

Rochester learning to stick with it



We are starting to see the needle move in key areas."

That is what Larry Marx, a participant in [ROC the Future](#), told our Editorial Board this week. On a seismic scale, we are probably talking about a 0.05 level earthquake (or less) here. Not a shake-your-world kind of movement, but movement nonetheless.

This is because ROC the Future appears to be practicing something called "sticking with it." That's a concept that we in Rochester have not excelled at when it comes to tackling deeply embedded problems like city schools and poverty. As we've

noted before, our community has a long history of big ideas that disappear without a trace.

But it looks like we're improving, and we must continue to do so.

You might not be familiar with ROC the Future, though it was formed in 2011. Based on a successful effort in Cincinnati, ROC the Future is an alliance of more than 50 organizations focused on getting city kids through school, prepared for life. But the group has never issued an ambitious agenda, or produced a slick report full of graphs charting its progress. Instead, the collaboration has been quietly chipping away at the problem until seeing results.

As we mentioned, the [results](#) aren't earth shattering. They include, for example, a 10.7 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism at 13 schools, an expansion of summer learning programs, and a 9 percent increase in the number of city high school students filling out college financial aid forms.

But that is how the Cincinnati program reached greater successes. The organizers stuck with it, for an extended period.

"What it takes, is to make those incremental changes. Over a long period of time, you are going to get there," said Anne Kress, president of Monroe Community College, one of the lead conveners of ROC the Future.

Though the Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative is still in its first year, it also shows signs of being "sticky." The massive collaboration has been plodding along, while retaining most of its original cast members and adding others. Many other efforts (including our own Unite Rochester, which is nearly 3 years old) are energetically pressing forward.

That does not mean the people leading these efforts, especially the taxpayer-funded Anti-Poverty Initiative, should not be transparent about their goals and progress. There are many reasons for this, but the most important is this: *Our community needs to see a long-term commitment to change, and wholeheartedly believe in it.*

It is not business as usual right now in Rochester. Initiatives are remaining on the table when new leaders replace old. More people are signing up than stepping down. Uncommon partners are striving for common goals.

ROC the Future is planning to increase its visibility, and it must, to help keep the momentum building. But make no mistake, things are happening now. One day, the ground will shake in Rochester and we will feel it.

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