

BPI / CURL Knowledge Exchange

*Presentation by the Steans Family Foundation:
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June 10, 2014*

Community Revitalization Strategies

The Steans Family Foundation began their work in the mid 1980's by sponsoring a class of sixth graders at the Lathrop Homes' Schneider School. Through this experience, it became apparent that a student's success in school was impacted by a range of issues, such as health problems and lack of access to health care, unstable and substandard housing, community violence, family problems, and the unemployment of parents. Even if the children were successful in elementary school, the gains they made were often stymied if they entered a non-selective public high school. This experience influenced the Steans Family Foundation's investment strategy. The foundation decided to take a comprehensive, holistic approach that addressed multiple dimensions of poverty in a single community--North Lawndale.

Discussion Summary

What have been the results of the Steans Foundation's comprehensive community investment strategy? What lessons have been learned?

Although the Steans Foundation took a different approach than the Enterprise Foundation's investment in the Baltimore neighborhood of Sandtown-Winchester (See <http://www.abell.org/pubsitems/arn1113.pdf>), North Lawndale and Sandtown-Winchester have had similar trajectories. Both experienced growth in the early 2000's, but were disproportionately affected by the foreclosure crisis. Unemployment and poverty rates are still high in both neighborhoods, despite community investment. However, both neighborhoods have also increased high school graduation rates.

The Steans Family Foundation has made a great deal of progress in education. North Lawndale's residents have greater access to early education and home visiting programs, and the quality of local schools has improved significantly. While test scores are still low, North Lawndale students are graduating from high school and attending college at higher rates than

"The Steans Family Foundation aims to change the life trajectory of children and youth who live or go to school in North Lawndale, an impoverished community on Chicago's West Side, through high-quality educational opportunities that support their academic, social and emotional development. Our children only get one shot at growing up and going to school. From the time an infant is born through his or her graduation from college or a career-related post-secondary institution, the Foundation invests in efforts to maximize the number of children who successfully journey through formal schooling and launch into a fulfilling and productive life, career and citizenship. "

*Stearns Family Foundation
2013 Strategic Vision*

most CPS schools. For example, at Manley Career Academy High School, a CPS neighborhood school in North Lawndale, 80% of students are going to college. Eighty percent of North Lawndale College Preparatory High School's student body is also going to college, and 60% are attaining college degrees.

In the past 20 years, it has been become apparent that local economic development strategies are extremely difficult to achieve if they are not backed by macro-level policies that support low-income communities. Education has emerged as an area where Steans has been able to make the greatest impact. The Steans Family Foundation continues to utilize a comprehensive approach by working closely with community based organizations to address multiple issues, but the school serves as an "anchor institution." Through their work in North Lawndale, the Foundation's staff and board have learned that no single anti-poverty strategy works if it is carried out in isolation—these efforts need to be connected. Schools provide a forum for building bridges between various organizations and social welfare systems. For example, The Steans Family Foundation has become increasingly involved in providing trauma based mental health services, but this is done through the local schools. Furthermore, early education programs begin with children, but can be a very effective mechanism for addressing the needs of the whole family.

The staff and board of the Steans Family Foundation have also learned the importance of developing and engaging local leadership. Rather than leading with dollars, Steans begins with a community planning process that determines how foundation dollars could be invested, and identifies and/or develops community leaders to implement the investment strategy. Community based organizations have been a source of stability and leadership, although local efforts would be much more effective if there were more political support at all levels of government. Finally, since North Lawndale is economically and politically isolated, the Steans board and staff have learned the importance of leveraging the Foundation's relationships and resources that exist beyond the community. For example, Steans has been very successful in securing matching funds for their investments.

What are the challenges to implementing the "school as an anchor" approach and how are those challenges overcome?

One of the biggest issues is turnover. In some cases, changes in school leadership and turnover at the network level have undermined the Foundation's efforts to improve curriculum and develop school policies that are more conducive to student learning.

Furthermore, CPS has a very high rate of teacher turn over. More than 50% of teachers leave CPS within their first five years of teaching, and these rates are higher in North Lawndale schools (For more details, see the CCSR report on teacher mobility <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/schools-teachers-leave-teacher-mobility-chicago-public-schools>). Charter schools in North Lawndale generally have lower rates of teacher turn over. They are re-evaluated every five years to determine whether their charter will be renewed, cancelled, or renewed for a probationary period. On the one hand, this can be a very effective tool for improving school outcomes, but on the other hand, a cancelled charter school could be very disruptive for the community and undermine community investment strategies that rely on local schools as anchor institutions.

Teacher turnover is highest among new teachers who report that they feel unprepared for the job and experience a lack of efficacy. This can be addressed through capacity building, and Steans works closely with local public and charter schools on instructional strategies and curriculum development. Steans has also worked to create stability in times of leadership change through succession planning and leadership development. In addition, local schools that participate in the Teach for America program have requested that teachers who grew up in the Chicago area be placed in North Lawndale schools. Forty percent of the current TFA cohort has decided to stay in North Lawndale schools, a figure consistent with the national TFA retention rates after two years.

Finally, student turnover undermines school stability. CPS has a student mobility rate of 22% and charter schools have a mobility rate of approximately 9%. The differences in mobility rates are likely attributed to differences in student residency policies. In CPS, students must change schools if they move out of a school district.

One of the most important factors in determining whether students will graduate from college is whether students 1) select the right college and 2) have access to ongoing support. Some colleges have much higher graduation rates for low income students. North Lawndale College Prep counselors encourage students to enroll in four year institutions because the community college graduation rates are low, and they work closely with students and their families as they go through the college application and financial aid process. Once students enter college, alumni counselors visit students on their campuses, and help arrange summer jobs and internships. Generally speaking, students have been successful at getting financial aid, although there has been more competition in recent years. Steans also established an emergency fund for students who have problems finding housing or are in need of transportation. The emergency fund is important, because students often drop out of school due to these types of financial crises.

After 20 years of implementing a place based approach, what does the Steans Foundation think of mobility programs, or Marge Turner's idea of creating neighborhood "launch pads" that provide opportunities for residents to move to less impoverished neighborhoods?

There is a lot of debate regarding the merits of people vs. place based approaches, but it is important to keep in mind that even a community based strategy is still focused people. Steans employs strategies aimed at improving the opportunities and quality of life for residents of the community. It is fine if people want to move, but there are many things that can be done to improve the quality of life and stabilize the environment of a neighborhood. In some ways, North Lawndale may act as launch pad as more students graduate from college and move to other places. However, the North Lawndale College Prep alumni are extremely important in motivating high school students, and returning college graduates are an asset to the community. The lack of community amenities poses a challenge for retaining and attracting residents with higher levels of income.

Mobility programs can be successful, but it is important to create a critical mass of neighborhood residents who can support each other in their new neighborhoods. Furthermore, it is important to select the right suburban location—many suburbs do not have job opportunities, have very poor transportation options, and can be extremely unwelcoming to low income people and people of color. Ultimately, both mobility and place-based approaches are needed, but relying solely on mobility programs may have the same outcomes as the development of selective enrollment high schools. They can be great asset for the program

participants, but what happens to those who cannot move (or do not want to move) to suburban locations? What happens to the communities that are left behind?

Implications for BPI

The Steans Family Foundation has developed successful strategies that may inform BPI's work at Atlgeld, particularly in the area of parental engagement. Early education and home visiting have been very successful, and Steans is currently focusing their efforts on providing more intensive supports for hard to reach families. It is important to provide robust home visiting programs that provide support for the entire family, including assistance with housing and employment. Steans has found that when parents begin to further their education, it has a ripple effect on the whole family. Furthermore, there is a need for capacity building among parents. Structures such as the PTA are extremely important.

There are several policies and practices that are exacerbating poverty in North Lawndale. BPI could address these broader polices affecting North Lawndale and other low-income communities through its work. First, North Lawndale has a very large number of ex-offenders, and these residents have difficulty obtaining jobs and housing. High rates of incarceration and the policies and practices that govern the re-entry process contribute to the lack of mobility in poor neighborhoods. Some progress has been made in juvenile justice, particularly by restorative justice programs and those who successfully advocated to expunge juvenile criminal records. Second, the eligibility criteria for early childhood education and social welfare programs prohibit social mobility. Early childhood education eligibility is tied to the employment status of parents, which excludes many families in need of early education services. In addition, the eligibility requirements for social welfare programs make it nearly impossible for families to develop assets, which is problematic because poor families are very vulnerable to economic crisis. Third, EITC is an excellent program, but needs to be expanded. Fourth, it is extremely difficult for low-income people to access mental health services. There is a great deal of research on the importance of trauma informed practice, but this has not translated into greater access to mental health care.

Further Reading and Additional Resources

Allensworth, et al. 2009. *The Schools Teachers Leave: Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools*. The Consortium on Chicago School Research

<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/schools-teachers-leave-teacher-mobility-chicago-public-schools>

The following organizations have been instrumental in increasing the educational outcomes of North Lawndale students:

<http://www.umojacorporation.org/>

<http://www.crcl.net/>