Continually Improving Promise Neighborhoods

The Role of Case Management Data

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Evidence from good research and evaluation puts the "promise" in Promise Neighborhoods. Good performance management, however, is what makes the promise a reality for children and families in Promise Neighborhoods. Research and evaluation rely on data reported over long periods of time, often analyzed only after implementation is complete, and are used to establish evidence-based and other proven practices in which initiatives like Promise Neighborhoods should be grounded. Performance management, on the other hand, uses real-time data—data that are typically updated regularly and available shortly after collection—to leverage the capacity of evidence-based programs to produce meaningful results for children, families, and communities, like those Promise Neighborhoods serves.

> For more on the difference between performance management and evaluation, see *Performance Management and Evaluation: What's the Difference?* (Walker and Moore 2011)

Case management data are an excellent source of real-time data for performance managers (e.g*.,* data managers, line-staff supervisors, executive staff, and board members) seeking to continuously improve their work in Promise Neighborhoods. As described in *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Improving Results*, there are typically three levels of data collected by a Promise Neighborhood: individual, school, and neighborhood (Comey et al. 2012). Case management data are collected on the individual level and, unlike the aggregated data collected on schools and neighborhoods, a unique identifier is usually assigned to enable records from different sources to be linked to the same person with whom a case manager (a person tasked with helping coordinate delivery of services to an individual or family) or partner agency works. Case management data are a powerful tool for performance management because they allow performance managers to see whether or not the Promise Neighborhood's strategy is working for the individuals and families the lead agency and its partners target most directly.

> For more on the data collected and data systems used by Promise Neighborhoods, see *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Improving Results.* (Urban Institute 2013, 34–9)

This report provides summary guidance on how to review case management data in the context of a Promise Neighborhood's strategy, particularly its theory of change and results framework. Although

written based on experience gained working with Promise Neighborhoods, the guidance here can be adapted to similar place-based and comprehensive change efforts.

The Importance of a Theory of Change and Results Framework

Performance managers (box 1) are better positioned to use case management data to produce results for families and children if their Promise Neighborhood has a well-developed theory of change and related results framework in the first place. In fact, any Promise Neighborhood that does not regularly refer to its theory of change and its supporting results framework will be hard-pressed to use any data—case management or otherwise—to manage to outcomes. This is because the theory of change and results framework provide an organizing frame (including vision, underlying theory for what will lead to positive change, target participants, target outcomes, strategies) for all the complicated contexts, programs, and organizations to which any Promise Neighborhood must relate and/or oversee.

For a Promise Neighborhood, the **theory of change** is the statement of what it takes for children to advance through the cradle-to-college pipeline and achieve successful outcomes. David E. K. Hunter

(2005), director of evaluation for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, describes a theory of change as "a formal rendering of the approach adopted by the organization to change something about the world. The theory of change becomes the guide whereby the organization structures its daily activities to achieve its strategic goals and objectives." For example, a Promise Neighborhood might base its strategy on the underlying theory of change that children from families experiencing multi-generational poverty will have a better chance of improving their educational and self-sufficiency outcomes if their parents achieve specific educational or employment outcomes in tandem with them, what is often called a "two-generation strategy."

Though the theory of change provides the basic statement of the Promise Neighborhood's approach, **a results framework** is the detailed expression of that theory of change in actionable terms. Typically tabular in form, a results framework links specific interventions and service partners to clearly articulated target populations and results, as well as to actual outcomes. Similar to a logic model, a results framework expresses the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of a given strategy. A key difference, however, is that a logic model is typically a short graphic rendered on the conceptual level, whereas a results framework is a detailed management tool that allows performance managers to look more closely at what is and is not working and then to adjust for continuous improvement.

> For more on the Theory of Change and its critical importance for managing to outcomes, see Chapter 1 of *Leap of Reason: Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity*. (Marino 2011)

Extending the example above, a Promise Neighborhood with a two-generation theory of change will construct a results framework that reflects service providers capable of working with both generations alone or in tandem with other partners, as well as results that may be "synergistic" for both generations (e.g., a parent's improved reading skills can advance his/her child's reading skills). In this Promise Neighborhood, case management data are crucial to performance managers who work to ensure the success of that strategy. For example, only individual-level data linked from multiple service partners can verify that sufficient referrals are being made of both children and their parents to dual-generation programs or, at a minimum, to separate programs that address the complementary outcomes specified by the results framework supporting the theory of change. If, on the other hand, the case management data show services being delivered to children through a variety of school-based partners and after-school programs but no corresponding engagement with their parents, then performance managers would realign their Promise Neighborhood's practices with its theory of change by identifying new two-generation partners who accept whole-family referrals or by working with case managers to develop better strategies for engaging both parents and children in tandem across partners. In the absence of fidelity to the Promise Neighborhood's theory of change and results

framework, staff might accept program attendance and modest impact results for children as evidence of success without acknowledging that their efforts fall short of the original poverty-busting vision of the Promise Neighborhood.

Case Management Data for Performance and Population Accountability

Promise Neighborhoods sit at the juncture of both population and performance accountability. Per the Results-Based Accountability model, which is used by many Promise Neighborhoods, population accountability is about the quality of life for an entire community or subgroups within the community, such as children or young adults. Performance accountability is about how well a program, agency, or service system is doing its part of the job for the members of the population that it serves directly (Results Leadership Group 2010). Performance accountability is crucial to reaching individuals in subgroups with the specific interventions most likely to help improve their well-being, which, in turn, should ultimately lead to population accountability measurable at the community level.

> For a brief primer as well as links to additional resources on RBA, see the website and products of the Results Leadership Group (RLG).

Case management data can assist a Promise Neighborhood to ensure performance accountability across the totality of its efforts and partners, thus making population-level results much more likely to be achieved. By actively using case management data, a Promise Neighborhood can verify whether sufficient numbers of individuals within defined subgroups are receiving the specific interventions prescribed for them by the theory of change and results framework. In fact, most Promise Neighborhoods will only achieve population-level change if they and their partners rigorously practice performance accountability and consistently reach significant shares of the highest-need families and students in their population.

Table 1 describes how performance managers can use case management data to ensure population and performance accountability. Case management data can be used to answer the performance measurement questions in the table as to explain how well current practice is achieving the targets and goals set forth in the results framework. Based on the answers to these questions, Promise Neighborhood leadership, managers, and service providers can either confirm that performance is consistent with those targets and or take corrective action to address any shortcomings.

TABLE 1

Using Case Management Data for Results Accountability

As defined in the results framework	As collected in the case management system	Performance measurement questions
Needs assessment and segmentation analysis: ▢ Total number of households and children, by age, living in the Promise Neighborhood footprint ▢ Target population segments by age groups, targeted schools, other targeted criteria, such as ethnicity or housing circumstances	**Participant identification and intake** ▢ Address and school enrollment ▢ Demographics ▢ Family roster	**Performance accountability** ▢ Are we enrolling children and families who can most benefit from our programs, per our theory of change and segmentation analysis? ▢ Are referrals from partners producing the target populations we said we'd reach? ▢ Have we identified the right partners and methods for enrolling these families? **Population accountability** ▢ Are our enrollment numbers sufficient to reach the penetration rates we specified across solutions in order to move outcomes for the entire population?
Performance results and baseline measurement ▢ The specific conditions of well-being (target results) and related target indicators set for each target population ▢ A graph presenting historic baseline and forecast for target indicators for each population	**Referral and case planning** ▢ Referring agency ▢ Enrolling agency (if other than the Promise Neighborhood agency) ▢ Baseline indicator measures for target results at intake ▢ Additional case notes on presenting issues at intake ▢ Additional baseline data from program assessments/pre-tests	**Performance accountability** ▢ Are our case managers and/or our partners referring children and families to appropriate solutions based on identified needs? **Population accountability** ▢ Are we providing solutions that match the level and type of identified needs in the target populations?
Continuum of solutions and evidence-based strategy ▢ The type and combination of evidence-based or research-informed interventions chosen to achieve the results for each population type ▢ The partners who can deliver these interventions and their enrollment targets	**Service provision** ▢ Types of service ▢ Units or intensity of service ▢ At or below target intensity/units ▢ Attendance ▢ Program exits and reason for exit	**Performance accountability** ▢ When we break down our case management data by partner, can we verify that each referral partner is providing the type of solution(s) we said they would? ▢ How much did each partner do? (Are partners consistently at target enrollment levels?) ▢ How well did each partner do it? (Is the quality of or fidelity to the intervention being provided by each partner appropriate? Are participants meeting the target intensity/dosage levels expected for each program? Are program attrition rates appropriate?)

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

As defined in the results framework	As collected in the case management system	Performance measurement questions
Annual performance reporting and continuous improvement ☐ Annual performance data for target results and re-evaluation of performance targets	**Annual assessment and case review** ☐ Address updates ☐ Demographic updates ☐ Annual indicator measures for target results ☐ Additional case notes on progress ☐ Additional follow-up data from program assessments/post-tests	**Performance accountability** ☐ For each partner or program, how many children served achieved the intended results? ☐ Do results of particular solutions (e.g., home visiting) vary by type, dose over time, or quality of the solution provided by each partner? ☐ Which partners are our high performers? Why? Should we shift our funding among partners and/or solutions? ☐ Did some participants have better results than others and, if so, what explains this difference? (e.g,, characteristics of the participant's mix of interventions, duration of interventions, intensity of interventions) ☐ Do we need to adjust our theory of change or estimated program effects of our solutions? **Population accountability** ☐ Did the solution(s) result in the population level changes expected in the aligned indicators? (i.e., children gained medical homes) ☐ If changes occurred, were they the result of our solutions the way our theory of change predicted, or was something else happening in the community that may have had a bigger impact on the indicator? ☐ Can we adjust our theory of change, continuum of solutions, or enrollment numbers to achieve better results (or do we need to change our targets)?

The Relationship between the Case Management Cycle and the Performance Management Cycle

Effective place-based initiatives are those that have robust case management and performance management cycles—that is, a series of steps that they follow faithfully and repeatedly to align services to the needs of individuals and families and to track and improve overall progress and results. For initiatives like Promise Neighborhoods, the performance management cycle begins with a needs

assessment of the children and families who live in the neighborhood, as well as a segmentation analysis that identifies the needs of specific subgroups within the population. This data, research, and stakeholder input are used to develop and refine the theory of change and results framework that sits at the very heart of any successful initiative. Board members, staff, partners, and other stakeholders are then responsible for delivering the resources (financial, human, capital) needed to implement the specified strategies and achieve the target results. Performance mangers monitor the success of those resources in fulfilling goals and make adjustments, as necessary, to improve results.

>For more on developing a detailed results framework, see *Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough* and *Transforming Performance Measurement for the 21st Century.* (Friedman 2009; Hatry 2014)

While performance management cycles operate at the initiative or program level, typical case management cycles do almost exactly the same thing on the individual/family level. A standard case management cycle begins with identifying clients in target populations and performing an intake process, including collecting basic information and possibly conducting a deeper assessment to pinpoint the specific issues which impede a particular client from enjoying desired educational, health, social, or employment outcomes. A service plan sets goals for addressing this client's needs and identifies providers and programs capable of working with the client to meet these goals. The case manager makes referrals to connect the client with programs, regularly assesses the client's progress on an ongoing basis, and determines, at appropriate milestones, whether changes are needed or whether the client is ready for a successful transition or "exit" from programming.

Although not all Promise Neighborhoods have individual case managers assigned to coordinate services for children and families, performance managers should still understand the symmetry between the case management and performance management cycles, as illustrated in figure 1. Both sets of functions are essential to ensuring performance and population accountability. If a Promise Neighborhood's overall strategy and partners are aligned with the specific services being offered to and used by the individual families and children the Promise Neighborhood serves most directly, then success on the population level is much more likely to be achieved .

Though it is not necessary to employ case managers, *per se*, to align the case management and performance management cycles, the examples that follow will illustrate how formal case managers can be helpful in this regard. Box 2 provides two examples of case management components found in initiatives like Promise Neighborhoods.

>For more on the components of a formal case management process see *Standards of Practice for Case Management*, which is produced by the Case Management Society of America, a health care-oriented professional association.

BOX 2

The Harlem Children's Zone: Academic Case Management

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) uses a case management function called "academic case management," which is a holistic approach to ensuring student success. Students are referred to HCZ case management staff called "advocates" who assess student needs and are the connectors between the student and other services.

Through individualized "action plans," HCZ creates concrete steps to help young people to be accountable and take responsibility for their education and advocate. An action plan represents a young person's interests in the school, program, home, and community. It is crucial for tracking the progress of the young person through the creation of short- and long-term goals. Advocates create these plans with the student through one-on-one meetings, parent engagement, and collaboration with school staff, and maintain notes and provide reports that analyze student and staff efforts and progress toward goals.

The Northside Achievement Zone: Academic Navigators

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) calls staff in the case management role "academic navigators." They are academic coaches who help students remove barriers and achieve academic success. By partnering with the student and his or her family and other services providers, academic navigators track and directly support achievement by working to improve attendance, improve completion of homework assignments, increase parental involvement, and improve academic performance. They also connect the student to behavioral health services and after-school and summer school opportunities.

NAZ's academic navigators also create individualized plans for youth, called "academic achievement plans," that they track through a shared data system. In addition to monitoring student progress in relation to their achievement plan, navigators also are liaisons between school administrators and the NAZ initiative to ensure effective collaboration by providing training, coaching, and problem solving to overcome obstacles for students and to help bolster coordination among partners and programs.

The NAZ initiative is also focused on supporting the entire family as a key strategy to promoting student success. In addition to academic navigators for students, NAZ also has "NAZ connectors" for families, who work with parents and caregivers to support students and connect households with services, such as housing assistance, employment, and financial planning. The NAZ model also includes regular case conferencing with multiple providers to review family data, review student achievement, track progress, and identify actions to support family goals.

FIGURE 1

Alignment of a Promise Neighborhood Performance Management Cycle and Case Management Cycle

Identify and intake participants

Conduct neighborhood needs assessment and segmentation analysis

Set performance results and indicators and identify partners

Plan services and make referrals

Promise Neighborhood theory of change and results framework

Review performance and continuously improve

Assess progress regularly and exit cases as needed

Deliver continuum of solutions and evidence-based strategy

Deliver services

Promise Neighborhoods performance management cycle
Case management cycle

Examine the *Who*, the *What*, and the *So What*

Promise Neighborhoods must seek to understand the *who*, the *what*, and the so what from both a population and performance accountability perspective. In other words, *who* receives services, *what* services are partners providing, and are the efforts (collectively and individually) making any difference at all, (i.e., the *so what*). Case management data are invaluable to answering these questions. This section will offer specific examples of how program and performance managers can use case management data to assess results across population and performance accountability levels by asking the types of questions outlined in table 1, above, and which are organized below into who, what, and so-what categories.

The Who

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT QUESTIONS

- Are we enrolling children and families who can most benefit from our programs, per our results framework and segmentation analysis?

- Are referrals from partners producing the target populations we said we would reach?

- Have we identified the right partners and methods for enrolling these families?

- Are our enrollment numbers sufficient to reach the penetration rates we specified across solutions in order to move outcomes for the entire population?

Questions about who a Promise Neighborhood is serving should focus on how faithful the effort is to the findings of its needs assessment and segmentation analysis. If the Promise Neighborhood has adopted a theory of change and supporting results framework that focuses on reaching and serving the neediest residents of the neighborhood and has segmented the total population into logical target subgroups, then case management data collected at the referral and enrollment phase of the case management cycle should reflect this.
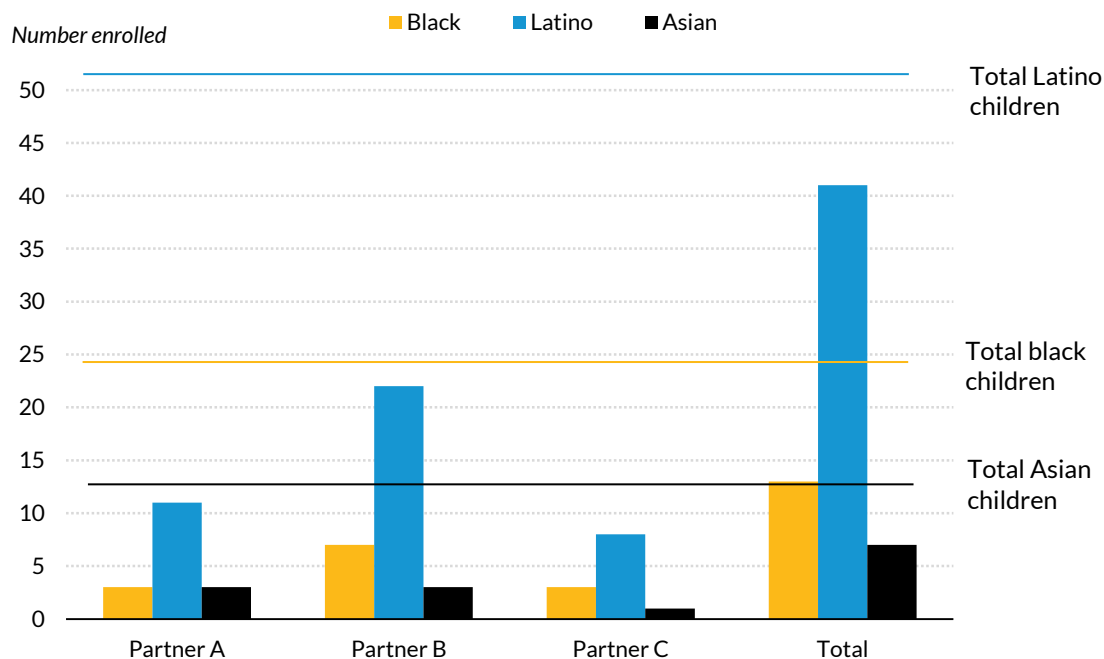
EXAMPLE 1

By comparing partner-by-partner enrollment data over time, a Promise Neighborhood can monitor if and how partners are meeting enrollment priorities set during the planning phase. For example, if a Promise Neighborhood's segmentation analysis identifies Latino children as a high-priority group for

services, then comparing the rate at which partners enroll such children is important. Figure 2 shows how enrollment data can be used to determine if a Promise Neighborhood is reaching a priority population identifiable through case management data (such as race and ethnicity). Partner B has enrolled more Latino children than any other program in the Promise Neighborhood's early learning network. Since this partner is aligned so well with the Promise Neighborhood's planning targets—as expressed in its results framework—performance managers should go deeper in finding out why their enrollment data for Latino children is so much better. In one such case, a Promise Neighborhood discovered that the partner uses staff who are all culturally (and linguistically) similar to the target population, trained to be liaisons between their community and health and social service organizations. These staff received special training and often served in roles like outreach worker, role model, and interpreter. To replicate the success of this strategy in other parts of their continuum, this Promise Neighborhood increased financial and staff resources for this staffing model and began using it to increase outreach and enrollment across many of the solutions and partners in their continuum. Although the liaison staff referred to in this example are not case managers, they play a similar and pivotal role in ensuring population-level strategies are expressed fully on the individual level.

FIGURE 2

Early Learning Enrollment

Number enrolled

Legend: Black, Latino, Asian

Total Latino children

Total black children

Total Asian children

EXAMPLE 2

For any outcome, there will always be a subset of the target population who would be successful without any intervention. For example, some students would graduate without additional services. To achieve greater outcomes for the community and steward limited resources, performance managers must know if they are reaching those individuals who are most in need of intervention. Often a theory of change will direct resources to groups who are not immediately identifiable, such as students in danger of dropping out before they graduate. Predicting a future event, such as dropping out or graduation from high school, can be difficult using just a single indicator. But Promise Neighborhood performance managers can leverage case management data to simultaneously monitor a collection of individual-level performance measures and flag students in need of additional resources.

For example, some Promise Neighborhoods use evidence-based early warning systems to identify students most likely to drop out of high school. These systems rely on research showing that the most powerful predictors of whether a student will graduate include course performance and attendance during the first year of high school (Allensworth and Easton 2005, 2007). Under such systems, Promise Neighborhoods and their partner high schools collect student attendance and course performance data to flag freshmen who are struggling and gather more information about them. This is the "participant identification and intake" portion of the case management cycle (see figure 1, p. 9). From there, the cycle moves into the "participant service planning and referral" and "service provision" phases as case managers coordinate a set of in-school, out-of-school, and home interventions for each identified student as appropriate to their needs. This use of case management data helps performance managers ensure cost-effective allocation of the most intensive services to the students in greatest need.

Figure 3 gives an example of how performance managers can use case management data to improve the allocation of services to a Promise Neighborhood's highest-need students. In the example, fewer than half of the eighth graders who are flagged for both failing test scores and low attendance, which show them to be at highest risk of dropping out, are enrolled in the academic case management solution. These data suggest that performance managers need to work with Promise Neighborhood staff, schools, and other partners to do a better job of identifying, referring, and enrolling those students who are most likely to drop out without direct intervention. Performance managers can also use case management data to monitor the ongoing provision of high-quality services to these students, as shown in examples 3 and 4 below.

FIGURE 3

Early Warning for Drop-Out Risk

Eighth graders
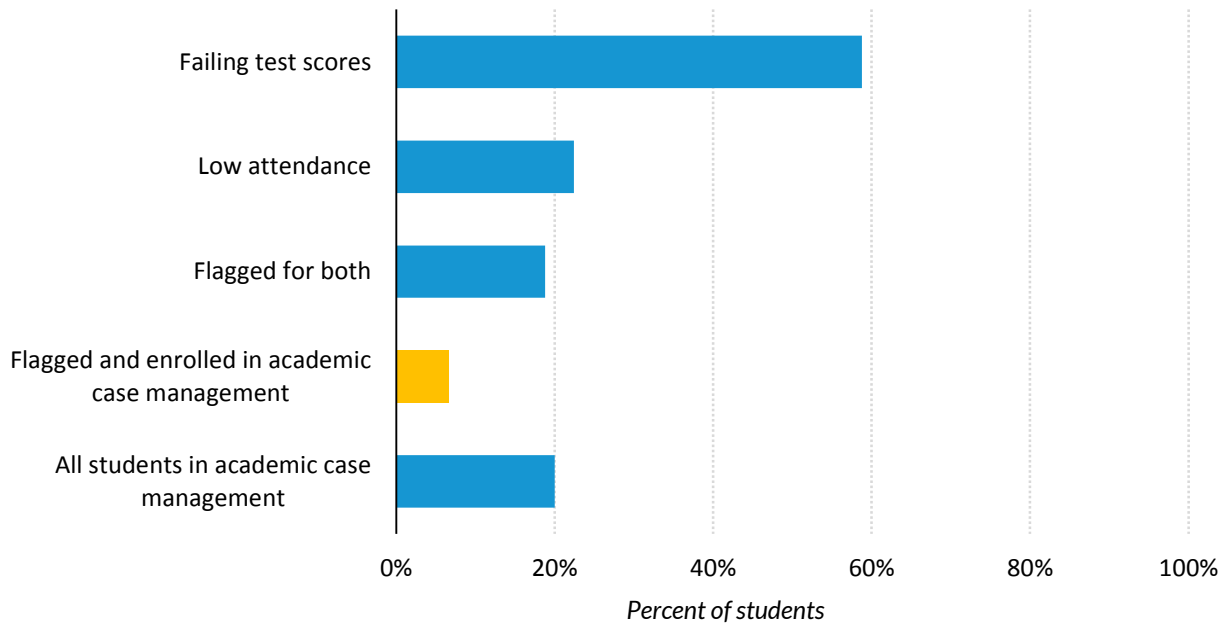
Note: There were 165 students in this class.

The What

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT QUESTIONS

- Are our case managers and/or our partners referring children and families to appropriate solutions based on identified needs?

- Are we providing solutions that match the level and type of identified needs in the target populations?

- When we break down our case management data by partner, can we verify that each partner is providing the type of service(s) we said they would?

- How much did each partner do? Are partners consistently at target enrollment levels?

- How well did each partner do it? Are participants meeting the target intensity/dosage levels expected for each program? Are program attrition rates appropriate?

Understanding precisely *what* services are being provided to enrolled participants is an important part of performance management for any Promise Neighborhood. For example, some Promise Neighborhood performance managers hold regular meetings with service provider partners. In those meetings, they review the partner's scope of work or service agreement and the target outputs they agreed to, such as number of students to be enrolled. Targets like this are driven by assumptions for how each partner will contribute to reaching the overall outcomes as specified in a Promise Neighborhood's results framework. These output measures are sometimes attached to the partner's payment schedule. If data show that the target population uses a certain partner's services less, the performance manager could explore whether services are underutilized because participants need them less or because the partner is less effective in outreach and service provision. Depending on the answers and whether performance can be improved, the Promise Neighborhood may choose to invest in improving the capacity of providers with low enrollment or ultimately decide to shift resources to other partners whose services have been consistently better utilized.

> There are many reasons actual outcomes may fall short of (or greatly exceed) performance targets. For more on how to compare outcomes with targets, of *Analyzing Outcome Information: Getting the Most from Data*. (Hatry 2004, 7–9)

EXAMPLE 3

In an effort to increase the number of 5-year-olds who enter kindergarten ready to learn, the theories of change and results frameworks of many Promise Neighborhoods identify professional development solutions for preschool and infant and toddler teachers who work for partner early learning programs. Figure 4 shows that the number of eligible children in a Promise Neighborhood's target population who are enrolled in partner early learning programs has been rising from year to year.

FIGURE 4

Early learning performance

All enrolled children
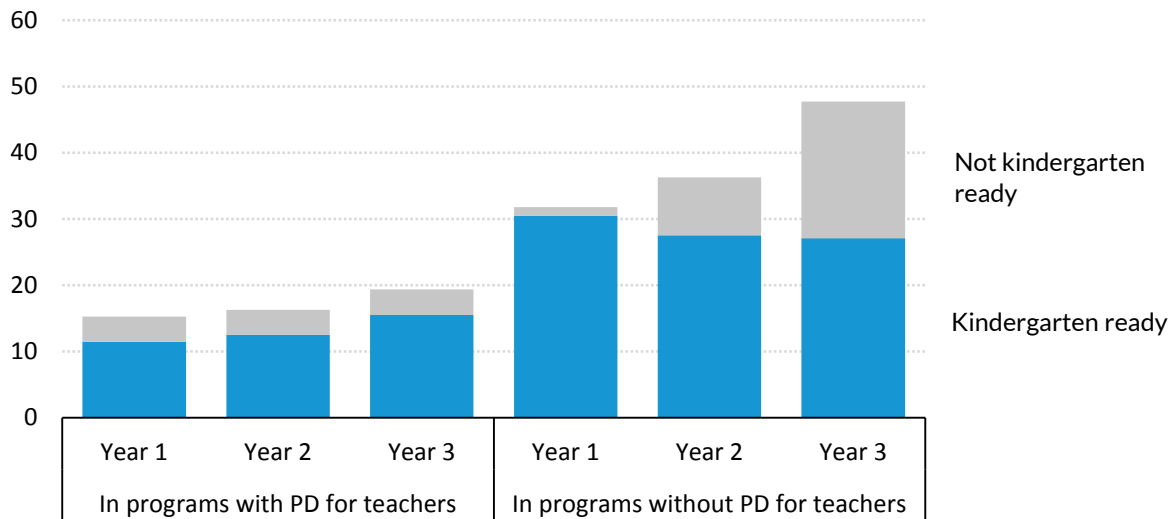
Note: PD = professional development.

However, the blue portion of each bar indicates that children who transition to elementary school and are kindergarten ready have been falling from year to year (both in total number and as a percentage) for programs without professional development for teachers. Figure 5 also shows that almost all children enrolled in early learning programs with professional development for teachers are kindergarten ready—and that this trend remains consistent across the three years displayed in the chart. Part of this Promise Neighborhood's theory of change is that building the capacity of early education teaching through professional development will lead to improvements in age-appropriate functioning for children. The evidence from the case management data is consistent with the theory of change, but it suggests that the implementation of the results framework is weak, because a smaller share of children are enrolled in early learning programs with professional development for teachers. This graph could be one of several exploring outcomes for different segments of the population, analysis that is possible only through the collection of robust case management data.

Using these data, performance managers can recommit program developers to the original theory of change, perhaps by providing more professional development supports to current early learning partners or by expanding partnerships with providers that already offer strong professional development support to their teachers.

EXAMPLE 4

Understanding which programs or providers are producing the best results for various types of participants often requires in-depth data disaggregation at the individual level. Intake forms, including demographic data and family roster information, provide a number of variables by which initiatives can break out data, such as race, family composition, and years in the neighborhood.

For example, Promise Neighborhoods may support activities designed to help teachers and school administrators build a culture of attendance and maintain it throughout the school year. School-wide attendance teams can regularly use attendance data to coordinate direct intervention efforts. These data can also be used to ensure that teachers receive professional development and training on how to implement student-motivation and parent-outreach strategies that will stem emerging absenteeism trends before they negatively impact a student's achievement. If implemented well, schools often show overall decreases in chronic absenteeism as the result of such efforts.

However, such success may be modest, and even fleeting, if Promise Neighborhoods and their partner schools do not dig deeper into individual-level data that show which types of students are responding to the new strategies and which aligned solutions are showing the greatest success. A summary like thank shown in table 2 might help the Promise Neighborhood identify which types of students are responding to attendance program efforts. For example, as the numbers in the gray cells show, the current strategies seem to be working better for girls than boys—almost a third of previously chronically absent girls showed considerable improvement, but over half of previously chronically absent boys showed no improvement. The blue cells highlight that the mentoring program served the highest share of students who showed considerable improvement in attendance, while the tutoring program by far served the highest share of students who showed no improvement in attendance.

These data call for further performance discussions with partners to understand how attendance solutions can better serve the types of students who still are still struggling and which programs might be the best to do so. They may also be an indication of the need for direct inquiry with students and families of various types as to the specific barriers the Promise Neighborhood might need to address (e.g., transportation, bullying/harassment problems among particular subsets of students) so that every student gets the precise *what* he or she needs to succeed.

TABLE 2

Students Who Improved Attendance

Among chronically absent students the previous year

Characteristic	Number of students	Considerable improvement[a] (%)	Some improvement[b] (%)	Little improvement[c] (%)	No improvement (%)
Gender					
Male	103	8	16	23	53
Female	112	29	33	18	21
Race/ethnicity					
African American	120	11	25	23	41
Hispanic	56	32	23	11	34
Asian	22	18	18	32	32
White	17	29	35	18	18
Eligible for free and reduced-price lunch	143	26	29	20	25
Grade					
First	48	17	23	25	35
Second	50	12	30	24	34
Third	52	13	31	19	37
Fourth	65	29	17	15	38
Promise Neighborhood program					
Mentoring	75	29	31	23	17
After-school recreation	68	18	25	29	28
Tutoring	72	8	18	10	64
Total students	**215**	**19**	**25**	**20**	**36**

[a] Increased attendance 10 or more days.
[b] increased attendance 5–9 days.
[c] increased attendance 3–4 days.

Such data can also help Promise Neighborhood performance managers to affirm or adjust their overall theory of change. For example, follow-up investigation may reveal a need for community-based strategies to address the attendance barriers some students face when tasked with providing child care to younger siblings during school hours so parents can work, something that might not have been part of the original theory of change. In other words, collecting and analyzing individual-level case

management data will both sharpen the practices of partners and inform and refine all related Promise Neighborhood strategies, inside and outside the school.

The So What?

- For each partner or program, how many children served achieved the intended results?

- Do results of particular solutions (e.g., home visiting) vary by type, dose over time, or quality of the solution provided by each partner?

- Which partners are high performers? Why? Should funding be shifted among partners and/or solutions?

- Should the theory of change be adjusted or estimated program effects of solutions be recalculated?

- Did the solution(s) result in the population level changes expected in the aligned indicators (e.g., children gained medical homes)?

- If changes occurred, were they the result of solutions in the way the theory of change predicted, or was something else happening in the community that may have had a bigger impact on the indicator?

- Did some participants have better results than others and, if so, what explains this difference (e.g., characteristics of the participants, mix of interventions, duration of interventions, intensity of interventions)?

- Should the theory of change, continuum of solutions, or enrollment numbers be adjusted to achieve better results (or should performance targets be adjusted)?

Promise Neighborhoods engage in so-what analysis when they begin to look beneath the surface of their theory of change and results framework to understand specific refinements needed to achieve results for particular populations. So-what questions are almost always more difficult for performance managers to answer than who and what questions because they often require more complicated analysis to interpret results correctly. For example, the early learning scenario presented in figure 4 provides a fairly simple analysis showing that more of a particular type of capacity-building service (e.g.,

professional development) will help to advance positive results for children and families. In the example that follows, the identified service (e.g., some type of evidence-based home-visiting model) is already in place across all partners, but results are still uneven, requiring deeper so-what analysis from performance managers to properly adapt their results framework and continuously improve their programming.

EXAMPLE 5

A Promise Neighborhood has planned to provide home visiting to low-income families with young children within its footprint and, accordingly, has contracted with two partners to implement the same 10-week evidence-based home-visiting model. When the Promise Neighborhood looks at data for families who complete one of the two programs, a simple analysis like the one in figure 5 shows that 3-year-olds in families in partner A's program have better results than those in partner B's, based on assessments of age-appropriate function after the program has concluded. Taken at face value, these data might suggest that partner A is doing a better job of managing and implementing the program than partner B.

FIGURE 5

**Three-Year-Olds Demonstrating Age-Appropriate Functioning**

However, if we break out the data further, as shown in figure 6, the data reveal that partner B is reaching more families with heads of household who are under 25, which may be a higher-need population. Looking at other data on the characteristics of households served may further confirm that

partner B is reaching a larger share of higher-need households and, consequently, can be expected to experience more challenges in achieving outcomes.

With these data in hand, managers have an opportunity for further discussion with partners about refining their home-visiting strategy, perhaps by designing a way to offer more intensive home-visiting services specifically for higher-need participants. Additionally, the Promise Neighborhood has the opportunity to maximize cost effectiveness by working with partners to implement the more intensive (and therefore more expensive) model only with families who meet specific indicators of high need, such as young heads of household, and reserving the less expensive model for families who are more likely to succeed with a lighter intervention. In this regard, designated case management staff can be very helpful to ensuring that the highest-need families are referred to the agency with the most appropriate home-visiting model. However, Promise Neighborhoods without a case management function can also devise referral mechanisms that respond to so what analysis of case management data and ensure adequate service provision for high-need families.

FIGURE 6

Three-Year-Old Assessment Score and Head of Household Age by Partner
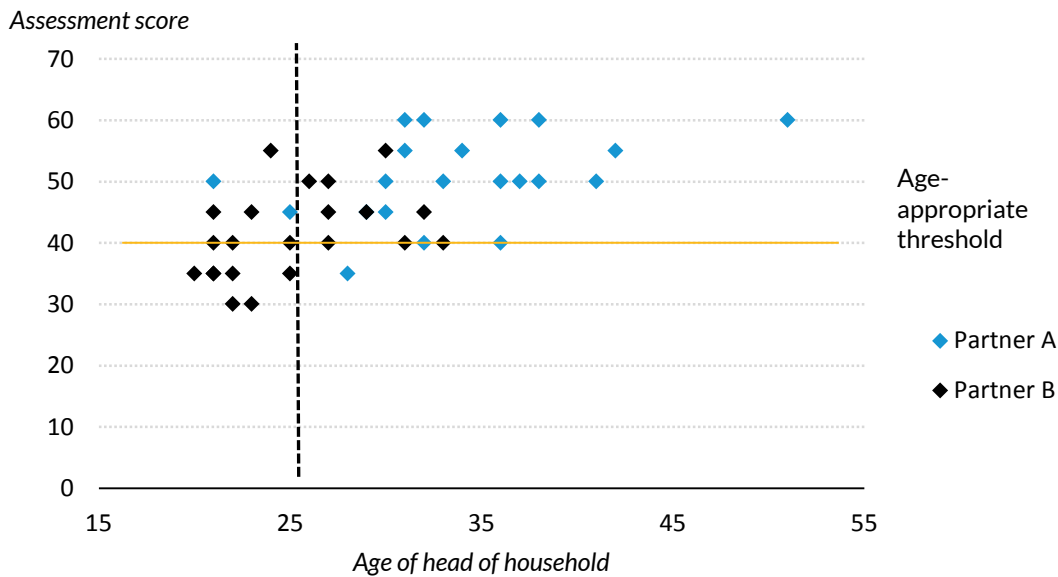
EXAMPLE 6

Case management data are also helpful in exploring whether population-level changes are the result of aligned solutions having an effect on indicators in the way a Promise Neighborhood's results frameworks predicts, or if something else happening in the community may be having a bigger impact on the indicator. Particularly when the external change may not be positive, Promise Neighborhoods

should use data to understand how their programs may or may not be working in the face of other factors out of their control. As noted in the Aspen Institute's roundtable summary, *Performance Management in Complex, Place-Based Work* (Auspos and Kubisch 2012)

> Determining whether an intervention is on target and making progress toward its goals is especially difficult in community change initiatives (CCI) because they aim for interactive effects among the broad array of programs and activities that are put in place. In a CCI, it is the combination of programs and activities across multiple levels (individual, organizational, systemic) and multiple domains of action (human capital development, physical infrastructure, economic development, and others) that is expected to produce changes in community-level outcomes. As a result, the process of change in a CCI is not necessarily predictable or controllable. Progress does not occur as, and cannot be measured by, a series of linear steps or stages. Markers are necessary to indicate whether the desired interactive effects are occurring or likely to occur.

For example, when a struggling neighborhood school closes, the mobility rate in a Promise Neighborhood, measured by the number of students who enter or exit a school during the academic year, will likely spike as a wave of students flows from the closed school into other target schools or out of neighborhood schools altogether. To look beyond the immediate high mobility rate in such a scenario, or to dig deeper into routinely high rates of student mobility, a Promise Neighborhood can break out case management data both to explore whether its current strategies are working and to guide the introduction and development of new strategies.

> For more on the complexity of performance management in community change initiatives, see *Performance Management in Complex, Place-Based Work.* (Auspos and Kubisch 2012)

For example, performance managers can juxtapose overall school performance (e.g., attendance rate and academic achievement) for a target school experiencing overall performance declines from high mobility rates, against the same indicators broken out to highlight students who have been continuously enrolled and those who are newly enrolled (figure 7).

FIGURE 7

Aggregate Performance for Target School

Legend:
- ■ Year 1 - Original cohort (light blue)
- ■ Year 2 - Original cohort plus new enrollees (medium blue)
- ■ Year 2 - Original cohort only (dark blue)

Attendance rate
- Year 1 - Original cohort: 83%
- Year 2 - Original cohort plus new enrollees: 74%
- Year 2 - Original cohort only: 84%

Performing at grade level
- Year 1 - Original cohort: 65%
- Year 2 - Original cohort plus new enrollees: 60%
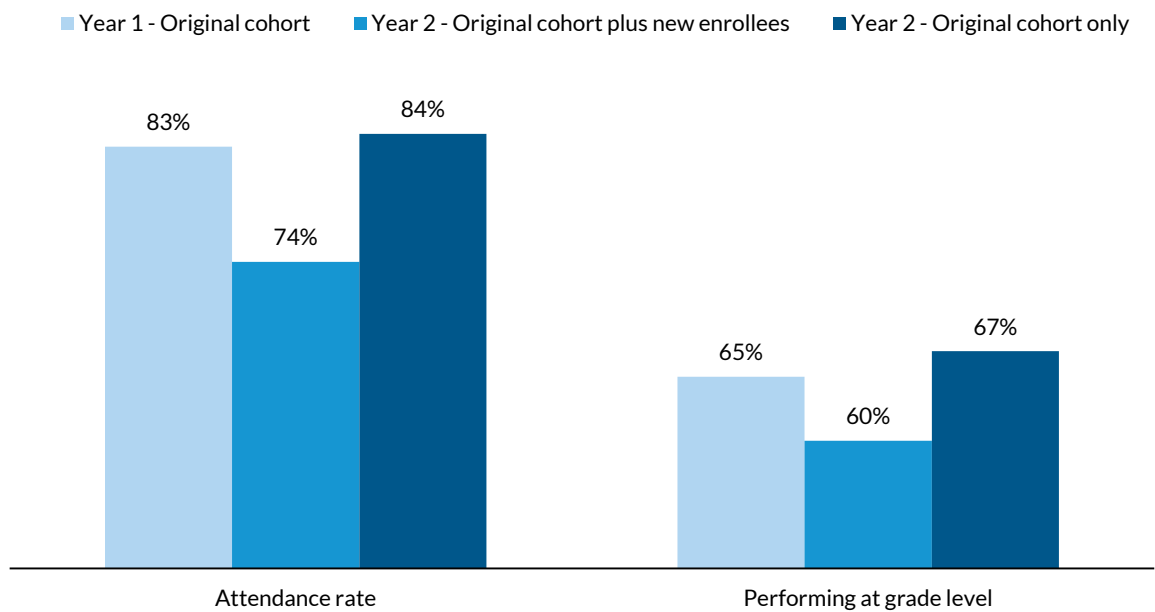- Year 2 - Original cohort only: 67%

Figure 7 shows that both attendance and academic achievement fell from year 1 to year 2 for the target school overall. However, breaking out the data to look at just those students who were continuously enrolled in the target school across both years (therefore removing those students who moved in and out of the school during that time period) reveals that the original or "stayer" cohort of students improved in both attendance and academic achievement from year 1 to year 2. This suggests that the Promise Neighborhood's attendance and academic achievement solutions may be working in the way they are expected to for students who are stably enrolled in the school. (Additional data and analysis would be needed to confirm this, however.)

Case management data can also be used to answer so-what questions with an eye toward improved or expanded strategies to address challenges from high mobility rates. For example, the Promise Neighborhood can use the case management data to focus partner conversations on how to maintain the performance of students who are moving in and out of the target school and who are more likely to have lower rates of attendance and achievement as a result. One strategy a Promise Neighborhood might adopt is to try to reduce the higher student mobility that is adversely affecting outcomes. But, because mobility can be difficult to affect in the short term, particularly where it is a result of events beyond the control of the Promise Neighborhood, an alternate or complementary strategy would be to incorporate high student mobility directly into the theory of change and results framework to mitigate its negative impact. For instance, the Promise Neighborhood could identify partners and solutions to

support the smooth transition of all students leaving target schools or the neighborhood, ensuring that all necessary files and service plans are shared with the "mover" students' new schools to minimize disruption to learning as much as possible. In addition, Promise Neighborhood staff can routinely follow up with school administrators, teachers, and students to monitor student success following the transition.

Another solution might be to enroll mover students into academic case management services that follow them through their transition, even if it is out of the neighborhood. Figure 8 shows how case management data could be used to track the effectiveness of such a solution. In the example, though there is a minor drop in academic performance, attendance remains stable. Using data like this, over time, a Promise Neighborhood may be able to show that, even if students are leaving neighborhood schools at higher rates than optimal, the majority of those students do not experience the steep academic performance setbacks typically observed among students who make nonpromotional moves between schools (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2004). Such a Promise Neighborhood will also be positioned to deal more effectively with the relatively common phenomenon of churning—students leaving and then returning to the neighborhood and target schools—because the program will have continued to monitor the performance of these students while they were away.

FIGURE 8

School Performance of Mover Students Who Received Academic Case Management
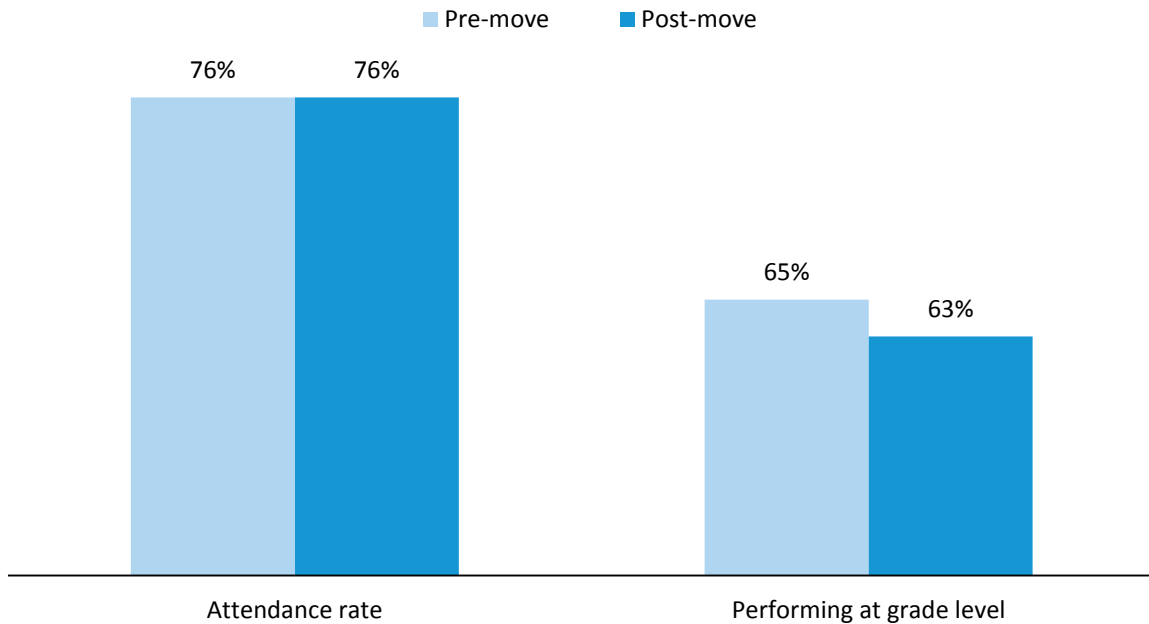
Conclusion

Continuous improvement of a Promise Neighborhood should be built on the strong foundation that only a detailed theory of change and supporting results framework can provide. Performance managers who wish to adopt the practices highlighted in this report should begin by reviewing their strategic planning documents. Together with program managers and partners who have insight into service planning and implementation, Promise Neighborhoods should ensure these documents reflect target results and outline how the initiative will achieve them. With that guiding framework in place, case management data can be a vital tool for understanding how all partners in the Promise Neighborhood are contributing to target results and how efforts can improve to better serve children and families. Case management data often shine a light on issues that other data sources may leave in the shadows.

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