

IN THIS ISSUE

Out of School Time

From a Family Policy Perspective

In keeping with CYFC's theme for 2005-2006, Policy From A Family Perspective, this edition of Consortium Connections focuses on an important issue for children, youth and families – Out of School Time – and examines it from a family policy perspective.

Out of school time is defined as the waking hours each week when young people are not occupied with school, studies, chores, meals and personal maintenance. An article on page 3 describes more specifically what is meant by Out of School Time and Out of School Time Policy.

From a practical standpoint, out of school time (referred to as OST throughout most of this publication) is all the pieces involved in the delicate balance families face as their children grow and develop, and move from spending all of their time around parents and/or caregivers to spending much of their waking time away from parents.

OST includes both the formal programs and environments where young people spend their time (such as child care settings, after school programs, arts opportunities like music lessons, and worksites) and the informal connections (such as the neighbor who teaches a child how to knit, or repair automobiles, or who takes them shopping).

Although they are not addressed directly in this issue, two family policy perspectives are guiding the way it is shaped. The first is a lens that is commonly referred to as the Social Ecological Model, developed originally by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This “ecological” perspective is one that CYFC embraces in all of its work. As it applies to the issue of OST, the ecological perspective suggests that children don't grow up in a vacuum, but rather are influenced by, and influence, people, organizations and systems that surround them. It also suggests that change must occur and be mutually reinforced at all levels in order to be most effective and sustained over time. Articles in this issue represent several of the specific contexts identified in the ecological model – parents, community, and policy.

The second lens guiding the examination of out of school time from a family policy perspective is a tool developed many years ago by a national consortium of family organizations, and recently re-released by the National Council On Family Relations. It is “A Checklist for Assessing the Impact of Policies and Programs on Families.” The checklist is designed to assess how well a policy or program supports six key areas of family functioning, and to evaluate whether it will help or hurt, strengthen or weaken family life. It is also intended to assist policymakers and program developers, as well as other stakeholders, in looking at intended and unintended consequences of policies or programs for families. This checklist was included in full, with an example of one way to apply it, in the Summer 2005 issue of Connections. One article specifically addresses ways in which OST policies and programs support and do not support parents in raising their children. Another article highlights the importance of families being involved.

The past several issues of Connections have featured an expanded on-line version, with additional or expanded articles, sources or references from print articles, and web links. The web version of this issue, as well as past issues, can be accessed at the following website:

<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection/index.html>

Since our purpose with this issue of Connections is to explore OST from a family policy perspective, that is the focus of most of the articles. However, we recognize that one of the contexts for youth development is outside of the family – and we have not addressed that perspective here. Excellent information on out of school time and youth development is available through Youth Community Connections (formerly known as the Minnesota Out of School Time Partnership) and the Minnesota Commission on Out of School Time website. Links to their work can be found with the web version of Connections.

Engaging Families and Communities Benefits Everyone

By Dr. Heather Weiss, Director,
Harvard Family Research Project

The potential benefits of family-centered policies and practices in out of school time are manifold. When after school programs build relationships with families and engage them in after school activities, children, families, schools, and programs all stand to benefit.

The term “engagement” itself must be considered broadly in order to realize its full benefits. When practitioners, including teachers and after school providers, think about family engagement, they often think only about activities—like program volunteering or attending parent-teacher meetings—that are located at the program site and serve the program's aims. But engagement and interaction can mean a wide range of involvement in children's learning that extends into the larger society: bringing food to a church

Engaging Families —continued on page 2

The Children, Youth & Family Consortium was established in fall 1991 in an effort to bring together the varied competencies of the University of Minnesota and the vital resources of Minnesota's communities to enhance the ability of individuals and organizations to address critical health, education, and social policy concerns in ways that improve the well-being of Minnesota children, youth, and families.

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Engaging Families —continued from cover

potluck dinner, donating skills such as typing or accounting to a community youth center, helping chaperone a field trip at an after school program, and organizing or attending a parent workshop or social gathering.

Just as children learn and grow in a variety of contexts and with the help of many significant adults, so also can connections between families, schools, and other community organizations serve parents' interests, needs, and capacities for leadership. After school programs can provide opportunities for parents to spend time with their children, learn more about children's schooling, receive support with life needs, develop their own skills, and build connections to other parents and community organizations that offer strong social networks of shared information and engagement.

In other words, a broad definition of family engagement holds the potential to reach, engage, and support a larger community of families, children, and youth.

Why engage families?

In a recent survey of urban African American and Latino parents, most parents said that spending more time with their children would help them be better parents. Most also felt that they were doing well as parents but were doing so in the face of multiple challenges in their communities, even while they received little support beyond immediate family to help them as caretakers.

The study's authors are emphatic about the need: "for the broader society to reflect on and rethink how it views and supports parents. . . . Instead of leaving them to their own devices, how can we be there for them as trusted friends and allies in the vital task of raising this society's youngest generation to be healthy, caring, and responsible? The answer . . . points toward creating communities, organizations, and systems . . . that understand that parenting is best done in the context of a supportive, engaged community." And engaged communities are healthy communities. (*see reference to Search Institute in on-line version*)

Decades of research show the benefits of family involvement in children's education in school and at home: boosting school grades and test scores, improving school attendance, fostering social skills, and increasing graduation rates and postsecondary education attainment. More recently, research and evaluation findings are demonstrating the benefits of engaging families in after school programs, such as greater involvement in school affairs and increased family assistance with children's homework, improved relationships between parents and children, and improved implementation and outcomes for after school programs.

Despite the benefits, engaging families after school can be challenging. Lack of time can pose a real barrier to engagement, since many parents seek after school programs because they work, attend school, or have other responsibilities beyond traditional school hours. Likewise, after school program staff are often overextended, so that engaging families may feel like a daunting task in the face of other priorities, such as safety, program planning, and budgeting.

Perhaps due to the many challenges they face, the majority of after school programs today lack a family engagement component. Yet ideally, a variety of strategies can be used: after school programs can ask families what they think about the program, how they can contribute, and how they can be served in return. Families' ideas and feedback can be gathered through surveys, focus group discussions, one-on-one meetings, and even suggestion boxes. Improved program outcomes can be one positive result of including the ideas of families in programming and improving what families think could be better. Strengthened connections between families and more active community involvement can be another.

Program evaluations point to support and service provision as one way to engage families in their children's learning. Some examples are parenting workshops, adult education classes, and other support services such as health, housing, and financial support. Offering informal social events or activities such as craft nights, potluck dinners, and weekend trips to museums, theaters, and other cultural institutions can help make parents aware of community resources for them and their children, and simultaneously lead to more community involvement.

The point bears emphasis: the continuum is not linear, but circular. Healthy child development requires strong nurturing families that in turn are nurtured and supported by individuals and institutions within the community. And communities are comprised of . . .

The Harvard Family Research Project recognizes that for children to be successful in school and life, there must be an array of learning supports around them. These supports and opportunities, which must reach beyond the school, should be linked and work toward consistent learning and developmental outcomes for children. HFRP calls this network of supports complementary learning. This approach acknowledges the significant contributions not just of schools, but also of families, after school programs, and other community supports for increasing children's success in learning and in life, and the necessity of strong links between these settings.

References and citations for this article can be found in the web version of Connections.

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Editor: Madge Alberts

CYFC Children, Youth & Family Consortium
McNamara Alumni Center, Suite 270A
200 Oak St. S.E.,
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612/625-7849
Fax 612/625-7815
email: cyfc@umn.edu
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu

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CONSORTIUM STAFF

Madge Alberts Program Coordinator
Candice Bartelle Office Specialist
Michael Brott Associate Director
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Jess Siebenbruner Project Coordinator

What Is Out Of School Time?

By Ann Lochner, Director,
Minnesota Commission on Out of School Time

As children and youth engage in high quality developmental experiences over time, they practice and perfect the skills they will need to become responsible adults, successfully integrated into and enhancing the vitality of their communities as contributing members. This real-life skill building happens in family homes, structured programs like 4-H or Campfire, and after school programs or activities in the wider community where parents and other adults serve as community guides for the developmental journey of young people.

Out of school time is about opportunities for learning and growth that shape young lives. New research reveals that brain development is vibrant and dynamic throughout childhood and adolescence. Through experience and experimentation with roles they will later play as adults - like teamwork, decision making, leadership, community contribution - young people ensure that the developmental competencies needed to establish these developmental competencies become strong.

When positive relationships and high quality experiences are nurtured, sustained and repeated over time, young people formulate the brain architecture to support their successes in multiple settings throughout the rest of their lives. One experience builds on another, much like building a house from the bottom up. Building a good foundation is only the beginning.

Research findings confirm that young people who participate in structured community opportunities receive better grades, have more positive attitudes toward school, and higher aspirations for post secondary education. Additional research points to long-term effects as well.

What is an Out-of-School Time Opportunity?

It is helpful to think of development as two intertwined processes. One is internal - the continuing development of brain architecture. The other is external - expanding connections to people, places and possibilities for learning about roles that will become increasingly important as young people journey toward adulthood. Challenging and high quality formal and informal opportunities help to merge the two processes as young people discover, explore and practice to be contributors in their communities.

Out of school time opportunities occur after school, on weekends, and during the summer. Examples range from music lessons to theater, from visits with grandparents or neighbors or mentors to a part-time job, from summer camps to youth leadership activities, from visiting a library to participating in sports. For younger children, out of school time includes settings such as child care and after school care, as well as formal and informal relationships with other adults and extended family.

While the physical environments vary, developmentally focused experiences share a common goal: Creating enriching activities across many content areas through which interests can be nurtured, skills tested and perfected, teamwork and leadership learned and decision making experienced.

What is Out-of-School Time Policy?

Policies may be laws, public or private regulations, or formal or informal procedures for accepted patterns of behavior that function as norms or guidelines. At the heart of any policy is a value that drives it toward commonly shared goals for society.

Viewed through this lens, OST policy includes things like child care funding, worksite policies regarding parents and children, such as family leave issues, and funding for OST programs. But formal, cohesive out of school time policy has yet to be created. While Minnesota has multiple programs that contribute pieces of targeted funding for specific needs, the state lacks a comprehensive vision and policy framework to ensure children and youth have access to the supports and opportunities they need to successfully reach adulthood – including policies related to out of school time opportunities.

In its June, 2005 report, *Journeys into Community: Transforming Youth Opportunities for Learning and Development*, the Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time noted the current lack of coordination in funding and sustaining measures for out of school opportunities. Further, the infrastructure necessary to achieve such coordination is lacking.

The slate is wide open. The current devolution of policy responsibility from federal to state and local jurisdictions provides a new opportunity for states to think about how effectively current youth policy structures serve the needs of youth. Investments in out-of-school time opportunities for Minnesota young people are investments in their development as well as the vitality of their communities now and into the future.

References and citations for this article can be found in the web version of Connections.

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Out of School Time... ...from the perspective of a parent

By Rose Allen, Family Relations Specialist
University of Minnesota Extension Service

Editor's note: Rose Allen has been a parent educator and family relations specialist with the University of Minnesota Extension Service for 20 years. She shares her personal experience with out of school time issues, as well as the issues she sees from her professional vantage point.

Years ago my children spent their days at child care. The annual cost of care for two children equaled the cost of tuition at the University of Minnesota, but that's what it took to insure they were in a safe, caring and stimulating environment while we were at work.

This worked well for us until about third grade. My kids outgrew child care. When I looked around at alternatives, there was little to be found that fit our needs. They weren't ready to stay home alone, especially during school vacations and summer break. Many of the options available did not provide full day coverage. You could drop them off at 9 and pick them up at 3. That didn't match the hours full time working parents needed for the care of their children.

So we spent a few years patching together a system of care when our children weren't in school. We relied on camps, a variety of after school activities and taking personal vacation time, all the time feeling like we had to invent the system of care ourselves. But we managed to make it through elementary school.

I worried about middle school. The day starts so early and the children are on their way home by 2:30 or 3. I had seen the data about the risks between 3 and 6 p.m. I would be at work and not available to monitor them. My neighbors were around sometimes, but it wasn't reasonable to expect them to keep an eye on my children.

I was pleasantly surprised to find a small charter middle school that didn't start at the crack of dawn and offered an optional, but very well attended "enrichment" program after school. This program was a lifesaver – the kids loved it because they got to choose – from homework help (a very popular option) to sports and crafts. As a parent I was relieved to know where they were after school and that they were engaged in physical activity and skill development. Best of all, the bus dropped them off about the same time I arrived home from work.

Now they're in high school. One child does not participate in any formal out of school activities. Out of school time (OST) is spent with friends, on the phone, watching TV and working. The other child got involved with a sport. We found this to be an "all or none" activity, and some weeks she was involved with practice or competition 7 out of 7 days! It was not only out of school time, but out of family time as well.

So, where is the happy medium?

Ask any parent and they will tell you time is a huge issue. Families have always been busy, but today there are more choices, more pressure and more expectations than ever before. The debate is intense about how kids spend their time, from the perspective of overscheduled kids to those who have no out of school structure.

We were fortunate. I know many families don't have the money, flexibility and support they need to access programs for their children when they aren't in school. And I know they worry about their children's safety, behavior, missing out on learning skills, being on teams and other positive aspects of OST programs.

What's a parent to do? From my perspective, when we talk about OST, parents and professionals sometimes have different realities.

Supporting youth outside their families and Supporting families in raising their children.

Some OST programs serve as a parent to the youth in our communities. These programs work with young people who do not have strong connections to kin

or other supportive adults. For these youth, program connection and an opportunity to explore who they are, the kids just know to show up and they leave with a sense of purpose for the day.

On the other hand, for most youth and families, OST programs are an extension of the family. Program connection and an opportunity for youth to explore the context of what is happening at home. Staff need to be interested and want to be connected to the program, opportunities to communicate and parents and other.

Setting youth oriented goals that don't involve Including parents in the goals of the program

Who is the audience for OST programming? The youth. Yes again. Youth are the program participants, but parents are the decision makers who determine the goals for the program. It's important for programs to understand their expectations for the experience their children want. How do they like to learn about the program activities? What opportunities do they want to participate through family nights, special family events, ceremonies, parent communication?

Being a place where "youth culture" can exist Taking an intergenerational view

We have deep separations of the generations in our culture. There is no doubt that being able to participate in youth activities is important for young people. But we must not forget the intergenerational entity and one place where the wisdom of older generations is shared with the children. How can this be achieved? Do we have staff of different ages? Are there opportunities for grandparents to participate and bring their perspective?

Providing structured time to develop skills and Unstructured time where children can

Many children and youth today are so busy – with school, work and enrichments like music lessons. OST programs need to provide structure in kids lives and at the same time, the opportunity for them to re-charge, dream and figure out on their own time on their hands.

The Harvard Family Research Project frames the continuum of services that form a "complementary system" of schools, families, OST programs and other community organizations in the process of learning. They found that successful OST programs with family engagement improves the outcomes for the children. Children involved with their child's education, parent/child relationship and the OST program shows better outcomes.

Parents need to know what the goals of the program are and how they are functioning. They need to be connected and included in the program. The expectations for parents are high – from the financial cost of the program to the long-term outcomes for their children.

An Example of One Successful Program:

The Minnesota Youth Community Learning Initiative: Community-driven and -defined connections between caring adults and youth

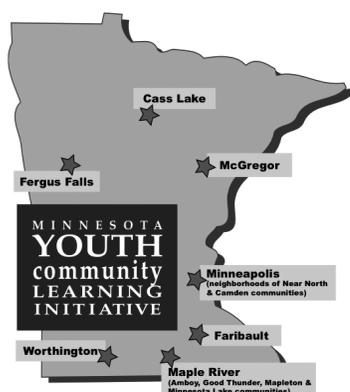
By Paul Snyder,
Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health

Through its work with community teachers and other caring adults, parents, guardians, families and school personnel, the Minnesota Youth Community Learning Initiative (MYCL) is increasing the capacity of community members to address the needs of young people in the community.

The Initiative is a partnership between seven communities throughout Minnesota and the University of Minnesota's Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health in the Department of Pediatrics. The Initiative's principal funder is the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The goal of the Initiative is to reconnect disconnected youth with learning. The Initiative's efforts are focused in four principal activity areas:

1. Linking high school and middle school students who are disconnected from learning with a community teacher;
2. Assisting parents in providing positive parenting and educational support for their middle and high school students;
3. Assisting schools to enhance a sense of connectedness for young people; and
4. Strengthening the capacity of each MYCL Initiative community coalition to address the needs of all youth in their community.

The seven partner communities, which represent the demographic diversity of Minnesota, include: Amboy/Good Thunder/Mapleton/Minnesota Lake, Cass Lake, Faribault, Fergus Falls, McGregor, Worthington and neighborhoods in the Camden and Near North communities of Minneapolis. Four of the seven school districts represented by the MYCL Initiative communities are included in the seven most diverse school districts of the state.



Increasingly, more sectors of the community are represented on community-level Initiative coalitions and boards. One community's coalition has increased dramatically the level of participation by persons of color, including representation on the executive committee. Another community seeks to serve an underserved population by hiring a family outreach worker who will conduct visits with families of youth who have not participated in community activities. A third community is making concerted effort to reach out to families who live in outlying areas of the community; youth programming in this community has historically happened in its downtown, beyond reach of these families and very limited outreach efforts to these families have occurred before now.

Much of the Initiative work is done through relationship-building, between concerned adults, between adults and youth, and between young people themselves. While some of these activities occur during the school day, much of the activity occurs during out of school time hours. These personal connections increase the level of trust between youth and adults in the community and help dispel longstanding stereotypes that each group, youth and adults, have of each other. Over time, the hope is that a paradigm shift will occur, resulting in a change in thinking about young people by policy makers and persons of influence in each of the communities.

The communities hired their own full-time Community Coordinators, with additional support from AmeriCorps Promise Fellows. The Initiative is community-driven with local autonomy in selecting promising strategies to address the needs of each community's youth. Consequently, the Initiative takes a different shape in each community. This flexibility allows for greater buy-in as each community determines the unique shape, direction, and focus for the implementation of its efforts. The Konopka Institute serves as a connector to resources, providing technical assistance and support, training, guidance, and troubleshooting.

The Community Coordinators showcase the positive activities of the youth involved in the Initiative, some of whom have not typically been included in positive press. The hope of this work is to change the negative outlook towards youth when skeptical adults witness previously labeled "problem" youth engaged in pro-social activities. Adults in the communities working with these youth are encouraged to provide informal and formal testimony to the worth, value, and positive potential of all young people in the community.

And this includes parents. Often, parents are so stressed, particularly by economic and occupational concerns, that they are not able to see the potential in their own youth. Parents of youth, benefited by addition of other caring adults in their child's life, see new possibilities for their child and their family.

The Initiative is instilling and renewing hope for families, for schools, and for the community in general, as young people discover or rediscover new talents and skills. But the greatest hope instilled is that in the youth themselves.

CECMH Bridges Research-Practice Gap in Children's Mental Health

The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health was established in 2003 as part of the University of Minnesota's President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. The goal in establishing the Center was to close the research and practice gap in children's mental health by developing strong interdisciplinary connections among researchers, clinicians, parents, and others working to improve the lives on children. Generating and disseminating evidence is the core of CECMH's work. This is achieved through providing resources, hosting educational events, sponsoring interdisciplinary collaborations, connecting university and community groups, and responding to inquiries from individuals throughout Minnesota seeking children's mental health resources and partnerships with others in the field.

One of the unique features of CECMH is that the impetus for its development originated in the community. Children's mental health was the topic at the top of the Hennepin County Leadership Action Group policy agenda, and they contacted the Children, Youth and Family Consortium to assist them in building partnerships with mental health experts to help address children's mental health issues in the county. The interest in establishing university-community partnerships around children's mental health was so broad that CECMH works with populations statewide and is now an ongoing part of the work of the Children, Youth and Family Consortium.

Highlights of CECMH's work to date include:

Lessons From the Field: Lessons from the Field is a University-Community seminar series intended to highlight local programs serving children, solicit feedback from scholars in various disciplines, and engage in dialogue about what works well, how to overcome obstacles, and what is needed in future research. The interest in these events is great; several seminars have been held to date, and all were filled and had a long waiting list well before the date of the event. Summaries of these and all CECMH events can be found on the CECMH website (see below), in the calendar under "past events."

University-Community Events:

- CECMH sponsored Dr. Dante Cicchetti, new University of Minnesota faculty member in the Institute of Child Development, in speaking about his research related to high-risk children and parents with depressive disorders, and translating this research into effective prevention and early intervention for children and families. He also discussed plans for the development of an interdisciplinary research and intervention center that will serve Twin Cities communities.
- CECMH and Hennepin County hosted a Children's Mental Health Roundtable. The goal was to facilitate direct connections between individuals from Hennepin County and the University by creating the opportunity to communicate the interests and activities of both organizations, meet colleagues, develop a directory of names and contact information, discuss overall policy issues, and identify potential additional infrastructure components to help promote future collaboration.

Website and database: CECMH has developed a website that features a calendar of training events and a searchable database of individuals and organizations with expertise in specific types of children's mental health issues. The database also includes a growing library of full-text documents available to the public. In the future, the website will feature commissioned research documents designed to bridge research and practice. University and community members can add information to the database on the website by going to: <http://www.cmh.umn.edu>

On-line Journal: CECMH staff are creating an on-line, peer-reviewed research journal designed to bridge current research as well as the researchers with practitioners and the way they practice. Currently, the staff and steering committee members are identifying topics, designing a rigorous peer-review process, and commissioning authors and consultants.

Children's mental health is a growing concern for families, school personnel, medical providers, policymakers, and many professionals working with children and families. The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health works to build connections between all of these groups of individuals in order to bridge current research with practice, connect parents and professionals with timely, research-based resources, and improve care for children and families in Minnesota.

For more information, contact CECMH at (612) 625-7849, e-mail cmh@umn.edu, or go to the website.



Staff of CECMH are:

Cari Michaels,
MPH, Coordinator
Ellen Lepinski,
Associate Program Coordinator
Nick Leonard,
Graduate Research Assistant
Candice Bartelle,
Office Specialist

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BRIEFS...

New CYFC Staff

CYFC has two new staff members. **Ellen Lepinski** recently joined the staff as Associate Program Coordinator for the Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health. Most recently, Ellen was director of services with Youth Intervention Programs Association (YIPA). She will be working with CECMH coordinator Cari Michaels in the ongoing work of the Center. **Candice Bartelle** joins the Consortium as our new Office Specialist, replacing Zoe Wong. Candice recently received her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from UMD.

Out of School Time Research Collaboration

A new research collaboration on out of school time between the University of Minnesota, Wilder Research and the Search Institute plans to engage expertise across the state to conduct research and evaluation on how, why, and in what ways we can best engage the youth of Minnesota in high quality, easily accessible, and high impact out of school time opportunities for learning and development. Nearly 40 individuals representing youth programming, policy, funding, business, research and evaluation sectors attended a retreat in December, coordinated by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, and reflected on the topic. Their ideas will be used to develop an integrated and collaborative research agenda for the state.

Family Policy Minor: The University of Minnesota introduced an interdisciplinary graduate minor in Family Policy this year. Family Policy Minor faculty and the Children, Youth and Family Consortium have partnered to organize a series of four spring family policy forums to explore the impact of public and private policies on families. Topics covered in the forums include: early motherhood and marriage in poor and low-income families; housing policy and its impact on homeless families; the impact of economic policy on families; and the impact of law on families.

Evaluation Retreat: The Children, Youth and Family Consortium is organizing a May retreat to convene evaluators, funders and representatives of community programs with the aim of increasing understanding of program evaluation and aligning expectations for evaluation between these three sectors.

Who's The Consortium?

Susan Hagstrum is the Chair of the CECMH Steering Committee and has been actively engaged with projects and events sponsored by the Center. She has focused time and energy particularly on Steering Committee development and fundraising for the Center. Susan, who holds a PhD and is married University of Minnesota president Robert Bruininks, is the Principal Consultant of The Bridgewater Group, formed in 1997 to provide leadership to non-profit organizations.

Gail Dorfmann, was instrumental in the creation of CECMH through her work with the Hennepin County Leadership Action group, who sought to partner with University experts on children's mental health projects. This request led to funding for CECMH through the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. As a commissioner, Gail has been an advocate for mental health reform, affordable housing, improved transportation systems, and initiatives that improve public health. She holds a graduate degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Sen. Claire Robling, R- Jordan, **Sen. John Hottinger**, D-St. Peter, **Rep. Doug Meslow**, R-White Bear Lake, and **Rep. Nora Slawik**, D-Maplewood are part of a group of about 20 state legislators who have been working with a team from the University of Minnesota to better understand the use of the Family Impact Checklist and how it might be used by legislators. The four legislators are co-chairs of the bi-partisan Early Childhood Caucus. Their work with the checklist is part of an Early Childhood Core Leaders project aimed at creating common ground between parties and houses to think creatively and responsibly about early childhood issues. The project, hosted by the U of M, is funded by the McKnight Foundation, the Sheltering Arms Foundation and the University of Minnesota President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families.

And the Consortium is YOU!

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Children, Youth & Family Consortium
McNamara Alumni Center, Suite 270A
200 Oak St. S.E.
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