



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Promise Neighborhood Project, Kinston, NC

By CED Program Interns & Students

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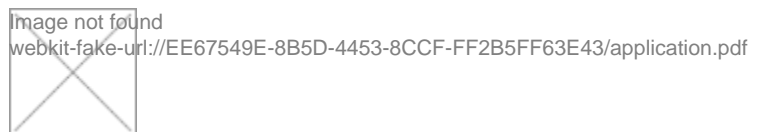


Kinston Promise is a comprehensive approach to educating

children and strengthening families in the town of Kinston, a mid-size community in eastern North Carolina. An organization, Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc., works through existing community-based programs to create a continuum of “cradle-through-college” solutions to improve the academic and developmental outcomes for children at all stages of growth: early learning, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college.

Once a vibrant community, the East Kinston neighborhood was devastated by inland flooding from Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Many residents in the area were displaced when their homes were destroyed and the county was forced to purchase a large amount of condemned property. East Kinston today has become known for high crime rates, public housing, food deserts, and low-performing schools. The city of Kinston has invested significant time and resources in improving the Martin Luther King, Jr. corridor which passes through the East Kinston community; however, city initiatives have focused primarily on attracting new development and private investment in the area. The vision of Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc. is to provide a comprehensive network of resources so that all children growing up in the East Kinston Promise Neighborhood will have access to effective schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and career.

The Kinston Promise Neighborhood model is based on the highly successful Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ), developed by Geoffrey Canada in the early 1990’s. The figure below illustrates the HCZ and Kinston Promise Neighborhood service model.



In his first term, President Barack Obama highlighted the successful work of Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children’s Zone by developing a Promise Neighborhood Initiative, under the Department of Education, which would provide communities across the nation the resources to replicate the HCZ model.

As outlined by the Department of Education, a Promise Neighborhood organization should break down agency “silos,” which means ensuring that multiple public agencies at all levels work together to share information, plan jointly, focus on



improving outcomes, and ensure that outcomes are shared, communicated, and analyzed on an on-going basis. To that end, Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc. will monitor existing programs and ensure continuity from grade to grade. The organization will review current program offerings and ensure adequate programming exists across five core areas (academics, mentoring, health, safety, and service) at each of the major developmental stages. Finally, Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc. will manage data collection and facilitate data sharing across all Promise Neighborhood community partners to ensure that no child or family falls through the cracks.

The Promise Neighborhood grant process has been highly competitive. Despite tireless work by Executive Director Theresa Williams-Bethea and a collection of community partners, Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc. has not yet been able to secure funding from the Department of Education; however, Ms. Williams-Bethea and a team of community organizers are committed to strengthening and growing a Promise Neighborhood in the East Kinston community in line with the goals of the Department of Education's Promise Neighborhood Initiative.

With support from the Community-Campus Partnership, I will be working with Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc. to create a business plan and a strategic roadmap to help launch the initiative into its next phase of work. With a business plan and strategic roadmap in hand, Kinston Promise Neighborhood will be better equipped to pursue private funding, begin Board development, and strengthen community engagement.

*Photo: Ms. Theresa Williams-Bethea, Executive Director, Kinston Promise Neighborhood, Inc.

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