Dallas may have laid out its best plan yet to fight poverty, and the country should take note

Alma Casiano (left) and Valeria Taboada play in a Pre-K classroom at N.W. Harllee Early Childhood Center in Dallas on Sept. 9, 2016. The business community is interested in early childhood education. (File Photo / Staff Photographer)

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Sometimes a problem is so deeply ingrained in a city and the stakes so high for improvement that a bold innovative approach is required to tackle it.

Such is the case for Dallas' decades-long battle with the conundrum of generational poverty. How could a city with so much economic success have the third highest child poverty rate in the country? One in three children in Dallas grow up poor. It's a shame and a struggle.

But now, Mayor Mike Rawlings and the city of Dallas are pushing a promising idea that could help us not only understand this problem but give us tangible, effective programs to combat it. A new independent nonprofit, Child Poverty Action Lab, (CPAL) has been created to leverage collective resources to try to break the cycle — trying solutions that haven't been tried before.

This work matters for all of us because the long-term economic cost of more than 115,000 local children growing up in poverty today exceeds $185 billion, the nonprofit reports.

Under the new nonprofit, for the first time CEOs of the city's major public institutions — including city manager T.C. Broadnax, Dallas Police Chief Renee Hall, Dallas ISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and Parkland's Fred Cerise — have been meeting regularly as an advisory group to come up with unified strategies on combating the causes and effects of child poverty.

Astoundingly, though they individually control all kinds of areas that determine a city's success including housing, education and jobs, local government officials have not before collaborated on workable solutions at this level, Rawlings said. We might be onto creating a national model.

We're most pleased that this isn't another in a long line of study groups. We've had enough of those. This is billed as an action-based organization with a lofty goal: using data to drive decisions to reduce the number of children in poverty by 50 percent in 20 years.

Take the WIC nutrition program for women and children, for example. CPAL estimates only 40 percent of eligible Dallas residents participate. Here's a possible reason that CPAL analysis uncovered: Many WIC offices aren't located anywhere near the highest concentration of eligible residents they are supposed to serve. The poor have some of the toughest transportation problems. Imagine the positive impact on the health of putting more offices where people who need them can reach them.

Dallas mayor Mike Rawlings speaks during a press conference about losing the Amazon bid at the Dallas Regional Chamber office in Dallas on Tuesday, November 13, 2018. (Vernon Bryant / Staff Photographer)

We were pleased to see that Rawlings tapped Alan Cohen to lead this effort.For those who don't recall, Cohen expertly designed Dallas ISD's early childhood education strategies that are paying big dividends. And he was part of the startup team that launched the education nonprofit Commit Partnership, which has proven this approach can work.

We do worry about this initiative losing steam after Rawlings leaves office next year. But he assures us the CEOs have promised they're all in for the long term. We hope so. And it's a good sign that $1.7 million in philanthropic seed money has already been raised.

This nonprofit is operating under the premise that poverty in our city is "morally unacceptable and economically unsustainable."

We agree. But we've seen a lot of promising initiatives go nowhere. We urge this community to put some energy behind seeing what this new group can accomplish.