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A series of big ideas and policy concepts designed to foster conversation and debate within the policy community.

Assessing the Harlem Children's Zone

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Abstract

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is seeking to transform central Harlem by providing a unique set of educational and support services to the children and families who live there. The philosophy is to create a positive "tipping point" to change the culture in which generations of students grow up, helping an entire community to lift itself out of poverty, high unemployment, and low educational attainment. While the available data indicate that the HCZ has improved the educational outcomes of participating students, some question the magnitude of its successes and the high cost of its programs. In any case, attempts to replicate the HCZ model in other cities should proceed cautiously, recognizing that some aspects of the HCZ may not be replicable outside of Harlem.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at **http://report.heritage.org/cpi_dp08**

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The Harlem Children's Zone® (HCZ or the Zone), an educational and social service organization, is seeking to transform central Harlem by increasing educational opportunities for students and working to strengthen families. The HCZ has attracted wide interest as a pioneering educational and social welfare organization in New York City because it has brought a unique and interesting approach to helping an entire community lift itself out of poverty, high unemployment, and low educational attainment.

Yet what is the essence of the HCZ approach? What does the research show about its performance and its lessons for creating opportunity and upward economic mobility in poor neighborhoods?

The Harlem Children's Zone

The Children's Zone began in the 1970s as Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families; it changed its name to the Harlem Children's Zone in 2002. Rheedlen began as a truancy-prevention program in Harlem. In the late 1990s, it expanded its mission to include providing additional education and support services to children and families while focusing on a 24-block area that it termed the Children's Zone.

The philosophy behind the Zone is to create a positive "tipping point" in the community by providing community-wide support services in a concentrated area in Harlem. This would create a critical mass of people involved in the program "so that children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults."[1] Since

The Harlem Children's Zone has attracted bipartisan interest as a combination of educational and support services that appears to produce remarkable educational results. How does it do that? How successful is it? And can the model and its results be "scaled up" and replicated? To explore these questions, the Center for Policy Innovation asked Danielle Hanson to take a close look at the Harlem Children's Zone.

its inception, the Children's Zone has expanded to include almost 100 blocks in the heart of Harlem, serving more than 10,000 children and 13,000 adults.[2]

The organization is run by an executive board and headed by Geoffrey Canada, a charismatic native of the Bronx. Canada's vision is to provide the support services to children in Harlem that will give them the educational and social capital to succeed in school, and then in college and life after college, while reinforcing the surrounding community to change the culture in which generations of students grow up. To do this, Canada envisioned creating a continuum of services to support students at every point in their development. Services would begin before children entered school to ensure that they had the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in school.

The Pipeline

With this vision in mind, Harlem Children's Zone services are structured to fit into a "pipeline" that provides continuous support and reinforcement from a child's birth until graduation from college, with an underlying system of community services supporting the educational pipeline.

Baby College. The pipeline begins with Baby College®, a nine-week parenting class for expecting parents and parents of children up to age three.[3] This class gives parents access to the latest research on child development, early education, healthy living, and discipline strategies.

Baby College seeks to equip parents with the skills and knowledge to give their children the tools they need to start school ready to learn. The program has already had great success in increasing the amount of brain-stimulating activities enjoyed by parent–child dyads, with 81 percent of participating parents from 2001 through 2011 reporting reading to their children five or more times a week at the end of the Baby College cycle.[4]

The Path to Promise Academies. At this point in the pipeline, the Zone's support tracks split between those children who gain admission to the charter school system and those who do not. At age three, children can enter the lottery for one of the Promise Academies, the charter schools established by the Harlem Children's Zone.

If admitted to a Promise Academy, the child enters the ***Three-Year-Old Journey*** program, the next stage of the pipeline. This weekly class for parents covers many of the same topics as Baby College. The Three-Year-Old Journey places extra emphasis on language development and gives parents tips on how to provide their children with opportunities to expand their vocabulary.[5] Engaging with the children on a weekly basis allows the staff to begin to identify any developmental delays and to provide English-language instruction to hundreds of children, including some who have no or limited exposure to the language at home.

Following the Three-Year-Old Journey is ***Get Ready for Pre-K***, a six-week summer session that prepares students for Harlem Gems®, the Zone's preschool program. The program mimics the preschool schedule to help prepare students for the change.[6]

IN THE 10 YEARS FROM 2002 TO 2011, 97.3 PERCENT OF THE FOUR-YEAR-OLDS AT HARLEM GEMS SCORED AVERAGE, ADVANCED, OR VERY ADVANCED ON THE SCALE.

Harlem Gems is an academically intensive, all-day (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) program that prepares students for kindergarten and grade school. It emphasizes language immersion, with every student receiving lessons in English, Spanish, and French.[7]

The Harlem Gems program has proved to be very effective in preparing students for elementary school. Independent psychologists administer the Bracken Basic Concept Scale—Revised, a school-readiness subscale, to students every year. In the 10 years from 2002 to 2011, 97.3 percent of the four-year-olds at Harlem Gems scored average, advanced, or very advanced on the scale, exceeding the

1. Harlem Children's Zone, "The HCZ Project," http://hcz.org/about-us/the-hcz-project (accessed August 25, 2012).
2. Harlem Children's Zone, "Our Principles—HCZ's Five Principles of Success," https://hczcareers.silkroad.com/hczext/Our_Values.html (accessed January 24, 2013).
3. Harlem Children's Zone, "A Look Inside," Summer/Fall 2002, p. 2, http://www.hcz.org/images/stories/pdfs/ali_summerfall2002.pdf (accessed April 11, 2012).
4. Betina Jean-Louis, Director of Evaluation, Harlem Children's Zone, e-mail interview with author, August 17, 2012.
5. Harlem Children's Zone, "Early Childhood," http://www.hcz.org/programs/early-childhood (accessed April 11, 2012).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

84.1 percent expected to do so based on test norms.[8]

The Promise Academies. Although not initially part of the Harlem Children's Zone's vision, the Promise Academies have become a focal point for the program. The Zone currently runs two charter schools, Promise Academy I and Promise Academy II. Both schools include a grade school and a middle school. Promise Academy I extends to high school, and starting in September 2013, so will Promise Academy II.

Several features of the academies make them unique:

- They have longer days and a longer school year than traditional public schools.
- They provide healthy meals and medical and dental care.[9]
- Remedial and test-prep classes are held in the morning before school starts or on Saturday.[10]
- They offer extensive after-school programs to their students.

Non-Academy Students. For students who are not attending the Promise Academies, HCZ offers free school-day, after-school, and summer programming in the traditional public schools located in the Zone, as well as other supports.

The ***Fifth Grade Institute*** is an after-school program that helps public school students in the fifth grade prepare for the often difficult transition to middle school. Program offerings include a strong focus on helping participating fifth graders apply to successful charter and traditional public middle schools rather than simply attending the local school. During the past year, all fifth graders who attended schools terminating in the fifth grade filled out multiple applications to better-performing middle schools.

A Cut Above, another after-school program, serves middle school students by providing "academic help and leadership development, as well as high school and college preparation."[11]

Additionally, the Zone provides a program known as ***Academic Case Management*** in partnership with the public school system. HCZ assigns a staff person to each student in fifth grade through 12th grade who joins the program. The staff person works with the public school staff to create an individualized academic plan and provide comprehensive assistance, when needed, to the student in collaboration with teachers and parents.[12]

Most programs are open to all students in the Zone area, regardless of where they attend school. TRUCE (The Renaissance University for Community Education) programs offer students educational opportunities that they might not have otherwise. The ***TRUCE Fitness and Nutrition Center***, which is geared toward late elementary and middle-school students, offers free karate, fitness, and dance classes as well as opportunities to learn about health and nutrition.[13] The ***TRUCE Media, Employment and Technology Center*** and ***Learn to Earn*** are available to all high school students and provide them with the opportunity to grow in "media literacy and artistic ability."[14]

Additionally, the Zone has developed gender-specific clubs, ***Boys to Men*** and ***Girl Power***, to offer students an opportunity to give back to their communities, participate in field trips, and discuss issues relevant to their lives.[15]

College Preparation. Several programs are geared specifically to high school students to prepare them for college and a career. Two such programs, the ***Employment and Technology Center*** and ***Learn to Earn***, teach important job and life skills and help to connect participants with jobs.

Additionally, the ***College Preparatory Program***'s goal is to increase college awareness, preparation, and attendance among high school students in Harlem. The year-round program provides students with academic assistance and college information.[16] In fiscal year 2011,

8. Jean-Louis, e-mail interview.
9. Harlem Children's Zone, "Middle School," http://www.hcz.org/programs/middle-school (accessed April 11, 2012).
10. Paul Tough, *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* (New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), p. 137.
11. Harlem Children's Zone, "Middle School."
12. Harlem Children's Zone, "High School," http://www.hcz.org/programs/high-school (accessed April 11, 2012).
13. Harlem Children's Zone, "Middle School."
14. Harlem Children's Zone, "High School."
15. Harlem Children's Zone, "Middle School."
16. Ibid.

95 percent of seniors in HCZ after-school programs were accepted into further education.[17]

The ***College Success Office*** is the Zone's support program for students in college or looking to attend a post-secondary institution. The Office helps students gain admission to college and provides support for them once they are there. It also helps to connect students with internships during the summer or on breaks. Finally, the College Success Office recruits faculty and other students to act as mentors to HCZ students while at college.[18] In addition to being role models, the mentors offer on-site, one-on-one support to students.

Community Programs. While academics are the focus of its mission, the Harlem Children's Zone also provides several community programs. They help to organize tenant and block associations, provide financial and legal advice, and organize educational outreach programs to address common issues in Harlem, such as asthma and obesity. The Zone has programs to strengthen and support families, including family counseling and referrals to alcohol and drug abuse programs. It also retains its original truancy-prevention program, although the program has expanded to include workshops on parenting, a support group for teenagers, and information on domestic violence.[19]

What Has the Harlem Children's Zone Achieved?

The Harlem Children's Zone has been credited with improving educational outcomes for students as well as providing needed support and services for the central Harlem community. Because of their apparent success, there have been calls to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone in other cities.

Nevertheless, there is much debate about what HCZ has actually accomplished. The Zone is still relatively new, established only in 1997, so drawing firm conclusions from the available data is difficult. Some programs have simply not operated long enough for their lasting impact on student achievement or the community as a whole to be evaluated adequately, and some are not easily evaluated due to their novel structures.

The Available Data. Most of the collected data for external reviews have been on the students who attend the Promise Academies, the two HCZ charter schools. The academies provide researchers with ample quantitative data at regular intervals, making them easier to evaluate. Having established benchmarks for success also makes the school system the place to start when measuring the Zone's success.

Because the Zone holds lotteries for admittance to the charter schools, there is also a group of motivated students who were not selected but who share many characteristics with the students attending a Promise Academy. These students provide a control group that allows researchers to isolate whether the Promise Academies have affected the educational achievement of participating students and to investigate the possible causes.[20]

Although these quantitative data are convenient for measuring the success of the Harlem Children's Zone, they provide only a limited basis for evaluating the Zone's full impact. As stated on its website, the Zone "works to reweave the social fabric of Harlem."[21] Thus, to evaluate the Zone fully, analysts would need to measure the cumulative social impact of the organization on the Harlem community, not just the specific results of the Zone schools. While academic success is an important factor in rebuilding a community, it is just one piece in the overall puzzle, not the puzzle itself.

Moreover, the education services and social services are intertwined with their long-term impact on children and their families. As Canada stated, "If your mission is about all of the students in a community, then dealing with family crises, gangs, drugs, violence, and health all become part of your strategy to support development of the whole child, not just how they perform on standardized tests."[22]

17. Jean-Louis, e-mail interview.
18. Harlem Children's Zone, "College," http://www.hcz.org/programs/college (accessed April 11, 2012).
19. Harlem Children's Zone, "Family, Community, and Health," http://www.hcz.org/programs/family-community-health (accessed April 11, 2012).
20. Will Dobbie and Roland G. Fryer, "Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap? Evidence from a Bold Social Experiment in Harlem," Harvard University, April 2009, p. 10, http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/fryer/files/hcz%204.15.2009.pdf (accessed February 16, 2012).
21. Harlem Children's Zone, "The HCZ Project."
22. Geoffrey Canada, "The Harlem Children's Zone Response to the Brookings Institute's Report: 'The Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education,'" p. 1, http://www.hcz.org/images/stories/pdfs/Brookings%20Institute%20study%20response.pdf (accessed August 25, 2012).

The Dobbie–Fryer Study

The HCZ is quick to point to the apparent success of its schools and the HCZ's underlying philosophy. Although no class has graduated from the complete pipeline, starting in Baby College and graduating from the Promise Academies, the College Success Office has enrolled more than 900 students. The overwhelming majority of these students are in their first to third years of post-secondary schooling, with 36 graduates from two-year and four-year degree programs. Less than 10 percent of their students drop out of school—significantly lower than the national average of 43.6 percent.[23]

The first students who have gone though the entire pipeline will graduate from a Promise Academy in 2020. Moreover, 2012 marks the first year that a class that began in the HCZ middle school graduated from the Promise Academy High School.

Although these students entered the pipeline as sixth grade students, this graduating class has achieved considerable academic success. For example, to receive the Regents diploma in the State of New York, students must score a 65 or higher on the Regents exams in high school. Promise Academy I's entire 2012 graduating class scored 65 or higher—almost half scored 85 or higher—on the comprehensive English exam; 90 percent scored 65 or higher on the Geometry exam; and 96 percent scored 65 or higher on the Algebra 2 and Trigonometry exam.[24] In 2010, 92 percent scored a 65 or higher on the Integrated Algebra exam.[25]

These scores are on par or above those achieved by KIPP Star Academy, the charter school system often used by HCZ critics as a yardstick by which to measure academic success.[26] In addition, every senior was accepted into and is planning to attend a post-secondary school. If their scores correlate with success in college and life after college, these young students have bright futures, as do the current and future students of the Harlem Children's Zone.

IF THEIR SCORES CORRELATE WITH SUCCESS IN COLLEGE AND LIFE AFTER COLLEGE, THESE YOUNG STUDENTS HAVE BRIGHT FUTURES, AS DO THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STUDENTS OF THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE.

The Promise Academy I High School students continued to perform at a very high level in 2012. Indeed, in the New York City Progress Report for 2011–2012, the school placed in the 99th percentile of city high schools with the sixth-highest score in the city. This ranking reflects the school's 96 percent pass rate in English and 98 percent pass rate in Integrated Algebra in the New York Regents examination.[27] Promise Academy II did not do as well in the Progress Report, in part because the report emphasizes improvement over previous years.

While focusing on the HCZ schools necessarily limits the scope of assessment, there has been some careful analysis of the charter schools. In particular, Will Dobbie and Roland G. Fryer of Harvard conducted a study, published in 2009, that compared the educational achievement of students that attended the Promise Academy with the students in the control group.

At the time of the Harvard study, the Harlem Children's Zone conducted lotteries for admittance to both the elementary and middle schools. The lottery for the elementary school never had as long a waiting list as the lottery for the middle school.[28] The middle school's much longer waiting list meant that many motivated students were never admitted to the Promise Academy, and this cohort of students thus constituted a more accurate control group. Accordingly, Dobbie and Fryer put more emphasis on the study of the middle-school cohort.

Their study results were a glowing affirmation of the success of the Harlem Children's Zone. They concluded that the Promise Academy and additional support services had

23. Harlem Children's Zone, "A Look Inside," Spring 2008, p. 7, http://hcz.org/images/stories/pdfs/ali_college_success_office.pdf (accessed February 15, 2012).
24. There was no comprehensive mathematics exam in 2011.
25. New York State Department of Education, "The New York State School Report Card, Comprehensive Information Report 2010–11: Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy Charter School," March 17, 2012, p. 1, https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2010-11/CIR-2011-310500860864.pdf (accessed April 25, 2012). No class took the exam for integrated algebra in 2011.
26. New York State Department of Education, "The New York State School Report Card, Comprehensive Information Report 2010–11: KIPP Success Through Teamwork Achieve & Respon Col Prep Charter Sch," March 17, 2012, p. 1, https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2010-11/CIR-2011-310500860858.pdf (accessed April 25, 2012).
27. New York City Department of Education, "Progress Report 2011–12: Harlem Children's Zone/Promise Academy Charter School," http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2011-12/Progress_Report_2012_HS_M284.pdf (accessed November 29, 2012).
28. Dobbie and Fryer, "Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap?" p. 18.

effectively reversed "the black–white achievement gap in mathematics (HCZ students outperform the typical white student in New York City and the difference is statistically significant) and reduce[d] it in ELA [English Language Arts]."[29] In addition:

> In fourth and fifth grade, before they enter the middle school, math test scores for lottery winners, losers, and the typical black student in New York City are virtually identical, and roughly 0.75 standard deviations behind the typical white student. Lottery winners have a modest increase in sixth grade, followed by a more substantial increase in seventh grade and dramatic gains by their eighth-grade year.[30]

> In fourth and fifth grade, before they enter the middle school, ELA scores for lottery winners, losers, and the typical black student in NYC are not statistically different, and roughly 0.50 standard deviations behind the typical white student. Lottery winners and losers have very similar ELA scores from fourth through seventh grade. In eighth grade, Promise Academy students distance themselves from the control group. These results are statistically meaningful, but much less so than the math results.[31]

Although Dobbie and Fryer do not explicitly state specific reasons for their results, one possible reason for the significant increase in test scores is the amount of time students spend in school. As the authors note:

> Promise Academy children spend nearly twice as much time in school as the typical public-school student. Despite this, lottery winners are absent less than the control group in every grade: 2.230 days in sixth grade, 5.267 days in seventh grade, and 6.253 days in eighth grade.[32]

At the elementary school, Dobbie and Fryer found significant differences between the test scores of students who attended the Promise Academy and the scores of students who lived in the same area but did not attend the Promise Academy:

> The effect of being enrolled at the elementary charter school on third-grade test scores—the first year that children in New York take standardized exams—is large and precisely estimated, with point estimates ranging from 1.906 to 2.039 standard deviations in math and 1.693 to 1.863 in ELA. This suggests that the HCZ elementary school impacts both math and ELA scores significantly, eliminating the race gap in both subjects.
>
> The relatively large gains in ELA are particularly noteworthy in light of our middle-school results, suggesting that deficiencies in ELA might be addressed if intervention occurs relatively early in the child's life.[33]

Dobbie and Fryer note that studies show that language and vocabulary develop at a relatively young age, so intervention later in life will have less of an impact on reading and English test scores.[34] Harlem Children's Zone programs focus on providing supports, especially early exposure to books and language development, for young students and their families, which may contribute to the Promise Academy students' test scores.

HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE PROGRAMS FOCUS ON PROVIDING SUPPORTS, ESPECIALLY EARLY EXPOSURE TO BOOKS AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, FOR YOUNG STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Criticisms of the Study. Not everyone sees the data as equally rosy. For instance, Helen Zelon, a writer for *City Limits Magazine*, argues:

> Fryer and Dobbie based their conclusions on gains made by a single class on a single test in a single year. In other years, and for other grades, state-exam scores at the Promise Academy have not always been impressive. The fifth-graders scored lower

29. Ibid., p. 3.
30. Ibid., p. 14.
31. Ibid., p. 15.
32. Ibid., p. 16. These numbers do not include absences on days outside of the traditional public school schedule.
33. Ibid., p. 19.
34. Ibid., p. 15.

> than the district average on the 2009 math test. Only a third of the schools [*sic*] eighth-graders were at grade level on the 2008 English test.
>
> On nonstate exams, the results are even more mixed. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the eighth-graders' average score was 41, well below the HCZ-set target of 50 and a score that correlates to an achievement ranking on the 33rd percentile nationally. (ITBS scores since 2007 have risen but still do not meet HCZ-set goals.) On the TerraNova English assessment, HCZ's goal was for 65 percent—the tipping point—of students to score 80 percent or above, a goal that the school has not yet been able to achieve. A similar target was set for math; again, the organization's testing goals were unmet, despite three-month delays in testing that should have translated into extra gains.[35]

Furthermore, the HCZ approach carries a large price tag, which has raised some debate about the efficiency of HCZ's charter schools. The Zone spends about $16,000 per student per year at the Promise Academies and an average of $5,000 per child for the many other programs the HCZ provides outside the charter schools.[36] On the other hand, New York City spends $14,452 per student per year.[37]

Still, some school districts spend much more than HCZ. For instance, the richest 10 percent of New York school districts spend $28,754 per student, much higher than the cost of educating students in the Harlem Children's Zone.[38]

A central tenet of the Harlem Children's Zone is that it is meant to be effective for every student in central Harlem, not just for students whose parents are able and willing to put in the time and effort to enroll them in a charter school. An issue in comparing the success of charters is thus the concern that a high rate of self-selection among their students creates a homogenous student body that does not reflect the overall population.

Many critics of the Harlem Children's Zone's purported educational success raise this argument. Helen Zelon, for instance, writes that "the students who attend HCZ are selected by lottery, which may in itself shape the schools' population: Unlike open-enrollment neighborhood schools, the lottery requires a measure of parental initiative that benefits HCZ students in other ways."[39]

Zelon continues, quoting the Dobbie and Fryer study: "'One has to take the...evidence with a grain of salt,' Fryer and Dobbie caution. 'Children who participate in the HCZ are not a random sample of students.... Students served by HCZ are likely to be self-selected, and results that compare [them] to other children in Harlem may be biased.'"[40] She adds that:

> [C]omparing the student populations at Promise Academy with those in the nearby regular public schools is an apples-to-oranges matchup: The HCZ schools serve significantly fewer high-need learners, like special education students or kids who are learning English. For instance, only six percent of the third graders who took the 2007–08 English test at the Promise Academy had disabilities, while disabled kids made up 30, 40, even 60 percent of the test-taking pool in open-enrollment schools in the district. Only a handful of students at the Promise Academies are English-language learners, compared with 14 percent in schools citywide.[41]

The Harlem Children's Zone responds that the students in its schools are not that different from those in other city schools. The Zone notes that 14.4 percent of its student body qualified for an Individualized

35. Helen Zelon, "Is the Promise Real: The Harlem Children's Zone Becomes a Template for National Change," *City Lights*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 2010), p. 15, http://www.phoenixworks.org/PLSC240/Zelon.pdf (accessed March 22, 2012).
36. Sharon Otterman, "Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/13/education/13harlem.html (accessed February 15, 2012). The fifth-grade cohort entered the Promise Academy in fifth grade and so had attended the academy for only one year before being tested.
37. Ibid.
38. Carole Kellerman, "No More Aid for the Affluent," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/opinion/28kellerman.html? (accessed February 7, 2013).
39. Zelon, "Is the Promise Real," p. 15.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.

Educational Plan (IEP) in the 2011–2012 school year, meaning they qualified for services due to a disability.[42] The rate in surrounding districts was a little higher (17 percent). According to Geoffrey Canada, the services that HCZ provides to students, especially through the early education programs such as Harlem Gems, decrease the incidence of special education and English Language Learner students in the Promise Academy system.[43]

Many critics have also pointed to the relatively rocky start of the Promise Academy middle school as an example of the differences in population between charter and public schools. Promise Academy I should have had a senior class in 2010, but the entire class was summarily dismissed at the end of the eighth grade "after three years of consistently dismal test scores."[44] A former principal labeled a third of these students as "troublemakers" with parents who were not actively involved in the school system.[45]

Critics say that the Promise Academy I Middle School evidently was not effective enough in reaching this particular group of students, and the choice to dismiss them shows some sort of selection by the administration in determining the makeup of their student body, making it less representative of the overall population and therefore skewing the available educational data. An account by James Forman in *The Boston Review*, however, presents a somewhat more positive picture:

> Eventually, under tremendous pressure from his board (one of whom feared that another year of low scores would damage "the Harlem Children's Zone brand"), Canada made a wrenching decision: he would not open a ninth grade as planned. The troubled eighth graders would graduate and be helped to find other schools, and Promise Academy would refocus its efforts on the younger kids, those whom Canada's programs had had more time to shape.
>
> A few months later, however, a final set of test scores for the eighth graders came in. They were stunning. Whereas less than 10 percent of the students had been on grade level in math when they arrived three years earlier, now 70 percent were. It turned out that even bad apples could achieve.[46]

Geoffrey Canada explained the decision by saying it would "permit us the opportunity to focus our efforts on making the middle school the best possible environment for a child to be educated."[47] Whatever the merits of that decision, the school appears to have been successful, especially in light of the eighth-grade results. Additionally, the students who were seventh graders when the eighth grade class was dismissed were academically and demographically similar to the class dismissed. This class successfully graduated from the Promise Academy this year, despite facing many of the same challenges as the dismissed eighth grade class.

Whether lotteries and charter schools attract a more determined set of students and families is also a more complex issue in the case of Harlem Children's Zone. Rather than simply announcing a lottery, HCZ actively recruits families from the Zone to enter the lottery for enrollment in the Promise Academies and other programs. They canvass sidewalks and shops and go door to door. In this way, they attempt to create a body of lottery candidates and future students who are more representative of the population than is often the case in charter schools.

Indeed, the test results of the dismissed eighth grade class may indicate that the schools can positively affect even a particularly difficult cohort of students. Dismissing the eighth grade class may have been a poor decision, but the class's test scores support the Zone's claim that its programs can work.

The Brookings Study of Wraparound Services

The other major criticism of the Harlem Children's Zone, as well as hesitation about launching nationwide replication, centers on the effectiveness of the additional

42. Jean-Louis, e-mail interview.
43. Paul Tough and Helen Zelon, "Assessing Harlem Children's Zone," *The Brian Lehrer Show*, WNYC, February 8, 2010, http://www.wnyc.org/shows/bl/2010/feb/08/assessing-harlem-childrens-zone/ (accessed April 19, 2012).
44. Helen Zelon, "Shaping Success," *City Limits*, March 2010, http://www.citylimits.org/news/articles/4019/shaping-success (accessed August 23, 2012).
45. James J. Forman, "No Ordinary Success," *The Boston Review*, May/June 2009, http://bostonreview.net/BR34.3/forman.php (accessed February 28, 2012).
46. Ibid.
47. Tough, *Whatever It Takes*, p. 235.

wraparound support services and their importance for school success. Regrettably, very little data are available for analyzing these programs. Given the data limitations, there is apprehension about spending a great deal of money, particularly government money, on programs that may not be effective.

Grover J. Whitehurst and Michelle Croft of the Brookings Institution have been the leading advocates of this argument. *The New York Times* reported that "Whitehurst, a co-author of a Brookings Institution analysis of the Zone, said there was still too little evidence that its approach, of linking social services to promote student achievement, justified an investment of federal education dollars, and urged that a more rigorous study be conducted."[48]

Indeed, Whitehurst and Croft argued in a 2010 paper: "If other charter schools generate outcomes that are superior to those of the HCZ and those charter schools are not embedded in broad neighborhood improvement programs, why should we think that a neighborhood approach is superior to a schools-only approach?"[49] However, Dobbie and Fryer concluded that the question remains open: "We cannot, however, disentangle whether communities coupled with high-quality schools drive our results, or whether the high-quality schools alone are enough to do the trick."[50]

Citing Whitehurst and Croft, some go further, arguing that the charter schools themselves may not be as good as Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children's Zone claim:

> Mr. Whitehurst's 2010 Brookings analysis went further, noting that test performance at the two charter schools was only "middling" among charter schools in Manhattan and the Bronx, even though higher-performing schools, like those in the lauded KIPP network, had no comparable network of cradle-to-college services.[51]

However, the full quote from Whitehurst and Croft puts a slightly different spin on the argument:

> The inescapable conclusion is that the HCZ Promise Academy is a middling New York City charter school. There are two credible studies demonstrating that charter schools in New York City are strong performers as a group, producing superior gains for students compared to traditional schools in that city. Thus the HCZ Promise Academy is up against strong competition. That it is in the middle of the pack is not an indictment of its effectiveness by any means.[52]

Furthermore, full integration of the schools with the numerous support services may be the key to meeting the needs of this particular population. The philosophy and effectiveness of the schools and the social services, such as the HCZ's work with young mothers, may mutually reinforce each other in ways that are crucial but difficult to identify given the limited data.

THE HCZ OFFICIALS ON THE GROUND ARE CONVINCED THAT THE MUTUAL REINFORCEMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION IS FUNDAMENTAL TO ACHIEVING THEIR GOALS FOR THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD.

The HCZ officials on the ground are convinced that the mutual reinforcement of social services and education is fundamental to achieving their goals for the entire neighborhood, and they emphasize this point repeatedly in their comments and material.[53] While test results can provide a snapshot of academic achievement, they are an incomplete indicator of the overall health of an entire community. According to Canada:

> Anyone who has even a basic understanding of our work would realize that the Harlem Children's Zone is a comprehensive place-based strategy that has a goal of working with all

48. Otterman, "Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems."
49. Grover J. Whitehurst and Michelle Croft, "The Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education," The Brookings Institution, July 20, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/reports/2010/0720_hcz_whitehurst/0720_hcz_whitehurst.pdf (accessed February 15, 2012).
50. Dobbie and Fryer, "Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap?" p. 4.
51. Otterman, "Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems."
52. Whitehurst and Croft, "The Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education," pp. 6–7.
53. For instance, see Harlem Children's Zone, "Whatever It Takes: A White Paper on the Harlem Children's Zone®," [2009], http://www.hcz.org/images/stories/HCZ%20White%20Paper.pdf (accessed January 24, 2013).

> children that reside in our Zone, whether they go to our public charter schools or traditional public schools. Last year we worked with over 8,000 children in the Children's Zone. The Whitehurst and Croft report looked at only one school—and only the 500 plus students who took the 2007–2009 statewide tests—to make its conclusions about the entire Harlem Children's Zone.[54]

Moreover, the Harlem Children's Zone is much younger than many of the charter schools in the area, including KIPP. Therefore, it may take time for the Promise Academies to demonstrate the same level of achievement as these more established schools. Indeed, the KIPP Academy itself questioned the Whitehurst study:

> Dave Levin, a co-founder of KIPP, took issue with the study, noting that most of his schools already had counselors and college-advice programs, and all were expanding to serve kindergarten through grade 12, just like Mr. Canada's. But KIPP schools do try to stick to the per-student spending of the surrounding district "to demonstrate what schools can do on the money that they have."[55]

Conclusion

The Fryer and Dobbie study makes a compelling argument in favor of the Harlem Children's Zone's charter schools. Other quantitative data provide evidence that some of the other Zone programs are having a positive effect on the children and families living there. There seems little doubt that the HCZ is having a dramatic impact on the lives of those children and their families in their programs.

At the same time, there are legitimate questions about the potential for replicating HCZ in cities across the country. The limiting nature of basing academic achievement on a set of standardized tests, the heavy cost of the Zone's pipeline model, and the Zone's relatively short and sometimes ambiguous history have given people pause. While the Harlem Children's Zone has been very successful at improving educational attainment and is making great strides in reweaving the social fabric of Harlem, how or whether the HCZ model could be applied in other communities is still unclear. For instance, is there a uniquely Harlem aspect and local culture that is a key to its success?

The Harlem Children's Zone's success in significantly improving outcomes for poor and minority students in Harlem has understandably led to a push to bring the HCZ approach to communities around the country. That is good, but communities should be cautious in assuming that exactly what works in the Zone and why is sufficiently understood.

Replicability raises many questions about why the approach is successful and what the key ingredients of success are. Any replication needs to be considered experimental, and variants on the HCZ pipeline model need to be explored, analyzed, and compared. Perhaps the Zone's relatively large size permits the continuous daily reinforcement of a culture of improvement, and this may be harder to maintain in smaller neighborhoods. There still needs to be a better understanding of the relationships among HCZ's social services, community building, and the success of its schools. Moreover, HCZ is not just about education. Zone leaders see their strategy as fully developing each child's social and academic health—indeed, the child's character—and this may be crucial to obtaining similar results elsewhere.

These and other aspects of the Zone need to be researched more deeply and monitored carefully in other places that seek to reproduce the remarkable impact of the Harlem Children's Zone.

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54. Canada, "The Harlem Children's Zone Response to the Brookings Institute's Report," p. 1.
55. Otterman, "Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems."