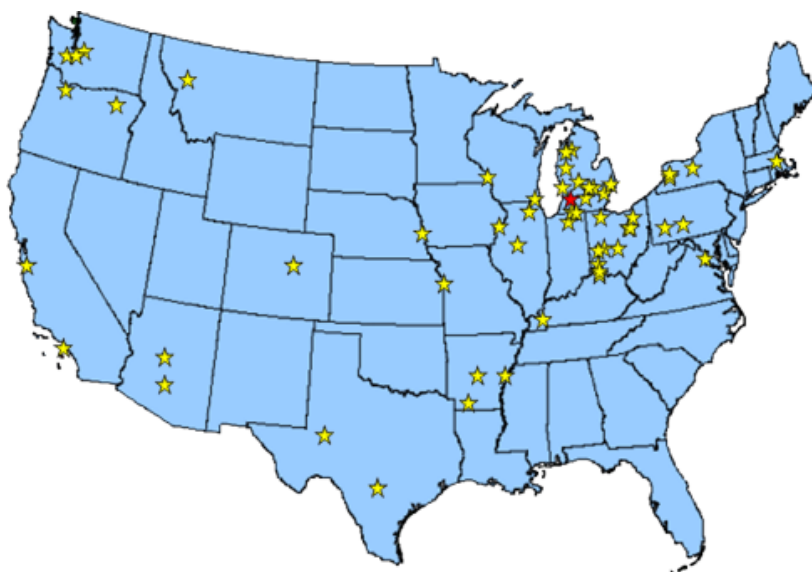


## The Kalamazoo Promise and the Diffusion of a Private Policy Innovation



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In November 2005, the mid-sized city of Kalamazoo, Michigan, became home to an unprecedented experiment in education-based economic renewal when it was announced that a group of anonymous donors had created the “Kalamazoo Promise” – a scholarship program that guarantees full college scholarships to every student who graduates from the Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS). Behind the scholarship is an economic development agenda that seeks to revitalize the city and the region through a substantial investment in public education. It is an unorthodox approach and one that has drawn widespread national media coverage and the attention of dozens of communities across the nation that are emulating key aspects of the program.

The Kalamazoo Promise differs from most other scholarship programs in that the allocation of funds is based not on merit or need, but on place. Beginning with the class of 2006 and continuing in perpetuity, every KPS graduate who has been enrolled in and resided in the district since Kindergarten receives a scholarship covering 100 percent of tuition and mandatory fees at any of Michigan’s 44 public colleges or universities. Graduates who have attended a KPS school and lived in the district for four years receive a scholarship covering 65 percent of these costs, with a sliding scale for those in between. There are almost no strings attached: students must maintain a 2.0 GPA in their college courses and make regular progress toward a degree.

Since its announcement, over 1,100 KPS graduates have utilized some portion of their scholarship, the donors have spent \$7.5 million, and enrollment in KPS has grown by 13 percent following decades of decline.<sup>1</sup> The initial results of the program include many surprises, some positive for the local economy (approximately two-thirds of scholarship recipients have chosen

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*Note:* Map on cover illustrates the location of communities exploring Promise-type programs as of June 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Data on the Kalamazoo Promise is available through the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research at <http://www.upjohn.org/promise>. Program details are available at <https://www.kalamazoopromise.com/>

to attend a local college or university, maximizing the positive local economic development impact), others less so (the program has had no discernible impact on the local real estate market). But there is no bigger surprise than what has happened outside Kalamazoo. Spurred in part by extensive national media coverage and the reporting (and misreporting) of early positive results from the Kalamazoo Promise, communities across the nation have created their own universal, place-based scholarship programs inspired by and modeled on the Kalamazoo Promise (referred to in this paper as “Promise-type programs”). In some cases the private individual funding model has been retained, while in other cases communities have turned to public sources of funds, local corporations, or philanthropic organizations.

The first cities to announce their intentions to develop Promise-type programs did so only a few months after the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise. These included Newton, Iowa, a company town adjusting to the imminent departure of the Maytag Corporation; Hammond, Indiana, a shrinking industrial city on the south shore of Lake Michigan; and Flint, Michigan, the distressed former home to General Motors’ main production facilities and the setting for Michael Moore’s movie *Roger and Me*. By the first anniversary of the Kalamazoo Promise announcement in November 2006 the floodgates had opened, with city after city announcing its own version of the program. Some of these plans have come to fruition, while others have not (see Table 1).

Programs currently up and running include:

- The El Dorado Promise in the small, resource-dependent town of El Dorado, Arkansas, where a local businessman read about the Kalamazoo Promise in the *Wall Street Journal*, shared the idea with other business leaders, and then approached the head of a local oil company for funding. The program is funded for the next 20 years through a \$50 million gift from Murphy Oil. The El Dorado program closely matches the terms of the

Kalamazoo Promise, except that students are allowed to use their scholarships to attend any college or university in the nation.

- The Pittsburgh Promise, where the school superintendent, after presiding over the closing of 22 schools in a single year, learned of the Kalamazoo Promise and decided that a similar intervention might help his district's demographics. He and the mayor announced the program before any funding was in place, and were then able to secure a \$100 million challenge grant from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center to be disbursed over a 10-year period to support the creation of an endowment.
- The Denver Scholarship Foundation, where a former resident of Southwest Michigan and her husband, the owner of a successful energy company, heard about the Kalamazoo Promise and contributed \$50 million to establish a scholarship program for the Denver Public Schools. The scholarship is available only to low- and moderate-income graduates; however, an important component of the program is the creation of Future Centers in every high school to support all students in preparing for college and accessing financial aid.
- The College Bound program in Hammond, Indiana, where local casino revenue supports a Promise-type scholarship program for high-school graduates whose parents are homeowners in the City of Hammond.
- Programs such as the Jackson Legacy and Peoria Promise, which allow all high-school graduates to attend their local community college for free. There are many programs like this, some of which predate the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise.

Many more Promise-type programs are in the development stage in communities ranging from La Crosse, Wisconsin, to Altoona, Pennsylvania. In Michigan, the recent passage of legislation

to create Promise Zones, which are modeled explicitly on the Kalamazoo Promise, could lead to the creation of universal, place-based college scholarship programs in ten more Michigan communities (Harger, State of Michigan). In June 2008, leaders from more than 80 cities and towns, representing 23 states, came to Kalamazoo for the first meeting of PromiseNet – a network for sharing information and best practices among communities pursuing Promise-type programs.

Some of the first communities to announce planning efforts, including Flint and Newton, subsequently abandoned the effort. And voters in other cities have dealt setbacks to leaders seeking to use public funds for such universal programs: In Akron, Ohio, the mayor's plan to use proceeds from privatizing the city's sewer system went down the drain in a November 2008 referendum, while in Davenport, Iowa, the city manager's effort to get voters to support a reallocation of the city's one-cent sales tax to support a Davenport Promise was defeated resoundingly in a special election in March 2009.

These developments raise several puzzles for policymakers and scholars seeking to understand the emergence of universal, place-based scholarship programs. First, what accounts for the rapid and widespread diffusion of the Promise model? How did news of the program spread, and why does this approach seem to resonate with leaders facing remarkably different challenges? Second, what accounts for the uneven pattern of success in implementing Promise-type programs? Are there common features that can help explain the success of some efforts and the failure of others? Third, can the same policy innovation be expected to have the same results in widely varying contexts? It is much too early to offer a summative evaluation of the impact of Promise-type programs – only a handful of such programs exist, and the oldest is scarcely three

years old – but consideration of this question can provide valuable formative information to communities considering a similar path.

The purpose of this paper is to explore whether the emergence and diffusion of universal, place-based scholarship programs can be analyzed using tools developed by diffusion theorists. The paper should be considered an initial “plausibility probe” (a la Eckstein) designed to assess the potential applicability of policy diffusion literature to the spread of Promise-type programs. On the one hand, many aspects of classic diffusion theory, summarized by Everett M. Rogers through the five editions of his book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, as well as more recent work in the field of political science on the mechanisms of diffusion (Shipan and Volden 2008) and the role of policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom 1997) provide a useful framework for investigating why and how this innovation has spread and some of the factors that condition its successful adoption. On the other hand, several aspects of this case pose new questions for scholars who study the spread of policy innovation. Among these are the genesis of the innovation, which originated among a small group of private donors who have chosen to remain anonymous, and the simplicity of the model itself, which can be tailored to different communities’ needs. Donor anonymity makes it difficult to ascertain the policy goals of those responsible for the innovation (and hence its effectiveness in achieving them), while the model’s flexibility and the degree of reinvention seen thus far makes it difficult to delineate a population of similar programs.

### Is this a case of policy diffusion?

I begin with some definitions to assess whether the story of the Kalamazoo Promise and its emulation by other communities is appropriate for applying theories of policy diffusion. Rogers defines diffusion as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain

channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers 2003:5).” The elements of his definition include the following:

- **An innovation is an idea, practice, or other object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption.** In this case, the innovation is a large-scale scholarship program based not on the individual attributes of the recipients (e.g., their financial need or academic merit), but on location (e.g., a given city or school district). This structure implies that the local economic development rationale for the program is at least as important as the implications for improving college access. Apart from one, small program in Philomath, Oregon, initiated in 1959 and no longer operating under the same rules, the Kalamazoo Promise is the first such example of this kind of scholarship program – and certainly the first to be widely publicized in the national media.
- **A communication system that facilitates the transmission of the new idea from one individual or group to another.** Rogers identifies two critical communication channels: mass media (“usually the most rapid and efficient means of informing an audience of potential adopters about the existence of an innovation,” 2003:18) and interpersonal channels. He also mentions interactive communication via the Internet as a more recent but increasingly important phenomenon. In this case, the national media played a critical role in transmitting awareness of the Promise model beyond the local community. Especially important were several *Associated Press* articles written shortly after the Kalamazoo Promise was introduced and picked up by newspapers around the nation, and somewhat later coverage by major papers (including the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*) that are read by decision-makers all over. Television played a role as well, with segments about the Kalamazoo Promise on the Today Show, Good Morning

America, and the CBS Evening News. Once word was out, interpersonal communications channels took over, with a stream of individuals calling, visiting, and e-mailing school district representatives, Kalamazoo Promise personnel, economic development officials, and researchers at a local think tank. Connections among communities interested in Promise-type programs were established through this interactive process, leading to the first PromiseNet conference. Dissemination of data and research over the web site of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a Kalamazoo-based think tank involved in evaluating the Kalamazoo Promise, also played an important role, with 13,000 downloads in its first year, and the rate of downloads rising to 2,000-3,000 per month as of late 2008 (Miller-Adams:129).

- **A social system that provides the domain for the diffusion process.** The Promise model brings together different policy arenas, meaning that the diffusion process has played out in several different social systems. One of these is the community of educators and education policy researchers interested in school reform, college access, and financial aid. (Some of the Promise model's most intense criticism has come from these quarters; see, for example, Dowd 2008) Another social system is that of economic development practitioners, where attention to the Kalamazoo Promise has been fostered through a series of awards and recognition of the model as an innovative approach to economic development (see below) and avid promotion of the community by the regional economic development organization, Southwest Michigan First.
- **Time for the innovation to spread** from awareness to adoption throughout the social system. The Promise-type model is in its infancy, with only a handful of programs up and running, the oldest of which was introduced scarcely three years ago. What is striking



about the diffusion process is how quickly communities in different regions, of varying sizes, and with different pressing needs have embarked on a similar path.

Rogers' framework also provides some insight into the factors that underpin the speed and breadth of a policy innovation. These include:

- **Characteristics of the innovation itself** – e.g., its complexity, whether its benefits can be observed, and other factors. For the Kalamazoo Promise, the simplicity of the concept and its ability to be adapted to a community's specific needs is a powerful factor in the rapid diffusion of the model. As for the observability of benefits, it has been troubling to witness a process in which partial and poorly reported "evidence" about the success of the Kalamazoo Promise has been disseminated as fact and used to secure support for the creation of programs in other communities (see below). However, it is undeniable that the benefits of the scholarship program for Kalamazoo (both real and perceived) have played an important role in demonstrating the potential value of such a program to policy entrepreneurs elsewhere.
- **Characteristics of communication channels** – e.g. whether word of the innovation is spread through mass media, interpersonal connections, or other organizational channels. For the Kalamazoo Promise, communication has occurred through all of these channels, with mass media playing the initial role in introducing people to the concept, interpersonal communication supporting adoption efforts in different communities, and organizational channels, including PromiseNet and ongoing research by the W.E. Upjohn Institute, contributing to the continued interaction of individuals engaged in similar pursuits.

- **Characteristics of the social system** – i.e., the compatibility of the innovation with social norms. One reason why the Kalamazoo Promise has attracted so much attention is its congruence with key norms in both the education and economic development fields. In facilitating access to post-secondary education for all students, the program fits with the emerging idea that a high-school diploma is no longer sufficient for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, and growing interest in the idea of a K-14 or K-16 system of publicly funded education. On the economic development front, the shift from investment in infrastructure to investment in human capital is a hallmark of current thinking about economic competitiveness and urban revitalization (see, for example, work by Florida, Glaeser & Saiz, Goldin & Katz).

This cursory exploration suggests that the basic concepts developed by diffusion theorists can be useful in understanding the spread of Promise-type models beyond Kalamazoo. One additional element is recent attention given by diffusion theorists to the process of reinvention -- the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of adoption and implementation. “Many adopters want to participate actively in customizing an innovation to fit their unique situation,” writes Rogers (2003: 17) in hypothesizing that an innovation diffuses more rapidly when it can be re-invented and its adoption is more likely to be sustained. The potential for reinvention in the case of the Kalamazoo Promise model has been an important element in its rapid diffusion.

One of the hallmarks of the program is its simplicity. The application form for the scholarship is one page long, and for its first three years a single administrator managed the entire tracking, application, approval, and disbursement process for all eligible students and post-secondary institutions. The concept, too, is intuitive and powerful: by investing in the post-

secondary attainment of its young people, regardless of their academic performance or financial need, a community can enhance its economic competitiveness, strengthen its school district, improve its workforce, and perhaps even increase its tax base and real estate values. The simplicity of both concept and structure has made it relatively easy for other communities to adapt the provisions of the Kalamazoo Promise to meet their unique needs. For example, the priority given to increasing the rate of owner-occupied homes in the city of Hammond led officials to restrict eligibility for the College Bound program to the children of homeowners. In La Crosse, a program is being designed to accommodate the varying needs of the three key stakeholders in the process – the city, the county, and the school district. In Denver, the focus of the program on students with financial need and the provision of extensive college-access resources are appropriate for a city where low rates of graduation and college attendance, rather than urban revitalization, is the most pressing need.

This variation in local design does pose a challenge for theorizing about the spread of place-based scholarship programs. What criteria are essential for a program to be considered a Promise-type innovation? Does Denver’s need-based formula place it outside the purview of those studying such programs? What about Pittsburgh’s 2.5 GPA and attendance requirements, which make the program not-quite-universal? Does it make sense to study a program limited to the children of homeowners as part of a movement whose hallmark is universal access? Although beyond the scope of this paper, these questions deserve further consideration, as they affect the extent to which programs sparked by the Kalamazoo Promise can be examined as a group.

Another unusual feature of the Kalamazoo Promise complicates the effort to study it as a case of policy diffusion. Unlike most cases studied in the political science literature, this

particular policy innovation originated not in the public but in the private sphere, among a group of individuals who have chosen to remain anonymous. This means that any understanding of the goals of the innovation have had to be deduced from its structure, and it is impossible to know if the various impacts of the program were intended by its creators. (As one evaluation expert said shortly after the introduction of the program, “The Kalamazoo Promise is not *about* anything. It’s a thing, a donation. You’ve had an iceberg land in the middle of the pool. Now you have to find out what it does.” Miller-Adams: 7-8.) It could even be argued that as a privately funded scholarship program it is inappropriate to treat the Kalamazoo Promise as a policy innovation in the first place – except that the introduction of the program has had such important implications for the public schools. These concerns notwithstanding, the next section will turn to the actual process of policy diffusion to examine why and how this private, anonymous act has had an impact far beyond the confines of its home community.

### Explaining diffusion

Why has the model pioneered by the Kalamazoo Promise generated such an intense interest in replication? The answer lies in a set of challenges shared by many different kinds of communities and the uniquely flexible tool for addressing them offered by a Promise-type program.

The widespread enthusiasm from diverse quarters to pursue some version of a Promise-type program appears to reflect dissatisfaction with existing strategies to increase educational attainment and improve economic competitiveness. For decades, policymakers at all levels of government have experimented with a variety of approaches designed to achieve these two goals. Cities, especially those in the industrial regions of the Northeast and Midwest, have struggled to

maintain their vitality in the face of a wrenching economic transition characterized by corporate downsizing, job losses, population decline, and the hollowing out of the urban core. At the same time, the changing nature of employment in the United States and increased global competition has led to a growing understanding that higher education is essential for individual success in today's economy. Yet these two priorities are almost always presented as competing, with taxpayers, private donors, and philanthropic organizations asked to allocate scarce resources either to making a community more competitive economically or to investing more resources in education.

The Kalamazoo Promise represents an unprecedented joining of these two priorities and suggests that the best strategies for achieving them may be one and the same. By supporting and encouraging higher education for local youth, communities not only increase the human capital of their residents but also position themselves more competitively in the global economy. The vitality of cities is part of this vision, as is an integrated strategy for regional economic development.

This unique approach to solving two challenges with a single tool was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the diffusion of the Promise model. Diffusion would have been highly improbable if the introduction of the program had not attracted widespread attention and coverage by national media. Mass media, ranging from "highbrow" publications like the *Economist* to more mainstream outlets like *USA Today*, played a critical role in the dissemination of awareness and knowledge about the Kalamazoo Promise. Why was media attention so acute in this case? First, the Kalamazoo Promise is indeed a new idea. With the exception of the Philomath program, it represented the first time that a scholarship had been made available for every graduate of a sizable school district. Second, the generous terms of the program – full

tuition and fees at any public university or college in Michigan, awarded on a first-dollar basis and guaranteed in perpetuity – attracted a great deal of attention, as did the intriguing question of the anonymous donors. Who were they? Would their names be revealed? What motivated their giving? Much of the mainstream media played up the human interest angle – that the Kalamazoo Promise is a life-changing opportunity for low-income youth in that town with the funny name – while the economic revitalization implications attracted the attention of the more serious journals, including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Economist*. Finally, the efforts of a professional marketing firm working on retainer for Southwest Michigan First and charged with promoting Kalamazoo nationally should not be discounted.

The value of the Promise concept was reinforced by a series of awards, such as those from *Fast Company* magazine, which included Kalamazoo in its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Fast 50 (portraits of “people and businesses writing the history of the next ten years”) and America’s Promise, an alliance for youth, which rated Kalamazoo as one of the nation’s “100 Best Communities for Young People.” The program was also recognized by more specialized organizations, such as Partners for Livable Communities, which chose Kalamazoo as one of three cities to receive its 2006 Entrepreneurial American Leadership Award, and *Expansion Management Magazine*, which included the metropolitan area on its 5-Star Quality of Life Metros list (Miller-Adams: 188-189). While such honors may have gone unnoticed by the general public, they drew attention to Kalamazoo within business and policy circles, and have been recognized and embraced by economic development officials as marketing tools with which to promote the community and attract new business to the region.

As leaders in other communities began thinking about whether and how to create similar programs to meet their own needs, many of them visited Kalamazoo (often as a group) to meet

with school officials, the Kalamazoo Promise administrator, economic development practitioners, and local researchers. Many others spent a great deal of time learning about the program through phone conversations or e-mail exchanges. Representatives from Kalamazoo were invited to visit other communities and speak with planning groups. With growing awareness of national interest in the Promise model, in December 2007 the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research convened a handful of individuals from different communities to discuss the possibility of creating a network of Promise-type programs and convening a meeting or conference at which information about the process could be shared more efficiently. (This planning process would not have been possible without the interpersonal relationships that had been built over the preceding two years.) The result was the inaugural meeting of PromiseNet, held in Kalamazoo in June 2008.

The first PromiseNet conference, which planners had expected to draw 50-100 attendees, ultimately involved over 200 individuals representing over 100 communities in 30 states. All of the nation's regions were represented, with attendees coming from large cities (including Denver, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco), rural communities, and everything in between. Michigan had the strongest representation, with representatives of 32 distinct communities in attendance, and Ohio the next strongest, with 13 communities represented. In part, this was a function of geography – many people drove to the conference, including a contingent from La Crosse, Wisconsin, 430 miles away. But there are also strong economic reasons for the clustering of interested communities. Michigan at the time had the highest rates of unemployment in the nation, with Ohio not far behind – numbers driven in large part by a drop in manufacturing employment. Along with their shrinking industrial base, many of the former industrial powerhouses of the Northeast and Midwest have experienced out-migration

from the urban core and a related decline of urban school districts, which have seen falling enrollment and rising concentrations of low-income students. Communities like Toledo, Pittsburgh, Dayton, Cincinnati, and Flint were naturally eager to learn more about a strategy that seeks simultaneously to strengthen urban areas and improve declining school districts through an investment in human capital.

One interesting aspect of the PromiseNet conference is that the attendance list was built almost entirely through the interpersonal communications channels that had evolved following the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise, with no additional marketing effort. The pool of individuals invited to attend the conference was simply a compilation of the names of people who had contacted or visited Kalamazoo over the previous few years. (In-state networks, such as the Council on Michigan Foundations and the Ohio College Access Network, also contributed to greater awareness of the event by disseminating information about it to their members.) The conference itself sparked a new round of media coverage, and within days of its conclusion, other communities organizing Promise-type programs or considering their development had surfaced. This time, the focus of media reports was not on the Kalamazoo Promise per se, but on the movement it had sparked.



**Table 1. Timeline for the announcement of selected Promise-type programs**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Program</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
November 2005	Kalamazoo Promise	Anonymous donors	Class of 2006	Universal
January 2006	Peoria (IL) Promise	Mayor	Class of 2008	Local community college only
February 2006	College Bound (Hammond, IN)	Mayor	Class of 2006	Homeowners only
February 2006	Newton (IA) Promise	Newton Development Corporation	Not implemented	Universal
September 2006	Jackson (MI) Legacy	Community Foundation	Class of 2008	Universal; local institutions only
October 2006	Denver Scholarship Foundation	Private donors	Class of 2007 (pilot); Class of 2008 (district-wide)	Financial need
December 2006	Pittsburgh Promise	Mayor & School Superintendent	Class of 2008	Near-universal (with GPA requirement)
January 2007	El Dorado (AR) Promise	Chamber of Commerce & Murphy Oil	Class of 2007	Universal
February 2007	Promise Zones	Governor of Michigan	2009-10 at earliest	Universal within designated communities
March 2007 (public launch)	Muskegon (MI) Opportunity	Core group of stakeholders	Expected for 2009-10	Universal
September 2007	Davenport Promise	Core group of stakeholders	Planned for Class of 2009; not implemented	Universal
February 2008	Akron Scholarship Plan	Mayor	Not implemented	Universal, local institutions only

\* The table includes information related to the programs mentioned in this paper.

Explaining implementation success or failure

Among those communities that have undertaken planning processes or announced their intention to create a Promise-type program, some have implemented programs and others have not. To

some extent this is simply a matter of the short time that has elapsed thus far, with more programs likely to be created in the coming years. But already there have been successes and failures for leaders attempting to introduce Promise-type programs into their communities. In this section, I look at a recent study of the mechanisms of policy diffusion (Shipan and Volden 2008) to examine the implementation process. The purpose of this exercise is, again, to test the extent to which the theoretical literature on policy diffusion is helpful in understanding the spread of Promise-type programs.

Shipan and Volden (2008) identify four separate mechanisms of policy diffusion: learning, competition, imitation/emulation, and coercion. As the following mini-case studies suggest, the primary dynamic behind the diffusion of Promise-type programs to date is imitation or emulation, although there is widespread perception that later adopters are learning from earlier adopters (even if this assumption can be challenged). Graham et al. define learning as the process through which decision-makers seek to solve problems: “When a policy is effective and others learn about its success, diffusion naturally follows (Graham p. 24).” Most policy entrepreneurs and elected officials intent on creating Promise-type programs believe they are learning from the experience of Kalamazoo, but they are only partially correct, for a number of reasons.

First, it is very early to have meaningful data about the impact of the Kalamazoo Promise, not to mention even younger programs. Second, while solid numbers are available regarding school enrollment and usage of the scholarship, other data has been misrepresented in the media. Of greater concern is that these misrepresentations have been disseminated widely and are often used to inform policy entrepreneurs promoting Promise-type programs in their own community. For example, a rise in the *number* of Kalamazoo Public Schools graduates in 2007 was misreported as a rise in the graduation *rate* (which cannot be determined unless the size of

the initial cohort is known). An “increased graduation rate” has now taken its place among the chief results of the Kalamazoo Promise while, in reality, the program has not (yet) had a discernible impact in this area. Similarly, a snapshot of area housing prices nine months after the Kalamazoo Promise was announced showed an increase in sales and values that was in marked contrast to declines in the surrounding area. This single data point has been cited over and over again in news reports and research studies of the Kalamazoo Promise, despite the fact that subsequent studies can find no discernible impact of the program on housing prices or values (most likely because of overall economic and housing market weakness). The third problem with other communities learning from Kalamazoo’s experience is that in a complex social system the question of causality is often nearly impossible to resolve. For example, in 2008 Kalamazoo experienced healthy job creation, with several firms announcing either a move to or expansion of existing facilities in the region. In only one case was the Kalamazoo Promise specifically cited (150 jobs to be created by a new Kaiser Aluminum plant). The scholarship program and broad institutional alignment around the vision of an “education community” have certainly made the region a more desirable place to invest, but many other factors are at play and it is impossible to discern the degree to which the Kalamazoo Promise played a role in these business decisions. The danger of such “learning,” whether about graduation rates, housing prices, or employment impact, is that it quite naturally raises expectations in later-adopting communities that may not be met, which can diminish public support and buy-in for what must be seen as a long-term investment in a community’s health.

With the launching of Michigan’s Promise Zones, the state may have introduced Shipan and Volden’s fourth mechanism – competition – into the diffusion process. By setting a cap on the number of Promise Zones that can be created (ten), regardless of their size or scope, the

legislation places numerous governmental entities into competition for the scarce resource of Promise Zone designation. There have also been competitive concerns raised about whether Promise-type programs will have the same draw for residents from surrounding areas if there are several to choose from in any given region. That is, will the initial impact of the Kalamazoo Promise in attracting new residents from around the state diminish as additional Promise Zones are created and residents interested in funding their children's education have the option of moving to Muskegon, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, or Lansing? (I believe this concern is misplaced. One of the chief goals of Promise-type programs is to increase the density of the urban core by slowing or reversing out-migration, and there are plenty of potential new residents in the outlying areas of every urban center to support the kind of enrollment and population increases hoped for by Promise planners.)

As the following cases suggest, the main dynamic of policy diffusion for Promise-type programs has been emulation, with policy entrepreneurs in diverse communities motivated by the concept of the Kalamazoo Promise and its very preliminary positive results. The emulation, however, is only partial – and imitation is probably too strong a word, since each community has tailored its program to its own needs and resources.

I divide these case studies into two categories: those that have addressed the question of financial resources early on (“Finance First”) and those that have begun with a process of community alignment, postponing the question of how to pay for a scholarship program (“Alignment First”). This distinction is useful because financial resources and community alignment or engagement are both essential components of a successful Promise-type program and the two approaches offer very different avenues to implementation. Within each category, I examine several cases, including those where progress has been made and those where it has not.

(Looking at cases of both adoption and non-adoption can help minimize the pro-innovation bias implicit in much diffusion research; see Rogers.)

### ***“Finance First” Models***

Communities that have pursued the “Finance First” model are generally motivated to do so through the work of a few individuals who serve as policy entrepreneurs, introducing the idea to the community and taking responsibility for securing (or providing) the necessary financial resources. The best illustration of this dynamic is the El Dorado Promise where a community member learned of the idea, shared it with others, and convinced Claiborne Deming, the CEO of Murphy Oil, to fund the entire program.<sup>2</sup> With Murphy Oil’s financial support in place, stakeholders traveled to Kalamazoo, consulted with community members there, and created a program modeled almost exactly on the Kalamazoo Promise, although on a smaller scale. This was a clear case of emulation; learning was out of the question, since no results of the Kalamazoo Promise had yet been reported. With a single, private donor and rules nearly identical to those for Kalamazoo’s program, the El Dorado Promise was up and running just 14 months after the Kalamazoo Promise was announced. The results have been very similar to those in Kalamazoo, with enrollment growth in the public schools, increasing use of scholarships (with many students attending local institutions), attendant economic development benefits,<sup>3</sup> and recognition by national media that has raised the community’s national profile (Brawner). One difference is a rapid increase in the rate of college attendance for El Dorado’s high-school graduates, who were starting from a lower base than in Kalamazoo. In recent months, El Dorado has introduced a new element into its program in response to the greater availability of state

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<sup>2</sup> For details on the El Dorado Promise, see <http://www.eldoradopromise.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Three months after the Promise was announced, El Dorado voters passed a one-cent sales tax, estimated to generate \$32 million over the next eight years, to implement the city’s strategic economic development plan. Later that year, voters approved a school millage increase to fund the construction of a new high school; the measure passed with 78 percent voter approval.

scholarship money: Promise funds are now applicable to on-campus room, board, books, and additional fees instead of the original tuition and mandatory fees restriction that remains the case in Kalamazoo.

A more complex story of securing financing for a program at the beginning comes from Pittsburgh, where the mayor and school superintendent announced the creation of the Pittsburgh Promise in December 2006 without yet having any resources in place.<sup>4</sup> The plan was greeted with skepticism by the press and some residents (Pittsburgh Tribune-Review). (As one blogger wrote, tongue firmly in cheek, “We currently don’t know how much this program will cost or where the money to pay for it will come from, but we’re committed to it, gosh darn it.” See Tunesmith & Anthony) Area philanthropies also expressed caution about raising the necessary resources (Zlatos). And a \$10,000 contribution from the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, received in January 2007, did little to dissuade the program’s detractors. In the meantime, a report commissioned from the international management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, published in December 2007, made the economic case for a Pittsburgh Promise. Based in part on these findings, the city’s leading employer, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, announced a \$100 million contribution that would be used as a challenge grant to secure additional funding over a 10-year time frame. Nearly 1,000 students from the Class of 2008 received the scholarship, and many area foundations have now made commitments to the scholarship program. The Pittsburgh Promise is modeled closely on the Kalamazoo Promise, but with a rising GPA requirement and the introduction of an attendance requirement.<sup>5</sup> These additional stipulations suggest that program officials hope to use the Pittsburgh Promise not only

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<sup>4</sup> For details on the Pittsburgh Promise, see <http://www.pittsburghpromise.org>.

<sup>5</sup> The Pittsburgh Promise began in 2008 as a near-universal program with a high-school GPA requirement of 2.0. For the class of 2009, the minimum GPA requirement rose to 2.25 and an 85% high-school attendance requirement was instituted. For the class of 2010, the attendance requirement will rise to 90%.

as a tool for economic revitalization but also as an instrument to improve student achievement. The problem is that the introduction of new requirements automatically reduces eligibility for and usage of the scholarship, thus diminishing its economic impact. It remains to be seen what the tradeoffs for Pittsburgh will be.

A third case where financial resources were the initial focus of attention is Akron, Ohio, where another policy entrepreneur (in this case, the mayor) developed the idea of paying for a Promise-type program through the privatization of the city's sewer system. Inspired both by the Kalamazoo Promise and the trend toward privatizing public services, the city sought the financial advice of investment bank Morgan Stanley and set up a 12-member advisory group to study the transaction and recommend key terms. The deal put before voters in November 2008 called for the lease of the sewer system for an up-front payment of \$250 million, which would be used to create an endowment to support a scholarship program for Akron students. The proposed program was far more restrictive than those on which it was modeled – while universally available to all high-school graduates it could be used only at local institutions. More striking was an extreme provision requiring that recipients continue to pay the city's income tax for 30 years even if they leave Akron. While intended to support the city's economic vitality, this provision reflected a deep lack of understanding of worker mobility and undermined the key mechanism through which Promise-type programs operate — by changing the incentives for as many people as possible to maximize usage and impact. The proposed program drew vocal opposition from a group of residents who formed a grass roots organization, Citizens to Save Our Sewers and Water (Citizens SOS) and lobbied actively against the ballot initiative. The proposal was defeated in November 2008 by a large margin (63 percent opposed to 37 percent in favor). Most of the opposition centered on the privatization of public services, but critical to the debate

was the perception that the mayor had developed his plan without broad public input and that the details were sketchy (one organizational member of the anti-privatization coalition pointed out that the entire plan – scholarship and privatization included – totaled only two-and-a-half pages; see AFSC). The lack of attention to broad stakeholder support and “buy-in” to the plan appears to have contributed strongly to its defeat.

### ***“Alignment First” Models***

A different path has been pursued by communities that have put the question of community engagement and alignment up front, postponing the financial question until after a program is designed and stakeholder support secured. This approach requires a slower, more deliberate consultation process, as well as an institutional champion willing to commit time, resources, and energy to the process of convening the community. The eventual outcome is uncertain, as stakeholders may decide that they do not want to move ahead with a program, but in cases where the decision to implement is made, broad support and buy-in will already have been cultivated.

Muskegon, Michigan, is an excellent example of how a careful process of community alignment has positioned the community to take advantage of new financial resources from the state authorized by the Promise Zones legislation passed in January 2009. Shortly after the Kalamazoo Promise was announced, a core group of about six individuals began meeting in Muskegon to consider the possibility of a similar program for the area, an economically distressed former agricultural and industrial community an hour north of Grand Rapids. From these roots, the Muskegon Opportunity Task Force was created – a group of several dozen local stakeholders committed to building a culture of learning and contributing to the economic



revitalization of Muskegon County.<sup>6</sup> Early on, the task force realized that the generous private funding structure in place in Kalamazoo would be impossible to secure in Muskegon, so they set their sights on ensuring that area students were able to access every dollar of federal, state, and local financial aid to which they were entitled. Utilizing existing pools of funds and working with school superintendents throughout the region, the Muskegon Opportunity developed a plan for comprehensive student support and college access strategies that will begin with students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and continue through the post-secondary education (see Gaertner and Muskegon Opportunity). Funds are currently being raised to hire a program coordinator, and the program is expected to be implemented in the 2009-10 academic year. As for funding, the high degree of collaboration that has evolved over the past few years has positioned Muskegon to be one of the first beneficiaries of Promise Zone legislation recently approved by the Michigan legislature. The Promise Zone designation will allow the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, which includes 12 school districts enrolling just under 35,000 public, charter, and private school students, to capture one-half the growth in the state education tax to support college scholarships for all youth residing in the zone. The release of state money will depend on a local fundraising effort. With the incentive provided by Promise Zone designation, Muskegon Opportunity leaders are confident that these private local funds will be forthcoming (author's interview with Brian Barber, task force member).

In La Crosse, Wisconsin an equally deliberate (although much less publicized) planning process is under way (Grooms). Since 2007, staff members of the city, county, and school district have been meeting to design a program to meet the needs of the region. This effort was sparked by several individuals who had heard about the Kalamazoo Promise through the national media. The challenge in this case is that the parties at the table have multiple, overlapping needs.

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<sup>6</sup> For details on the Muskegon Opportunity, see <http://www.muskegonopportunity.com/>

Engaging in a highly collaborative process and deeply committed to compromise, they have crafted a plan that addresses simultaneously the problems of rising poverty rates in the urban core, enrollment decline in the public schools, and regional sprawl that is consuming farmland and increasing the cost of service delivery. The next stage in the process is to seek financial support for a La Crosse Promise from area businesses, wealthy individuals, and philanthropic organizations. While the program that has emerged was clearly inspired by the Kalamazoo Promise, the La Crosse plan is an excellent example of how communities can reinvent the model to meet local needs, even if these are relatively complex.

Sometimes even the most careful engagement process does not yield the results hoped for by planners. In Flint, Michigan, a roundtable of potential funders convened just months after the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise evolved into the Greater Flint Education Exploratory Committee, a task group of educators, foundation officials, and business representatives that met regularly for several years. The group ultimately concluded that the community did not have the financial resources for a Flint Promise. The deeply distressed condition of the local economy and lack of participation by the city (a key player in Promise-type programs elsewhere), also shaped the final outcome. In Davenport, Iowa, a task force of city, school, and community leaders led the push to provide scholarships through a reallocation of proceeds from the city's one-cent local-option sales tax (Dooley). Despite a careful convening process, which included multiple public consultations, extensive media coverage, and the commissioning of an economic impact study from an outside consultant, the program ultimately failed when it was put to a vote in a special election in March 2009. Proponents blamed the harsh economic climate, although the organized opposition that insisted such a program be privately funded was clearly a factor (Harris).

Anticipated results and lessons learned

There are almost as many versions of Promise-type programs as there are programs themselves; however, it is clear that the fundamental features of the Kalamazoo Promise have remained intact throughout the diffusion process. These include an emphasis on universal, or near-universal access (within the designated school district or city), suggesting an economic development motivation behind the programs; a sliding scale of benefits designed to reward continuous residency and enrollment; and a lengthy duration for programs, reflecting an understanding that gains are likely to materialize over the medium or long term. The three tables that follow provide a simplified typology of programs categorized by student eligibility; eligible post-secondary institutions; and funding structures.

**Table 2. Student Eligibility Options**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Examples</i>
All residents	Davenport Promise (defeated by voters 3/3/09) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Would have included public, parochial, private, and home-schooled students residing in the City of Davenport, as well as Davenport residents open-enrolled at other public school districts for first five years of program.</li> </ul>
All residents enrolled in public school district	Kalamazoo Promise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimal residency/enrollment requirement of 4 years in Kalamazoo Public Schools.</li> </ul> El Dorado Promise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same enrollment/residency requirements as the Kalamazoo Promise.</li> </ul> Pittsburgh Promise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same enrollment/residency requirements as the Kalamazoo Promise.</li> <li>- Additional merit/conduct requirements: minimum GPA and attendance policy.</li> </ul>
Low-income public school students	Denver Scholarship Foundation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship is limited to those students whose expected family contribution under the FAFSA is 2x the Pell Grant limit.</li> <li>- No residency requirement</li> </ul>
Specific category of students	College Bound (Hammond, IN) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship is limited to children of homeowners in the City of Hammond.</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Post-Secondary Attendance Options**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Any public or private college or university	<p>El Dorado Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2-year associate’s degree or 4-year bachelor’s degree only; no technical degrees or certificates</li> </ul>
Any public college or university in the state	<p>Kalamazoo Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any public 2-year or 4-year institution in the state; includes technical degrees and certificate programs (even very short-term programs) as long as college credits can be assigned for them.</li> </ul> <p>Denver Scholarship Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In-state public colleges &amp; universities, and not-for-profit, public technical colleges</li> </ul>
Any public college or university in the state PLUS local private institution(s)	<p>Pittsburgh Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any publicly funded school or community college in the state, as well as private schools in Allegheny County that offer 2- or 4-year degree programs.</li> </ul> <p>La Crosse Promise (proposed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plans call for including local private college in addition to any state-funded 2- or 4-year institution.</li> </ul>
Local, public two-year institution	<p>Jackson Legacy (Jackson, MI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship use limited to Jackson Community College.</li> </ul> <p>Ventura Promise (Ventura, CA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship use limited to Ventura Community College.</li> </ul> <p>Peoria Promise (Peoria, IL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship use limited to Illinois Central College.</li> </ul> <p>Many other programs with a similar structure.</p>

**Table 4. Funding Structure Options**

<i>Funding source</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Private	<p>Kalamazoo Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funded by anonymous donors</li> <li>- Scholarship applied on a first-dollar basis</li> <li>- Funds can be used only for tuition &amp; mandatory fees</li> <li>- Scholarship covers any in-state public college or university with no maximum tuition cap</li> </ul> <p>El Dorado Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funded with \$50 million contribution from local businessman</li> <li>- Scholarship applied on a first-dollar basis</li> <li>- If other scholarships are received, funds can be used to support other costs, including room, board, and books (as long as billed by the college)</li> <li>- Maximum scholarship amount is the highest annual resident tuition at an Arkansas public university (maximum for 2008-09 was \$6,505)</li> </ul> <p>Pittsburgh Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$100 million challenge grant from University of Pittsburgh Medical Center over 1-year period; matches private contributions 2-to-3</li> <li>- Additional contributions from local foundations – as of March 2009, program had raised \$11.5 million of \$15 million target for fiscal year ending in June</li> <li>- Maximum scholarship amount is \$5,000; may double to \$10,000 for students who pass a state high-school graduation exam (not yet in place).</li> </ul> <p>Denver Scholarship Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initial challenge grant of \$50 million from local business owners; matches private contributions on a 1-to-1 basis</li> <li>- Maximum scholarship amount is \$5,000, although scholarships for 2009-10 for most students have been cut by 17-18% due to effect of recession of DSF endowment and donors</li> </ul>
Public	<p>Davenport Promise (defeated)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposed funding from allocation of a portion of the one-cent local sales tax option; defeated by margin of 60-40 in March 2009 election</li> </ul> <p>Akron Promise (defeated)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposed funding from privatization of Akron’s sewer system; defeated by margin of 62-38 in November 2008 election.</li> </ul>
Public/private hybrid	<p>Michigan Promise Zones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legislation approved in January 2009</li> <li>- Requires local contribution from private donors</li> <li>- Authorizes creation of up to ten “Promise zones” located in areas with a high percentage of low-income children.</li> <li>- After two years, state will capture half of any increase in the State Education Tax collected in the Promise Zone above a certain initial amount and pay the captured tax to the promise zone authority for use in scholarship program.</li> </ul>

Judging the impact of these programs is a far more difficult task than categorizing them. The Kalamazoo Promise has awarded scholarships to only three graduating classes, and the other programs are even newer. (The El Dorado Promise began with the Class of 2007, and the Pittsburgh Promise with the Class of 2008.) With different driving forces in place for each community, there is also the question of which indicators are most important to consider. Enrollment in the Kalamazoo Public Schools is up almost 14 percent since the program was announced, with most of the gains coming in the first year. In El Dorado, district enrollment rose by over 4 percent in the two years since the Promise was announced, while the rate of El Dorado students attending college has increased markedly (from 60 percent prior to the Promise to 82 percent for the 2008 graduates). The enrollment impact of the Pittsburgh Promise is less positive; in the first year of the program, enrollment in the district continued to slide at the rate of the past few years. Observers attribute the seeming lack of impact of the scholarship program to families' concern over ongoing school closings and consolidation. The anticipated economic development effects of such programs, which take longer to materialize, are even more difficult to assess at this early stage.

It is nonetheless possible to offer some preliminary hypotheses that have implications for program design:

- It appears to be the universal applicability of the Kalamazoo Promise and El Dorado Promise (in contrast to many other targeted scholarship programs) that has generated strong support for their goals among diverse populations and made them tools for community transformation. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that universal programs will be more effective catalysts for change than scholarship programs limited by academic merit or financial need.

- It is through the process of engagement and alignment that scholarship resources can be leveraged for deeper change. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that a scholarship program alone, no matter how generous, is not sufficient to bring about the economic or social transformation of a community. The financial resources necessary for a universal, place-based scholarship must go hand in hand with the engagement and alignment of community stakeholders if a Promise-type program is to achieve its broader transformative potential.
- There are important intangible gains to be realized from Promise-type programs. The introduction of a universal, place-based scholarship program can help strengthen a community's identity as an education-rich region and home to knowledge-intensive industry. This potential, however, is based not on immediate and tangible economic results generated by the introduction of a scholarship program, but on the longer term alignment of the community around the linked goals of educational excellence, access to higher education, and economic competitiveness. Especially in light of the current economic crisis, expectation of gains from the program must be squarely focused on the medium and long term.

The model pioneered by the Kalamazoo Promise has shown itself to be remarkably flexible and prone to reinvention based on the needs of different communities. This flexibility may be the most powerful factor in accounting for the rapid diffusion of the model.

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In the preface to the fifth edition of *Diffusion of Innovations*, Rogers offers a criticism of the behavioral science movement he helped found, saying that “once diffusion researchers formed an ‘invisible college’ (defined as an informal network of researchers who form around an

intellectual paradigm to study a common topic), they began to limit unnecessarily the ways in which they went about studying the diffusion of innovations,” leading to a “sameness” in studies of policy diffusion. In contrast, authors of a recent review article of policy diffusion research in the field of political science argue that “the piecemeal and disconnected nature of the research to date has left us intellectually poorer than we should be (Graham et al.).” In part, these contrasting perspectives represent the different disciplines of the authors, with Rogers’ more interdisciplinary approach lending itself to greater methodological and substantive pluralism, and the authors of the review article seeking to focus the work of political scientists more tightly on advancing the theoretical contribution of diffusion research. But it also represents a particularly troubling aspect of political science – the field’s tendency to “reinvent the wheel” rather than borrowing and incorporating strong, preexisting bodies of work and knowledge that have been developed in different disciplines. Should those interested in policy diffusion as an avenue to social change be concerned about developing “a systematic, general understanding of how diffusion works (Graham et al. 2),” or should we avoid “an unnecessary standardization of diffusion research perspectives (Rogers 40)”? I would argue that diffusion researchers working in political science should welcome the contributions made by 60 years of diffusion policy research, whether emanating from the fields of rural sociology or marketing and communications, and use what is most useful in seeking answers to the questions that motivate them. Studying the Kalamazoo Promise, an innovation that blurs the boundaries between education policy and economic development strategies, is an ideal endeavor for pursuing such an interdisciplinary approach.



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