

IN THIS ISSUE

As CYFC continues its work on the theme of Educational Disparities, this edition of Consortium Connections is the second to focus on issues related to schools and educational disparities. As we noted in the Spring 2008 edition, it is important to emphasize that educational disparities are far greater and more complex than schools alone, but include children themselves, families, communities, society and policies. But because schools are a major place where most children receive their formal learning experiences, it is important to focus attention on them.

In this issue, we offer the work of two University of Minnesota faculty members from disciplines that are not always considered in the children, youth and family arena. Dr. John Robert Warren from the Department of Sociology, and Dr. Paul Glewwe from the Department of Applied Economics, have conducted research on two issues that are often discussed in regard to student achievement: Class size and high school exit exams. Articles summarizing their work can be found on pages four and five, and links to their full research articles are included in Connections On-Line (see box below). This edition also includes further focus on parent involvement, and a look at the role of positive school climate and children's mental health.

We recognize there are many issues related to schools that we have not been able to cover in these two editions of Connections:

teacher training and professional development, school responsiveness to the variety of cultural backgrounds represented in its students, ways in which the school administration contributes to (or not) a school environment that is conducive to all students having the opportunity to achieve, expectations of and sources of support for students, and more. As CYFC enters year three of its focus on Educational Disparities, with three more editions of Connections also focused on this topic, we will consider ways to address these issues.

Circles of Influence continues to be the guiding framework for CYFC in its educational disparities work. The Circles graphic is not included in this edition of Connections because it has not changed since it was published in Spring 2008. However it is available in Connections On-Line.

One final note: Readers may remember that CYFC conducted a survey about the effectiveness of Consortium Connections about a year ago. One of the suggestions in the responses was to develop an index of Connections articles. We have now done that, and it can be found by going to the Connections On-Line website. In the case of more recent editions of Connections, we are able to isolate the individual articles and they can be printed individually. For older editions, we reference the PDF copy of the full newsletter, but pages can be printed individually.

When Schools Involve Parents, Children Succeed

By Luis Garcia

Introduction

For the past year as the Americorps Promise Fellow for the Children, Youth and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota, I have had the unique opportunity of researching parent involvement as it relates to educational disparities and working with a diverse array of parent involvement professionals whose mission is to develop, support and implement programs that catalyze parent involvement in schools across Minnesota. I am grateful for the relationships fostered, the information learned, and I am uplifted by what is being done to address achievement parity in Minnesota.

What the Research Says

When schools involve parents, children succeed. Parent involvement is perhaps one of the most highly researched and effective methods to increase student achievement agreed upon in the education field today. Research consistently shows a high correlation between parental involvement and the academic performance of children. The evidence is so compelling that the No Child Left Behind legislation has identified it as one of six areas for targeted school reform. Even so, for a variety of reasons, most schools find it challenging to partner with parents in meaningful ways and need help developing programs to engage parents, families, and communities, especially in those communities that would benefit most.

When Schools Involve Parents, Children Succeed— *continued on page 6*

Connections On-Line

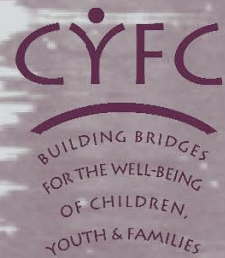
Consortium Connections has an enhanced on-line version that can be found at:
<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection/>

Connections On-Line contains a PDF copy of the print version. In addition, it contains all articles individually, some of which are more extensive than the print version. When articles contain citations, they are included in the on-line version, but not the print version.

Finally, Connections On-Line contains links to resources related to the articles.

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

The Children, Youth and Family Consortium was created in 1991. Its mission is to build capacity at the University of Minnesota and in Minnesota's communities to use research, inform policy and enhance practice to improve the well-being of Minnesota's children and families.



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Lessons from the Field

2008-2009

The 2008-09 Lessons from the Field series will focus on the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

CECMH decided to focus this year's series on autism based upon the feedback from attendees at last year's workshop series. Workshops are being planned to include: Neurobiological foundations of autism, Early diagnosis and intervention, Complementary alternative interventions, Supporting parents/families of the autistic child. Check our web-site at www.cmh.umn.edu for further information as dates and speakers are finalized.

Education and Children's Mental Health: Creating a Positive School Climate

By Charlene Myklebust, Psy.D.

Charlene Myklebust is Director of Social Emotional Learning for Intermediate District 287. See Who's the Consortium on p. 8 for more detail.

Introduction

To ensure that educators receive preparation in identifying the early warning signs of mental health disorders in children, Minnesota lawmakers passed legislation (2002) requiring related training prior to the initial issuance and renewal of educational licenses. The training must also contain information about appropriate next steps after warning signs are observed. Recommended actions often include referrals to school-based mental health personnel and perhaps subsequently to community mental health providers. Although such referrals are necessary and appropriate, many ask if there are additional educationally sound prevention and intervention strategies that may be implemented in the school setting. Fortunately, there are a variety of practical home, school-wide, classroom, and individual interventions that promote children's mental health. This article will briefly review educational initiatives that are becoming increasingly prevalent as research proves the inextricable link between school-based social and emotional support and increased student achievement.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

PBIS is a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behavior in all students. It is a proactive approach for achieving safe, caring, and effective schools. PBIS is based on the premise that school environments that are positive, preventive, predictable, and effective are safer and more caring; have enhanced learning and teaching outcomes; and provide a continuum of behavior support for all students. PBIS offers an alternative to "get tough" disciplinary approaches in schools that can assume students are inherently "bad" and will learn more appropriate behavior through increased use of aversive interventions. The emphasis of PBIS is not on fostering an environment of control, but rather on creating a *systemic* set of primary, secondary and tertiary activities that create positive school environments. Intermediate District 287, a consortium of 13 west suburban school districts in Hennepin County, is implementing PBIS at its Hosterman Education Center in New Hope. The staff and students have embraced a "Character Education" theme and students learn about the pillars of good character. Students are "caught" demonstrating these character traits and receive positive recognition for doing so. Additionally, students are supported through animal-assisted interventions supervised by Minnesota Linking Individuals, Nature and Critters (MN LINC). An analysis of staff behavior reports reveals a significant reduction in the use of regulated interventions and police liaison officer involvement. A promising practice to be implemented in the Fall of 2008 involves the wide-spread introduction of Mindfulness Education, a curriculum developed by the Goldie Hawn Foundation to help students with stress reduction and increased awareness of their own learning experiences. Additional information and specific steps to implement PBIS are available at www.pbis.org.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

RTI is an individualized multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs. Initially, there is high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Learners who are experiencing problems are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. Decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is used when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data. RTI includes: 1) high-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction; 2) ongoing student assessment; 3) tiered instruction; and 4) parent involvement. Many of the Intermediate District 287 member districts are using RTI to support individual student success. In one member district, a regular education student who was falling behind in reading would have typically been referred for a special education evaluation. Instead, he participated in Brain Gym and other movement and learning, as well as brain-based instruction activities, in order to more effectively master content instruction. Subsequent assessments revealed increased mastery of reading skills so the student was assigned the following year to a teacher who uses similar instructional strategies. Additional information is available at www.rtinetwork.org

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is a *skills training* process that teaches skills students need to effectively and ethically handle themselves, their relationships, and their school tasks. These skills include recognizing and managing emotions, developing concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children

Positive School Climate— *continued on page 7*

White Privilege and Education in America: “We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know*”

By Renee Wegener, Ilana Lerman, Amanda Steepleton, Khong Xiong, Laura Presnail, Chelsey Perkins, and Jo Fullmer

Editor’s note: This article is a bit of a departure from those usually found in Consortium Connections, but we are including it here because the topic of white privilege is so important in children’s educational experience. The authors are students in the Social Justice Minor in the School of Social Work in the College of Education and Human Development. CYFC provided partial funding for them to attend a national conference on white privilege. This article provides their reflections on their experience.

In April 2008, we - seven students who had met through the Social Justice Minor - attended the 9th annual White Privilege Conference in Springfield, Massachusetts. Our experience at the conference was of such magnitude that it would have been impossible to envision in advance. Together we listened, talked, laughed, and cried. The experience was both invigorating and devastating. The conference inspired dialogue regarding inequalities in the education system in America. Each of us gained unique insight about how we can use what we learned to work for change in the educational system. In this article, we wish to discuss the most profound and influential issues discussed at the conference.

Diversity

Diversity is the big buzzword today, and we absolutely agree that diversity is a good thing. However, our struggle towards a truly equitable and just society cannot end here. For example, “taco night” in schools might recognize a different ethnic culinary tradition, but it does nothing to create a more equitable environment for Latino students. “Taco night” does not ensure that schools provide translators so Latino parents can communicate with teachers about their children, that more money is spent on schools than prisons in areas with large Latino populations, or that children of undocumented parents who have spent twelve years in our education systems can receive in state tuition at their local, public university.

Transformational change in our schools and society will require that we look beyond diversity toward systemic and institutional change. Once we have achieved systemic change, perhaps special events like taco night will become obsolete. We won’t need to relegate “diversity” to a special day. We’ll be living diversity through an environment in which Latino, black, American Indian, and other marginalized students feel included and regarded each day and are given equal opportunity and encouragement to create,

explore, develop, and succeed.

Parenting

The intersection between race and education also is affected by the challenges of parenting. In a workshop titled “Raising Boys in a Racist Society,” we were made aware that, from the perspective of many non-white parents, school is a dangerous place where the best protection is guidance and preparation (but with no clear directions on how to do so) for the entrance into the world of poorly veiled white and male supremacy. Parents perceive that their children will encounter other children who already understand their white privilege and their ability to exert power over students of color. They will encounter adults who see young boys of color as deviants instead of as contributors, and who may not believe them if they report racialized crime. To survive such a brutal climate, children of color must leave their natural selves at the door as they walk into school, and adapt to white society that dominates the school system. This is often referred to as “code-switching,” and it leaves students of color more emotionally exhausted at the end of the day than their white comrades from having to adapt all day. How can parents protect their children from that? How can we question why children of color do not like school?

Talking About White Privilege

One of the most compelling topics discussed at the conference was how to engage with other white people about privilege and oppression. Learning to discuss these issues respectfully and with empathy is critical to making lasting change; if “I’m a better white person” feelings pervade, it is only replicating the very power structures that we are attempting to overcome. It is necessary to remember that no white person is born understanding the skin color privilege bestowed upon them and what that means in society. Conducting these conversations is particularly important in academic settings, where many students may be grappling with these issues for the first time. Hopefully, students keep an open mind and begin to see their own privileges in a different light, and use them for positive change instead of “power over” others.

Stereotypes

Keynote speaker John D. Palmer and some workshops addressed the ‘model minority’ stereotype of Asian Americans, a stereotype furthered by mainstream media portrayals of Asian Americans as outstanding educational and economic

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

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State High School Exit Exams Don't Make the Grade

By John Robert Warren, PhD

Rob Warren is associate professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Sociology. See Who's the Consortium on p. 8 for more detail. Dr. Warren currently has several additional papers on testing and related matters in review. A link to his website is provided in Connections On-Line.

State high school exit exams harm those who fail them and provide no benefit to those who pass them or the taxpayers who pay for them. This was the conclusion of my research with colleague Eric Grodsky of the University of California-Davis as we looked at the value of exit exam policies, attempting to broaden our understanding of their consequences - both positive and negative - for a variety of student outcomes.

State high school exit exam policies were implemented beginning in the late 1970s with the intent of ensuring that graduates have the skills required to succeed in college and in the modern global economy. Although they are not uniformly endorsed, these policies enjoy widespread support among policy makers, business leaders, and others. Supporters say that tests are a means to evaluate the skills and knowledge of graduates as they leave high school and enter the work world or college. But others say that tests lead to increased dropout rates without offering opportunities for students to improve their outcomes, and they force educators to "teach to the test." Currently, exit exams are in place in 23 states (including Minnesota) and affected about two in three members of the class of 2008.

In a 2006, we reported in an article in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* that state exit exams modestly reduce the public high school graduation rate. While unfortunate, for many people denying diplomas to some students in order to more broadly boost academic achievement is an acceptable trade-off. If exit exams help students meet the academic and work demands they face after completing high school, the social benefits of the exams may outweigh the costs they impose on students who fail to pass them.

However, our most recent work offers no evidence that state exit exams boost academic achievement or improve graduates' post-high school labor market prospects. On the question of improving academic achievement, we found no evidence for any effects of exit exams on reading or math scores at the mean, or at any level of student academic achievement. These results did not vary across students from different racial/ethnic or social class backgrounds.

On the question of better preparing students for work, we found that between 1980 and 2002 young people who earned their diplomas in states that required exit

exams experienced the same chances of employment and the same wage rates as those who were not required to pass exit exams. These findings also held across racial/ethnic and social class backgrounds. In addition, these findings held whether the state exams were minimum competency (easier) or higher competency (more difficult).

We wondered what led some states, but not others, to implement exit exams. We found that the states most likely to do so were those that faced difficult economic circumstances, and when there are relatively more African American and Latino students in their schools. There are several ways this finding can be interpreted. A benign interpretation is that such states turn to exit exams as a standardized, seemingly unbiased way to educate diverse student populations. A more malevolent interpretation is that these policies are motivated by culturally or racially biased notions of which students "deserve" high school diplomas. Our results do not speak to which interpretation is correct, but do set the stage for potentially disparate impacts of these policies along the familiar fault lines of race/ethnicity and social class.

We believe the reason states' exit exams fail to boost student achievement or workplace preparedness has to do with the low standards that most states set for passing the tests. In order to avoid denying diplomas to large and politically unpalatable numbers of students most states have historically set the bar for passing exit exams at a relatively low level. The result is that the costs of state exit examinations—both to individual young people who are denied diplomas and to the general public that foots the bill to develop, administer, and score the tests—are not offset by any appreciable benefit to students, employers, or society.

We have approached this work not as policymakers, but as researchers, and with the belief that both the "pro-test" and "anti-test" positions had plausible arguments. States that implemented exit exams did so with a clear intended goal of benefitting students and society. Our research indicates this is not happening. As they are currently implemented, exit exams appear to have real downsides and none of their perceived upsides. The first exit exams were implemented a quarter of a century ago. In our opinion, they should either be greatly modified to achieve their goals---despite their concurrent downsides---or abandoned entirely.

Class Size: Is Smaller Better?

This article is based on an in-depth research article in the Summer 2007 issue of the CURA Reporter. Direct quotes here are from that article. A link to the article, including methodologies and citations, can be found in the online version of Connections.

Does reduction in school class size improve student performance?

Prevailing wisdom says yes, especially in the lower grades.

But research does not consistently support this answer. Most of the studies until about 10 years ago found no statistical significance in the effects of class size on student performance, largely due to the difficulty in isolating the impact of class size, given all the other variables in school and out of school that may influence children's learning. For example, "parents who are very concerned about their children's education may be more likely to move to areas where schools have small classes, which would lead to a situation in which students in schools with small class sizes have, on average, parents who provide more support at home." This leads to an overestimation of the impact of small classes on student achievement.

Studies in more recent years have attempted to take these other variables into account. One study that used multiple regression analysis to eliminate variables due to bias still found no significant effect of class size on test scores in math and reading.

One major exception is Project STAR, a four-year longitudinal study conducted by the Tennessee State Department of Education and funded by the Tennessee General Assembly. Students were randomly assigned to one of three class-size configurations beginning in kindergarten and continuing through grade three. Project Star found that students in smaller classes showed significant advantage in both math and reading over students in typical class sizes, even when an aide was present for assistance in the larger classes. Moreover, in follow-up studies in 10th grade, at graduation, and entry into higher education, Project Star found that the advantage for these students continued over time.

At least two states in addition to Tennessee, California and Wisconsin, made decisions to reduce class sizes in grades K-3 significantly based on the Project Star findings.

To address the question of whether Minnesota should do likewise, Professor Paul Glewwe from the University of Minnesota's Department of Applied Economics and graduate students Hyunkuk Cho and Melissa Whitley set out to discover what they could learn through a literature review and an examination of Minnesota test score data in schools with varying class sizes.

When Minnesota test scores were examined in correlation with class size, in most cases the research team found little statistical significance in test scores based on class size. In fact, contrary to what might be expected, in some comparisons the test scores were found to be slightly higher for both reading and math in the schools that had larger class sizes in grades 3 and 5. Only very small differences were found when looking specifically at students of color, and students eligible for subsidized lunch. And when other variables were factored out, and class sizes were reduced by 10 students, there was still only a small effect of reduced class sizes, although some were statistically significant.

Even in studies where a significant correlation was found between smaller classes and student achievement, the increase in student performance was not large and would not significantly reduce the disparities in test scores between students of color and white students, or between economically disadvantaged students and students whose families had more resources.

What did they make of this departure from expectations?

Although the authors note that more research of the quality of Project Star is needed, given the small change in test scores based on Minnesota data, the answer to the research question posed above is probably not. Glewwe noted that even though they did find some beneficial effect of smaller class sizes, the statistically significant effects are quite low, and would not substantially reduce the achievement gap.

Thus, funding may be more effectively used to address the other variables that have a greater impact on test scores than class sizes. It is important for future research to address what specifically these variables might be and what policies would produce the sizeable increases in student performance that are desired.

The research described in this article was supported by a Faculty Interactive Research Program Grant from The Center for Regional and Urban Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota.

When Schools Involve Parents, Children Succeed

— continued from page 1

There are a number of reasons why schools and parents have difficulty maintaining parent partnerships and the research has shed light on patterns that could be mitigated by parent involvement. Joyce Epstein summarizes those patterns in her *School, Family, and Community Handbook for Action*:

- Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, *unless* schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level.
- Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' families.
- Schools in more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, *unless* they work at developing balanced partnership programs that also include contacts about the positive accomplishments of students.
- Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far away from the school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children.

What works?

“So what’s the answer?” “How do you ‘involve’ parents?” – These are the questions I invariably get from people when I try to describe my work. They are good questions and unfortunately there are no easy answers. Because every community is different there is no “catch-all” solution. What works in North Minneapolis will not necessarily work in Rochester or Sleepy Eye or Mahanomen. The key is to break down barriers to parent involvement by establishing authentic and trusting relationships with parents and having the capacity and knowledge of what works to create a sustainable school community partnership that continually works to improve upon itself. Not only was this echoed in the literature time and time again, but the parent involvement professionals I interviewed throughout the year also stated it directly to me. I asked them specifically about parent involvement programs that were successful at engaging parents in traditionally underserved communities and they could all easily tick off a list. However, they stressed the importance of building relationships with parents, establishing trust, and using culturally competent communication (i.e. Spanish in Spanish speaking homes).

There are many ways schools and communities can work toward increasing parent involvement. Some of the main strategies that have been identified in the research literature by Pedro Noguera include:

- A commitment to engage parents as partners in education with explicit roles and responsibilities for parents and educators spelled out;
- Strong instructional leadership focused on a coherent program for curriculum and instruction that teachers support and follow;
- A willingness to evaluate interventions and reforms to ensure quality control;
- A recognition that discipline practices must be linked to educational goals and must always aim at re-connecting troubled students to learning;
- A commitment to finding ways to help meet the non-academic needs of poor students.

Again, the key is decreasing barriers through equity in partnerships between schools and parents. Schools that implement these strategies do not view parents as deficient individuals who need to be “fixed” in order to serve the educational needs of their children, but rather as people who are the most important environmental supports for children’s educational development.

Earlier I mentioned that I conducted interviews with parent involvement professionals whose mission is to support parents in schools across Minnesota. These interviews were conducted “on site” for the purpose of polling parent professionals on best methods for partnering with parents in their respective communities. The really successful programs that were able to partner with parents and change outcomes in schools not only used the practices described in this article, but they also removed every social, economic and physical obstacle in their parent involvement programming by:

- Providing childcare
- Providing meals
- Providing language interpreters
- Providing transportation
- Recruiting parents by referencing neighbors or friends

When schools involve parents, children succeed. More significantly, to be successful, schools need to broaden their definition of what it means to involve parents. It isn’t enough simply to get parents on the school site. Schools need to become learning communities where families and educators have a shared responsibility in the development of children. The schools that have narrowed their achievement gaps have already become just that.

Positive School Environment— *continued from page 2*

to regulate feelings, make friends, resolve conflicts, and make ethical and safe choices. Many of the programs that teach SEL skills have now been rigorously evaluated and found to have positive impacts.

SEL is also a framework for school improvement. Teaching SEL skills helps create and maintain safe, caring learning environments. The most beneficial programs provide sequential and developmentally appropriate instruction in SEL skills. They are implemented in a coordinated manner, school-wide, from preschool through high school. Lessons are reinforced in the classroom, during out-of-school activities, and at home. Educators receive ongoing professional development in SEL and families and schools work together to promote children's social, emotional, and academic success. Educators in every District 287 site have piloted evidence-based SEL curricula such as Second Step, PATIIS and Teen Outreach Program. During the 2008-09 school year, every classroom will be expected to regularly utilize an evidence-based curriculum. A bi-weekly SEL newsletter keeps staff members and parents informed about the latest research and creative ideas related to Social Emotional Learning. Additional information is available at www.casel.org

As schools develop competence in creating positive school climates by implementing approaches such as PBIS, RTI, and SEL, students will reap the benefits in the domains of academic growth, healthy peer and adult relationships, recognition and expression of emotions, ethical conflict resolution, and reflective self-awareness.

White Privilege— *continued from page 3*

achievers. The idea is often communicated that if other racial minorities work hard, and do so despite the difficulties, they will achieve great accomplishments just like many Asian Americans. This misperception creates tensions between other racial minority groups and Asian Americans, and can be detrimental to some Asian Americans because they are held to a higher standard, and if they do not succeed, they will believe they are a failure to society. There are also many different ethnic groups under the umbrella of "Asian American," and not all succeed at the same level. This kind of stereotyping can further harm people who may already be treated unfairly.

Educational environment and role models

One of the most compelling speakers at the conference focused specifically on education. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu addressed the issue of Euro-centric education in public schools. He pointed out that 83% of elementary teachers are white women and they will shape much of our children's understanding of the world. He said, "The future of the black race lies in the hands of white women." (Only 1% of elementary teachers are African American males.)

Dr. Kunjufu sees the problems in education as a combination of funding, classroom culture, and inadequate role models for academic success for students of color. He also discussed the importance

of teachers working to understand the culture of their students and connecting with them in deeper ways in order to know them better.

Finally, Dr. Kunjufu argues that same sex classrooms should be more seriously considered. He cites the Women's Leadership Academy in Harlem, which has a 100% graduation rate, with 98% of students receiving four-year college scholarships.

Dr. Kunjufu's arguments and evidence are compelling in addressing the racial inequalities in education. His final point was, "we know all we need to know to save these children."

The conference not only informed us but challenged and engaged us to question privilege, and it provided practical strategies and mindsets for reducing inequality and spreading awareness. It focused on committing ourselves to strategies of connection, compassion, validation, growth, gratitude, vision to make needed changes rather than fear, blame, anger and shame. The theory is that the better we take care of ourselves and our communities, the more fully we are able to engage in efforts to dismantle oppression and become better educators for the next generation of children of color.

**Subtitle borrowed from Gary Howard, We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1999.*

Dr. Lisa Albrecht, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, is the director of the Social Justice minor. She organized the trip to the conference referenced in the article above. Funding was provided by several departments and campus organizations.

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BRIEFS...

Two programs funded by McKnight Foundation through CYFC have completed their first year of work.

Parent Involvement Resource Sharing Network (PIRSN)

(PIRSN) is a learning and resource-sharing network of parent involvement practitioners from across the state who meet monthly in an effort to learn from each others' practices and from research while exploring ways to intersect and connect around parent involvement. In addition to its networking function, PIRSN focuses attention on parent involvement specifically as it relates to improving children's educational outcomes and serves to build the capacity of its members (practitioners). Throughout 2007-2008, technical assistance was provided to the group by Luis Garcia, AmcriCorps Promise Fellow hosted by CYFC (see Luis' article on p. 1). Meeting content is determined by members and usually involves trainings, presentations, "case conferences" (brainstorming around a current problem or question faced by a PIRSN member) and "show-and-tells" (members spend time describing their organization to other members). Meetings are convened by CYFC and facilitation rotates monthly among the members. For more information, contact CYFC at cyfc@umn.edu or call 612-625-7849.

Parenting For School Success

Parenting For School Success is a program currently in development by the U of MN Extension Service Family Relationships Educators, with CYFC as a partner and fiscal agent. The intent of PSS is to develop materials that will assist parents in helping their children be the best learners they can be. The first PSS product, geared for general audiences, is a booklet for parents with suggestions on how to enhance their children's learning. It will be available soon through Extension and CYFC. Training for school staff who work with parents is also being planned. The PSS team has also been working with Latino and African American cultural guides to conduct culturally specific focus groups to determine the needs of parents regarding their children's education, and how PSS might help address those needs. Additional culturally specific focus groups are planned in the second year of the project. The culturally specific focus groups will be a major influence in determining the content and format of PSS for their cultures.

Who's The Consortium?



Charlene Myklebust

Dr. Charlene Myklebust, Psy.D., is the Director of Social Emotional Learning in Intermediate District 287, which provides specialized educational services to students from 13 member districts throughout Hennepin County. Her background is in teaching, educational administration, corrections, chemical dependency counseling, and children's mental health. Char was honored with the 2007 "Educator of the Year" award from the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH). Char served as a charter contributor to the Goldie Hawn Foundation Education Committee and is currently involved in promoting Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and the Hawn Foundation's Mindfulness Education curriculum in schools.



Rob Warren

Dr. John Robert Warren, PhD, is the Department of Sociology's director of undergraduate studies. After completing his undergraduate work at Carleton College in Northfield, he received his MS and PhD degrees in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Two of his major areas of research are: high school exit exams, as detailed in his article in this issue, in which he is looking at the effects of state-mandated exams on high school completion, educational achievement, and post-high school labor market outcomes; and work and family across the life course, in which he is examining the impact of work and family across the life course on health, well-being, financial security and other outcomes in late adulthood. He is the deputy editor of Sociology of Education.



Richard Wassen

Richard Wassen is a senior fellow for legislative and policy affairs in the College of Education and Human Development. During session, Richard can be found at the capitol where he serves as the College's liaison on education and human development issues. Richard is a valued member of the Children, Youth and Family Policy Work Group (PWG), a group of University faculty and staff interested in policy work as it relates to children, youth and families. CYFC convenes the group monthly in order to maintain open lines of communication and provide opportunities for collaboration across the University.

And the Consortium is YOU!

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