M&T Bank Newsroom

# Buffalo Receives Federal Promise Neighborhood Grant

**BUFFALO, N.Y.—**A Buffalo proposal to create a “cradle to career” educational and social services program for children received a $500,000 planning grant under the U.S. Department of Education “Promise Neighborhoods” program today, announced M&T Bank President Mark J. Czarnecki and Buffalo School Superintendent Dr. James A. Williams.

Known as the Buffalo Promise Initiative, the grant-winning proposal was submitted by Buffalo’s Westminster Foundation, which is associated with the Westminster Community Charter School partnership headed by M&T Bank. Executives from M&T organized the proposal, and brought together a wide array of community institutions and organizations to support the initiative.

“M&T’s partnership with Westminster goes back 17 years, and in that time, we’ve done a lot to improve the education that our students were getting at the K through 8 level—but along the way we’ve also learned that to be fully successful, we have to be reaching kids before they get to school, before they’re even born, and we have to continue to provide support through high school, through college, until they are established in a career,” said Czarnecki.

Superintendent of Buffalo Public Schools James A. Williams said he is very thankful to M&T Bank, the University at Buffalo and all of the local agencies that helped to secure the planning grant. “This grant will help us to form a coalition in ZIP code 14215 that will address the academic, social and emotional issues of the community and take a cradle to college holistic approach with the students who live there.” Williams made special note of the particular need for “seamless development beyond the classroom.”

Buffalo Promise is one of 21 proposals by nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education that received Promise Neighborhoods planning grants, which were announced today by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. More than 300 communities from 48 states and the District of Columbia submitted applications for Promise Neighborhoods planning grants.

The Buffalo application was one of only three to receive perfect scores through the grant review process.

To address the challenges faced by students living in communities of concentrated poverty, Promise Neighborhoods grantees and their partner organizations will plan to provide services from early learning to college and career, including programs to improve the health, safety, and stability of neighborhoods, and boost family engagement in student learning.

Winning Promise Neighborhood grant applications reflect deep partnerships among community-based organizations, service providers, schools and the district, colleges and universities, local leaders and others. “Buffalo Promise is a true public-private partnership,” said Czarnecki. “Everyone has come together to help make this happen—M&T Bank, Buffalo Public Schools, the Oishei Foundation, the United Way, Read to Succeed Buffalo, Catholic Charities, the Buffalo Urban League, the University at Buffalo, and the City of Buffalo.”

M&T Bank has actively committed managerial and financial resources to public education for 17 years. M&T Bank adopted Buffalo’s lowest-performing school in 1993 and is still partnering with Westminster Community Charter School today.

Building on that success, an expanded group of partners has designed a continuum of service solutions that will support the academic achievement of all students in the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood, from “before birth” through school to college- and career-readiness.

Phase I of the Buffalo Promise plan focuses on a very low-income neighborhood of 11,000 residents in a contiguous one mile area located east of Buffalo’s downtown within the 14215 ZIP code. The neighborhood includes three schools: Westminster Community Charter School, Highgate Heights, a “low-performing school that is not also a persistently lowest-achieving school,” and Bennett High School, a “persistently lowest-achieving school.”

Phase II would add 14,000 residents in contiguous neighborhoods in 14215, and Phase III would launch a new Promise zone on Buffalo’s west side.

Organizers anticipate that Buffalo Promise will include:

- Early childhood and parenting programs to prepare children for school
- A strong plan to improve student performance at the three schools within the Promise Neighborhood
- A full cradle-to-career service approach to supporting learning
- Concrete steps toward integrating a wide array of social services to meet the needs of all children
- Access for students to volunteer opportunities, mentors, and internships and partnering with the many dynamic leaders in

the Buffalo Promise neighborhood

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