

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Education #2: Attacking the root problem: a school district can't succeed when poverty and its related problems are concentrated the way they are in the York City schools.

Why is this a recommendation?

The biggest single determinant of the condition of the York City School District is the concentration of poverty that grips the student population. There's no talking around this fact.

How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

The Metro-York Education Workgroup was the scene of passionate debates about the concentration of poverty in city schools. Some members were prepared to recommend disbanding the city school district and dividing its students among neighboring districts – but the majority focused on improvement and new opportunities within the current system. Rather than recommending a single strategy, participants decided to present a menu of potential solutions. Our region stands at the beginning, not the end, of the dialogue on this issue. We hope the community's leaders – from educators themselves to business leaders and from clergy to editors – will use this as a chance to *ask* the community: Which of these ideas will work best for York?

What else can you tell us about it?

Other than grouping them by purpose, the ideas in this recommendation are listed in no particular order. Each had some support in the Workgroup. Participants did agree on the need for both “inside-out” and “outside-in” solutions: strategies that will increase interaction and educational opportunities between existing city and suburban populations *and* a plan for drawing middle-class parents back to the city with their children.

Where else is it being tried?

The communities that are undertaking one or more of these strategies are too numerous to fully document here. The Kalamazoo Promise, for example, has been in place just since 2005 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, but efforts to establish similar programs are underway from El Dorado, Ark. to Newton, Iowa.^{1, 2}

What happens next?

Because the scope of the conversation is so wide, their first objective for the champions of this recommendation will be to identify others who want to work specifically on these issues.

What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

To be clear, this will be the most difficult conversation – the one with the most different points of view and the most ardent opponents of doing anything at all – but that's okay. Some of the municipal recommendations will see more progress, sooner, because the issues on that side have been talked about for years. The community has been ready for a while to address many of them. In the case of this education recommendation, again, this is the *beginning* of the dialogue. Several of the Metro-York ideas have never been introduced in a public forum in York County before. So – let's be ready for disagreements and bumps in the road, but let's start by agreeing that *change of some kind is necessary*. Otherwise, five or ten years from now, the situation will be much, much worse, and Harrisburg or Washington are likely to place on the table much more radical suggestions than Metro-York's.

1. Kalamazoo Promise. <http://kalamazoopromise.com> and available via yorkcounts.org/metro.

2. *Communities with Programs Modeled on the Kalamazoo Promise*. W.E. Upjohn Institute. <http://www.upjohninst.org/promise/communities.html> and available via yorkcounts.org/metro.

