



## Remarks for Education Reform Commission

Yvonne S. Minor-Ragan, President

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1:00 p.m.

For years, due to a phenomenal partnership between a business (**M&T Bank**) and a public school (**Westminster Community Charter School (WCCS)**), we have witnessed a successful academic and social/emotional program that not only addressed the major needs of its students, embraced the parents, but also positively impacted the community. This 19-year partnership has resulted in a once failing school achieving the status of being placed on the **State Honor Roll**, receiving the **NYSED Most Improved School** designation several times, and being honored by **Every Person Influences Children** for its outstanding parent involvement.

In 2010, the partnership through the **Westminster Foundation**, applied for and received one of the **USDOE Promise Neighborhood Planning Grants** to replicate the success of WCCS and scale up the impact to include an identified zone in the **14215 zip code**. This grant established a precedent in developing a partnership with a public charter school and the Buffalo Public Schools District.

In 2011, **The Buffalo Promise Neighborhood** was one of only five recipients awarded a five-year Implementation Grant from USDOE. **We received the highest score nationally!** Key elements of our proposal, which was greatly influenced by the **Harlem Children's Zone Promise Neighborhood**, include:

1. **Developing and implementing continuum of services as well as a longitudinal approach to improve student achievement from the cradle to college and careers.**
  - a. Our program begins with identifying babies at birth, enrolling them in a newly built **Early Learning Childhood Center** (9/2013) and also partnering with community **Home Care Providers**.

- b. In addition to our early childhood academic focus from birth to pre-kindergarten, three schools will be impacted:
  - i. Westminster Community Charter School (Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup>)
  - ii. Highgate Heights Elementary School (Pre-kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup>)
  - iii. Bennett High School
  - iv. We are also partnering with our local colleges and universities to increase the graduation rate and percentages of students matriculating to college.

**2. Coordinating and collaborating with major social service agencies in Buffalo.**

- a. The Partnerships and Providers include, among many others:
 

Belmont Housing Resources for WNY	Bethel Head Start
Buffalo Public Schools (BPS)	Buffalo Urban League
Catholic Charities of Buffalo	City of Buffalo
Closing The Gap	United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
College Success Center/College Summit	Community Health Center of Buffalo
Council for Unity	Council Member Bonnie Russell
Council Member Demone Smith	EPIC (Every Parent Influences Children)
Erie County	Jeremiah Partnership
The John R. Oishei Foundation	Read to Succeed Buffalo
- b. **The Westminster Foundation** serves the functions of Administration and Accountability, and Oversight.
- c. **The Westminster Foundation Board of Trustees** serves as the Governing body.
- d. **The Community Council** ensures we are meeting the needs expressed by the neighborhood.

**3. Replicating the ‘Best Practice’ implemented at WCCS.**

**4. Implementing a research-based school transformation model, that includes academic support (Talent Development – Johns Hopkins University).**

**5. Implementing a strong social/emotional and behavioral support program:**

- a. Prioritizing student mental health
- b. Improving student attendance
- c. Increasing the number of role models in students’ lives

**6. Emphasizing nutrition and student health**

**7. Organizing strong community and business engagement.**

The success of this long-term public/private partnership has been greatly documented and studied. Based on these findings, we would like to provide several recommendations that are replicable and will assist in student success. **While each recommendation may be well-known, what is unique about this plan is its comprehensiveness and the balance of all of the elements as important facets of one structure. In addition, the impact has been to create systems and policy changes for successful educational programs.**

- 1. Develop strong, long-term Public/Private Partnerships, in this case M&T Bank and WCCS/BPS.**
  - a. Key to our success is the strong, long-term involved partnership of M&T Bank with WCCS.
  - b. This partnership included not only financial support, but the shared expertise and talent of human resources, in terms of organizational, financial, and technological support.
  - c. There are clear responsibilities and expectations for the school, and clear responsibilities and expectations for the business.
  
- 2. System of collaboration with major participants that is strong and on-going.**
  - a. Must be inclusive and transparent with all stakeholders:
    - i. The staff needs to know what is going on as much as possible to remain focused on the goals and to continue to have a vested interest in the success of the program.
    - ii. Parents participate and are informed of the plans and impact on their children and their families. This collaboration will strengthen parent support.
    - iii. Continuing to communicate with the community will develop strong support and strong community alliance.
  - b. Must include different perspectives and additional talents in decision-making
    - i. This will ensure that decision-making considers various perspectives.
    - ii. Will increase percentage of success and broaden the impact.
  
- 3. Key to a successful educational program is a strong research-based academic program that has the added feature of having been normed on the population served.**
  - a. Strong on-going professional development is a mandate.
  - b. Supplemental support relevant to academic programs is vital.
  - c. Instructional program must have an extended academic program: afterschool and summer school.
  
- 4. Effective social and emotional support programs addressing the whole child, including**

- a. An effective referral and accountability process
  - b. An attendance program
  
  - c. Requiring family involvement
  - d. Mentoring
- 5. Parent Involvement is a must and should be intentional.**
- a. The goal of parent involvement must be to engage the parents and maintain parent support and involvement.
  - b. A process must be developed to strengthen the lines of communication between parent and school that is responsive to parent needs and requests.
  - c. There must be a developed parent engagement process that is implemented throughout the school year.
- 6. Data and Assessment**
- a. Student achievement must be the focus.
  - b. All programs must be monitored: enrichment and remediation.
  - c. Strong staff support in data utilization for informing instruction.
  - d. A process must be developed and implemented for timely review, analysis of the data results, and focused intentional teaching.
  - e. Data drives instructional methods.
- 7. Collaboration across schools and districts**
- a. Sharing of successful ideas and best practice creates and enhances learning systems and processes within education.
  - b. Collective learning at all levels will definitely broaden the scope of success.

These recommendations center around the basic elements of effective schools, focusing on the students. The staff, which is seen as key to the success of the students, must be supported through intense and ongoing professional development. Parents and community organizations are much-needed allies and partners. Organization and programming are vital to the process of providing students with a well-rounded and comprehensive curriculum. And finally, building public/private partnerships provide the services and expertise needed to have long-term, sustained success.

