

Groups will try to replicate Harlem Children's Zone in Los Angeles

Written by Howard Blume, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
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Two Los Angeles nonprofit groups have received \$500,000 federal grants to create programs modeled on a high-profile Harlem effort to help low-income and minority students from cradle through college, federal officials announced Tuesday.

The federal Promise Grants are an anti-poverty and education-reform initiative in one, an approach many experts applaud but also say is expensive, with goals that are difficult to achieve.

The grants will go to the Youth Policy Institute, based in Los Angeles, and Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights. They will fund planning for a broad-based community initiative that would emulate the Harlem Children's Zone project of Geoffrey Canada.

The Harlem zone covers a 97-block area of Manhattan with a \$48-million budget, or about \$5,000 per child annually, not including government funding for schools that substantially surpasses education spending in California. Mothers can begin to participate in its programs when they are pregnant, and services follow their children throughout their education.

The grantees, among 21 groups chosen nationwide, will be working in communities where, for instance, no child had tested as academically advanced in school for several years. In another area selected, one-fifth of children had a parent sent to prison, said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

"This is about communities where educational outcomes haven't been what any of us want," Duncan said. "We want everybody rallying together" so children can be successful.

The two L.A. organizations will be in the running next year for federal grants of \$10 million to \$20 million, but ultimately the effort, if it follows the Harlem model, will depend on both private funding and a more effective use of government funding for schools.

The Los Angeles awards were announced at City Hall, where Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa spoke of a coordinated effort among city and county staffers, local nonprofits and the Los Angeles Unified School District, which was represented by school board President Monica Garcia.

L.A. Unified “has its arms open to the community to help us help our children and our families,” Garcia said.

Proyecto Pastoral will focus on a portion of Boyle Heights. The Youth Policy Institute will have one project area in Pacoima and another in Hollywood. Its efforts already include job training, computer donations, day labor centers, after-school programs and two charter schools.

Unsuccessful local applicants included the University of Southern California; a collaboration involving the Brotherhood Crusade, Community Coalition and Urban League; and ABC, a nonprofit working with UCLA in the neighborhoods around the new RFK Community Schools complex in Koreatown. These groups can still apply for future grants; Duncan said this year’s funding ran out before the list of deserving applicants.

Across the country, the groups chosen for planning grants included a Boys & Girls Club, universities, a housing organization and healthcare nonprofits in areas ranging from New York City to the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana.