

Northside Achievement Zone Services & Educational Success in North Minneapolis

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers, educators, and other professionals engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful dialogue about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

We were interested in understanding the experiences of families served by the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), including those who were recipients of a state-funded rental assistance program, and the association over time between NAZ engagement and school attendance. We created groups of children with different lengths of NAZ engagement. Results indicated that NAZ serves children with high sociodemographic risk. Within NAZ, the recipients of state rental assistance had even greater risk for attendance and homelessness, suggesting that these families were even higher on a continuum of risk than the broader population of families served by NAZ. Results also indicated that families who were able to engage more thoroughly with NAZ received more NAZ services and maintained higher attendance than the other groups.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that families who were able to engage most with NAZ over time had relatively lower risk compared to other families in NAZ (e.g., lower prevalence of homelessness, lower CPS involvement, more two-parent households), which may have supported their ability to engage with NAZ and experience its benefit. In your practice, what are effective ways to reach and engage families that are most in need of support? What barriers do you encounter?
2. This study focused on the association between NAZ services and school attendance. Surprisingly, we learned that children with less than one year of NAZ engagement, and children with two years of NAZ engagement had better attendance than children with one year of NAZ engagement. What kinds of factors might be driving this result? Do you think the findings would change with additional years of information about NAZ engagement? In addition, what do you think are other important outcomes to examine?
3. This study found that, in general, greater engagement with NAZ was associated with better school attendance. Do you think that there is a particular service that NAZ offers—school supports, parenting support, high-quality early childhood education—that is most important for school attendance or do you think it is their comprehensive place-based approach that is most effective? What types of services do you observe as attendance-improving factors in your own work?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. This study focused on a place-based neighborhood program – the Northside Achievement Zone. Results of this study show that engagement with this program is supportive of children's educational success. However, very few of these kinds of place-based neighborhood programs exist. What do you think are the barriers to designing and implementing these types of comprehensive services? In what ways might local or state policies be developed or changed to better meet the needs of students who face high sociodemographic risk? What do you think are integral services that should be offered to support school achievement?
2. In addition to place-based supports, what do you think are other important system-level supports for student attendance? Are there system-level supports that your organization provides? If so, what ways can these be expanded or enhanced to support student achievement?