains an evolving experiment offering new lessons and insights as officials refine the strategy for Guilford County and plan to expand to two additional communities by 2018. Among the national organization’s goals is to create a series of demonstration sites from which other communities, policymakers and foundations might learn.

Under the Say Yes promise, public high school graduates who gain admission to public colleges in their state are guaranteed free tuition, with the local Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Board pledging to fill any gaps left after accounting for other awards such as state scholarships or federal Pell Grants. Say Yes calls these “last dollar” scholarships. In some communities, additional financial help for campus housing is available for those in greatest need. The scholarships to in-state public institutions are available to students regardless of annual family income, though students must demonstrate continuous enrollment in the public school system to receive the full scholarship. (Students in Buffalo who demonstrate continuous enrollment beginning as late as ninth grade are still eligible for partial scholarships to in-state public institutions; those who enroll by kindergarten will have 100 percent of their tuition to an in-state public college or university covered.)

In addition, Say Yes has developed partnerships with more than 100 private colleges and universities that have agreed to cover the cost of tuition and fees, after federal and state aid, for Say Yes graduates who qualify for admission and whose families earn less than \$75,000 a year. Those institutions span the nation, including all eight Ivy League institutions and other highly selective universities such as Duke, Stanford and Notre Dame, as well as smaller colleges like Bennett in North Carolina, Lycoming in Pennsylvania and Rhodes in Tennessee. In return, those colleges and universities are able to build more diverse student bodies by reaching out to cities such as Buffalo, where blacks, Hispanics and other minority groups account for nearly 80 percent of public school enrollment.

The 73-year-old Weiss recalls the excitement of the Say Yes launch in Buffalo. “I get a big high when I’m around kids,” he said. “There was one girl there – as soon as I made the announcement – she started crying her eyes out.” The girl, an honor roll student, said her parents had told her they couldn’t afford to send her to college, Weiss said. “It’s a great high because you see the joy, you see the hope in the faces of these students.”

There is ample evidence of the economic benefits of a college degree. A 2014 report by the Pew Research Center said that among today’s young adults, “the disparity in economic outcomes between college graduates and those with a high school diploma or less formal schooling has never been greater in the modern era.” The report, based on U.S. government figures, said the median annual salary for those with a bachelor’s degree or more was \$45,500, compared with \$28,000 for a high school graduate.

Nevertheless, college costs can be a significant barrier. In a 2014 survey by Gallup and the Lumina Foundation, 79 percent of respondents said they do not believe education beyond high school is affordable for everyone who needs it. Don Hossler, a senior scholar at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, has studied the affordability issue. As early as fifth or sixth grade, many low-income children “stop thinking about college or don’t think realistically about it, in part because they assume they can’t afford to go,” he said.

Weiss agreed. He said students who lack the financial wherewithal too often limit their college options. “When you look at Buffalo and Syracuse...all the top students would just go locally,” he said. With Say Yes, “all of a sudden you expand their horizons, and kids are going to Harvard, Yale, Penn.”

To Weiss, Say Yes not only was a promise to students, but to a city that was among the poorest urban areas in the nation, a symbol of the economic decline of America’s Rust Belt. “Working together,” Weiss told the audience as he announced the Say Yes launch, “we can make a difference to return Buffalo to the greatness that it was.”

THE TIMING WAS RIGHT

Say Yes arrived in Buffalo just as the city was undergoing an economic recovery. Today, signs of progress dot the landscape. The revitalization of downtown Buffalo and the waterfront, the expansion of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, and plans for a new solar panel factory are giving new hope to a region hard hit by the collapse of manufacturing jobs over the past half century. Four years ago, the city received a major boost when Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced the “Buffalo Billion,” a billion-dollar package of incentives to spur economic development.

“The timing [of Say Yes’s arrival], whether accidental or just lucky, is perfect for Buffalo in that we’re experiencing a resurgence here in the city,” said former Congressman Jack Quinn, now president of Erie Community College, where many of the recent Say Yes graduates have enrolled. “The promise of a college education, which was unattainable for a lot of people, is now very real.”

Nevertheless, community leaders continue to worry about a city school system often described as dysfunctional. Over the past five years, the school district has cycled through seven full-time or interim superintendents. The school board has been split along racial and political lines, and relations have been so contentious that one faction recently discussed hiring its own lawyer. The district spent \$442,000 in 2013-14 to pay for board lawsuits and legal fees, according to a study by the Buffalo News. Say Yes Buffalo officials believe that the latest superintendent, hired a year ago, has begun to restore stability and that a realignment of the school board after a recent election will tone down some of the rancor. Still, academic results have remained dismal, with just 12 percent of elementary schoolchildren reaching state proficiency standards in English language arts and 15 percent in mathematics last year. In a meeting last year with Buffalo News reporters and editors, Gov. Cuomo called schools “the fundamental problem for a place like Buffalo.”

“No matter how you came at this, all the arrows pointed to the urban education system in terms of our economic health. We’ve got to fix public education,” said Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

In 2010, Dedecker began taking steps to start a scholarship promise program in Buffalo modeled after similar programs in cities such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Say Yes, meanwhile, was looking to take on another city. In Syracuse, things were not going as smoothly as planned. Fundraising was behind schedule, student data collection proved to be difficult, and some administrators and principals remained skeptical. What lessons could be learned from Syracuse? Could this work in Buffalo?

After hearing about Say Yes and meeting with Schmitt-Carey, Dedecker was convinced that Buffalo was a good fit. Something, she said, had to be done. Dedecker and Blythe Merrill from the John R. Oishei Foundation convened meetings with more than 100 community organizations to build grassroots support. “Shared governance was really very important because it meant everyone had to be around the table,” Merrill said.

Dedecker and Merrill became tireless advocates in the effort to bring Say Yes to Buffalo. “What was so attractive to us about Say Yes is that it had a very clear [goal] – and that was increasing postsecondary completion,” Dedecker said. “It just made too much sense not to give it the full court press.”

BUILDING A COALITION

Before Say Yes agrees to form a partnership with a community, it requires broad-based support and commitments from government, schools, businesses, local leaders and scholarship donors. Those commitments are fundamental to long-term success and crucial in building a sense of local ownership of Say Yes, according to Schmitt-Carey. That did not happen as hoped in Syracuse, she said.

In Syracuse, some viewed the New York City-based Say Yes organization as an outsider – “Park Avenue going in, telling them what to do,” said Eugene Chasin, chief operating officer for Say Yes, in reference to the organization’s headquarters in midtown Manhattan. “Buy-in and commitment did not get transmitted to mid-level administrators and principals... We were much more humble going into Buffalo... I met with over 100 community based organizations before we launched. It was a very different approach.”

A study of the Syracuse project by the American Institutes for Research credited Say Yes with improving collaboration among community leaders but said, “There were a number of challenges, such as the lack of role clarity and disagreements about strategies to reach common goals.”

Chasin said, “What happened in Syracuse is that the governance structure wasn’t defined before we launched it... What we didn’t have is an upfront commitment to the postsecondary planning (data) system. We did not have written agreements with the different parties about their role.”

It was a lesson that Say Yes took to Buffalo, requiring specific commitments “hardwired into their application,” he said.

Dedecker understood the importance of those commitments. “The collaborative governance is a non-negotiable for Say Yes,” she said. “So I met with the county executive, I met with the superintendent, I met with each of the school board members. I met with the parent leaders. I met with the commissioner of social services. Clearly, the business leaders were already backing this.”

“I personally met with each individual stakeholder that needed to sign a letter, a memorandum of understanding,” she said. “One by one, everyone said yes.”

Dedecker also began securing pledges to build a scholarship fund. “When she asks you to do something, you don’t say no,” recalls one major donor. Say Yes has attracted pledges from hundreds of donors, including businesses such as BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, Key Bank, Delaware North and others.

“We started with the business community,” said Alphonso O’Neil-White, chairman of the Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship board. “The original strategy was if we could get the business community on board, everybody else would follow.” The fund has secured more than \$25 million in pledges so far but has a long-term goal to create a substantially larger endowment to sustain the scholarship promise, he said.

O’Neil White, the retired CEO of HealthNow New York Inc., recalls his own experience growing up in a poor family. “I got a scholarship to go to college,” he said. “I know the value of an education and what that value is in my life, so it was clear to me the financial barrier is so huge that if you can remove that you can create hope for a lot of kids out there. That was the missing piece.”

The Say Yes scholarship promise immediately appealed to other civic leaders, too.

State Rep. Crystal Peoples-Stokes and state Sen. Tim Kennedy made separate trips to New York City to meet Weiss and make a pitch on Buffalo's behalf.

"If there was ever an opportunity to bring something like that here to Buffalo, I wanted to help make it happen," Kennedy said. "Quite frankly, if there was ever the potential to lose it to another part of the state or the country, I wanted to prevent that."

Last year, Peoples-Stokes backed her commitment to Say Yes with a \$5,000 contribution to the scholarship fund – money she set aside from a campaign fundraiser. She said the jobs being created in areas such as technology and health care that are part of Buffalo's economic revival will require more than just a high school diploma. Say Yes, she said, is "such an opportunity to provide a sense of hopefulness to people who hadn't thought about college."

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown also became an advocate for Say Yes, citing the program during his re-election campaign. "I don't think you can have a strong, healthy vibrant city without strong, healthy vibrant schools," Brown said recently. The city has provided about \$1.3 million so far for Say Yes scholarships and academic support, he said. "While we have had challenges in public education, particularly in the Buffalo public schools, Say Yes is viewed as a ray of hope," Brown said.

AN UNLIKELY COALITION

A month before Weiss came to Buffalo to announce the Say Yes partnership, the Buffalo News published a story about a testy dispute between outspoken parents' group leader Sam Radford and the powerful head of the Buffalo Teachers Federation, Phil Rumore.

It was not the first time the two had clashed.

One of the challenges in a Say Yes partnership is fostering collaboration among disparate, sometimes competing groups. Some feared that without the support of the teachers union, Say Yes would be doomed. Rumore, a veteran of union wars, had been a lightning rod for criticism in Buffalo. "Everyone talked about what a challenge this guy was to work with," Chasin said. "Before we came, that was going to be our big barrier."

Today, Rumore and Radford are working together as members of an operating committee that oversees Say Yes Buffalo. They are among its strongest advocates.

"It's one of the best things that has happened for Buffalo," Rumore said.

Radford, head of the District Parent Coordinating Council, admits he was a skeptic at first. "I just thought... there's got to be a catch... [but] it came all the way home for me on the day they announced Buffalo was a Say Yes city... To see the reaction of the kids, you know, scream and holler and cry. It got real to me right then."

Nowhere is the collaboration among community partners more evident than on the 16-member Say Yes operating committee, a diverse mix of political and philosophical backgrounds. Besides Radford and Rumore, it includes school board representatives; the district superintendent and other school administrators; a police department representative; local college presidents; the administrators' union president, foundation officials, and the Erie County social services commissioner. The committee meets every three weeks.

Radford credits Say Yes with making progress despite political turmoil within the school board and the frequent turnover of superintendents. "Ten years ago...you had 50 percent graduation rates, and nobody cared," he said. "All of a sudden, now you've got the business community at the table, you've got not-for-profits, you've got the churches, you've got all the education stakeholders, higher ed – all these people at the table on a regular basis...to keep us on track."

"I don't pretend that we always agree...but now we can listen to each other," he said. "It's civil."

Whatever their differences, committee members share a common goal, Rumore said. "The most important thing we can give our kids is a sense of a positive future," he said. "If there are differences, you can work them out...The key to any of this stuff is you have to find common ground."

MORE THAN JUST A SCHOLARSHIP

At Public School #3, the D'Youville Porter Campus School, Chanda Ramirez is a familiar presence, greeting students as they step off of school buses, helping a second-grader tie his shoes, or stopping a teacher in a hallway to ask about an absent student. She uses a list of local social service agencies maintained on the Say Yes Postsecondary Planning System, finding help for families dealing with issues such as housing, medical needs, or nutrition. On Fridays, you can find her after school, joining teacher volunteers to pack food bags for needy families, a project she started in connection with the Western New York Food Bank.

She is "the bridge that connects families and the school," said D'Youville Porter Assistant Principal Freddy Barrera. "I already see progress when it comes to parent engagement....She makes things much easier for us."

Ramirez is one of 55 family support specialists hired under the Say Yes program, one at each of the city's public schools. Funded by Erie County, the City of Buffalo and Say Yes, the addition of specialists is among a series of steps – known as wraparound services – designed to help students overcome problems that interfere with schooling. These services, everything from health clinics to mentoring, are a fundamental piece of the Say Yes promise and an expansion of the role of Buffalo's schools.

"This is re-imagining public education," said David Rust, executive director of the Say Yes Buffalo chapter. "This is not the traditional 9-to-3 school day focused on academics with some art and music and physical education mixed into it."

"I mean you're talking social work in the building, mental health services in the building, legal services in the building, summer camps available to kids, physical health services, mentoring as they transition from their

high school to their collegiate or postsecondary programs.” A former deputy social services commissioner for Erie County, the 36-year-old Rust said linking those services directly to schools is “what it takes to serve kids and families these days... This is about doing what’s fundamentally right.”

Nearly 80 percent of Buffalo’s schoolchildren come from families categorized as economically disadvantaged, according to state figures.

“When you have poverty at such high levels and segregation at such high levels as you do in Buffalo, you expose all sorts of vulnerabilities,” said Dr. Will Keresztes, chief of intergovernmental affairs for Buffalo Public Schools. “Children in our district have disproportionate health needs. It manifests itself in poor nutrition and higher asthma rates than usual... You have lack of access to health care, lack of family access to any kind of counseling or mental health services... Say Yes has closed that gap.

“Public education is not necessarily wired to adequately address social needs, so what the Say Yes phenomenon does is it says we have this opportunity for students in the form of the scholarship, but... we also understand that just because you offer kids a scholarship doesn’t mean they’re going to automatically overcome all of their barriers,” he said.

By providing health services, family specialists and legal clinics in school buildings, Buffalo and Say Yes are part of a growing trend to make public schools a community hub and expand responsibility beyond their traditional academic function, said Paul Reville, a professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

“Making [services] available in schools – because schools are places where families and children congregate regularly – makes a lot of sense,” said Reville, former secretary of education in Massachusetts. “I think we’re beyond the days where schooling alone, as we currently know it, is a credible vehicle for achieving an equal opportunity society.”

At D’Youville Porter School, Ramirez has been a versatile resource for students and their parents. A former Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, she speaks fluent Spanish, a valuable skill in school where Latino children make up nearly 70 percent of enrollment, and about one-third of the students speak limited English.

On one recent school day, nine fifth-graders who had frequent absences filed into her tiny office during lunch hour to discuss the importance of attending school. That same day, in a school hallway, she stopped to help a boy tie his shoes. The boy, she explained later, often falls asleep in class or on the school bus and has had behavior problems. He is part of a small caseload of several families with whom she works intensively, including home visits.

“He has some pretty significant health concerns that I’m working with his mom to address... He’s an 8-year-old kid on grade level for reading in second grade. This boy is smart, [but] he will never get to college if these other issues about his behavior, his own distractibility, his health concerns don’t get addressed,” she said.

Later that day, Ramirez stood in a hallway holding a sign promoting Say Yes as rows of students filed past for afternoon dismissal. One boy, a new student, noticed the sign and asked, “How does it work?” She explained, “When you graduate from high school, you get a scholarship to go to college.”

However, unless these students get the help many of them need, that would be a hollow promise, Ramirez said.

“The leverage is the carrot of the scholarship. That’s the thing that everyone is attracted to...but I wouldn’t want to be in an organization that is scholarship only...because it washes over the real challenges that kids and families are facing in a struggling urban environment,” she said.

“So it isn’t enough to say, ‘Oh, look, you can go to college.’”

In addition to the family support specialists, Say Yes and its local partners have added or expanded a variety of other wraparound services, including the following:

HEALTH CLINICS

Say Yes worked with Erie County officials to establish mental health clinics in school buildings. Before Say Yes arrived, there were 12 school-based clinics in Buffalo. Today, there are clinics in 42 of the school district’s 55 buildings, with plans for further expansion to all schools. Counselors are available to help students overcome issues such as behavioral problems, anxiety, depression and trauma.

“I go every Friday (to counseling)...I was very excited to do it,” said 18-year-old senior Fawn Milewski. “I just wanted to get help for myself.” She said she was depressed and skipping school because of troubled family relationships. “I just want to make it to graduation, and I want to do better than I was in the past,” said Milewski, who visits a clinic across the street from her school, Hutchinson Tech. Next year, that school expects to have a clinic within the building.

Putting clinics in school buildings made sense, said Al Dirschberger, Erie County’s commissioner of social services. “Why not bring them to where you need them?” he said. “Some of the big stressors for kids are school and family, so why not have all the areas work together?”

The clinics deal with young people who struggle in school and are at risk of being truant or dropping out, he said. The clinics make it less likely for those students to be moved out of their homes into expensive residential treatment centers, where an average placement costs roughly \$80,000 a year, Dirschberger said.

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo provided start-up funding to establish the school clinics. Regular operating costs are borne by Erie County through Medicaid reimbursement and private insurance. Starting this year, Erie County, Buffalo Public Schools, and Say Yes also will support two mobile health buses that will provide routine healthcare to schoolchildren.

“It was like music to my ears when I heard we were going to make wraparound services a priority,” said Ellen Grant, former deputy mayor in Buffalo and now an official with Say Yes. “To me, one of the things that was lacking over the years...was that we did not take care of our youth in terms of a holistic approach,” said Grant, whose background also includes work as a health care executive. “We expected them to come to class, sit there attentively and do their work. Well, if they were dealing with issues of homelessness, problems with their vision or their teeth, or with domestic violence – they could not be attentive in the classroom.”

LEGAL CLINICS

When a young Sudanese refugee, the mother of two elementary school children in Buffalo, told a school family support specialist that her home was infested with rats, the specialist referred her to one of the new school-based legal clinics opened by Say Yes. There, a volunteer lawyer explained her rights as a tenant, showed her how to report the matter to authorities, and referred her case to a neighborhood legal services agency.

Hers was one of 96 cases handled in the five months following the opening of the clinics in January of 2015, according to a report by the Erie County Bar Association’s Volunteer Lawyers Project.

Say Yes, which provided start-up funding, opened afternoon clinics in four schools, added a fifth in an adult education center, and is planning a sixth this year, said Robert M. Elardo, managing attorney with the Volunteer Lawyers Project.

Six Buffalo law firms provide volunteers to staff the clinics, offering free advice on eviction, foreclosure, landlord problems, divorce, child support, immigration and other issues.

“The range of problems goes from housing issues to family law issues,” Elardo said. “Maybe it’s a single mother and she’s not getting child support, and it’s putting lots of strain on the household.” In one recent case, a parent lost her job after frequent absences from work to handle behavioral problems at school with her 6-year-old son. She was initially denied unemployment benefits, but “a lawyer here took the case to a hearing and won,” Elardo said.

SUMMER SCHOOL AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

In schools across the nation, including many charter schools, educators have provided additional learning time through after-school programs or summer classes. Some research suggests that the extra time can be effective, especially in high poverty school districts, but Say Yes’s plans for summer school and after-school programs in Buffalo got off to a rocky start.

Summer classes were in jeopardy last year when Buffalo school officials, citing financial difficulty, scrapped plans for summer school. Say Yes stepped in to provide funding, and local churches agreed to offer their buildings for summer classes.

“In two months we got 28 churches on board to do summer schools,” said the Rev. Rachelle Robinson, co-chair of the Say Yes Religious Leaders Task Force. Say Yes pledged \$500,000 to run last year’s summer classes and negotiated an agreement that shifts costs to the school district for a seven-year period.

Meanwhile, after-school programs posed an even bigger challenge – with a price tag estimated to be about \$12 million annually.

In 2014, the school district scaled back plans for after-school programs because of funding shortages, resulting in the cancellation of programs at a handful of schools. However, Say Yes, which has paid for fiscal reviews at the district’s request to reallocate funding more efficiently within the school budget and fund key district priorities, worked with school officials on a plan to restore funding to expand the programs. The school board this spring adopted the proposal and will run and sustain after-school programs at all schools, starting in the 2016-17 school year.

POSTSECONDARY PLANNING SYSTEM: CODE RED?

When a student falls behind, how does a parent know? What if it were as easy as a tap on a smartphone?

A key element of the Say Yes strategy is the development of a Postsecondary Planning System to monitor student progress, using data such as attendance, behavior, health and academic records. One of the difficulties Say Yes encountered in Syracuse was the inability to develop an efficient data system. In its study of Say Yes Syracuse, the American Institutes for Research said school officials and Say Yes “operated from year to year in a state of flux, changing the goals for data efforts while they were underway.” The study also said school and community leaders failed to use data reports to improve school programs.

In Buffalo, officials have begun building an extensive database, including surveys from parents, students and teachers in the effort to keep students on track toward college. The system provides data about student performance against 17 academic, social emotional, and health and wellness indicators (as well as 30 sub-indicators). The system also recommends specific wraparound supports for each school.

The use of data “is a core principle” of the Say Yes strategy, allowing school-based study teams to quickly identify and help students who need mentoring, tutoring, counseling or other assistance, said Schmitt-Carey, the Say Yes president. “The potential of this is extraordinary,” she said.

The school district has an existing student data website known as a “parent portal,” but the site has had limited use, with only 14 percent of parents logging in so far.

In an effort to make it easier for parents, teachers and others to make use of the data, the district is developing a simple color-coded system to monitor progress toward high school graduation: Green indicates a student is on track, yellow means at risk, red in danger of failure. The online system will include links allowing parents and school officials to refer students to tutoring and other services.

At a recent meeting of the Say Yes Buffalo operating committee, school administrator David Mauricio compared the data website to a GPS guidance system used in automobiles: “It shows you where you are. It shows you where you want to get to. It shows you how to get there.”

Operating committee members said the data should be readily accessible, even suggesting a smartphone application as one way for parents to check whether their children are on track.

TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

While much of the focus of Say Yes has been to keep students on track in the K-12 system, colleges, too, have a significant role to play. The ultimate goal of Say Yes is to help students earn college or other postsecondary degrees, and the Say Yes operating committee provides a rare forum for K-12 officials and higher education officials to coordinate strategies leading toward that goal. Say Yes and its local partners support a variety of services aimed at college students, including summer prep programs for incoming freshmen, a volunteer mentoring program and job internships.

Say Yes funds summer programs for incoming freshmen at the three schools that enroll the largest number of Say Yes Buffalo scholars: Erie Community College, Buffalo State College and Medaille College.

Like many other freshmen, Say Yes scholars often arrive unprepared for college life “in terms of academic [readiness]... autonomy, independence and especially in terms of navigating through the college system, including the registrar’s office, admissions, student finances,” said Stanley Simmons, who runs the summer program at Buffalo State College.

Buffalo State has seen a steady increase in the number of incoming Say Yes scholars attending the summer bridge classes. Simmons supervised 20 Say Yes scholars two years ago and 31 last summer but expects 50 or more this year.

At Erie Community College, the summer program has been effective in helping students build academic skills and improve their chances of staying in school, said Ben Packer, executive vice president for student affairs. “We’re seeing pretty significant results in level of placement for students,” he said. Among students initially assigned to remedial math and reading courses, for example, more than 90 percent improved their placement after attending summer classes last year, the college reported. In math, 70 percent of the summer students were placed directly into college level courses after being retested while 88 percent of remedial English students moved into college level English.

In addition, those who attended Say Yes summer classes were more likely than other students to remain in college after their first semester, Packer said.

Students who attend the summer classes also receive stipends from Mayor Brown’s summer youth employment program.

Erie Community College has enrolled about 700 Say Yes scholars so far, more than at any other higher education institution. “We’re not really going to succeed at the higher ed level unless we succeed here,” Packer said. “We’ve got to intervene proactively and aggressively.”

As a result of the Say Yes partnership, the community college has made several changes to accommodate incoming students, Packer said. For example, although Say Yes provides an advisor for Say Yes scholars, the college assigned three of its own staff members as additional advisors to help serve the large number of students needing assistance. The college also consolidated counseling, career services, enrollment services and Say Yes mentors all into a single area to improve customer service.

“Our partnership with Say Yes has helped push these initiatives... [It] makes us want to do more,” Packer said.

At Medaille, a private college with campuses in Buffalo and Rochester, the enrollment of more than 150 incoming Say Yes scholars in 2014 prompted the school to commit an extra \$1 million in financial aid and expand remedial programs significantly, said former Medaille President Richard Jurasek.

In addition, Medaille hired about a dozen coaches to help incoming freshmen adjust to the rigors of college life, Jurasek said.

“Some of the kids have so much catching up to do... We’re getting better at taking weak kids and at least getting them to commencement,” Jurasek said.

In another effort to help young people adjust to college, Say Yes started a program that matches high school seniors and incoming college freshmen with professional volunteer mentors, based on common interests and career aspirations.

Nineteen-year-old Say Yes scholar Salvador Saez, a freshman engineering student at Buffalo State College, was paired with Greg Gamble, a young banker. “I thought I was ready for college. I thought I knew everything,” Saez said. “I got a good awakening when I went to college.” Saez said Gamble helped him organize his time more efficiently and gave him confidence to seek help from professors and counselors. Together, they wrote a series of goals for Saez to meet on a timetable for a month, a year, four years.

“When I first met Greg, I knew we had a connection,” Saez said. “He likes sports, I like sports. He wants to run a business, I want to run a business...He’s taught me a lot.”

Gamble said he has enjoyed working with Saez. “It rejuvenated me...to help [him] through the challenges he was facing.” He added, “You don’t have to wait until you’re in trouble to seek help.”

Starting this year, some of the Buffalo Say Yes scholars will have another option. About 40 local businesses have agreed to hire those students as paid summer interns.

The program is operated by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership representing businesses throughout the region. It is available to college juniors and seniors.

Among the companies planning to hire interns is the Wegmans supermarket chain. Previously, the company's intern program had been limited to families of employees, but the chance to collaborate with others to improve the school system was appealing, said Michele Mehaffy, Wegmans' consumer affairs manager in Buffalo.

"Obviously we're very hopeful that Say Yes is really going to help to turn the district around," she said. "The graduation rate is pretty abysmal...and we know that Say Yes is committed to working with partners to turn that around...That's why we're so hopeful that it will be a success."

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SAY YES

With Say Yes only in its fifth year in Buffalo, it is too early to predict its long-term success. The first Buffalo high school graduates eligible for Say Yes scholarships entered their senior year of college in the fall of 2016.

Around the nation, there is a limited amount of research about the impact of scholarship promise programs, and there are differences among the programs themselves. Some, such as the Pittsburgh Promise, limit eligibility based on factors such as grade point average and attendance.

Meanwhile, a handful of large-scale programs, including Say Yes and the Kalamazoo Promise, offer scholarships to all graduates who come through the local school system. Michelle Miller-Adams, a researcher at the Michigan-based Upjohn Institute, has studied promise programs and said the inclusion of all graduates appears to have a positive effect.

The 11-year-old Kalamazoo Promise – one of the earliest large-scale programs – has produced encouraging results, according to an Upjohn study. The study found that nearly half, or 48 percent, of eligible Kalamazoo graduates earned postsecondary degrees within six years of graduation, compared with 36 percent of those who graduated before the program began. Some of the largest gains occurred among low-income and minority students.

What differentiates Say Yes from Kalamazoo and most other scholarship promise programs is its emphasis on wraparound services, Miller-Adams said. While some services are available in other school systems such as Kalamazoo, they are not directly linked to the scholarship promise program, as they are in Say Yes, she said.

"That's the big difference for Say Yes," she said. "I don't know of any other promise programs that have the specific inclusion of wraparound support all the way along...That's very unusual."

Say Yes has generally enjoyed widespread support, and that has helped it survive amid the stops and starts of a school system that has had a string of superintendents, a deeply split school board, and a teachers union engaged in a decade-long fight over a new contract.

Say Yes has had success working with local officials to make adjustments when challenges arise. The district's last-minute decision to drop summer school last year, for example, was an unexpected hurdle. So was the reluctance of a former superintendent to share student data, resulting in a renegotiation of a Say Yes data-sharing agreement – a crucial element of the strategy to monitor student progress.

Like any new program, Say Yes was viewed with caution by some. Some school counselors and social workers, for example, initially worried they might lose their jobs to the family support specialists.

In the view of one top school official, one of the toughest challenges confronting Say Yes when it was launched in Buffalo was the effort to build collaborative relationships between outside partners and an entrenched school system. “The easy part is getting the public to embrace [Say Yes] and all levels of government to embrace it,” said Keresztes, the intergovernmental affairs chief. “The hardest part is getting the public school bureaucracy to accept a fully vested partner helping us govern our organization.”

Keresztes said Say Yes has changed the relationship between the community and the school administration. “What Say Yes has been able to facilitate is an open, honest fully integrated relationship with the community, such that the expectation is we no longer make decisions in isolation,” he said.

Keresztes credits Say Yes, for example, with bringing together all of the key partners in shaping the recent agreement to provide after-school programs at all schools next fall. “We wouldn't be in the position we are right now to offer [high quality after-school]...were it not for Say Yes,” he said.

Keresztes said that Buffalo's newest superintendent, Dr. Kriner Cash, has fully embraced the partnership with Say Yes.

“I'm all in with it,” said Cash, who arrived in Buffalo in the summer of 2015 after heading the public school system in Memphis, Tennessee. Cash recently announced a school improvement agenda that meshes closely with Say Yes goals, including strong wraparound services, community schools, and high quality summer and after-school programs. The biggest impact of Say Yes, he said, is the scholarship promise, “just a huge, huge deal for young people who often can't afford college tuition.”

In the five years since Say Yes arrived in Buffalo, there are encouraging signs. The graduation rate ticked upward to 61 percent last year, up 12 percentage points, from 49 percent in 2012. College enrollment rates for Buffalo graduates also are rising – up 10 percentage points, from 57 percent in 2012 to 67 percent last year.

Because the long-term success of Say Yes depends on local support for scholarships and operating costs, fundraising is crucial. According to Chasin, one of the lessons of both Syracuse and Buffalo is that communities must secure major financial commitments before launching the scholarship promise. In Syracuse, there was virtually nothing raised in advance, and fundraising lagged, requiring Say Yes to more than double its original contribution, Chasin said. However, Syracuse recently got a major boost when community partners secured a \$20 million economic development grant for Say Yes from Gov. Cuomo's Upstate Revitalization Initiative. The grant enabled Syracuse to meet its funding target of \$30 million to fully fund the scholarship endowment program.

In Buffalo, donors had pledged about \$15 million for the local scholarship fund before the launch, but “\$15 million was not enough,” Chasin said.

“The time to get the hard stuff done is before you announce the city,” he said. In Guilford County, Say Yes required 40 percent of the estimated endowment goal before launching. Of a total goal of \$70 million, Guilford County raised \$32 million by the time the project was announced, Chasin said.

In Buffalo, officials say a significantly larger long-term target will be needed to establish a permanent scholarship endowment. The scholarship board, which has relied on volunteers to solicit pledges, recently hired a development director to coordinate the effort.

“We think we’ve just scratched the surface of the big donors,” said O’Neil-White, the scholarship board chairman. Among recent gifts is a \$1 million gift from Key Bank and a \$2 million donation from the The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation. Wilson is the late founding owner of the Buffalo Bills football team.

Aside from building the scholarship fund, the ongoing challenge for Buffalo will be to sustain Say Yes and its wraparound support programs by gradually shifting financial responsibility away from Say Yes and into the operating budgets of local funders, including the city, county and school district. The ongoing fiscal review by Say Yes of the school district budget played a role in reallocating school funds to cover expenses for summer school and after-school programs, for example.

Barbara Nevergold, a school board member who also sits on the Say Yes operating committee, said the track record of Say Yes since its arrival is a reason for hope.

“Looking back, I think at that time certainly there were questions about whether or not this program could deliver on what they promised. I think the history has shown that not only have they delivered on what they promised with the scholarship, but they have gone far above what the expectations were...Given that, I believe there will be great support for finding the funding regardless of the changes we have seen in administration, the changes we have seen in the board.”

It may be years before anyone can gauge the success of Say Yes, but as the organization evolves, it can take lessons from both Syracuse and Buffalo. One of the key lessons is to establish a solid foundation and secure commitments before the project is launched.

Taking lessons from Syracuse and Buffalo, Say Yes focused intensively on the groundwork before making its move into the North Carolina community of Guilford County. In addition to requiring a 40 percent advance commitment to the scholarship endowment fund, Say Yes conducted extensive reviews of school finances and indicators of student progress, negotiated detailed agreements on data sharing, and reached out to rank-and-file staff – all before launching the project in September, 2015.

Nearly a year before the launch, a task force began identifying agencies and programs serving students and families in Guilford County, finally producing a list of more than 500 programs to review for possible inclusion in the Say Yes Postsecondary Planning System.

“We had a good vetting process in Buffalo...but the vetting process went on steroids when we considered [Guilford County],” said Chasin. “We were spending time making sure the teachers knew about it and were committed to it, and the same thing with principals. We wouldn’t proceed...until we saw those conditions exist.”

Chasin – a former principal, superintendent and college professor – is a veteran of school reform efforts. He once headed the Institute for Urban School Improvement at the University of Connecticut and was the CEO of Accelerated Schools, a national school improvement model. He does not, however, think of Say Yes as simply a school-centered reform effort.

“I just feel like this is the first time in my career I’m involved in something that’s sustainable, that’s really going to endure because it’s not owned by the school district. It’s not designed to be owned by one entity, and no one wants to see scholarships go away...This is a whole community effort that drives shared ownership and accountability for enabling every child to truly succeed.”

Schmitt-Carey said too many efforts to improve urban education have failed because they ran out of money, lost key leaders or limited their focus to schools alone. The fundamental promise of Say Yes is to build a structure designed to survive even in the most troubled school systems. “Buffalo demonstrates it’s possible to keep a whole community focused on very specific goals and objectives...even when chaos occasionally reigns,” she said.

This view of the Say Yes promise as a community-wide enterprise that extends beyond schools – drawing in government, business, churches and others – has caught the attention of others in the worlds of philanthropy and education.

“Unlike many education reform efforts, [Say Yes] places values on what’s happening both inside and outside of schools,” said David Callahan, the founder and editor of the news website Inside Philanthropy. He described Say Yes as a leader in a strategy “which aims to get all stakeholders in a community behind the push to improve schools.”

Frederick Frelow, a senior program officer at the Ford Foundation, takes a similar view.

“Many folks in the philanthropy field are now understanding that schools really don’t stand alone in communities. They stand as part of the assets of a community,” Frelow said. “One of the reasons Say Yes is highly respected by a lot of teachers and folks in the educational community is they do have that broader perspective.”

The challenges of sustaining the scholarship promise over the long term are significant, but Frelow is encouraged by the Say Yes approach.

“The real answer will be a couple of decades from now when we see a couple of cohorts of kids make it through high school and go on to college, but I think what they have [done] in terms of mobilizing this community around the promise of a postsecondary degree...[is] a very exciting idea...They embrace their

role of helping communities lock their arms together on behalf of children and their families...They're actually helping to build the muscle and habits of improvement that cities and school districts need."

Among this year's Say Yes applicants is 17-year-old Evan Brooks, a senior at Buffalo's Hutchinson Central Technical High School. He was a freshman when Say Yes Buffalo was launched.

"It was a huge thing, all over the news," he recalls. Brooks said it changed his outlook. "Who knew if I was even going to go to college?...Freshman year, my grades weren't very good." After hearing of the scholarship promise, he began thinking about the University of Southern California, one of the Say Yes partner institutions. "So I really focused and got on track. My grades started climbing and climbing," he said.

He was disappointed when USC rejected his application but said he was excited to be accepted by the State University of New York at Buffalo. "It was always my other plan," he said. "I definitely like UB...I can remember going there on field trips in elementary school." He plans to study mechanical engineering there, but UB might not have been an option without the promise from Say Yes, he said.

His mother works as a waitress, his stepfather a groundskeeper.

"My family barely gets by," he said. Without the scholarship, "I don't think there'd be enough to pay for college." Like Brooks, many Say Yes Buffalo scholars have chosen public or private colleges near Buffalo. Some also have enrolled in high-profile nationally known institutions that have partnered with Say Yes, including Ivy League universities such as Cornell and Princeton.

"For inner city kids to have this opportunity to go to some of these Ivy League schools, you know, it's amazing. It really is," Brooks said. "It's a dream come true."

Self-Study Questions

Questions to consider while reading this case about effective and sustainable education and community development grantmaking:

1. What were the lessons learned from the Syracuse Say Yes project? How did Say Yes change its approach in Buffalo? In Guilford County?
2. What kind of stakeholders and collaborative partners were necessary to make the project in Buffalo successful? What partners might be useful for your initiatives?
3. How is governance in a Say Yes community fundamentally different from traditional approaches to governance? Which community partners are needed to share ownership and responsibility for a long-term community goal of postsecondary success for all students?
4. How did an emphasis on wrap-around services benefit the Say Yes scholarship promise?
5. How did a focus on data collection and data use enhance the Say Yes initiative?
6. How can grantmakers think differently about creating community buy-in for initiatives?
7. What are the key drivers for and detractors from the community impact of Say Yes' work?
8. How can grantmakers support initiatives that effectively engage the full community?
9. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case and how might they apply in your future grant making?

Effective Education Grantmaking

principle
no.

1

Discipline and Focus

In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.

principle
no.

2

Knowledge

Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.

principle
no.

3

Resources Linked to Results

A logic-driven “theory of change” helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.

principle
no.

4

Effective Grantees

A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.

principle
no.

5

Engaged Partners

A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners – the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue – to ensure “ownership” of education problems and their solutions.

principle
no.

6

Leverage, Influence and Collaboration

The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.

principle
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7

Persistence

The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.

principle
no.

8

Innovation and Constant Learning

Even while acting on the best available information – as in Principle #2 – a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn’t—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

Grantmakers for Education (GFE) is a national network of hundreds of education philanthropies, united by a passion and commitment to improve public education and learning for all students of all ages, cradle to career. GFE is a force multiplier, harnessing the collective power of education grantmakers to increase momentum, impact and outcomes for this nation's learners. We are proud to promote a culture of learning among education funders and provide a forum for interaction and engagement that builds upon and deepens the impact of our member's individual investments. Grantmakers for Education and its members believe in the power of what we can all achieve when we work together and learn from each other's successes and challenges.

