

United Way of Salt Lake Promise Partnership Salt Lake County, UT



United Way of Salt Lake, working within three, soon to be four, districts in the Salt Lake area, has helped increase student achievement and graduation rates. At one of United Way’s partner schools, Granite Park Junior High, the percentage of students completing 9th grade on track to graduate has more than doubled in just two years. Their efforts also have increased preschool opportunities in their poorest neighborhoods. Seeing this works as a collective impact strategy, United Way has put more than \$21.5 million toward the initiative since 2012 and has set a goal of having 28 community schools in the region by 2017.

Demographics

Number of Community Schools: 11
 Number of Students in Community Schools: 10,184
 Race/Ethnicity

- African American: 4.87%
- Hispanic: 36.39%
- Caucasian: 47.03%
- Native American: 2.16 %
- Other: 9.55%

ELL Students: 27.48%
 Special Education: 12.02%
 Free/Reduced Lunch: 51.84%
 Mobility Rate: 26.52%

Results

- 1,000 additional low-income students attend high-quality pre-school
- 3rd grade reading proficiency scores rose 15.5% from 2013-2014
- Chronic absence decreased from 21% to 14% from 2013-2014
- A study found that parents at community schools are more engaged than their peers at non community schools
- More than 900 students participated in summer programs, of those 64% improved in math and 49% improved in reading proficiency
- 82% of children have health insurance compared with 75% in 2012

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United Way of Salt Lake

Bridging Strategies to Promote to Grow Salt Lake's Collective Impact Strategy

After deciding not to hold any more employee-giving campaigns in his district, Martin Bates, superintendent of the Granite School District in Utah, didn't have much contact with the United Way of Salt Lake.

But then they wanted to talk to him about the concept of Collective Impact. He was suspicious, he says, but he kept listening.

Now, several years later, 11 schools in his district are community schools working in partnership with government and community agencies to meet the needs of students and families, and Bates is committed to seeing more schools become community schools as funds become available.

"It's markedly clear when you compare them with other schools," he says about the student achievement gains in community schools. "You can see it and you can measure it."

The Promise Partnership

The Granite School District is one of three—soon to be four—districts that are part of United Way of Salt Lake's Promise Partnership Community School Initiative with the community school as the vehicle, the initiative was first inspired and supported by the community school leadership of Children's Aid Society in New York City. United Way of Salt Lake then organized its community schools within specific communities, using as a model the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhood Initiative. The partnership is also part of StriveTogether, a network of communities across the country taking a collective impact approach to providing children the support they need to succeed from birth through college and career.

United Way of Salt Lake adopted the Collective Impact approach as a way to create far-reaching, systemic change that would both support and be bolstered by the work on the ground at the community schools. "We weren't achieving the scale of change that we were hoping," says Bill Crim, the senior vice president for collective impact and public policy at United Way of Salt Lake. StriveTogether, provided an important example of what he calls a "backbone structure" built around data sharing and the alignment of services and systems. The cradle-to-career framework also meant that United Way would refocus its efforts on developing a pipeline of services in specific communities—combining the strengths of the community school strategy with a place-based initiative,

explains Scott McLeod, the senior director of community school partnerships at United Way.

United Way employs the school directors, which is the term used for a community school or resource coordinator. The directors are considered key members of the leadership teams in the schools where they work. In addition to meeting with partners at their schools once a month, the directors meet as a group every other week and also have pipeline meetings to examine data on students transitioning from one school to another and to focus on how services can continue for students as they move. One of the best examples of that continuity is the mobile health clinic that Utah Partners for Health brings to schools participating in the Promise Partnership. The medical staff will provide check-ups, women’s health exams and serve as primary health care providers for uninsured and under-insured families in the schools.

A Promise Partnership Regional Council, which was formed in 2014, includes education, business, government and nonprofit leaders, guides the initiative and focuses on keeping the work aligned. The structure of the group, Crim says, creates “healthy pressure” to maintain a commitment to the goals of the partnership.

Collaborative Action Networks have also been formed to help organize the work and bring partners together around specific goals. Convening around a desired result—such as improving 3rd grade reading scores or increasing the percentage of high school students who are college ready—is different, McLeod says, than convening around a program or a funding stream and has a way of bringing together providers who otherwise never would have worked together.

United Way’s commitment to community schools and cradle-to-career Collective Impact has also had a dramatic impact on how it does business. Instead of operating as a traditional grant-making organization, it directs resources toward efforts that are aligned with the goals of the partnership. Since 2012, United Way has put more than \$21.5 million toward the initiative and has set a goal of having 28 community schools by 2017.

“All of the investment we do comes from the lens of this is what we’ve agreed to do,” McLeod says, adding that any program that is funded has been thoroughly vetted before it reaches the board of directors.

Making Progress in Communities

Currently the Promise Partnership’s cradle-to-career pipelines are the most developed in the city of South Salt Lake and in Kearns, where elementary schools feed into a junior high and then a high school. At Kearns Junior High, the community school work began with a desire to give students more constructive ways to spend their time after school.

“Before, we could never get the kids to stay involved after school. By aligning our efforts, doing some more targeted services and involving them in more positive things, now we can’t get the kids to go home,” says Principal Kandace Barber.

With students more engaged, the focus then turned to providing support for parents in English and computer skills so they could complete their own education. A parent liaison works in the morning classes to coach parents on how to help their children with schoolwork, and child care is provided to make it easier for the parents to participate. An interpreter was also employed to help Barber communicate with Spanish-speaking parents.

United Way of Salt Lake brought AmeriCorps volunteers into the school to give students more individual support in reading and math, and Latinos in Action, a leadership development organization is partnering with the school to teach students how to run a peer-tutoring program at one of the feeder elementary schools. Barber mentions how the experience of helping a younger child has had a positive effect on one boy who was “heavily gang involved.” “Those little kids look up to him. It turned things around and he started to get good grades,” she says.

The staff of the mobile clinic also gives eye exams, and when a screening shows that a child has a vision problem, they are quickly referred to an eye doctor. At Kearns Junior last year alone, 55 children received glasses.

“I’m so excited to have this opportunity,” Barber says about working at a community school with “people who are willing to target services to make sure kids are successful.” Because of those partnerships, she says, her school’s performance data is even higher than where the district predicts the students would be scoring, based on demographics.

Schools in South Salt Lake are posting similar results. Three of South Salt Lake’s four schools received better school grades (which are based on a point system that measures growth and proficiency in math, language arts, and science) in 2014 than in 2013. Also in 2014, English Language Learners in that community’s Elementary Schools outperformed English Language Learners across the District on the 2014 end-of-year SAGE assessment. Since 2012, at Granite Park Junior High, the percentage of students completing 9th grade on track to graduate has more than doubled. At that same school, since 2012 until the most recent year for which comparable data is available, the percentage of Granite Park students proficient in math doubled (according to the CRT, Utah’s now retired state-mandated test).

From Bates’ perspective—in addition to the gains in academic scores—one of the greatest benefits of participating in the partnership is having the school directors “streamline” the process of working with community partners. For example, Utah’s three different refugee organizations were often competing with each other for grants

and to work with the schools. United Way, he says is able to create ways for everyone to work together and avoid turf battles.

“We’re busy people,” Bates says. “It’s been really helpful to have United Way Community School Directors be the go-between to broker these conversations.”

The partnership has also created opportunities for families, he says, that would not have been available otherwise, such as adult literacy programs or computer classes offered by the Department of Workforce Services. “It’s amazing what they were doing and no one knew,” Bates says. “Those classes are now occurring in our schools.”

An Investment in Young Children

The Promise Partnership is also involved in a cutting-edge approach to creating preschool opportunities for children in its target neighborhoods with the goal of reducing the chances that children from low-income families will be referred to special education. Known as a social impact bond, private investors Goldman Sachs and J.B. Pritzker have pledged \$7 million to expand high quality preschool for low-income three and four year olds in Granite and Park City districts. In the first two years of the five year project, this “pay for success” model has served 1,350 children and will ultimately reach 3,500.

Under the model, a loan is given to an intermediary organization, United Way, which oversees the program. Children’s progress is tracked by administering the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the loan will be paid back from savings that are accrued by children avoiding expensive special education services. In the Utah project, repayment for the first year’s loan is made by United Way of Salt Lake and Salt Lake County. With passage of state legislation in 2014, all future repayments will be made by the State of Utah. Goldman Sachs also supported the creation of materials on the preschool program in seven languages in order to target the community’s growing refugee population. The outreach led to the enrollment of 57 refugee children last year.

“Here is a program that could break the cycle of poverty and welfare dependency,” Richard Snelgrove, the chairman of the Salt Lake County Council and a Republican, said in a *Salt Lake Tribune* story. “[That] means a smaller government footprint in the social services area. I can get behind that.”

As a cradle-to-career initiative, however, the goal of the partnership is to improve environments and outcomes for children long before they enter preschool. One key to that process is gathering information on the development of young children. Chris Ellis, United Way’s partnership director for early learning outcomes, said they tried holding family-oriented events to get parents to complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), a universal developmental screening tool, but those efforts were not effective. Now United Way is working with the Utah Department of Health and Help Me Grow, a

resource and referral agency, to gain access to a statewide ASQ database. The purpose of the collaboration is to bring providers into the discussion about children's needs and possible interventions.

"We're really interested in knowing what providers are doing once they see this data," Ellis says, adding that the goal is for children to "enter pre-K on track," not just kindergarten.

While Ellis hopes to see more connections between Promise Partnership schools and families with newborns and toddlers, one school is already demonstrating how to link with providers who serve families with younger children. Guadalupe School, a charter in Salt Lake City, has an in-home educator program to help new parents learn about child development and positive parenting skills. An early literacy-focused Toddler Beginnings program is also available for older children to help introduce them to a group setting.

Importance of Data Sharing

In addition to collecting data on young children's development, strict data-sharing agreements between the school districts and different community partners are also a significant component of making the Promise Partnership work. While data allow the partners to see whether they are having a positive impact, Bates says he knew his staff would not be able to fulfill all of the requests for data. The solution was for United Way to place a full-time staff person in the Granite district's information technology department who works specifically on data requests from community school partners.

Analyzing and presenting data to teachers is also a significant part of the school directors' jobs, says Lindsey Edwards, the director of community school partnerships at United Way and the first school director hired in Granite. "Directors help pull data to create visuals for teachers," she says. "They are helping facilitate data-driven conversations."

In fact, Crim says, "Our community school directors can often be as helpful to supporting the core instructional practices of the school as they are to removing the barriers of poverty."

Moving Forward

The Promise Partnership also includes schools in the Davis and Park City districts, and will soon include the Canyons School District. That district currently hires its own school directors, and will continue to do so; but, by becoming part of the Promise Partnership, it will gain access to United Way's resources, volunteers, networks of providers and all of the learning that is already taking place. Crim expects that the Canyon schools will gain from the preschool work that is occurring in the other districts, and in turn Davis,

Park City and Granite will benefit by learning about Canyon’s well-integrated partnerships with mental health providers.

As the partnership grows and more pipelines are completed, United Way, Crim says, will maintain what he calls an “obsessive” emphasis on results. That’s why professional development for teachers is one area where the partnership is focusing its spending, such as paying for 36 teachers in three schools to receive training in reading strategies that can be effective with English language learners. The training will be ongoing for additional teachers as well.

“It is critical,” McLeod says, “that we support principals in getting teachers what they need.”