

IN THIS ISSUE

Educational Disparities

The Children, Youth and Family Consortium (CYFC) began last year to organize a major portion of its work around theme areas as a way to address children, youth and family issues in greater depth. The first theme during the 2005-06 academic year was "Policy From A Family Perspective." Several issues of Connections and a number of events focused on topics related to family policy.

This fall, CYFC will begin a new two-year focus on the topic of "Educational Disparities," more commonly known as the achievement gap – a critical issue in Minnesota, which has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation. This issue of Connections is intended to introduce this work, and subsequent issues will expand on various aspects of educational disparities.

CYFC considers educational disparities to be the differences in educational opportunities and outcomes among various groups of people, often defined by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geography. Much of the work on the achievement gap has focused primarily on student differences in outcomes or achievement; CYFC's work will also look at the disparities in opportunities.

As is the practice in all of its work, CYFC will address educational disparities from ecological and development perspectives.

The developmental perspective recognizes that human development begins at birth, and continues throughout the lifespan. Events that occur at one stage of development have a profound effect on future development. Educational disparities spans the ages of birth to adulthood, and includes issues such as language acquisition, early childhood experiences, school readiness, classroom performance and behavior, standardized test performance, out-of-school experiences, high school completion, post-secondary enrollment, job preparation, and labor force participation and earnings.

The ecological perspective recognizes that children and families do not operate in a vacuum but rather their development is influenced by interactions between the many parts of the world around them. As illustrated

by the graphic on the insert, the child is at the center of this model with multiple circles of influence ranging from immediate family and informal support systems to the more distant society at large. The experiences that occur within and across these circles of influence all contribute to the child's (as well as the family's) development. To most effectively address issues related to children and families, actions must occur and be reinforced in all of these areas. CYFC's work related to educational disparities will focus on all five circles of influence. Most of the articles in this issue reflect the ecological perspective in some way. The center pages focus on the inner two circles: the child, and the family/informal supports. Subsequent editions of Connections will focus on Communities, Policy and Society.

Many activities and events relating to educational disparities are in the works at CYFC. Among them are: a conference on Oct. 6 launching the vision of 25 superintendents Minnesota school superintendents for a world class educational system in Minnesota, (see article on p. 3), a project with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, Dr. Sandra Christenson and Latino parents that will provide parents with culturally appropriate resource materials to help their children be better learners (see item on p. 8), and a variety of events including a forum focused on creating a blueprint for bringing greater coherence to Minnesota's educational system.

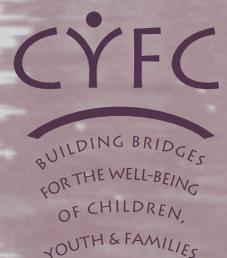
The goal of CYFC's work related to Educational Disparities is to move beyond talking about it and put into action some potential tools to reduce the gap in Minnesota. CYFC will be consulting and working with partners from many parts of the University and the community to make this happen.

CYFC is using the phrase "educational disparities" rather than "the achievement gap" to define our work in this area because we believe it conveys a broader scope of the issue. However, we recognize that achievement gap is the more commonly used phrase, and where authors have used achievement gap, we have not changed it.

All references, citations and additional resources for print articles will be included in the web versions only.

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, influence policy and enhance practice to improve the well-being of Minnesota's children and families.

CONNECTIONS



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CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN
CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

STAFF

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2006-07 Academic Year

October 18, 2006

What is Attachment Theory... Really?

Featuring: Marti Erickson, PhD;
Panel of Respondents

February 5, 2007

Infant-Parent Relationships: Promotive Interventions

Featuring: Dr. Charles Zeanah,
Tulane University;
Panel of Respondents

March 29, 2007

Inter-Relationship between Attachment and Other Mental Health Concerns

Featuring: Dr. Read Sulik,
St. Cloud Behavioral Health
Services; Panel of Respondents

April 25, 2007

Attachment: Intervention/Treatment Models

Featuring: Anne Garity, PhD,
LICSW; Panel of Community
Practitioners

*For further information and to
register go to:
www.cmh.umn.edu*

Children's Mental Health and the Achievement Gap

By Nicholas Leonard,

CECMH Graduate Research Assistant and Graduate Student in School Psychology, U of MN

The "achievement gap" is generally defined as the gap in academic achievement between minority and white students. Most initiatives to date focus on improving academic competence of poor students, students of color, and second-language learners. Significantly fewer initiatives have examined the "gap" through a children's mental health lens. While recognizing the relationship between poverty and culture on mental health, this perspective also allows us to examine the bi-directional influence between mental health and academic achievement. This article is meant to open dialog about this emerging lens, and raise awareness about the challenges we face in closing that "gap."

Consequences of Untreated Mental Health Needs

National statistics confirm the growing prevalence of mental health problems among youth. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, in the course of a year approximately 20% of children and adolescents in the U.S. experience symptoms of a mental health problem. Children with mental health concerns are at significantly greater risk for behavioral, social, familial, and academic difficulties. Left untreated, childhood disorders are likely to compromise a child's chances for academic success and lead to a downward spiral of school failure. In fact, the dropout rate for students with severe emotional and behavioral needs is approximately twice that of other students .

The Role of Schools

There is little disagreement that families should be the first source of support for a child's mental health. However, a growing body of research points to public schools as the major provider of mental health services for school-aged children. For many schools, building the capacity to serve the vast mental health needs of their students is challenging. While some barriers are obvious, schools also face less noticeable obstacles that inhibit mental health service delivery. For example:

- **An Expanded Definition** - Just as mental health is no longer seen as solely the absence of mental illness, mental health service delivery must be seen as more than intensive treatment for a single student. Much confusion and conflict surrounding school-based mental health is due to definition, or rather, lack thereof. As discussed by Franklin, there appear to be no state mandates about mental health services in schools and no clear definition of what constitutes mental health services. We must begin to recognize a definition of service delivery that includes not only "treatment", but also promotion of social and emotional development.
- **A Fragmented Delivery System** - Children do not live in a school vacuum and schools do not have all of the necessary services/answers. Schools will be most effective when they work with families and community providers to create an integrated continuum of interventions that meets the universal needs of students.
- **Lack of Knowledge about Existing Services** - "Precisely what is provided by schools under the rubric of mental health services...is largely unknown." Without a clearer understanding of "what" and "who," efforts aimed at improving service delivery in schools are challenging.

Closing the Gap

When families, schools, providers and policy-makers together address these and other barriers, school-based mental health service delivery can produce positive outcomes. According to a growing body of research, students who receive social-emotional support and prevention services achieve better in school. For example, higher levels of school bonding and better social, emotional, and decision-making skills predict higher standardized test scores and grades (Fleming et al., 2005). In addition, expanded school mental health services in elementary schools have produced declines in disciplinary referrals, suspension, grade retention, and special education referrals among at-risk students.

The Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health (CECMH) is committed to addressing these barriers through its work to bring together providers, parents and researchers in educational trainings; disseminate evidence-based practices; and support interdisciplinary research. In collaboration with the Department of Education, CECMH has taken the first steps to better describe school-based mental health service delivery in Minnesota. This fall, findings from the first state-wide study of school-based mental health service delivery will be released. For a link to the results, visit the CECMH website at www.cmh.umn.edu.

*References and citations for this article can be found on the web version at:
<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection/index.html>*

Toward a New World-Class Vision of Public Education in Minnesota.

By John Currie, Superintendent
Rosemount, Apple Valley, Eagan Schools

Earlier this summer, I had the opportunity to travel to China with a number of other superintendents, the Commissioner of Education and additional Minnesotans who are focused on further strengthening teaching and learning in our state. To put it mildly, it was a fascinating and eye-opening trip. We saw a country that has tremendous educational challenges, but that also has a serious long-term vision for the future of education and plans and structures to realize its vision over time. With strong commitment at the national, provincial and local levels, China is providing a small but steadily growing percentage of its students with educational programs that are as rigorous and effective as those found in the world's highest performing nations. They are also methodically bringing everyone else up to solid levels of basic academic proficiency.

Although none of us on the trip thought China could or should become a model for education in Minnesota, we did agree that what is happening in the classrooms of that country and in many other nations around the world has big implications for the future of our students and our state. In an era when jobs and opportunities can be relocated across the globe or replaced by new technologies in the blink of an eye, all Minnesota students must leave our schools with world-class knowledge and skills. Our students are not competing against other Minnesota students, or even U.S. students, for top jobs; they are competing with students from around the world. A growing number of students from other nations will be better prepared for those top jobs than students from the U.S.

Most of us on the trip also agreed that despite the progress public schools in Minnesota have made in recent years — as measured by everything from the rising percentages of students who score proficient in reading and math in the elementary grades to the nation-leading percentage of students who score well on the ACT college entrance exam in science — our state's educational system is not yet adequately organized or supported to produce world-class student performance across the board.

If the idea of world-class education is taken seriously, it has profound implications for how educational systems and schools are organized, how we prepare our teachers, what teachers teach, and how students learn. It means Minnesota can no longer benchmark its efforts only or even primarily against other U.S. educational leaders such as Massachusetts and New Hampshire (which scored just ahead of and just behind Minnesota on 2005 national reading and math tests), but must set its sights on global leaders like Finland, Korea and the Netherlands.

The trip to China came at the perfect time for me because it helped to make very real the issues I have been thinking about with a group of 25 superintendents for the past year-and-a-half as a part of an informal "think tank" called the Superintendent Symposium. Created through a partnership between the Saint Paul Public Schools and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators with support from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi L.L.P. Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice, the Symposium brought together the leaders of rural, urban and suburban districts, as well as districts that serve some of the state's most affluent communities and some of the state's poorest.

Through our work together, we have developed a vision paper that we are calling "Minnesota's Promise: World-Class Schools, World Class State," that lays out some ideas about where we collectively think public education in our state needs to go over the next decade. In recent months, the University of Minnesota has become a strong supporter of this effort, and President Bruininks will host an event on October 6 at which we will outline our vision. Other key University partners are the Children, Youth and Family Consortium and the new Consortium on Postsecondary Academic Success.

We know the vision we outline in our paper and will begin sharing with others in October isn't a finished product or a fully developed plan of action. Our primary goal is to make the case that our state can and must set its sights higher for all children and that the long-term goal of all our educational improvement efforts must be the creation of a coherent, truly world-class system of schools in Minnesota. As my colleagues and I saw in July, the Chinese have a bold, broadly understood and widely supported vision for the future of their schools. Minnesota's students need and deserve the same.

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

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Editor: Madge Alberts



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
Sara Benning, Special Projects Coordinator
Michael Brott, Associate Director
Cathy Jordan, Director
Nicholas Leonard, Graduate Research Assistant, Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health
Ellen Lepinski, Associate Program Coordinator, Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health
Cari Michaels, Coordinator, Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health

Editor's Note:

Kwame McDonald and Mary K. Boyd have worked in education for many years: Mary Kay worked in a variety of capacities with the St. Paul Schools, and Kwame is a lifetime youth worker, baseball coach and advocate, and taught at the high school and college levels in several states. Recently, he was the associate director of the St. Paul High School Reform Project through the Center for School Change (Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota).

Kwame brought Mary K. in as a consultant to work with the St. Paul schools project, which received \$8 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to convert existing large schools into smaller, more personalized schools, or learning communities, within the larger building. The schools within a school model is one that's been used successfully in New York for some time, according to Mary K. Each of the schools within a school has its own staff, administration and decision-making power to define its own culture. One of the project's goals was to make sure that every student left high school with a plan for post-secondary education.

The project originally involved several schools in St. Paul. After a while Kwame and Mary K. made the decision to focus their efforts at Harding High School, working specifically with Black students. Harding administration was very committed to this work, and willing and able to provide the support needed, and to assist in engaging parents. They designed the process used at Harding, and their article here describes the project, some of their learnings, and things that made it successful.

Students in their BSA-THE program were invited to participate by the school's cultural liaison and the principal, but when others starting hearing about it, they asked to be involved. They were responsible for their own self maintenance once they committed to the program.

One of Kwame and Mary K.'s beliefs was that it doesn't work to begin a new model like this with big numbers of people and the expectation that many of them will change. But that's often exactly what funders and governments do expect. So they decided to start small, with a group of people who were really committed to making change, and as small successes occurred, the word would spread and more people would become involved and additional changes would occur.

BSA-THE Encourages Black Students to go to College

By Mary K. Boyd and Kwame McDonald

We began our work at Harding High School by holding focus groups to find out more about the students we intended to work with. What were their aspirations? What did they think of their school, their teachers? What makes a good teacher? What should a student contribute to her/his success? What are the student's strengths, challenges?

One of our discoveries was that when you are trying to build something strong and sustainable, you do not seek a foundation that is flawed, or a source of weakness or a base easily moved or pushed around hither and yon. You look for a foundation of firmness, a source of strength, an immovable base of rock-like, impenetrable objects. Thus, we sought the student's strengths, while at the same time visited their self-perceived challenges.

While all of the students said they wanted to enroll in institutions of higher learning, few had actually prepared themselves by attending classes regularly, completing class assignments, and taking the ACT. Though all were individually gifted, they generally lacked discipline and good habits. Absenteeism and tardiness were among their bad habits. Many were deficient in credits. Some had not yet applied to a post secondary school. We asked them to develop some community standards for their group. Without our input, they listed raising attendance, developing respect for self and others, and having better grades. They agreed to encourage each other in these areas.

Thus, we began our journey to assist a group of Harding students who subsequently became known as Black Students Advancing Toward Higher Education or BSA-THE. We were looking to build, not tear down. Therefore, any weaknesses were shelved, de-emphasized or used as lessons learned.

Some students had mastered reading, writing and computing, yet

were hesitant to further forge those skills. We encouraged continued practice and the honing of those and other related skills. Some were proficient in skills such as athletics, fixing things, organizing things, hair care/braiding, nail care, laundering, cooking, baking, or child care. Others had talents in articulation, music, visual art, performing, spoken word, mentoring, tutoring, interpersonal relations, cleverness, diplomacy, argumentation and debate, as well as many other innate competencies. They may have learned these at home, church, recreation centers, in the streets, playgrounds, swimming pools, odd jobs, sewing, volunteer opportunities, through observations and day-to-day survival, or caring for younger siblings and pets. Sometimes they developed skills by assisting older family members, who might have part-time janitorial, cleaning or service jobs. They readily admitted they even learned some things in school.

By recognizing those and other informally learned skills we validated these young people, continually letting them know that "If you can do that, you can do this!" At the same time we weaned them from unproductive habits.

As we nurtured and encouraged their strengths, students learned to transfer their skills to other activities such as writing proposals to the school decision makers to create after school activities, including tutoring, cultural arts programs and a Dance, Drill & Double Dutch team that eventually participated in a multi-school competition. One of our most active students, a sophomore, was a panelist on an hour-long television show that gave students advice on getting into higher education.

Each student must be well-known, cared about and appropriately encouraged by an adult, and the Harding administration, faculty and staff helped do that. The Cultural Liaison was key. He

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Educational Disparities

Families Enhance Children's Academic Achievement

By Madge Alberts, Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) and CYFC Program Coordinator

Children's educational achievement is significantly influenced by the family, beginning before children start school and continuing throughout their school career. As we look at educational disparities between children from various ethnic, socio-economic and geographic backgrounds, it is important to consider the effect of the family and home environment in which children live on a day to day basis.

While some may believe what happens at home is not directly related to a child's school performance, research has consistently shown otherwise. The family and home environment is one of several areas of influence that contribute to children's overall development, including their cognitive/learning development.

One researcher says families are "10 times more important (than schools) in several of the critical areas necessary for teachers to best manage their classrooms and maximize learning: self awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, motivation to learn, and relationships." Another study suggests that family support, guidance, expectations and interaction are responsible for as much as 60% of the difference in children's achievement (whereas social class, for example, predicts only 25%).

These findings suggest that a strong, stable, supportive family can make a positive difference in children's achievement, and the lack of this can hinder achievement.

Drs. Craig and Sharon Ramey, in their book "Going To School," respond to the question: "Can children do well in school if their parents are not very involved?" Their answer is that they can, but their success is much more dependent on highly effective teachers, because school is only one piece of children's total learning experience.

The relationship between children's learning success and their family environment has been an area of passionate interest for Dr. Sandra Christenson, professor in Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her research over the years has identified six informal, out of school areas in which parents can focus to best support their children's formal academic learning. The six factors represent the degree to which the home environment is a learning environment that is associated with a several positive indicators of school performance. These six are found in the box on page 6, and are reflected in the "Circles of

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Putting A Face On The Gap

By Karen Cadigan, Director of Outreach and Public Policy, Center for Early Education and Development, U of MN

The cost of achievement gaps and of the various interventions to close them has received attention in research and policy discussions. For example, high quality early interventions for children in poverty (programs that improve outcomes, but don't get kids anywhere close to their middle class peers) have been shown to save society around \$7 for each dollar spent.

Appropriately, these research and policy discussions around achievement gaps refer to children in groups: White and nonwhite; Immigrant and non-immigrant; Poor and non-poor. Group comparisons are necessary to give institutional level accountability and show where we need to make progress at a systems level. As has been highlighted in this issue, Minnesota has an embarrassingly large achievement gap, one that our systems have yet to deal with in an urgent and effective way.

While group analysis is really the only way we can see the scope of the achievement gap, and closing the gaps so groups show better outcomes has numerous economic advantages for society as a whole, what does an achievement gap mean to the individual child who experiences it? What does it mean for Maria Rodriguez, a kindergartner in Sleepy Eye? Or Lee Van, a sixth grader in Frogtown? Or Davonne Smith, a senior in North Minneapolis? What does finishing high school versus not finishing high school mean for a child, not for a nameless faceless statistic whose adult future is six or eight or twelve years away?

Parents and educators see the individual children, and their struggles. They see Maria and Lee and Davonne. But most of us hear only about the groups. Seeing the gaps as made up of individual children rather than as groups may help each of us in our role, from voters to legislators, feel the urgency of this problem. If she falls through the achievement gap, what is little Maria's future more likely to hold?

First, the bad news. Maria is more likely to drop out of high school. Poor and minority children are more likely to drop out of high school than their white and middle class peers. Davonne is more likely to earn less over his lifetime. High school dropouts earn just 37 cents on the dollar compared to high school graduates and the difference in lifetime earning power between a high school graduate and a college graduate is over a million dollars. So Davonne is more likely to live on the financial edge all of his life than his friends who graduate. Lee is more likely to go to prison. Increased years in school relate to lower rates of involvement in criminal systems. If she does not graduate from high school, Maria is less likely to vote and Davonne may even die a decade earlier than his peers who do finish school.

These are the outcomes that we can measure – in groups. But measuring the impact of poor achievement on Maria's hopes and dreams, on Davonne's feelings about himself, on Lee's quality of life as he grows and matures, and, in turn, on the future of their children – these "qualitative" consequences, the real, everyday effects for Maria, Davonne and Lee, are much more difficult to measure and define.

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BSA-THE Encourages Black Students to go to College

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organized a Black parent group that eventually produced the president of the school's Parent Teacher and Student Association (PTSA), which was important in the strengthening of Black presence and influence in the school's overall operation.

Another factor was the participation of individual parents, who supported their children by attending events in which they were participating. This bore out the belief that students normally participate in activities that are encouraged by their parents, and when parents are models for their children.

Home visits were also an important part of the program's success. We visited students and parents in their homes. It was fun and enlightening, and there was tremendous power in sitting with the families in their living rooms. All students and families were given our phone numbers and encouraged to contact us, which many of them did.

The highlight of our last year was a celebration that opened with greetings from the Somali, Ethiopian and Oromo communities, and closed with two honor graduates from our 2005 class. The students, with the help of two young college producers, performers and song writers, produced a song "Stay on the Grind."

Three of the "Stay on the Grind" students continued as participants in a Summer Leadership in Literacy program, with stipends provided by an educational community group. They are expected to - and we are confident they will - share the concepts and skills they learned with their fellow students.

Finally, we believe it is the building of relations in a community buttressed by agreed upon standards, commitment and values that makes this work successful and sustainable.

Families Enhance Children's Academic Achievement

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Influence" graphic inserted in this issue of Connections.

There are ways parents and other adults can strengthen these six areas that don't require a huge investment of time or money. All six areas can be strengthened by simply making changes in parents' normal, everyday way of relating to their children: attitude, communication style - including language use, talking with children about school and life regularly, showing that education is valued and important, reading to children and on their own regularly, praising children for their effort even more than their successes.

However, it's hard to even begin to think about these things when basic financial and emotional needs in the family are not being met. Socio-economic situation is among the most significant influences on

educational disparities. One of the most important issues society must address in closing the achievement gap, or reducing educational disparities, is economic stability for families so parent/s can re-direct some of their emotional focus from meeting basic needs to helping their children learn.

In looking at the Circles of Influence graphic, one can see that in order to help families help their children, educational disparities must be addressed in many areas simultaneously. Poverty and class is one of the critical societal issues that cannot be addressed by the child or the family alone. Society, policy and communities will need to be partners in changing the outcome for families who do not have adequate resources.

Putting A Face On The Gap

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The good news is that achievement gaps are not the result of unalterable genetic codes. Individual children achieving below their full potential are the result of the cumulative effect of environments and experiences that are less than ideal. Environments and experiences can be changed, and so can outcomes. For equal opportunity to be a reality, children must have access to quality experiences, starting at birth, no matter what their background. It's true that high quality early childhood programs can help equalize outcomes, but even the best of these opportunities start too late and end too early. Early childhood programs alone still result in at risk children going to jail and dropping out of high school at higher rates than middle class peers.

Commitment by parents and nonparents, by private and public leaders alike, is required for Minnesota to close this gap and improve the chances of kids like Maria, Davonne and Lee of having a happy, productive and healthy life.

Helping children become better learners

Expectations: Students become better learners when expectations are clearly stated and discussed, when those expectations are realistic but high, when consequences are understood, and when parent/s emphasize effort and not just results.

Structure: Students become better learners when parent/s provide a regular routine and environment that encourages learning.

Opportunities To Learn: Students become better learners when they are given formal and informal opportunities to learn in their everyday world, outside of school.

Support: Students become better learners when adults talk to them about their schoolwork, praise them for their efforts, encourage them to keep trying, and teach them problem solving and negotiation skills.

Climate/Relationships: Students become better learners when they experience warmth and friendliness, and when they receive praise, recognition and respect.

Modeling: Students become better learners when the adults in their lives read, study, ask questions, talk about education, set long-term goals, and get involved in their child's school.

From All Parents Are Teachers, U of MN Extension Service program based on Dr. Christenson's work.

Educational Disparities: How We Frame the Issue Matters

Dale A. Blyth, Chair of the Children, Youth, and Family Consortium Advisory Committee, Associate Dean for Youth Development and Director of the Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development University of Minnesota Extension Service

The fact that Minnesota has major educational disparities is indisputable. How we understand these disparities and whether they matter to us depends on the frames we use. Simply put, frames are the lenses we use to interpret and make sense of the world. How we frame issues of disparities in Minnesota matters greatly. Our frames can facilitate effective action or support inaction.

Frames make a difference for three reasons. First, as noted above, they shape one's view about the cause of problems and who is responsible for solutions. Second, frames tend to ignore facts that don't fit with their view. And finally, frames shape what people consider as potential solutions.

In thinking about educational disparities, some people immediately jump to the achievement gap between white students and students of color. Unfortunately, with this jump they may be using a frame that says achievement is the responsibility of the schools, parents and the youth themselves. It also places blame on these groups: If parents just cared the problem would go away; If youth were just motivated they could succeed; If schools did their job well the gap would not exist.

These frames are inadequate because they leave out many of the systemic tools most needed for successful solutions. Even the phrase educational disparities tends to frame the issue in terms of school systems and does not invoke broader community responsibility to provide challenging and engaging learning opportunities. Learning results from a wide variety of experiences and opportunities such as parent questions, interpretations of daily experiences, expectations about and support for learning at home and in the community, availability and use of out of school time opportunities, and the variety of school, teaching, and context factors that matter greatly.

How then do we frame the discussion about educational disparities? If the way we talk about educational disparities triggers the school or parent responsibility frames too strongly, it can eliminate effective solutions in other arenas and lead to failure. Instead, I advocate for frames that help people see education and opportunities for learning as a public good, not just a private one. Framing the debate in terms of the benefits to society of well-educated children, and the place of the U.S. in global competition, may make these issues more important to those who see it only as a school/parent/child problem. It may result in rethinking the ways we engage children and youth in learning activities across our families, schools, and communities. When opportunities for children to learn, and ways that help them succeed at it, are seen as benefiting society, the range of possible ways to support that public good expand.

I believe the frames we use also need to help people see the need for a balance of solutions at the public, private, and personal levels.

- By public I mean public policy and public systems, and the ways in which they support and reward effective learning strategies for all. While education funding and schools are part of this, they are not the only systems that are engaged to help children learn.
- By private I mean the corporate and philanthropic communities and the ways in which they talk about educational disparities, support solutions, and encourage action. We have become accustomed to seeing disparities only as a public issue that someone else, namely government, should address. Given the ideologies war around government's role, we cannot afford to allow disparities to become only a public issue. It is that, but much more.
- Finally, by personal, I mean individuals and the actions they take everyday. Whether we become mentors, or support special learning opportunities, or act as parents and neighbors to support the learning of young people, it matters. Especially important in this area is the need to use frames that engage children and youth in their own learning.

Frames do make a difference. People respond to frames subjectively; what motivates one person to act may cause another to withdraw support. How frames affect people is important to keep in mind as we work to reduce educational disparities in Minnesota.

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Jan Ormasa Hopkins Public Schools
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BRIEFS...

New CYFC Staff

Sara Benning has joined CYFC as Special Projects Coordinator. A U of MN Family Social Science graduate and volunteer at the University's Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education, Sara is currently pursuing her Masters of Liberal Studies, an interdisciplinary masters program at the University of Minnesota. She will be organizing University-community events, projects and activities that address the pressing needs of children, youth and families.

Minnesota's Promise: World-Class Schools, World-Class State, a forum scheduled for Oct. 6 at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute and organized by CYFC, will introduce a vision paper prepared by a group of 25 past and present Minnesota school superintendents who met for 18 months beginning in the winter of 2005 to exchange strategies for system-wide improvement and reform in Minnesota's school districts. The group was convened by former Saint Paul Schools superintendent Pat Harvey and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, and funded by the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi, L.L.P., Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice. More details about the superintendents' work can be found in an article on p. 3. Although attendance is by invitation only, the entire forum will be videotaped, and can be accessed on CYFC's website following the event.

In July, 2006 the University of Minnesota launched *the Consortium for Post-Secondary Academic Success* when it hired **Kent Pekel**, former senior policy analyst for America's Choice and former director of research and development for the Saint Paul Public Schools under Dr. Patricia Harvey. This new consortium will coordinate University PreK-12 initiatives with school districts and education organizations to improve the coherence, relevance, and visibility of University PreK-12 activities, contribute to public and private PreK-12 education systems, help prepare youth for higher education, ensure access, and close the achievement gap for underrepresented groups. We welcome Kent and look forward to collaborating with the Consortium for Post-Secondary Academic Success.

CYFC, the University of Minnesota Extension Service Family Relationship educators, and Dr. Sandra Christenson, professor in Educational Psychology, are working together on developing *resources for parents to help their children be better learners*. Based on extensive literature reviews by Dr. Christenson and her graduate students, the parent education materials will focus on six factors related to the home/family environment that have a significant influence on children's ability to engage in learning, and experience academic success. They will be published in English and Spanish, as well as adapted for cultural appropriateness for Latino parents, and will be accompanied by a series of trainings in their use. Currently titled All Parents Are Teachers, the materials will be ready in late 2006 or early 2007.

Who's The Consortium?

Ernest Davenport is associate professor of Educational Psychology at the U of MN. Since 1991, Dr. Davenport has been providing leadership to a partnership between the college and the Twin Cities Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, a national black fraternity, that provides a free comprehensive review course for students of color to prepare for the ACT/SAT tests. The eleven week course meets on Saturday mornings January through March.

Todd Otis, President of Ready 4 K, has been committed to issues related to children's readiness for school for many years. Under his leadership, Ready 4 K has become a powerful influence in early childhood policy development, and has developed a strong statewide network of advocates for making sure all children are ready for kindergarten. Todd served several terms in the Minnesota Legislature, and serves as a member of the CYFC Advisory Council.

Sandra Christenson is professor in School Psychology at the U of MN. Her research with Check and Connect, an intervention program aimed at marginalized students of all ages who have been identified as at-risk for dropping out or school failure, is in its 15th year. The program includes mentorships, regular check-ins and timely interventions. Dr. Christenson is currently working with CYFC and the Extension Service to develop educational materials for English and Spanish speaking parents, to help their children be better learners.

Brent Gish, retired as superintendent of Mahnomon School District, is now working with the Red Lake School District on vision, mission, goals and curriculum mapping. He is part-time executive director of the National Indian Impacted Schools Association that focuses on reauthorization and annual appropriations for more than 640 school districts across the U.S. And he is part of a planning team in the community of Naytahwaush located on the White Earth Indian Reservation, whose vision is to support current efforts in school readiness and create new opportunities for families and communities to work together for the betterment of all.

And the Consortium is YOU!

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Children, Youth & Family Consortium
McNamara Alumni Center, Suite 270A
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