

Memorandum

To: Roundtable participants

cc: Mayor Betsy Hodges; Minneapolis City Council

From: Spencer Cronk, Minneapolis City Coordinator

Date: January 26, 2016

Subject: Results Minneapolis follow-up: Child and Infant Disparities

Thank you for participating in our first City Goal Results Minneapolis roundtable on Child and Infant Disparities. This roundtable was a unique opportunity for City staff and external stakeholders to engage in a robust, data-driven conversation about the complex factors that influence third grade reading proficiency and infant mortality rate in the Minneapolis community. These two indicators were chosen because they reveal patterns, disparities and trends related to community stability, health and opportunity across the city. Third grade reading proficiency is an indicator of whether a student will graduate from high school on time and become employed. Infant mortality rate is a sentinel indicator that reflects not only the quality of prenatal care and the family environment, but also the lived experience of Minneapolis adults before they become parents.

Stability is a key factor that influences progress on both of these indicators. There are many possible definitions of stability, and stability should not be confused with being stuck. One guiding definition of stability is the ability for residents to have control over decisions such as where they live and where their children go to school, with the assurance that geography will not indicate outcomes. The City of Minneapolis has many opportunities to improve stability through its policies, programs and actions.

The following themes and examples emerged during the roundtable discussion:

- **Wide racial and economic disparities heavily influence child and infant outcomes.** Segregation and racism have contributed and still contribute to racial and economic disparities. As a result, race and poverty are closely linked and concentrated in specific geographic areas of Minneapolis. The City needs to do more to improve racial and economic integration in its neighborhoods and schools. At the same time, the City must target investment in job creation and economic opportunities for disadvantaged residents to avoid displacement. As one roundtable participant said, we aren't looking for gentrification; we want our current residents to be the gentry.
- **Racial and economic bias in our systems leads to many barriers.** From the federal to local level, policy decisions and the way systems are designed have profound impacts on Minneapolis residents. These impacts are often divided along racial and economic lines. For example, child care is linked to parents instead of children; as a result, household instability is more likely to lead to child care interruptions. Black students and American Indian children have the highest rate of out-of-home placements, which also decreases child care stability. Once children reach school age, those who are the most vulnerable (including

homeless students, low-income students, black students and American Indian students) are often placed in low-performing schools. There are also disparities in how children are placed into academic programs such as special education. It can be said that every system has been perfectly created to get the results it's getting. Our outcomes are a result of our systems.

- **Chronic stress and trauma have a substantial impact on child and infant disparities.** Research has shown that nearly fifty percent of infant mortality risk can be traced to the period of time prior to conception. Chronic stress resulting from discrimination, poverty, unemployment and other structural racial and economic factors combined with trauma from violence carries severe risks. There are many ways the City can positively contribute to the pre-conception period. Additionally, children who face violence, chronic stress and trauma at home arrive at school far less ready to learn.
- **Areas of concentrated poverty tend to have schools that both perform lowest overall and have the largest racial and economic gaps in third grade reading proficiency.** Racial and economic disparities in third grade reading proficiency are driven by gaps in stability, which can be measured in many ways. Our analysis shows that areas of concentrated poverty also tend to have higher rates of family violence, unemployment and unstable and subpar housing. School-based factors that impact student learning, such as discipline and suspension rate, also tend to be drawn along racial and economic lines.
- **Housing is a key element of stability that involves difficult tradeoffs and decisions by residents and the City.** Residents are sometimes faced with hard tradeoffs between access, affordability and safety. At the same time, the City of Minneapolis is challenged by situations where revoking the rental license of a problem landlord (to promote long-term stability of a community) is seemingly at odds with the short-term stability of individual families (who would then likely have to move). In addition, where the City invests in affordable housing can perpetuate areas of concentrated poverty.
- **The City is investing resources in areas of concentrated poverty; these investments can be more targeted, data-driven and responsive.** There are many types of investments and resources, from simply providing basic needs to promoting self-determination. Investments must be evaluated in the context of stability and academic achievement and tailored to the individual needs of a specific place. Opportunities exist to maximize the impact of both the youth school system and adult programming in instances where there are two generations of students currently enrolled. For example, are adult education programs operated by the City located in close proximity to child care facilities and schools with after-school programming? Are there ways we can better quantify the impact adult education has on families and whether that influences child achievement? Are City investments directed toward the programs that communities find most helpful?
- **Investments in healthy relationships and families are high-impact and desired by the community.** Young parents are seeking information about healthy relationships and family building. The chance of a child becoming a violent adult is connected to what happens in the home during childhood. Family violence can stem from a lack of coping mechanisms; these patterns will not stop until families have the opportunity to learn new tools. There need to be more opportunities for men to learn how to build relationships, work through troubles and be vulnerable. Additionally, formal and informal policies have pushed men out of families and made it hard for them to be good partners. As examples, child support policies are a barrier for parents who want to co-parent and family centers rarely provide resources geared toward men.
- **Coordination across organizations and jurisdictions is critical.** There are many effective initiatives happening, but sometimes that good work gets lost amidst the scale and complexity of large organizations. Improving third grade reading proficiency requires aligned interventions beyond the school environment and decreasing the infant mortality rate requires aligned interventions beyond the periods of pregnancy and infancy.

- **Additional investment in teacher education is critical to equip educators to handle the needs of students.** Teachers need more skills and support to handle situations where students have experienced trauma. They also need training on equitable and culturally appropriate instruction. New teachers do not have the time and space to learn how to become a teacher when they are in schools with many students who are in distress. Teachers also need more training and support in reading instruction.

The following potential action steps emerged during the roundtable discussion:

- **Improve opportunities for data sharing across organizations.** There is a real opportunity to convene County, school, City and nonprofit organizations in data sharing to understand what investments are impacting stability and, ultimately, infant mortality rates and academic achievement. If we want to upstream interventions, we need to better understand the data and experiences of youth and families.
- **Improve organizational alignment– within and between organizations.** We need to make sure that conversations and ideas are shared within individual organizations and across stakeholder groups. The City, County, schools and nonprofit organizations have resources and connections that can be built upon and leveraged. Is there a way to coordinate conversations and initiatives to make sure all interested stakeholders are engaged? Should there be a point person within each entity to help share data, target resources and coordinate efforts?
- **Remove grant requirements that act as barriers.** A need was identified to convene multiple jurisdictions which issue grants and organizations which have received them to talk about granting barriers. Grants often have restrictions that partners have to work around to get their work done.
- **Convene a team to frame research questions for the new Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System.** The Department of Education, State Department of Human Services and State Department of Health are combining their data into a common data system. The project will contain child level data from early childhood and be connected to the longitudinal data kept in the educational data system. The new data system provides an opportunity for educators and policymakers to answer a range of program and policy questions to better understand child and family experiences from early childhood through postsecondary education and beyond, and design targeted improvement strategies.
- **There are opportunities for targeted data analysis to inform action.** Many of the same blocks and intersections in Minneapolis have faced distressed and violent conditions for years. Since these areas also experience high mobility, we are connecting these patterns to something about the space itself and perhaps how it feels to be in that space. Identifying these specific small areas and tailoring interventions for them would substantially improve conditions and impact our community indicator outcomes.
- **A model for intensive, family-centered intervention exists.** Prenatal and early childhood programs have been shown to be powerful economic investments. Increasing investment in these initiatives to proactively ensure that all high-risk families and children are identified and supported can have a tremendous impact on child and infant disparities. Each year, 3,000 babies are born to low income Minneapolis mothers, which is not an insurmountable number. The Nurse-Family Partnership in Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis currently reaches about 10 percent of them. Increasing and focusing resources on these 3,000 families would have powerful results for generations to come. Once children reach school-age, this level of intensive engagement needs to continue. The Northside Achievement Zone is doing this work and could be scaled or adapted and reproduced in additional communities.