

Actionable Evidence Initiative Case Study

Maximizing Insights from Existing Data for the Camden Promise Neighborhood Initiative

Candice Dias, Ph.D. September 2022

The Actionable Evidence Initiative

Led by Project Evident with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Actionable Evidence Initiative seeks to understand and remove barriers to building evidence that is equitable, useful, credible, and relevant for practitioners as they aim to improve the outcomes of students who are Black, Latino/a/x, or experiencing poverty. Please visit <u>https://www.projectevident.org/actionable-evidence</u> to learn more, join our network, and find partners interested in working together on actionable evidence solutions.

Actionable Evidence in Education Cases

This case is one in a series commissioned by the Actionable Evidence Initiative in 2020 and 2021. (Cases are published on the Project Evident <u>website</u>.) The series illustrates how researchers, evaluators, practitioners, funders, and policymakers across the country are exemplifying principles of the Actionable Evidence framework. It profiles a range of settings, actors, learning questions, methods, and products, unified by a commitment to practitioner-centered, timely, practical, equitable, and inclusive evidence building. Each case describes the origins, development, and results of a research or evaluation project, along with the authors' reflections on their experiences. Our hope is that these cases will provide both inspiration and practical guidance for those interested in generating and using evidence that leads to better and more equitable outcomes for youth and communities.



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Executive Summary

Launched under the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods grant program, Camden Promise Neighborhood in Camden, New Jersey, is a collective impact initiative. The vision of Camden Promise Neighborhood is to drive efforts, resources, and strategies to significantly improve educational and developmental outcomes of the children and youth in the target neighborhood, from birth to college and career. This work extends across multiple domains of a family's life but is anchored in neighborhood schools, where 95% of students are Black/African-American or Latinx.¹ Families in Camden experience high rates of poverty and unemployment, with 35% of families living below the poverty level² and unemployment rates as high as 14% within the Camden Promise Neighborhood footprint.

A central goal of Camden Promise Neighborhood is to establish a data-driven culture with and among partners. This case illustrates the shift toward this culture by focusing on the process of extracting new perspectives from existing school data, specifically attendance data. It outlines how the partners established trust for data sharing and collaboratively interpreted data. In creating structured and guided discussions within regular scheduled accountability meetings and employing tools such as root cause factor analysis to collaboratively problem-solve, practitioners co-created findings that shaped efforts to improve outcomes for neighborhood youth. This case is a snapshot of early-stage work in an emergent learning cycle. It suggests that, in complex and under-resourced systems, even descriptive data analyses can offer practitioners important insights that may have been previously overlooked.

This case suggests several lessons related to fostering and deepening practitioner engagement with data. It was imperative that research and evaluation staff were willing to code switch from the language of data, research, and analysis to terminology that is more accessible and less intimidating to practitioners. Collective review of findings provided an opportunity to co-create meaning and empower stakeholders to derive actionable evidence. Establishing efficient technical processes through a trusted broker and data pipeline limited burden on under-resourced partners, releasing them to participate in timely reviews of data with openness and an orientation toward shared learning. The collective attention to student attendance as the foundation of improved outcomes facilitated additional resources for wraparound social supports to get students to school, where staff could then prioritize their needs based on attendance, grades, and behavior.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.



¹ CCSD and KIPP enrollment data, 2020-2021 school year.

About the Project

Origins

The work discussed in this case study was part of the Camden Promise Neighborhood initiative. The federal Promise Neighborhoods grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, was established in 2010 under the legislative authority of the Fund for the Improvement of Education Program and authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act. Inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, the Department of Education has stated that the "purpose of Promise Neighborhoods is to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities."³ As illustrated in Figure 1, these outcomes are supported by building a comprehensive continuum of integrated, cradle-to-career solutions, with great schools at the center, and by developing the local infrastructure of systems and resources needed to sustain and bring effective solutions to scale. Promise Neighborhoods are fundamentally place-based, seeking to turn on its head the aphorism that individuals must move out (of neighborhoods) in order to move up economically. In focusing on distressed communities that have experienced high rates of poverty and unemployment, Promise Neighborhoods aim to address the educational gaps that accompany concentrated poverty and thus to expand the educational and economic choices of residents.⁴

Figure 1: Promise Neighborhoods Theory of Change



Source: https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/node/3

⁴ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.



³ U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods website 2018

A citywide and neighborhood-based cross-sector coalition of partners under the leadership of the Center for Family Services joined forces to launch Camden Promise Neighborhood, a holistic, long-term service delivery model focused on accomplishing this vision for children and families living in the most distressed neighborhoods of Camden, New Jersey. Beginning in 2012, with funding from a Promises Neighborhoods planning grant, this coalition completed an 18-month strategic planning effort that engaged community residents in assessing needs, identifying neighborhood-based assets, and building a continuum of solutions that are data-driven, evidence-based, and research-informed. In 2016, the Center for Family Services leveraged this work to become one of just six communities nationwide to win a five-year Promise Neighborhoods implementation grant. In 2017, the Center received a \$30 million grant to build the Camden Promise Neighborhood across the four contiguous neighborhoods of Cooper Lanning, Bergen Square, and parts of Centerville and Liberty Park, home to nearly 14,500 individuals, including 3,773 children. Families in Camden experience high rates of poverty and unemployment, with 35% of families living below the poverty level⁵ and unemployment rates as high as 14% within the Camden Promise Neighborhood footprint.⁶ Camden Promise Neighborhood partners with five target schools: KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy Lanning Square Primary School, KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy Lanning Square Middle School, KIPP Whittier School, U.S. Wiggins College Preparatory Lab Family School, and Camden High School. Reflecting Camden city overall, these five target schools primarily serve students of color: 58% of students are Black or African-American and 37% are Latinx.7

The vision of the Camden Promise Neighborhood is to drive efforts, resources, and strategies to significantly improve educational and developmental outcomes of the children and youth in the target neighborhood, from birth to college and career, while greatly strengthening the social, communal, and familial infrastructures that support and nurture their success. Camden Promise Neighborhood partners designed a continuum of solutions to saturate the neighborhood with services for children at every age and stage of development and create a neighborhood of opportunity where children can follow pathways to college and careers. Once families are connected to services, Camden Promise Neighborhood provides the infrastructure to ensure that they remain connected to the services they need even as their children grow and transition to subsequent stages in life. Camden Promise Neighborhood's holistic, cradle-to-career approach considers the complex needs of individuals and the community and delivers a results-driven continuum of supports that address the education, health, food access, safety, and other needs of families in the footprint.

⁷ CCSD and KIPP enrollment data, 2020-2021 school year.



⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

⁶ Camden Promise Neighborhood Survey, 2019 (random sample, in-person survey).

Figure 2: Cradle to Career Pipeline



Source: Adapted from South Salt Lake Cradle to Career Pipeline graphic

According to the Department of Education, the purpose of the Promise Neighborhoods initiative is to support system change in multiple ways:

- Build capacity focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood
- Put in place a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center
- Integrate programs to reduce barriers and silos to effectively and efficiently implement solutions across agencies
- Develop local infrastructure of systems and resources needed to sustain and scale proven, effective solutions beyond the initial neighborhood footprint
- Establish a data-driven culture with and among partners to collect and evaluate critical information indicative of the overall impact of Promise Neighborhoods, and the relationship between strategies, approaches and practices and student outcomes⁸

Partners

The <u>Center for Family Services</u> serves as the backbone organization for the Camden Promise Neighborhood partnership, which includes the City of Camden, Camden City School District, KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy, Camden County Police Department, Camden Housing Authority, Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, resident leaders, Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative, Rowan University, Camden County College, Cooper University Hospital, Cooper Medical School at Rowan University, and Rutgers University. Headquartered in Camden, the Center for Family Services has a long history and demonstrated commitment to supporting the City's most vulnerable children, youth, and families, including community outreach, afterschool programs, substance use treatment, individual and family counseling, case management, foster care, emergency shelters, and residential facilities.

⁸ This list is adapted from Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods goals.



The role of the backbone organization is to convene partners, develop program strategy, and engage in collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data to understand and refine program offerings. In many collective impact frameworks, backbone organizations are primarily conveners. In Promise Neighborhoods, by contrast, the backbone organization is also held accountable for project work and is tasked with establishing accountability for all partners. This structure encourages an ongoing assessment of needs and reflection on progress, and is predicated on robust engagement with data.

The work of this wide range of partners extending across multiple domains of a family's life is anchored in the schools within the Camden Promise Neighborhood. At the outset, Camden Promise Neighborhood included five schools (two traditional public schools and three renaissance schools⁹). Due to school closures and district restructuring, there are now six target schools: three renaissance schools and three traditional public schools.¹⁰

Approach

Camden Promise Neighborhood's approach to building and using actionable evidence is informed by a few core principles. One is that, in an effort of this scale, engagement with data takes place throughout the project lifecycle. The diagram below captures the broad stages of data engagement within the Promise Neighborhood cycle. In stage 1, prior to implementation, a needs assessment is completed. In stage 2, performance indicators are established; in the case of Promise Neighborhoods, these were set by the Department of Education. Additional measures set by each Promise Neighborhood are referred to as local measures and often emerge in stages 3 and 4.

¹⁰ At the outset, the two two traditional public schools were the Wiggins College Prep Family School (K-8) and Camden High School. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, the Wiggins school was closed and many Wiggins students began to attend Forest Hill Elementary and Morgan Village Middle School, so these schools were added to the Camden Promise Neighborhood umbrella. The renaissance schools are operated by the KIPP system and include KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy (KCNA) Lanning Square Primary (K-4); KCNA Lanning Square Middle School (a co-located middle school serving grades 4-8); and KIPP Whittier Middle School (grades 4-8).



⁹ Renaissance schools are a hybrid school model established under New Jersey's 2012 Urban Hope Act, allowing charter management organizations to establish neighborhood schools.

Figure 3: Promise Neighborhood Performance Management Cycle



Source: Mary Bogle, Sarah Gillespie, and Christopher R. Hayes, *Continually Improving Promise Neighborhoods: The Role of Case Management Data* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015).

In alignment with the results-based accountability framework used across Promise Neighborhoods, this approach prioritizes placing "results at the center" while seeking to understand contextual explanatory factors through "the story behind the curve."¹¹ This structure places a population-level result such as "students successfully transition from middle school grades to high school"¹² as the central goal statement for partners to work toward. With this shared goal, stakeholders review trend data ("the curve"), and seek to identify underlying drivers that can be affected by the collective impact work.¹³

In Camden, local measures were developed with the intent to track and respond holistically to student and family needs. Local measures include assessments of social emotional learning, resilience, food access and food security, technology access, and experiences of virtual learning during the COVID pandemic. The approach to this work is informed by the spirit of emergent strategy,¹⁴ more concretely expressed as an emergent learning orientation that recognizes that in complex systems where actors tend to respond individually, the process of working together sets the stage for pattern identification and response. Darling et. al. (2016) note that, while "their goal is to work toward a shared outcome, each player has a point of view and is capable of making decisions of their own volition, based on what they are seeing

¹⁴ adrienne maree brown's call to fractal, nonlinear, adaptive and iterative change principles (among others) has undergirded the CSSP Results Count leadership development seminars in which many Promise Neighborhoods have participated. See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.



¹¹ These two concepts are central to results-based accountability, and emphasized in the continuous improvement trainings provided by Clear Impact, a technical assistance provider for Promise Neighborhoods. See <u>Resources</u> and <u>Further Reading</u>.

¹² <u>Promise Neighborhoods Results Framework</u>

¹³ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u> for an illustration of the "story behind the curve" structure.

in the unfolding environment. The more the team plays, the better individuals become at recognizing patterns in their very dynamic environment, and the smarter their individual decisions become."¹⁵ As this description suggests, there are several stages between the starting point of individual perspectives and decision-making and the ultimate goal of collective movement. This case reflects the early stages of setting up an emergent learning environment, of creating an infrastructure for shared exploration and learning that could be leveraged for specific uses, such as the attendance analysis discussed in more detail in the Results section below. The strategies used to create this environment included establishing formal structures committed to data use, dedicating resources to data and learning, and collaboratively determining local measures that the collective impact partners could work toward together.

Leadership and Governance

To support establishing a data-driven culture with and among partners, Camden Promise Neighborhood employs two formal accountability structures: a Leadership Council and a Data Governance Board. The Leadership Council includes leaders of the partner agencies and resident representatives within the Promise Neighborhood collective impact umbrella. This group focuses on program strategy and overall management and review of the initiative. The Data Governance Board (DGB) provides oversight of the use and interpretation of data, providing the principal forum for the initiative's data analysis and transparency.

By design, there is significant overlap in membership between the two groups to foster awareness of the interplay between data and programmatic work. Data and analysis can sometimes be viewed as separate from the work of teaching, learning, and providing student supports. One important function of the Leadership Council and DGB is to remind stakeholders that data is a way of describing their work, while analysis is a path to reflect, assess, and adjust. In practice, ongoing continuous improvement discussions and formative evaluation findings are reviewed at the Data Governance Board meetings and key takeaways are shared at Leadership Council meetings so that partners can use data to inform the overall management of the initiative, such as making mid-course corrections when needed.

The Data Governance Board is central to the work of fostering a data-driven culture, in no small part because it provides a rare forum for actors to view each other's data and dive deeply into the ways their data (and, by extension, their clients or students) intersect. The DGB is convened by the backbone agency and the initiative's lead data partner, the <u>Camden</u> <u>Coalition of Healthcare Providers</u> (CCHP). Importantly, CHHP has deep expertise in highly protected data and complex data systems as the host of the region's health information

¹⁵ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.



exchange and provider of patient navigation services for patients with complex needs.¹⁶ DGB meetings are structured as working sessions, where partners review data together and actively talk through what the data means and how it can be responded to programmatically. The goal is to create and support a continuous learning culture where partners share perspectives and engage in problem-solving together. We start with foundational questions: What does this data show? Does this reflect your experience as a partner/service provider? If not, we discuss what might account for the gap between the data and direct service experience. The emergent learning questions in these discussions are, "What's the same? What's surprising? What's different?"¹⁷ What does the data tell us about the population being considered? How could these populations be better served/what would improve performance? What else would we need to know to understand the issue? Programmatically, what adjustments could be made to support improvements? The level of engagement in these discussions is high, as indicated by the consistent willingness of participants to continue discussions beyond the allotted meeting time and the additional analysis questions generated by the group.

Resources

Being part of the federal Promise Neighborhoods program has given Camden Promise Neighborhood access to important support for its data and evidence work. In addition to federal funds, all Promise Neighborhood grantees benefit from structural recommendations and ongoing technical assistance provided by the Urban Institute and others. As the longtime technical assistance provider for Promise Neighborhood grants, the Urban Institute has created a large pool of resources including data guides and case studies as well as ongoing community of practice convenings designed to allow grantees to share resources, ideas, and learn from each other.¹⁸

Following lessons learned from previous Promise Neighborhoods, Camden embedded the initiative's Director of Research and Evaluation (the author) within the backbone organization, the Center for Family Services. In addition to this leadership role, the Center for Family Services houses a small team of analysts.¹⁹ As noted previously, in this collective impact structure, the backbone organization is accountable for grant implementation; structurally connecting data to accountability reinforced the importance of the data pillar.

The Center for Family Services and the Camden Coalition (which, as noted above, is the longtime trusted data partner among Camden healthcare, school, and other nonprofit partners

¹⁹ The team has varied in size from two to four staff.



¹⁶ The Director of Research and Evaluation for the overall initiative is embedded in Center for Family Services, the backbone agency. The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, which provides deep data management, guidance, and support, co-chairs this board via their Director of Informatics and Analytics.

¹⁷ Darling, et. al. (2016).

¹⁸ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.

and service providers) have anchored and executed the bulk of the activities required to successfully ground Camden Promise Neighborhood conversations in data. For example, electing to frame the Data Governance Board as an interactive working group has had many benefits, but it is a resource-intensive approach. Productive DBG discussions rely on the background work of identifying and gathering relevant data, conducting basic analysis (e.g., monitoring trends in focal outcomes; disaggregating outcome data by race, gender, ELL and IEP status; etc.) and pulling together relevant programmatic and data-related context. The data sharing agreements established under the Camden Promise Neighborhood umbrella have facilitated the initial collating of data. CCHP, acting as the trusted data broker and manager, receives regularly scheduled data extracts from the school district. The frequency of extracts depends on the data types; for example, attendance data is shared weekly. For some analysis, CCHP then links individual-level data to other data sets such as school-based health clinic data and de-identifies the data for further analysis. The Center for Family Services' internal research and evaluation team and CCHP collaborate to perform disaggregations and basic analysis. Doing this groundwork of preliminary exploratory analysis allows for a deeper guided discussion. This structure shifts the resource-intensive work to the data leads and removes barriers to participating in data-engaged conversations. Without this resourcing, each partner would need to invest in their own data processing and analysis mechanisms, a difficult undertaking without additional and coordinated resources. The Promise Neighborhood structure allows for flexible resourcing so that the backbone and key data partner, CCHP, can collaborate and take on analysis as staff time is available. Camden Promise Neighborhood's investment in supporting the Data Governance Board is reflective of its overall commitment of resources to data, evaluation, and learning.

Measures for Accountability, Learning, and Community Representation

The U.S. Department of Education established 15 core indicators for Promise Neighborhoods, known informally as GPRAs.²⁰ These are population-level metrics that gauge well-being and academic performance at significant ages and grades, based on substantial evidence that interventions at these times can have lasting impacts.²¹ These indicators have proven to be a useful tool for establishing a language and framework of shared outcomes. For example, Camden Promise Neighborhood partners make frequent reference to how a program might impact a particular GPRA or how many GPRAs might be addressed, and that is immediately understood as an action that requires data monitoring and analysis. There is a strong shared understanding that the compliance requirements of Promise Neighborhoods are intensive and predetermined.

²¹ See Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Indicators for Promise Neighborhoods, attached at the end of this case.



²⁰ "GPRA" is a reference to the Government Performance and Results Act, which requires federal agencies to (among other requirements) develop performance measures. All Promise Neighborhoods grantees report against the same 15 GPRA metrics.

However, in order to truly become data-driven and to foster the system-level change at the center of Promise Neighborhoods, it has been essential to move beyond the reporting requirements associated with the GPRAs. The Promise Neighborhoods' required indicators (GPRAs) gauge overall student and community well-being and academic achievement at the grade or school level and can measure long-term change for a population. For example, GPRAs include student performance on statewide standardized assessments, which is reported annually at the school and grade levels - information that is too coarse to be actionable for school and community service providers. Individuals' scores are, of course, available to students and parents but, for practitioners, the opportunity to intervene is at the meso level - not at the level of the school or district but at the level of groups of students within grades. Practitioners benefit most from information about groups of students who would benefit from particular types of services, such as tutoring, nutrition support, or after-school care. The required Promise Neighborhood indicators typically don't offer timely insight into shorter-term changes or meso-level needs that can guide the development or improvement of focused interventions by practitioners. Thus, while local indicators are encouraged rather than required for Promise Neighborhoods, in practice they make the project significantly more responsive to the practitioner context.

The question regularly posed to stakeholders is what additional local measures would provide them with insight into the collective impact of the Promise Neighborhood. Developing these local measures involves several steps. Central to the effort is ensuring that the measures tell us something meaningful about the community or about a program. Once there is agreement on which measures provide the most useful feedback to service providers and other stakeholders, the challenge is to identify reliable sources of data from which these measures can be derived. The final step is to establish systems for routinely collecting, analyzing, and communicating data to community service providers, closing the feedback loop.

Camden Promise Neighborhood's local measures include indicators of general well-being (e.g., food insecurity, transportation access) and academics. For example, parents were asked about the number of books in the household, which research suggests can influence literacy gains and, more generally, support student achievement over their entire K-12 experience.²² A number of programs within Camden Promise Neighborhood distribute books to students and families, so the measure of how many total books are within a household also complements the distribution counts that the programs track, providing a more complete picture of household-level literacy resources. Another example of this process was the development and

www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100520213116.htm.



²² For example, M.D.R. Evans, Jonathan Kelley, Joanna Sikora, Donald J. Treiman. Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 2010; DOI: <u>10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002</u>; University of Nevada, Reno. "Books in home as important as parents' education in determining children's education level." ScienceDaily.

incorporation of COVID-period remote learning questions into the grant-required neighborhood survey.

As in many vulnerable and marginalized communities, measures in Camden often underscore deficiencies, gaps, and vulnerabilities. This emphasis tends to alienate residents and place parents in a defensive mode, underscoring a perception that research and metrics identify only what is "wrong" with the community. To successfully foster a data-driven culture, we recognized that residents and parents need to be engaged in reflections around data and view research and evaluation efforts as building on community strengths. Taking a strengths-based perspective, an additional local measure asks parents about their goals for their child's education and career. Over 50% of parents hoped their child would go on to graduate, law, or medical school or similar advanced training, and almost 60% were certain that their child could find a good job locally.²³ Black and brown high-poverty communities are sometimes viewed as insufficiently aspiring to higher levels of education, so it was important to residents and other stakeholders to highlight that parents actively desire high levels of educational attainment for their children. Residents found this to be validating; it also created an opportunity to highlight programs and supports available to students to prepare for and connect to postsecondary education. The data was communicated to residents using a feedback structure that emphasized that these data represented their voice ("We asked. You answered.") and were tied to program offerings ("We heard you. We're here to help!").

As illustrated in the example above, it has been important to recognize parents and residents as key stakeholders and to seek out their input and perspective. This input has come directly, through formal mechanisms such as a community advisory board, and through direct service staff who work with parents and are Camden parents and residents themselves. Linking the perspectives of residents, staff, and institutional partners such as schools has established a feedback loop that seeks to be transparent, actionable, and that uses data meaningfully.

Challenges and Responses

One set of challenges was operational and technical and related to creating a robust data pipeline. The first two years of the initiative focused on establishing the basic elements of the data infrastructure such as data sharing agreements, processes to transfer and store data, and understanding of the fields and variables available in partner data sets. Years of working together in the planning period had created a baseline of trust between partners. Despite a commitment to data sharing in principle, however, logistical challenges remained. Changes to district leadership and staff turnover in the district legal office delayed finalizing the data sharing agreement. Limited data management staff and legacy processes delayed receipt of data. Drawing on years of acting as a trusted data intermediary for nonprofit partners in

²³ Camden Promise Neighborhood Survey, 2019 (random sample, in-person survey).



Camden and technical skill in navigating data and information systems, the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (CCHP) was instrumental in navigating these issues. Their expertise in managing highly protected data and complex data systems reassured education partners that their data was well protected and managed. CCHP cemented trust with partners by ensuring the technical burden on partners was low: Camden Promise Neighborhood would accept data in any format, and would require minimal additional technical investment from partners. After a modest initial investment of time, partners could hand off data, regardless of how messy or clean.

Another challenge for Camden Promise Neighborhood was to elevate the work of the Data Governance Board to ensure that it could drive learning and improvement. In the first year of the initiative, partners tended to view the DGB as a technical group where the finer points of planned analysis (e.g., coding or regression specifications) were discussed and therefore sought to deputize database administrators or research assistants to participate. However, a group of technical staff would not have been positioned to bridge the data-to-action divide (i.e., to use the data to drive intervention shifts or adjust direction). Thus, leaders of the initiative emphasized that attendees must be engaged in program or leadership work. We underscored the role of joint data reviews as a key driver of partner accountability and the mantra of these meetings has been the importance of data to create a feedback loop for programming, and the need to make data meaningful.

A third challenge lay in developing the collective understanding of what it means to move beyond a compliance framework. In other words, how can we ensure that the data collected and the analysis undertaken are useful to the practitioner community, and more importantly to the students and community the initiative serves? A common obstacle to research relevance for practitioners is the lag between data collection and release of findings. Given that Camden Promise Neighborhood is fundamentally an applied project, we recognized that partners needed to quickly see the value of engaging with data analytically in order to maintain buy-in. And buy-in was critical, as it ranged from participation at meetings to ensuring that data was received in a timely fashion and, ultimately, that it was used to construct and implement solutions to real obstacles to the educational success and well-being of children in the neighborhood. School partners already routinely reviewed and reported data to meet school and district requirements. Our challenge was to demonstrate that, by addressing additional questions with the data, we could gain insights that might lead to more nuanced understanding of how students could be supported and, thus, tailored interventions to improve outcomes. We also needed these insights to be available promptly so they would be actionable, even within the same school year. The pressing need for timely, applicable, and low-burden data suggested that an effective approach would be to draw upon an existing,



relatively robust, and accessible data set. In the case of the Camden Promise Neighborhood, student attendance data fit the bill on all these counts.

Results: Exploring Attendance to Advance a Data Culture

Why Attendance?

The Camden Promise Neighborhood chose to focus on students' school attendance for two reasons. First, as noted above, it became imperative to demonstrate what could be learned from data without increasing burden on school partners. The most accessible and frequently updated data was attendance data. No additional work was required by school or district partners to collect or process these data. While only aggregate attendance reports were required for grant compliance, there were also opportunities for additional analysis. By analyzing student-level data, we could generate new insights from a core data set and add a new diagnostic tool and response process to the practitioner toolkit.

The second reason for a deep dive on attendance was that Promise Neighborhood technical training and assistance providers were encouraging a focus on this topic and supported Camden Promise Neighborhood in deepening this approach through trainings in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Results Count[™] framework. This framework brought together a cross-section of Promise Neighborhood grantees to focus on school attendance. The choice was pragmatic. School attendance is a widely recognized indicator of the overall well-being and home support of children. Low or erratic attendance often signals academic, social, emotional, health, or safety issues warranting attention. As in Camden, attendance data was also the most readily available and readily understood data across most Promise Neighborhoods. Drawing on attendance data does not require additional resources from school partners, yet it can offer important insights into student- and school-level patterns warranting attention. For example, from the perspective of human services actors such as the Center for Family Services, student-level attendance dynamics provide early insight into student and family risk levels.

The Camden Promise Neighborhood team that explored attendance data through the intensive Results Count workshops was composed of Center for Family Services, school district (CCSD), and KIPP staff. During the workshops, the team conducted deep exploration of a single theme, and sought to identify and share observations and lessons from similar partnerships and communities. This deep focus on attendance data yielded a number of insights, including spotlighting opportunities for system-level interventions, as discussed below.

Exploring Anomalies

The first step in bringing an analytical lens to attendance data was to pose baseline questions, for example: What are the patterns of attendance across Camden Promise



Neighborhood target schools? Across the district? Across the school year? The Camden Promise Neighborhood research and evaluation team (comprising Center for Family Services and CCHP staff) started with basic calculations such as average daily attendance and weekly attendance. When time was added as a variable, system-level patterns began to emerge, with notable dips in attendance at the school and district level at unanticipated points. Informal discussions with Camden Promise Neighborhood direct service staff and school staff confirmed that attendance drops around snow days, just before Thanksgiving, and in general on Mondays and Fridays; these were known patterns. However, three attendance events stood out: Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day, the week a pipe burst at Camden High School, and the week of the Philadelphia Eagles Super Bowl parade. These patterns were visualized, as shown in the image below, to make these dips visible to stakeholders without any specialized knowledge. In keeping with our goal of engaging stakeholders and stimulating the curiosity necessary to make sense of data, the intent of this visualization was to underscore both the magnitude of the attendance declines and their cadence within the school year. The visualization was presented to the Data Governance Board, where stakeholders were asked whether these data reflected their existing knowledge, and if so, how these patterns might be addressed.



Figure 4: Daily Attendance Rate²⁴

²⁴ Data for non-KIPP schools in the Camden Promise Neighborhood.



At the Data Governance Board discussion, representatives from the Wiggins College Prep Family School indicated that the decrease in attendance on Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day was a known phenomenon. Districts surrounding Camden and the KIPP schools treat the day as a holiday and are closed. In contrast, CCSD schools, including Wiggins and CHS, are open. School leadership particularly at the K-8 public school, Wiggins, saw this finding as validating their experience and reported they found it challenging to ensure that students come to school when their neighbors' and relatives' schools are closed. As analysts embedded within the applied project, we were also able to connect school leadership with resources that were made available through the Promise Neighborhood technical assistance team. We shared resources from the Attendance Works <u>website</u>, including automated voice call scripts that reminded parents that, although other schools would be closed on Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day, Wiggins would be open and it is important for students to come to school. This instance provided practitioners a concrete experience of the benefit of an additional analytical lens, of timely analysis, and of the additional resources available through the Promise Neighborhoods program.

Supplementing the Data Governance Board discussions, root cause factor analysis exercises were conducted with wraparound services/social supports staff who worked directly with families, such as family support specialists (social workers who provide mental health and other social services), family engagement coordinators, and academic success coaches. Using tools from the Results Count toolkit such as the root cause "Five Whys" exercise,²⁵ staff were guided through the data to ensure a shared understanding of what the data showed. The next step was to ask what factors were contributing to these trends and, for each explanation, ask another "why?" As Raj Chawla, a Results Counts facilitator, stated, the "purpose of asking 'why?' is to have a good enough understanding of the factors to make informed choices about which ones are actionable by a stakeholder and/or partner [and] are relevant for the population being impacted."²⁶ Through this process, school staff and wraparound services/social supports staff identified weather as a factor in attendance, tying adverse weather to transportation barriers and lack of appropriate clothing. This set the stage for Promise Neighborhood stakeholders to discuss to what degree transportation and clothing were addressable barriers.

The attendance data added another dimension: the effect of one weather-related school closure on other schools. Notably, all schools showed a significant dip in attendance during the week that Camden High had to close due to burst pipes. One explanation for this is that the weather was so severe that all students were affected. Severe weather could create universal obstacles such as roads not being cleared or emphasize barriers such as

²⁶ Raj Chawla, Results Count, Factor Analysis Worksheet.



²⁵ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.

inadequate clothing. Another explanation considered was that students are linked through family and community ties; it may be that, when students and families hear that one school is closed, they assume other schools are closed. Similarly, if students are taken to school by older siblings, if a high school student is not going to school, the older student may not drop off younger siblings. It was not possible to definitively determine the causes of the attendance decreases, but engaging with the data in this way prompted a robust, problem-solving oriented discussion that allowed practitioners to consider how these challenges could be concretely addressed. Understanding that a single significant event at one school has broader repercussions suggested a need to maintain an awareness of events at all schools in the community.

The final unexpected attendance event was attributable to the Eagles, the Philadelphia area football team, winning the Super Bowl for the first time in their history. The entire region, including Camden, was awash in celebrations, which included a celebratory parade in Philadelphia. Camden city schools were closed for the day of the parade, but attendance for the entire week was exceptionally low, averaging 88%. This event was truly exceptional so, while winning the Super Bowl is unlikely to be a regular event, it did underscore the need to account for and respond to large-scale events beyond the district's control (e.g., by communicating with families in advance of special community events or by finding ways that schools can offer opportunities to celebrate on campus).

Building Capacity and Diving Deeper

With the success of looking at overall attendance patterns and recognizing system-level effects, practitioners were receptive to other findings. Taking age into account, we noticed that many grades had a wide spread of ages. For example, at Wiggins, children in grade 5 ranged in age from nine to 12 years old; at KIPP Lanning Square Middle, they ranged from eight to 12 years old. At Camden High School, 10th grade students were as young as 14 and as old as 20. This means that, in many classrooms, children at very different social, emotional, and cognitive stages spend their instructional, class, and recess time together. Linking this demographic data to attendance, we found that students who were older than the typical age for the grade were more likely to be absent. Given that in many cases older post-pubescent adolescents were grouped in the same classroom as prepubescent children, it may be unsurprising that there is likely a social disincentive and disinclination for the adolescents to be in class. At the high school level, this gap could be as pronounced, with young adolescents sharing classrooms with adults. For school partners, these findings confirmed what they knew intuitively, but having the data validated their experiential knowledge, and underscored the importance of having wider conversations about grade retention.

Overall, attendance data provided an entry point into deepening partner relationships, enhancing trust, and offering scaffolding for shifts in conversations around student needs



and interventions. Since attendance had been most commonly viewed through a compliance lens, data had previously been reviewed primarily to assess school-level average daily attendance and to determine disciplinary steps for individual students. By visualizing data in an accessible way, and by undertaking analysis that added time and age as factors, the relationship of attendance to a range of social factors was accentuated. Some factors could be addressed by more proactive communications with parents, such as messaging that a particular school was still open even when surrounding schools were closed. Other factors, such as the wide range of ages in classrooms, reminded all stakeholders of the importance of social supports, and the need to broaden and perhaps revisit the discussion around grade retention. The latter also reinvigorated the efforts of social supports stakeholders to assist parents in understanding the value of attendance and the social value of grade promotion to parents, who could then better advocate for their children. Attendance analysis highlighted the interwoven nature of student, family and community life, and emphasized the importance of wraparound services.

The shifts in dialogue around attendance were small but significant: These additional analyses and structured dialogue moved the conversation from a view of attendance as a budgetary, compliance, and disciplinary necessity to one that gave deeper consideration to the student and family experience. Creating room to ask questions such as what might cause these patterns, how could they be addressed, what factors occur at the population and system level, and what impacts might be seen at the individual level was a valuable exercise in itself. In vulnerable communities, schools are often under-resourced and overstretched, with insufficient space to tease out the underlying meaning of a data calculation, and it is in this environment that these conversations were particularly noteworthy.

Connecting Learning to Interventions

Exploring attendance anomalies provided additional focus for guiding interventions, and shifted greater attention to chronic absenteeism as a key indicator. While attendance data provided aggregate snapshots that could illuminate school- or district-level impacts, identifying individual students who were absent for 10% or more of school days provided an entry point for student- and family-level interventions. Focusing on individual student chronic absenteeism, Camden Promise Neighborhood staff met with school staff, students, and parents to identify and help address barriers to attendance. Through this deeper level of engagement, staff conducted home visits and developed consistent relationships with students. Student absences were commonly triggered by a range of family and household events. For example, one parent described their job loss as producing anxiety and depression; their response to this destabilizing event was to foster a sense of household stability by literally holding their children close by keeping them at home. Parents' struggles with both physical and mental health were common factors in student absences, and Camden Promise



Neighborhood staff were able to elicit this information from parents and connect families to appropriate services. Other widespread impediments to student attendance included transportation, responsibility for other children in the household, uniform or clothing needs, and housing instability.

While social support staff drew on chronic absenteeism data as an entry point to working with individual families, Camden Promise Neighborhood introduced a series of attendance incentive efforts at the school level. The "Strive for Five" program was modeled on resources from Attendance Works that have been used successfully in several districts across the country.²⁷ This initiative encouraged students to attend school five days a week by providing them a worksheet to track their own attendance, recognizing good attendance and most improved attendance in posters in common areas, and entering students in raffles to win school "swag."

The awareness of the wide distribution of ages within grades raised through the data analysis and review work of the Data Governance Board brought additional nuance to considerations of learning loss in the post-COVID 19 period. During the return to in-person learning after the prolonged remote instruction periods of 2020-2021, there were grave concerns about learning loss nationally and locally. Cognizant of the prior analysis of pre-pandemic retention patterns, the Camden Promise Neighborhood staff were especially attuned to the implications for grade retention. If students who had already been held back continued to be retained due to pandemic-related learning loss, their risk of being socially and developmentally misaligned with classmates increased and put them at a much higher risk of dropping out as well as of disruptive behaviors. To mitigate this, Camden Promise Neighborhood devoted additional resources to connecting students to district summer school programming. Students at risk of retention were connected to transportation to access summer programming, they received regular reminders about attending summer school, and staff met with them regularly, adding home visits to emphasize the importance of attending school to ensure progression to the next grade. During the fall 2021 semester, staff identified specific students at risk of retention for the 2021-2022 school year and helped families understand the risks associated with retention, coaching them to advocate for their students.

²⁷ See <u>Resources and Further Reading</u>.



Alignment with Actionable Evidence Principles

Principle	In This Case
Centers on Community Needs and Voices Addresses the context, perspectives, priorities and assets of students and families, along with the challenges they face	 Parent and student needs lie at the heart of the Camden Promise Neighborhood initiative. The initial proposal establishing the Camden Promise Neighborhood framework was informed by a community needs assessment, and by in-depth and long-standing discussions among stakeholders and partners, including community residents. Parent and student voices are represented via a Community Advisory Board, community engagement events, staff who are Camden residents and parents, and direct service staff who work closely with parents and students. School and community surveys provide additional input.
Prioritizes Practitioner Learning and Decision-making Answers questions that are highly relevant to policy and practice, and that help practitioners prioritize decisions in service of students and families	 Program leadership and direct service staff are directly engaged in interpreting and understanding data and findings. Questions that guide additional analysis are co-developed with practitioners. Root cause and factor analysis exercises encourage a focus on potential program refinements and system-level interventions that are within the control of practitioners and policymakers.
Enables Timely Improvements Allows practitioners to make evidence-informed decisions in a timely manner	 Using data that is updated continuously and consistently allows for review and reflection within as well as across school years. Establishing a standardized data pipeline and processing structure allows new data to be incorporated quickly. Regular meetings such as those of the Data Governance Board allow for timely collective review and discussion.
Credible and Transparent Uses high-quality data and analysis, aligning methods with practitioner questions, timeline and context	 A key step in this work was establishing access to data via data sharing agreements. Significant attention was given to developing clear understandings of data definitions and data collection practices, ensuring attention to data quality.



Responsive to Operational Context of Practitioners Reflects the context in which practitioners operate, including organizational settings, relationships and resources, and political and policy environment	 The deep and long-running partnership among all stakeholders involved in Camden Promise Neighborhood contributed to a collective understanding of contextual factors. Shared outcomes (GPRAs) established by the funder provided an impact framework that motivated partners.
Accessible and User-Centered Clearly communicates research design, analysis, and findings to facilitate practitioner understanding and use	 Camden Promise Neighborhood research and evaluation partners maintained awareness of, and responded to, practitioners' perceptions of the data and language used to understand and interpret data, often substituting terms such as "information" for "data." Research and evaluation partners created opportunities for school partners and other practitioners to claim data and use their specific lenses to interpret them.
Builds Practitioner Capacity for R&D <i>Provides practitioners with data,</i> <i>products, tools and trainings to own and</i> <i>advance their evidence agenda</i>	 Promise Neighborhood funding allowed for the launch of a collaborative team with significant time allotted to developing and shaping conversations around data. The collective impact partnership provided several forums in which school partners and social supports/wraparound service providers could discuss data together. These joint data reviews and root cause analysis exercises fostered connections across spheres, breaking down traditional service silos.
Attends to Systemic and Structural Conditions Considers systems, policies, practices, cultural norms, and community conditions that drive inequity, including those related to poverty and racism	 Analysis that disaggregates data based on race, ethnicity, language, gender, and age seeks to identify disparities. Benchmarking against larger, more affluent geographies such as the state highlights contrasts that may not be visible within local data sets in a community that is 95% African-American and Latinx and where 35% of families live below the poverty level.

Reflections and Conclusion

Engaging with data through the Camden Promise Neighborhood framework has illustrated the opportunities and challenges of developing a culture of actionable evidence within a collective impact initiative.

Structure and Capacity

Gathering the right stakeholders and resources to more completely understand what data is available, how it can be effectively used, and what action steps are possible was critical to the success of the initiative. Recognizing the social and structural context of the school district and other partners in Camden was also critical; as an under-resourced school district under



state control, district staff had limited time and resources for data work beyond meeting compliance requirements. With the establishment of the Camden Promise Neighborhood, additional resources became available in the form of personnel with the skills to design, analyze, and facilitate the interpretation of data, as well as technical resources to process and manage large-scale data sets. Understanding large, complex data sets requires dedicated resources and attention to systematically validate data, ensure consistency, identify patterns, and structure meaningful interpretations. The Promise Neighborhood structure provided by the U.S. Department of Education also prompted stakeholders to move beyond the data required by the state for compliance by establishing broader population-level indicators (the previously referenced GPRA indicators), which were supplemented with relevant local metrics.

Making Data Approachable

The resources available through Camden Promise Neighborhood provided important benefits and incentives for stakeholder participation, but timeliness and relevance were vital to ensure credibility with and buy-in from practitioners. In many fields, and perhaps particularly in the fields of education and associated wraparound services, practitioners often view themselves as reacting to crises or emergent situations – as being embedded in "doing" and, therefore, separated from the activities of research or reflection and analysis. This is compounded by a common practitioner view that data work is in opposition to program work, sometimes expressed as "data versus people." The prevalence of these views meant that it was important for the Camden Promise Neighborhood Initiative staff to meet stakeholders on their terms and work diligently to shift perspective. This required not only listening and observing as traditional academic researchers do, but also demonstrating a willingness to code switch from the language of data, research, and analysis to more accessible and less intimidating terminology. For example, when presenting data, we always consider whether the audience might retreat in the face of words like "data" or "analysis" and, if so, substitute words such as "information" or "learning."

Early analysis that highlighted district-wide absences connected to the Super Bowl was used to counter perceptions of data as intimidating and difficult to grasp. While that finding did not have wide everyday utility, it allowed stakeholders to engage with a data use case that was not punitive. It facilitated a conversation that was gently humorous, disarming the data and creating a space where stakeholders could develop their confidence in understanding data. It also served as a reminder that community-wide events had implications for student attendance and, therefore, should be accounted for- a finding that could apply to celebrations as much as to traumatic events such as gun violence. This example was intended to provide a gentle on-ramp into engaging with data.



Understanding What Data Mean in Practice

This work made clear that formal definitions may not reflect how a variable is understood by staff in the field or the practices used to collect the data. Taking the data at face value may produce flawed interpretations in which neither causes nor outcomes are well enough understood to identify an effective intervention. We learned that the practitioner input and lens in making meaning of the data was critical in fully understanding what the data was telling us.

For example, while student attendance may seem like a binary variable– the student was present or not – recorded lateness (also known as tardies) can affect absenteeism data. This became apparent when students who were progressing through the school district's absence disciplinary process²⁸ were not always identified in the Camden Promise Neighborhood analysis. At the district, three tardies were counted as an absence; however, front office procedures for recording tardies were inconsistent. Questions were raised around validity and the meaning of tardies – for example, what would be learned from the data by converting tardies to absences? Conversely, what could be understood if tardies and absences were handled separately?

These questions prompted the Camden Promise Neighborhood research and evaluation team to further investigate tardies, and we discovered that most tardies fell into the first 45 minutes of the school day, largely occurring during the breakfast period, prior to the start of instructional time. This finding led to excluding tardies from Camden Promise Neighborhood calculations because stakeholders agreed that attendance should reflect the opportunity to receive instruction, and missing 15 to 30 minutes of instruction at the start of the day was not meaningfully equivalent to an absence because the student was receiving instruction for at least 90% of the day.

Responding to Practitioner Time Horizons

Producing timely data, which is important for practitioners, often requires navigating gaps in data. As the aphorism suggests, this work requires that we not allow the perfect to become the enemy of the good. Tactics for navigating data gaps can lead to a sense of imprecision for researchers. Yet they are often necessary to gain practitioner attention, buy-in, and willingness to adjust based on the analysis. The tension between robust and systematic analyses and translating research findings into action revolves around the very different time horizons within which practitioners operate. The Camden Promise Neighborhood research and evaluation team was intended to operate as an applied research team, identifying practical and timely insights for practitioners. As such, ongoing engagement with and input

²⁸ For traditional public schools in the district, three absences triggers a letter to parents, and at ten absences, the school may bring parents to truancy court.



from practitioners through the Data Governance Board, staff, and stakeholder convenings were central to setting shorter time horizons for analysis.

Nurturing Continued Learning from Data and Looking Ahead

Perhaps the most durable benefits the Camden Promise Neighborhood brought to school partners were analysis of existing data sets in ways that were not part of the district or school's current reporting structures (or that school partners undertook at a different frequency) and help processing data in ways that could drive action to improve outcomes for students. For example, chronic absenteeism is reported to the state annually and reviewed for individual students as part of the truancy process. It is not traditionally examined at the school population level or for other subgroups (grade, etc.) during the school year, when intervention is still possible. In offering a fresh lens through which to look at existing data, the project displayed sensitivity to school stakeholders' constraints – no new burden of data collection was introduced – and acknowledged that stakeholders and partners were the experts in their own domains.

The lessons learned from this process yielded a deeper understanding of how widely students struggled to attend school and prompted structured problem-solving discussions around barriers to school attendance. Camden Promise Neighborhood interventions have focused on working with individual students and families to address transportation barriers and connect to mental and social support services. In addition, this work has opened the conversation to identifying system-level enhancements such as improved communication to parents and adopting tools from Attendance Works and other sources.

In sum, the goals of this effort have been to foster more effective engagement with data through:

- Building habits of reviewing data through a lens of curiosity and learning rather than a lens of reporting and accountability. In fostering a shift from a compliance mindset to a learning mindset, we have sought to find a middle ground between state reports that focus on counts and robust research investigations that address complex questions over longer time horizons.
- Bringing attention to performance measures, which by definition reflect short- and medium-term horizons that match the sense of urgency that motivates practitioners. Doing so requires a recognition that the data and accompanying analysis and reflections are imperfect and iterative and are an attempt to identify early trends that can inform interventions and action.
- Developing the infrastructure needed to manage (securely accept, store, and clean) and the processes to define, link, transform and analyze data, recognizing the processes themselves as the infrastructure of developing data competency.



• Fostering structures to review data regularly and identify implications as a step toward integrating data as part of an actionable evidence toolkit.

The COVID-19 public health emergency upended many of the planned activities and adjustments that emerged from our deep engagement with attendance data. The schools participating in the Camden Promise Neighborhood initiative were closed to in-person instruction from March 2020 to April 2021, when some grades began to return in a hybrid format. During remote instruction, for reasons that are echoed in many communities – limited technology and internet access, inadequate home spaces, and so on – measures of attendance and instruction have shifted. All schools in New Jersey resumed in-person instruction at the start of the 2021-2022 school year. Using the structures and habits that we developed under the umbrella of the Camden Promise Neighborhood, we intend to continue refining interventions based on the lessons learned from previous years of attendance analysis.



Resources and Further Reading

About Camden Promise Neighborhood

• The Camden Promise Neighborhood website

About Promise Neighborhoods

- U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods website
- <u>The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink</u>
- Urban Institute | Promise Neighborhoods Project
- <u>Center for the Study of Social Policy Promise Neighborhoods resource page</u>
- Harlem Children's Zone

Results and Learning Frameworks

- Promise Neighborhoods Results Framework
- Results-based accountability resources shared by Clear Impact
 - o <u>The Results-Based Accountability Guide</u> (Clear Impact)
 - o <u>Results Playbook: A Bridge from Programmatic to Results Work</u> (Raj Chawla)
 - <u>A Developmental Pathway for Achieving Promise Neighborhoods Results</u> (PolicyLink)
 - o <u>Theory of Aligned Contributions: An Emerging Theory of Change Primer</u> (Jolie Bain Pillsbury)
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Results Count"
- brown, adrienne maree. (2017). Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- Darling, M., Guber, H., Smith, J., & Stiles, J. (2016). Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation. *The Foundation Review*, 8(1). <u>https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1284</u>.

Attendance

- <u>Attendance Works</u>
- For a summary of the discussion on the importance of identifying and addressing chronic absenteeism, see Jordan, P. W. (2017, May 12). <u>How Did Chronic Absenteeism</u> <u>Become a Thing?</u> *Education Next*
- For underlying analysis, see Chang, H. N., & Romero, M. (2008). Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades (p. 32). National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP).



About the Author

Candice Dias, PhD, led research and evaluation for Camden Promise Neighborhood at Center for Family Services in Camden, NJ. As Associate Vice President for Evaluation and Learning, her work has focused on creating meaningful analyses and feedback loops to drive sustainable systems and policy change. She previously provided strategic analytical and data supports at the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and has broad experience in applied research and evaluation projects within human services and education. She is particularly interested in making data and insights accessible and actionable for programmatic and policy stakeholders.

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Case Keywords

K-12 | urban | low-income | program improvement | administrative data | nonprofit service provider | school district | school | attendance





Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Indicators for Promise Neighborhoods

These 15 GPRAs are the outcomes that guide the Camden Promise Neighborhood. They are focused on particular populations as shown in the "Target Population" column, and in specific age groups. These age groups/age categories receive particular attention because there is substantial evidence that suggests that making interventions at these ages can have a lasting impact. Further, US DOE Promise Neighborhoods across the country use these same measures to assess their progress towards providing cradle to college and career supports to their communities.

GPRA measure	Target Population	Age/Grade Category	Data Source
<i>GPRA</i> 1. Children, birth to kindergarten entry, who have a place where they usually go (other than an emergency room) when they are sick or in need of advice about their health.	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Ages 0–5	Neighborhood survey
<i>GPRA</i> 2: Three-year-olds and children in kindergarten who demonstrate at the beginning of the program or school year age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning as determined using developmentally appropriate early learning measures.	Children participating in targeted early learning program(s)	Ages 3 and in kindergarten	Administrative data, school
<i>GPRA</i> 3. Children, from birth to kindergarten entry, participating in center-based or formal home-based early learning settings or programs, which may include Early Head Start, Head Start, child care, or publicly-funded preschool.	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Ages 0–5	Neighborhood survey
GPRA 4. Students at or above grade level according to State mathematics and English language arts assessments in at least the grades required by the ESEA (3rd through 8th and once in high school).	Children attending target schools	3rd through 8th and once in high school	Administrative data, school
GPRA 5. Attendance rate of students in 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade as defined by average daily attendance.	Children attending target schools	6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th	Administrative data, school
GPRA 6. Graduation rate (by cohort, as defined by NJ DOE).	Children attending target schools	High school	Administrative data, school
 GPRA 7. Promise Neighborhood students who a) enroll in a two-year or four-year college or university after graduation, b) matriculate to an institution of higher education and place into college-level mathematics and English without need for remediation c) graduate from a two-year or four-year college or university or vocational certification completion d) earn industry-recognized certificates or credentials. 	7a-7d: Graduates from target Promise Neighborhood high schools	Graduates from target schools	7a and 7c: Administra tive data 7b and 7d: Case management system

GPRA measure	Target Population	Age/Grade Category	Data Source
<i>GPRA</i> 8-9. Children who participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily; and consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily.	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students	School climate survey
GPRA 10. Students who feel safe at school and traveling to and from school, as measured by a school climate needs assessment.	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students	School climate survey
<i>GPRA</i> 11. Student mobility rate (as defined in the guidance document).	Children attending target schools	Elementary, middle, and high school students	Administrative data, school
<i>GPRA</i> 12. For children birth to kindergarten entry, parents or family members who report that they read to their children three or more times a week.	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Ages 0–5	Neighborhood survey
<i>GPRA</i> 13. For children in the kindergarten through 8th grades, parents or family members who report encouraging their child to read books outside of school.	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Kindergarten through 8 th graders	Neighborhood survey
<i>GPRA</i> 14. For children in the 9th to 12th grades, parents or family members who report talking with their child about the importance of college and career.	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	9 th through 12 th graders	Neighborhood survey
<i>GPRA</i> 15. Students who have school and home access (and percent of the day they have access) to broadband internet and a connected computing device.	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students	School climate survey