



Family Engagement and Learning in North Minneapolis

Emerging Picture in the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)

NAZ began around 2008 out of prior grassroots efforts to improve the quality of life and success for residents on the Northside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone, it is a highly collaborative two-generation initiative targeting improvements at the individual and community levels. It was formally established as the Northside Achievement Zone in 2010, and received its Promise Neighborhood grant at the end of 2011. At that time its enrollment was 217 families with 584 children. During the latest full year of operation (2015-16) it operated at full capacity, with nearly 1,000 families and 2,200 children participating in NAZ collaborative programs.

About NAZ

NAZ incorporates a data-driven, results-based accountability process, using data from a high-tech collaborative administrative data system that supports a high-touch, human-centered approach to work with families and scholars. NAZ has eight K-12 partner schools, including five that are part of the Minneapolis Public Schools, two charter schools, and one Catholic parochial school. These schools serve around 5,300 students, of whom about 24 percent live in the 13 x 18 block zone, and about 18 percent are actively enrolled in NAZ.

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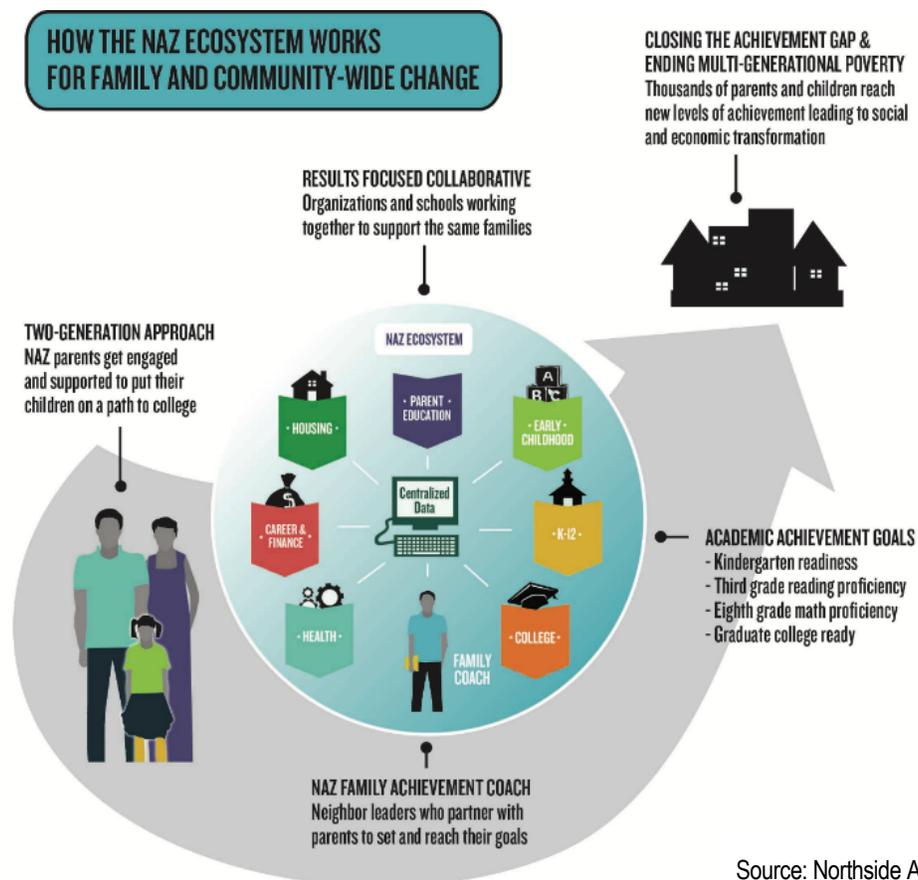
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NAZ's approach

NAZ's results-driven approach is based upon research that demonstrates how place, race, and income simultaneously influence the academic, social, and economic outcomes of a child's life, as well as the lived experience of his or her family. NAZ works to reimagine ways in which families experience the academic and socioeconomic systems in which they live. Children – consistently referred to as “scholars” – are wrapped in integrated, coordinated, high-quality academic, social, and health programs and supports from the cradle to college to career. Schools' efforts are complemented by intentional family and community engagement and governance of this system, as families support their children and community, and the neighborhood seeks population-level change.

Parent engagement and leadership

NAZ's approach turns the social service model on its head, shifting families to a leadership role in which they establish academic goals for their scholars and identify the help they need to accomplish those goals. They partner one-on-one with Family Achievement Coaches who grew up in the Zone, or in communities like it. The process is described on the next page.



Source: Northside Achievement Zone

Parents partner with NAZ at every step in their child's path to college and career:

- Family Achievement Coaches enroll families into NAZ and partner with them to support their path forward as long as they remain engaged, including through college. Most Coaches are housed at partner schools or early learning centers, to maximize opportunities to integrate their work into the scholar's educational setting.
- Coaches work one-on-one with parents *and* their children to instill the belief that college is possible; help parents set family goals called Achievement Plans; help scholars set and reach academic goals; and help integrate the parents' and scholars' plans.
- As parent needs are determined they may work with their Coaches to set goals in Family Support areas (housing, career and finance, or behavioral health) in addition to the academic plans; Coaches help connect them with Specialists, who are co-located with NAZ partner organizations and can help them get the support they need to work on their goals in these areas.
- Parents are encouraged to take NAZ Family Academy empowerment and parenting education classes, which include child-age-options from birth through elementary school. A class for parents of middle school scholars is under development; NAZ is also developing a scholar-focused version of empowerment.
- NAZ intentionally promotes and celebrates parent leadership in a variety of ways, and a team of parent leaders are selected to serve on the NAZ Parent Advisory Board and represent families in the results-based accountability review process.
- Data about parents and scholars are maintained by all partners in the centralized data system known as NAZ Connect.



Integration of parent engagement with the schools

Beyond the high-touch engagement of Coaches with parents (and scholars, as their age permits), more direct academic support includes Expanded Learning programs. These provide both academic support and the social-emotional learning typical of youth development programs, offered both afterschool and over the summer by a mix of NAZ partners including schools and community-

based organizations. Review of academic outcomes shows increased educational attainment for those scholars who participate.

Parent engagement is intentionally integrated into the NAZ partner schools through co-location of the Family Achievement Coaches, provision of Family Academy classes in the school setting, Scholar Achievement Planning, and the use of Scholar Teams to integrate family support to intentionally address and support school success.

Family Achievement Coaches in the schools

As it learns from experience including review of data in its continuous improvement process, NAZ has been strengthening the way it integrates Coaches into Anchor Schools. At each school, NAZ now has between two and four Coaches, and a Manager who helps embed the engagement process into the school setting. Coaches increasingly work with teachers as well as parents, bridging classroom goals back to parents and providing ongoing support for scholars around their context for learning. NAZ is also exploring working with groups of scholars.

Scholar Achievement Planning

Scholar Achievement Planning is a process to bring out the best in each child and accelerate their academic growth along a path to college. Scholars work with trusted adults from NAZ and its partner programs to focus on five elements of achievement:

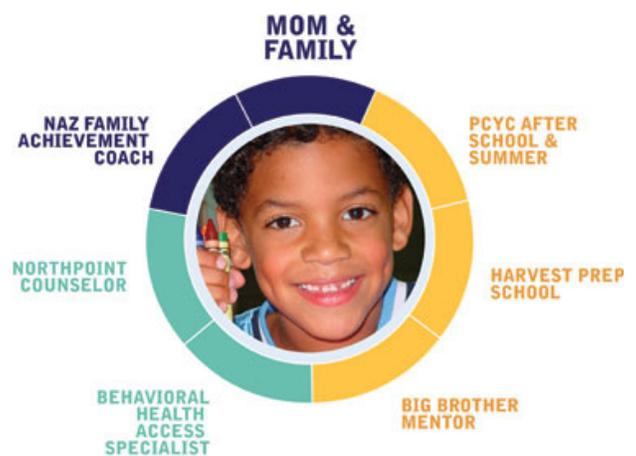
1. Maximize **learning time**
2. Connect scholars to solutions tailored to accelerate **academic** growth
3. Surround the scholar with a **team** of caring adults, committed to his or her academic success
4. Recognize that the scholar's behaviors, positive or negative, are the **voice**, or expressions, of the scholar's life experiences, and support the scholar to convert his/her voice into constructive communication and positive actions
5. Identify and support the scholar's **spark**, or deep passions and interests, which propels the scholar toward optimal achievement by igniting his/her energy and joy.

Progress is monitored through the shared data system, NAZ Connect.

Integration of family support with academic success

Scholar Teams integrate scholar support and family support to promote personal and academic success. For example, eight-year-old Brandon is a typical NAZ scholar. His mom struggled to pay rent on an income below the poverty line. “Team Brandon” was formed after he was placed in Level 4 special education and suspended from his after-school program due to behavior. This team includes his mother, teacher, NAZ Family Achievement Coach, NAZ Academic Specialist, a NAZ Behavioral Health Access Specialist, and more.

Their work quickly identified anxiety as the cause of his problems at school. He is now working one on one with his Academic Specialist to set and reach his own goals in school. Brandon attends a NAZ Anchor School and his Specialist is located on site. As barriers arise, they work together to find solutions. Because every scholar’s progress is tracked through NAZ Connect, his team knows that his after-school and summer programs have helped him to jump ahead in reading and math. He is now in Level 1 special education. Every week he hangs out with his mentor and visits his behavioral health counselor.



Other features of the NAZ-school partnership

Although it is outside the scope of this brief review of parent- and scholar-focused strategies, other ways in which NAZ has worked with its partner schools include:

- A learning community of all partner school principals, which helped develop a sense of shared accountability for the children of the Zone; this shared experience is rare if not unique for such a combination of public, charter, and parochial schools
- Work with teachers on instructional strategies appropriate for the Northside population, including trainings on adverse childhood experiences and the Innocent Classroom, as well as consultation from NAZ’s lead behavioral health partner on behavioral health strategies
- Close coordination between the academic support at Expanded Learning and the regular classroom curriculum, together with intentional recruitment by NAZ and partner schools of those scholars most in need of the extra help
- Regular shared review of academic data to identify whether scholar performance is improving, and what interventions are associated with the greatest improvements



Continuous improvement cycle: Results NAZ and ongoing data review using NAZ Connect

Results NAZ is a series of roundtable conversations focused on NAZ’s Results Plans, formerly known as Solution Action Plans. Each plan relates to one of six different Action Areas: Family Engagement and Education; Early Childhood; K-8 Success; High School to College; Family Support; and the Collaboration that holds all of the other action areas together. Each roundtable gathers NAZ leadership, partners, and families to review data, highlight successes, identify new solutions, and adjust strategies. The meeting is followed by a post-roundtable

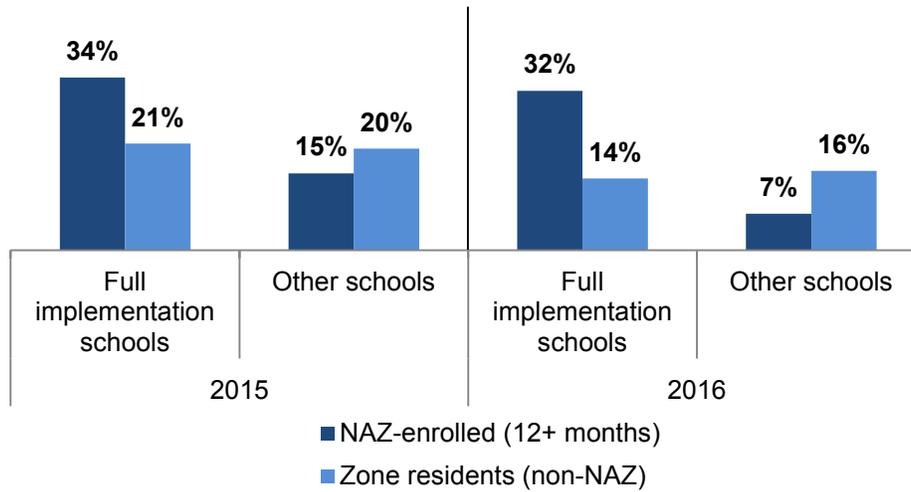
agreement on adjustments to the strategy – both at the NAZ program level and at the larger community level (partners’ larger operations, and policy implications) – as well as sharing results with partner organizations, the Action Teams (the teams responsible for overseeing implementation of the Results Plans), and the NAZ Board.

In addition to this formal annual cycle, NAZ Connect data are used for continuous improvement in real time by Coaches who regularly review family progress toward goals, and in particular by all the partners who support scholars and who can check on the most recent annual or semester progress measures to determine both need and the extent to which current solutions are helping to address it. The NAZ Connect database pulls together academic data and data that reflects efforts and interventions with the parents and scholars across all of the areas reflected in the NAZ ecosystem. This cross-walking of data is what helps drive the work of the family with the help of their team (staff and partners) and helps NAZ analyze at individual, program, and solution levels to support continuous improvement. The language of data and outcomes is becoming the norm within families and their support systems.

Learning outcomes

NAZ relies on shared leadership, close relationships, and analysis of academic data to develop and adjust its strategies for working with scholars, parents, and partners. Analysis of data from 2014-15 MCAs (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, the state’s annual statewide proficiency tests) showed larger gains in proficiency rates at Anchor Schools that engaged more fully with NAZ, and in particular more fully embedded family engagement staff and the supportive resources they could wrap around scholars and families. These are referred to here as “full implementation schools, described in more detail below). Adding a second year of analysis largely supported and refined the hypotheses about the essential active ingredients in this full implementation.

MCA reading proficiency by school's level of NAZ implementation, grades 3-5

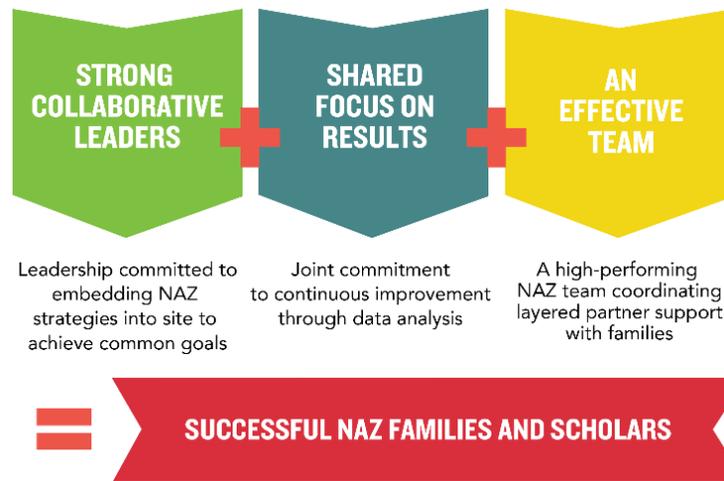


Characteristics of full-implementation Anchor Schools

As identified by NAZ and its partners, and as illustrated in the figure below (see graphic on next page), the elements that are present in the full-implementation schools with higher academic outcomes, and not present in the other schools with lower outcomes, are:

- Strong, collaborative school leadership, committed to embedding NAZ strategies into the school site, sharing accountability with NAZ to achieve common goals
- A shared focus on results, with a joint commitment to continuous improvement through data analysis, shared between school and NAZ staff
- An effective team of high-performing NAZ engagement and support staff (2-5 NAZ staff embedded at the school), coordinating partner support with families including whatever “layers” of support are needed
- Family Academy (parenting education) and Expanded Learning offered through the school or through NAZ partners, with one or more NAZ strategies reaching approximately 25 percent to 50 percent of the students in the school.

Emerging Learning about the “Formula for Success” in NAZ and Anchor School Partnership



Source: Northside Achievement Zone

At present, this “formula for success” is based on staff observation of the characteristics at the higher-performing schools, and analysis of student test scores for NAZ-enrolled vs. other Zone scholars. During 2017, evaluators will work with NAZ and its partners to operationalize these constructs so that the specific replicable factors can be identified and more rigorously tested against the data.

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