

Proposal for the Place-Based Initiative

Children's Board of Hillsborough County

Drafted by Allison Pinto, Ph.D. and Bobbi Davis, Ph.D.
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Overarching Purpose of the Place-Based Initiative¹

The Children's Board is committed to investing in efforts that bring about significant positive changes in the lives of all children who live in Hillsborough County. Place-based initiatives are a strategy with great potential and some compelling evidence of demonstrated success.

A child-oriented place-based initiative focuses on the well-being of all the children in a particular geographically-defined community. It involves partnering and collaboration among the people who live and work in the designated community so that everybody together can

- strengthen relationships
- exchange and develop resources
- navigate changes

in ways that are most likely to significantly improve the well-being of all children living and learning in that place.

Place-based initiatives are grounded in the assumption that each community is able to transform itself by drawing upon its existent strengths and ensuring that resources are focused strategically so that a "tipping point" occurs. This refers to that transition in a community when the negative feedback loops occurring among many interrelated issues become positive ones, and the well-being of not just a few, but all, is realized. Once this happens, it then becomes possible for the positively changed state of one community to influence the communities that surround it, such that positive changes scale out and ignite the transformation of other communities as well. The hope is that in this way, the ultimate goal of the Children's Board – positive changes in the lives of all children who live in Hillsborough County – can be realized. That is, by concentrating efforts in designated communities, success will catch and spread and ultimately the entire county will be transformed.

To generate the momentum that is needed to begin², it is necessary to choose a particular aspect of child well-being as the central focus, and also to identify initial communities with whom to partner.

¹ While "Place-Based Initiative" is a term commonly used in the professional fields of community development and philanthropy, it has been critiqued as a rather sterile and over-professionalized term. Because a more suitable name has not yet been identified, "Place-Based Initiative" is used in this proposal, but it is recommended that another name be selected as the official title of the initiative.

² Although the proposed initiative represents a new effort in some ways, it is important to remember that neighborhood- and community-specific efforts and community-building strategies have always been an important dimension of the work of the Children's Board. It is because of the wisdom generated through initiatives including the Family Support and Resource Centers, the Network of East Hillsborough Neighborhoods, Palm River Point, Palmetto Beach, and Positive SPIN that it is possible to formulate the Place-Based Initiative that is being proposed at this time.

Central Focus of the Place-Based Initiative: 3rd Grade Reading

Children's ability to read has been chosen as the central focus of the proposed Place-Based Initiative. This aspect of child well-being is compelling because the ability to read so profoundly enhances a person's ability to learn in virtually all areas over the course of an entire lifetime. The ability to read also affects a person's opportunities to participate in the fullness of life as a member of society whose wisdom and intellect are recognized, respected and embraced.

We now know that a critical benchmark in the development of a person's ability to read in the United States is 3rd grade. When a child can read fluently by third grade, s/he can keep up with learning opportunities as they are presented. Reading "on grade level" by third grade also makes it possible for children to keep up with peers in discussion, debate, and communication more generally, which affects so many aspects of development and well-being, including engagement, motivation, self-perception, and active involvement in community life.

For these reasons, the Place-Based Initiative will focus on children's ability to read by third grade.

Lead Communities of the Place-Based Initiative

To begin, the Children's Board will partner with three lead communities in Hillsborough County. These communities have been selected because:

- They feature neighborhood elementary schools within walking distance of students' homes.
- They already have secured the expressed commitment of the School District of Hillsborough County in relation to school performance.
- They recognize their neighborhood elementary schools as active partners in place-based efforts to promote local children's learning.
- They have resident leaders who are active champions of children's well-being with an appreciation of the importance of their community coming together around children's ability to read.
- They are located within the city of Tampa, making it possible to examine and address the influence of policy and government on child well-being at the full range of neighborhood, community, city and county scales.
- They are in very close proximity to one another, making it possible for them to form relationships, exchange resources, and respond adaptively to local changes together.

It is anticipated that partnership with these communities ultimately will help all communities in Hillsborough County to discover ways to reach a tipping point related to childhood reading: that day when all children will be reading on grade-level by Grade 3.

In order for there to be sufficient strengthening of relationships and concentration of resources in the three lead communities, initial efforts will focus on the area of each community that is associated with a designated neighborhood elementary school. As such, all of the people who live and work in the elementary school's attendance zone will be acknowledged as neighbors with a significant role to play in bringing about the day when all children of the community are reading on grade-level by Grade 3.

The three lead communities are: the Potter Elementary community of East Tampa, the Just Elementary community of West Tampa, and the Sulphur Springs Elementary community of Sulphur Springs. Some of the particular features of each community are as follows:

Potter Elementary – East Tampa

Potter Elementary is a school community of approximately 630 students. It is located in the northeastern quadrant of the East Tampa community. Most children are able to walk or bike, as opposed to taking the bus, to get to school. The school is named for *Marcellus D. Potter* who lived in Tampa and started the first African-American newspaper in the state of Florida. The majority of students at Potter Elementary are identified as Black/African-American (about 90%), and approximately 6% are identified as Hispanic. With regard to reading ability, 40% of Potter Elementary third graders were at or above grade level on the FCAT-Reading in the 2009-10 academic year. In the entire East Tampa community, which is approximately 7 square miles in size, there are about 8500 children and teens under age 18, with an average of 560 babies born each year. In the community as a whole, approximately 70% of the residents are identified as Black/African-American and 22% as White/Caucasian, with 11% who are identified as Hispanic. East Tampa is home to many historic, cultural, and community assets, with 12 active neighborhood associations and 16 different schools in the area. There are more than 150 licensed child care providers and over 100 places of worship in the community, as well as a diversity of businesses, social service providers and nonprofit organizations. In recent years there have been major infrastructure improvements in the area, including new sidewalks, lighting, and playgrounds, commercial façade improvements, and beautiful improvements to retention pond design.

Just Elementary – West Tampa

Just Elementary is a school community of approximately 590 students located in the northeastern quadrant of the West Tampa community. Many children are able to walk to school from their apartments in North Boulevard Homes, the housing development located directly across the street from the elementary school. The school is named for *Dr. Ernest E. Just*, a doctor of zoology who became a highly respected scientist, publishing one of the most important textbooks of the 20th century. Like Dr. Just, the majority of students at Just Elementary are identified as Black/African-American (86%). Approximately 10% are identified as Hispanic. With regard to reading ability, 33% of Just Elementary third graders were at or above grade level on the FCAT-Reading in the 2009-10 academic year. In the entire West Tampa community, which is approximately

3 square miles in size, there are about 5400 children and teens under age 18, with an average of 321 babies born each year. In the community as a whole, approximately 43% of the residents are identified as Black/African-American and 45% as White/Caucasian. In some areas of the community more than 50% of the residents are Hispanic, although this is true for less than 20% of the people who live in the school attendance zone of Just Elementary. West Tampa is also home to many historic, cultural, and community assets, including a number of parks and playgrounds, schools (including the University of Tampa), library programs, churches, businesses, original cigar factories, and riverfront access.

Sulphur Springs Elementary – Sulphur Springs

Sulphur Springs Elementary is a school community of approximately 590 students. It is located in the center of the Sulphur Springs neighborhood and all of the children can walk or bike to school from their homes. The school is named for the neighborhood itself, which was a resort area in the 1920's referred to as "the Coney Island of Florida." The majority of students at Sulphur Springs Elementary are identified as Black/African-American (79%), with approximately 14% who are Hispanic. With regard to reading ability, 33% of Sulphur Springs Elementary third graders were at or above grade level on the FCAT-Reading in the 2009-10 academic year. In the entire Sulphur Springs community, which is approximately 2 square miles in size, there are about 2770 children and teens under age 18, with an average of 144 babies born each year. In the community as a whole, approximately 60% of the residents are identified as Black/African-American and 30% as White/Caucasian, with approximately 14% who are Hispanic. Sulphur Springs is home to many historic, cultural, and community assets as well, including beautiful riverfront parks, several arts-oriented youth programs, a recording studio, a neighborhood history museum, and a cluster of facilities that include a recreation center, community resource center, and library all connected to or in very close proximity to the elementary school.

For more details about each community, please refer to the Community Profiles available on the CBHC website, which have been created as a synthesis of available information from the Hillsborough Community Atlas, the U.S. Census, and several other databases.

Strategies of the Place-Based Initiative

Place-based initiatives combine four inter-related strategies: Community-building, service programming, policy / systems reform, and evaluation. While all of the strategies are in essence community-building, these distinctions are helpful in clarifying the inter-connectedness of efforts. The plan for the proposed Place-Based Initiative needs to take into account the particular realities of each lead community, in Hillsborough county context, and also to be flexible enough to respond adaptively to changes that occur as the initiative evolves.

Community-building

Community-building refers to efforts to increase the leadership abilities, organizational capacities, social capital / sense of community, and civic engagement of community residents. In place-based initiatives these are recognized to be of critical importance because it is through the social network of relationships and the spirit of the community that sustainable change becomes possible at the whole-community scale. Without attending to community-building, service programming efforts tend to affect change in the lives of individual program participants, but are not sufficient for an entire community to reach the tipping point necessary for transformative change.

In the proposed Place-Based Initiative, community-building efforts will focus first on CBHC and the lead communities getting to know one another better. This will include CBHC staff engaging in the following: visits to local people, places, and activities in the community; participation in community efforts that are already occurring to support child well-being (both those in everyday settings and those of formal collaborations); “tag-alongs” with young children and their families (to get a sense of how opportunities, networks and conditions inter-relate in the lived experience of local children), and the search for resident community facilitators.

Once resident community facilitators are identified, a period of intensive two-way training will occur, with CBHC staff and resident facilitators sharing with one another what they know about place-based efforts, child development, community-building methods, and the local communities. This knowledge exchange will involve sharing from both the perspective of family member / neighbor / citizen and the perspective of child-oriented community professional.

The resident facilitators will then take the lead to actively cultivate a sense of community and civic engagement in their home communities, and to facilitate conversations to clarify community member perspectives on what it will take to bring about the day when all of the community’s children are reading on grade-level by 3rd grade. CBHC staff and community facilitators will systematically document their efforts and findings, and will participate in ongoing reflective practice to support the work.

Service programming

Service programming refers to programmatic efforts to support and promote the human (individual and family), physical and economic development of the community. These include social, educational and recreational services, services to enhance the natural or built environment (e.g. green space, air and water quality, roadways/transportation, housing, and the safety upgrades / beautification of school or business buildings), and services to address or improve the economic situation of the community (e.g. jobs programs, skills training, savings and loan programs, opportunities to purchase discounted goods or services).

In the proposed Place-Based Initiative, service programming efforts will focus on first clarifying the current state of service programming in each community. This will include identifying: which services exist and where they are located, who is actually utilizing

them, the extent to which they are high quality, and how they correspond with changes in the well-being of not only program participants but also the community as a whole. As community perceptions of and satisfaction with existing services are clarified, this process will also provide opportunities for programs to receive valuable feedback for continuous quality improvement.

Efforts will then focus on comparing the current state of services in the community to that which other tipping-point communities have discovered to be optimal, and to that which local community residents are identifying as desirable. In these ways, it will become possible to clarify the particular constellation of services that are likely to contribute most optimally to the community's ability to realize the day when all children are reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade.

CBHC staff simultaneously will be working over the course of the year to adjust timelines and processes associated with funding decisions, so that the CBHC portfolio can be adjusted to synchronize with what is being discovered. CBHC staff, funded service providers, and residents of the lead communities will convene regularly so that all become increasingly skilled at using place-based frameworks and approaches.

Policy / systems reform

Policy / systems reform efforts focus on ensuring that policies, procedures, practices and resource allocations affecting the life of the community are optimally promoting the well-being of all community residents.

In the proposed Place-Based Initiative, policy / systems reform efforts will focus on identifying and analyzing all of the policies that influence opportunities, decisions and actions associated with children's well-being in each lead community, with a particular emphasis on those most related to the tipping-point goal of all children reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade. This is likely to include, for example, policies related to housing, job qualifications, family leave and time-off, school attendance and grading, library and bank lending, car safety and driving, healthcare, child welfare, policing, imprisonment, and voting. As policies are clarified, it will become possible to identify modifications most likely to improve child well-being, and action steps to bring about these modifications.

Systems reform efforts will also include the convening of diverse groups of stakeholders to promote resident-system partnerships and collaborative financing strategies that will most powerfully contribute to the community's ability to reach the tipping point needed for all children to be reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade.

Evaluation

Evaluation refers to ongoing observation, measurement and reflection to spot meaningful changes in the community, and in the intentional efforts of the initiative. This makes it possible to navigate the developmental process that will enable the community to reach the tipping point such that all children will be reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade.

In the proposed Place-Based Initiative, evaluation efforts will begin with further decision-making about which data to collect, both with regard to whole-community outcomes and the place-based strategic efforts. (Many data sources have already been identified through efforts associated with the development of the Community Partnership Plan.) Further decisions will be made mid-way through the first year, as resident groups convene to dialogue about their perspectives and desires.

There are also several data collection approaches that need to be further developed. GIS mapping, RBA scorecard, and Sensemaker Suite (storymodeling) have already been initiated, and can be developed further even while decisions are being made about which additional data to gather.

Another approach that will powerfully support the Place-Based Initiative is the Matrix Outcomes Model. This approach will make it possible to spot changes in family well-being across neighborhood, school and service settings using the Family Development Matrix. It will also make it possible to assess service programming and community-building using the Community Scaling Tool. As such, it will enrich the Empowerment Evaluation (EE) model currently used by CBHC. Once resident community facilitators are conducting community dialogues, it will be possible to initiate the process of individualizing the assessment tools of the Matrix Outcomes Model to fit the needs and preferences of each community, with technical assistance from the model's creators. It is anticipated that this process will take between 6 and 12 months to complete.

There are several other evaluation approaches that could enhance the Place-Based Initiative, including the TECCS pilot that CBHC is supporting in Sulphur Springs (an assessment of student well-being by kindergarten teachers, with corresponding asset-mapping of the community), and the Gallup Student Poll of student hope, engagement, and well-being. Other strategies to consider for the visualization of findings include agent-based modeling and dynamic social-network analysis. These will be considered as the assessment plan of the Place-Based Initiative develops.

It is important to keep in mind that the central purpose of evaluation in place-based initiatives is to provide information in real-time (or as close as possible) for learning and feedback to the community, in order to inform ongoing decisions. As Kelly (2010) noted, evaluation "implemented well and practiced intentionally can be the most critical ingredient of transformative community change." To ensure that this is maintained as the central purpose of evaluation, the methods of Results-Based Accountability (RBA) will be used. Each month, an RBA session will be conducted to reflect on all that is occurring in each of the lead communities with respect to bringing about that tipping point in time when all children are reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade. There will also be quarterly RBA sessions to reflect on how the Place-Based Initiative is itself developing in the service of ultimate goal of the universal well-being of all children in Hillsborough County.

Desired Outcomes and Preliminary Timeline of the Place-Based Initiative

When the Place-Based Initiative realizes its ultimate goal, all of the children in each of the lead communities will be reading on grade-level by 3rd Grade, and the positive changes in the lead communities will be catalyzing positive changes in surrounding communities as well.

Along the way, desired outcomes suggesting that efforts are indeed contributing to the emergence of the ultimate tipping-point include the following:

- Social networks of connection are strengthening among residents, schools, child-serving service providers, other stakeholders, and the Children's Board.
- The spirit of community that exists in each lead community is more clearly recognized and celebrated, and as such is generating an even more vibrant sense of community, especially as relates to children's well-being and ability to read.
- The available array of services available to children and other residents of the lead communities becomes more well-known and as such more accessible.
- The available array of services becomes increasingly high-quality, attuned and responsive to the needs and preferences of community residents, in the service of promoting children's well-being and the community's potential to reach the tipping point associated with children's ability to read by 3rd Grade.
- The policy landscape affecting community life in the lead communities, particularly as relates to the lived experience of children, becomes more clearly recognized.
- The policies affecting child and community life in the lead communities are modified and upgraded to better support the opportunities, decisions and actions of community members, with particular emphasis on children's well-being and ability to read.
- Methods of evaluation are serving to promote learning and feedback to the community, in order to inform ongoing decisions that will bring about the tipping point for child well-being and ability to read by 3rd Grade.
- Overall, children's ability to read is improving. Total numbers of children reading on grade-level are increasing, and areas where children reading below grade-level have been relatively more concentrated become less so.

A preliminary timeline is provided to illustrate how the various activities of the Place-Based Initiative inter-relate. (Please see the attached document.) It reflects the anticipated timing of activities over the course of the first year of the initiative, with the recognition that future steps will be contingent upon all that is learned at the beginning. It is expected that the specifics of the timeline will be adjusted as the initiative comes to life, in order to be flexible and responsive to the actual development of the initiative, in local context.

CBHC Resources to Support the Place-Based Initiative

Adequately resourcing place-based initiatives is critical if tipping points are to be realized. As the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change observed:

“It is disingenuous to claim that we are seeking such results if we are not also willing to make commensurate investments to achieve that end. Until we do invest enough to create some successes, we also may not be able to determine what pieces are essential and what are not and therefore how to achieve such transformation more efficiently (Bruner, 2006).”

Specificity with regard to resource allocations will be addressed following CBHC deliberations to clarify purpose, focus, strategies, and desired outcomes of the Place-Based Initiative.

Conclusion

Place-based initiatives have great potential as a way to bring about tipping-point changes in communities, for the benefit of all children. The Children’s Board of Hillsborough County is well-poised to develop such an initiative, given our history of work and learning over the past two decades, and the many rich resources that are available to be devoted to such an effort at this time. If CBHC chooses to commit itself to as ambitious an endeavor as this, what a meaningful contribution we could make to the county-wide community for whom our organization exists. Now is a moment to “be the change we want to see.”