

# Promise Neighborhood **Site PROFILE**

## Berea College Promise Neighborhood

### GRANTEE ORGANIZATION:

Partners for Education,  
Berea College

### LOCATION:

Clay, Jackson, and  
Owsley Counties, KY

### FEDERAL PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD GRANT:

*Date of grant award:*  
December 2011

*Date grant agreement with U.S. Department of Education executed:*  
December 2011

*Total investment:*  
\$45 million (\$30 million federal grant and \$15 million in matching funds) over five years

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT/ TARGET POPULATION

Berea College Promise Neighborhood serves Clay, Jackson, and Owsley Counties—cumulatively comprising 961 square miles of rural Appalachian Kentucky. Per capita income in these counties is significantly lower than the state and national average, and Clay, Jackson, and Owsley are some of the most economically distressed counties in the country.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, 81 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price school meals. All of the middle and high schools included in the Promise Neighborhood are persistently low-achieving. Altogether, 6,300 students—prekindergarten through grade 12—reside within these three counties, and the initiative aims to reach all of them in some way.

### KEY PARTNERS AND THEIR ROLES

Due to the limited resources within their rural neighborhood, Partners for Education, the branch of Berea College that leads the Berea initiative, implements many of the initiative's services, but it recruited several partners to participate in the planning process and play major roles in advising and implementing the Berea College Promise Neighborhood initiative (see sidebar, page 2). The lead agency had to enlist some of their partners from outside of the community because there were no local providers.

All schools in the three school districts within the Berea College Promise Neighborhood geographic boundaries—a total of 16 schools—are key partners in the initiative. Other major partners include Save the Children and the Eastern Kentucky Child Care Coalition, which provide early childhood expertise and programming such as home visiting, and professional development, respectively; partners that provide academic support, such as the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning, which provides teacher professional development; and family and community

well-being partners such as Grow Appalachia, which facilitates a community gardening project. REACH Evaluation developed the Berea College Promise Neighborhood longitudinal data system and will evaluate the initiative.

### THE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

The lead agency of the Berea College Promise Neighborhood, Partners for Education at Berea College, has worked with local schools throughout Appalachia to enhance college readiness through Department of Education grant programs such as GEAR UP and Investing in Innovation (i3) and has supported families through financial education and family empowerment programs. The Promise Neighborhoods grant enabled Partners for Education to expand their reach beyond middle and high school college readiness to include early childhood and elementary programming, as well as health and arts programs across grade levels, resulting in a holistic cradle-to-career pipeline. Major pipeline components and activities of the Berea College Promise Neighborhood are outlined in Figure 1.

- **Programs.** A primary component of Berea's early childhood intervention, serving 500 children annually, is Early Steps to School Success (ESSS), which consists of a home visiting program to promote early literacy for children birth to age 3 years and a book exchange program for children up to age 5. Early Childhood Specialists work with children transitioning out of the home visiting program. They monitor and support the development of children in various early childhood programs, primarily Head Start—public preschool partnerships, as well as those remaining in parental care. Berea's support for preschool-age children also includes professional development for early childhood educators to help programs meet state standards. To facilitate children's transition to kindergarten, Berea College Promise Neighborhood hosts

## Berea College Promise Neighborhood Key Partners



### Early Childhood Services

Save the Children  
Eastern Kentucky Child Care Coalition



### Academic Services

Clay County Public Schools  
Jackson County Public Schools  
Owsley County Public Schools  
Collaborative for Teaching and Learning  
Kentucky Arts Council



### Health, Wellness, and Safety

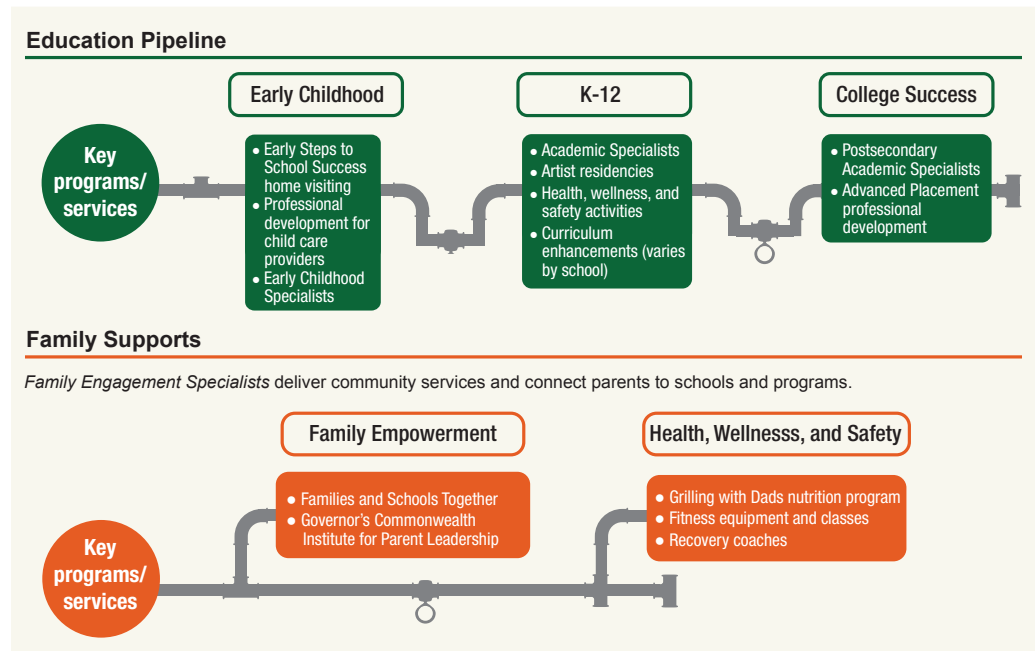
Local health departments  
Local police departments  
Grow Appalachia  
University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service  
Jackson County Family Court



### Data System and Evaluation

REACH Evaluation

**Figure 1.** Berea College Promise Neighborhood Pipeline Components



Source: Site visit interviews conducted in 2014.

Note: This figure highlights key activities in each area; it does not list all the programs and services the Promise Neighborhood offers.

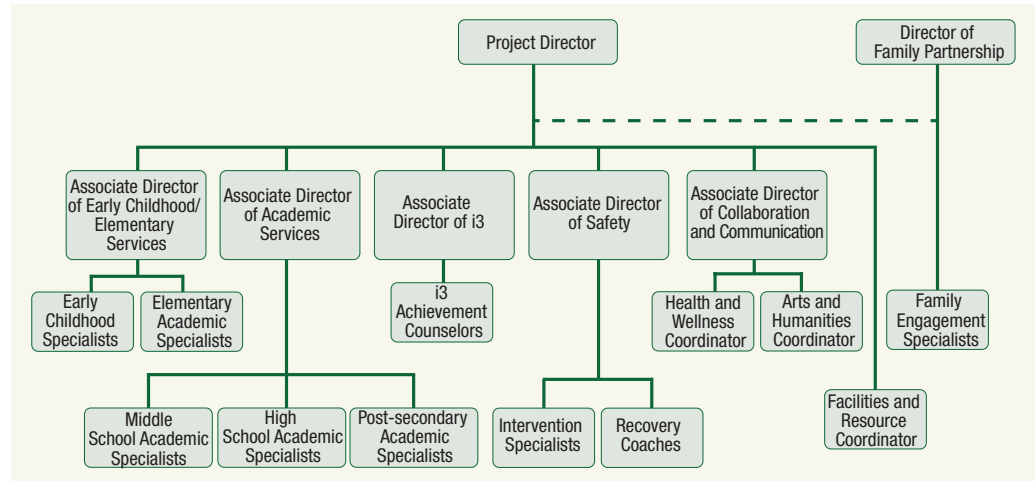
picnics at each elementary school where elementary school Academic Specialists discuss the importance of attending kindergarten, and parents pledge to send their children. Early Childhood Specialists also attend to inform parents of steps they can take at home to prepare their children for kindergarten.

Berea College Promise Neighborhood's school reform efforts include the provision of academic supports as well as programs focused on physical and social-emotional well-being. Academic Specialists located in every elementary, middle, and high school in the three counties provide individual and small-group tutoring in mathematics and reading to low-performing and at-risk youth, as identified through the early warning system, which is based on grades, test scores, and attendance. Berea College Promise Neighborhood also supports the schools by providing professional development; purchasing new curricula and technology; and offering arts, health, wellness, and safety programs. For example, Berea College Promise Neighborhood staff trained teachers to facilitate Jump Start, a physical fitness program offered before the school day. The initiative purchased new Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids equipment and training for schools, and promotes nutrition

through several school gardens and an increased emphasis on farm-to-cafeteria food. Through artist residencies, students receive instruction in a variety of art forms including music, drama, and dance. The artists and classroom teachers work together to incorporate academic content into the art instruction. To promote healthy relationships and behaviors, the initiative introduced the Green Dot program, which focuses on reducing dating violence, and a program that encourages children to intervene in situations that might include bullying and violence.

To enhance the community's existing college access and success efforts, the Berea College Promise Neighborhood hired a Postsecondary Academic Specialist for each high school to provide academic case management to increase graduation, college enrollment, and college completion. The responsibilities of the Postsecondary Academic Specialists include helping high school seniors apply to college and facilitating the enrollment process for Promise Neighborhood students accepted to the local community college. The Advanced Placement Training and Incentive Program provides training to both teachers and students to increase Advanced Placement course offerings and exam pass rates.

**Figure 2.** Berea College Promise Neighborhood Organizational Structure



Source: Background documents from Berea College Promise Neighborhood, revised with feedback from interviews.

- Families.** Berea College Promise Neighborhood empowers parents and families through multiple parenting and wellness programs. Berea’s health and wellness services extend beyond schools into the community and include Grilling with Dads, a structured four-week nutrition program for families; family fitness events open to the community; and recovery coaches who work with the family court in one county to support parents with substance use disorders and their families.

Family engagement staff facilitate Families and Schools Together (FAST), a family empowerment program led by parents. Parents choose topics of interest, such as bullying, and the family engagement staff, in partnership with schools and other community organizations, bring in related speakers. The family engagement staff also support a Parent Involvement Taskforce (PIT Crew) in each school district. The PIT Crew comprises parents committed to improving the overall health, well-being, and academic achievement of students in their district. The taskforce identifies local needs and works to meet these needs through activities such as family math nights and extracurricular opportunities for families of students with special needs.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND STAFF ROLES

Partners for Education administers a number of education and family empowerment programs that support the Berea College Promise Neighborhood.

A management board comprising Partners for Education leadership, including directors of these programs, key partners, and community representatives, helped design the initiative and facilitated initial implementation of the Promise Neighborhood. The leadership team is responsible for ongoing implementation of the initiative and includes the Project Director and Associate Directors of Early Childhood/Elementary Services; Academic Services; i3; Safety; and Collaboration and Communication (Figure 2) in conjunction with Partners for Education’s Family Partnership program. Each of the associate directors oversees the implementation and programming for their target areas. There were few existing community-based organizations within the Berea College Promise Neighborhood, thus Partners for Education hired numerous staff to provide the planned programs and services, including Early Childhood Specialists, Academic Specialists, i3 Achievement Counselors, Intervention Specialists, and Recovery Coaches.

## PROGRESS/ ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- More than 6,000 students touched by services.** In addition to the teacher professional development that benefits all students in the neighborhood, staff estimated that 5,000 students have been served by Berea College Promise Neighborhood arts programs. Attendance in the Jump Start physical fitness program has been steadily increasing with 600–700 students currently participating. Jump Start was originally

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introduced at a single school within one district, but expanded in the 2013–2014 school year to six additional schools across two districts, per school request. The Eastern Kentucky Child Care Coalition has provided professional development and coaching to 45 teachers and administrators in 21 of the 25 publicly funded preschool and Head Start classrooms in the neighborhood.

- **Initiative embraced by families and schools.** A parent who has participated in a number of programs commented, “There are so few services and activities [in our area]. The Promise Neighborhood gives me great opportunities that aren’t available otherwise.” One Family Engagement Specialist reported that 65 percent of middle and high school parents attended her back-to-school event. She noted that parents of middle and high school students are typically challenging to engage.

In the beginning, some principals were uninterested in partnering with the initiative. Berea College Promise Neighborhood staff made a concerted effort to build relationships and engage them in the decision making process regarding the programs and services that would be offered in their schools. As a result of these efforts, the principals now value the initiative. A Health Content Specialist reported that a principal who was not initially interested in offering a Jump Start program is now fully supportive of the program and has cited its positive effect on student school attendance.

- **Promising early outcomes related to school readiness.** Based on data compiled and analyzed by Results Leadership Group,<sup>2</sup> Berea has seen an increase in the percentage of kindergartners who demonstrate at the beginning of the program or school year age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning (Government Performance and Results Act indicator 2). School readiness increased from 16 percent in 2013 to 38 percent in 2014 based on Kentucky’s kindergarten readiness measure, the Brigance K and 1 Screen III. Promise Neighborhood staff credited a combination of their ESSS home visiting program, professional development provided to early childhood educators, and the addition of Early Childhood Specialists for the increase in kindergarten readiness.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- **Lack of transportation.** In rural areas, transportation can be an obstacle for out-of-school activities. There are no interstate highways in Berea, and children often spend up to two hours per day traveling to and from school. This limits how many children can attend activities held outside regular school hours, and the Promise Neighborhood found it was too expensive to offer transportation directly. The initiative has attempted to partially address this issue by organizing some programs before school, for which children can rely on the bus. In other instances, they have been able to find support from community partners—for instance, local churches agreed to provide transportation for a summer program.
- **Limited initial school engagement.** During the Promise Neighborhood planning process, Partners for Education garnered district support for the initiative, but some principals expressed little interest as implementation began. The Promise Neighborhood leaders discovered that district support did not necessarily translate to principal support and realized in hindsight that they should have sought the buy-in from school principals as well during the planning stage. They have taken steps to gain the support of principals, including changing the annual budgeting process to involve principals in decisions about the specific programs and services provided in their schools.
- **Unclear federal data requirements.** The federal government did not provide enough clear, consistent, and timely information and support about data requirements and how to access different types of data. The limited early support resulted in a lengthy measurement framework development process, delaying their ability to report performance indicators. Despite the setbacks, Berea College Promise Neighborhood has begun using data to refine and enhance the initiative. For example, through the process of analyzing their data, they discovered a gap in their early learning services that they rectified by adding Early Childhood Specialists to work with individual children and their families in early childhood programs.
- **Fragmented planning process.** Some Promise Neighborhood leaders believed that the two-stage process of competing for a planning grant and an implementation grant

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## ABOUT PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS CASE STUDIES

The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at Policy Link (PNI) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct in-depth case studies of five selected Promise Neighborhoods, including Berea. For these case studies, Mathematica gathered and analyzed data from documents, telephone interviews, and three-to-four-day site visits to each selected Promise Neighborhood at the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

was disjointed. The leadership team had to begin drafting their implementation grant halfway through their planning year. The local community also expressed frustration with the lengthy planning process, as they were eager to begin implementing programs. In response, the leadership team began piloting some programs during the planning year.

## LOOKING FORWARD

- **Streamlining current services.** With no plans to add components to their initiative, Berea College Promise Neighborhood staff are focusing on refining and streamlining the services they offer. They plan to examine the data to identify the most effective components of their initiative to inform sustainability plans.
- **Sustaining and expanding programs.** Promise Neighborhood leaders commented that they do not yet have the data to identify the most promising programs and services on which they should focus their sustainability efforts, but they are looking to partners to provide future support for some programs and working to identify new funds to support others. They expect that continued work and collaboration with districts, schools, and other partners will facilitate sustainability. They are working with schools to build their capacity to maintain programs the Promise Neighborhood put in place, which should enable a degree of sustainability, even if there is a loss of the Promise Neighborhood staff placed in schools when the grant period ends. Berea College Promise Neighborhood is providing assistance to partners in securing ongoing funding. For example, they worked with schools to draft successful applications for Teaching Arts Together grants; the process not only obtained those immediate funds but also trained school personnel to continue applying for grants. In December 2014, the initiative convened a meeting of partners, potential partners, parents, and community members to discuss broad sustainability efforts. The Promise Neighborhood will follow up with two community meetings in each county and a sustainability summit in 2015.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Berea College Promise Neighborhood implementation grant application, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Queen, J., Epps, Z., Whiting, D., & Stone, M. (2014, August). *Berea Promise Neighborhood annual grant performance report*. Rockville, MD: Results Leadership Group.

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## Suggested Citation

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