

# IN THIS ISSUE

## Educational Disparities: Early Childhood

There is little doubt that the beginnings of educational disparities occur well before children enter Kindergarten, and even before birth. With young children's brains developing at such a rapid rate in their early years, it is critical that parents, caregivers, communities and society maximize the opportunities to strengthen children's learning capacities, and that public and private policies support them in this effort.

Minnesota has been a leader in early childhood education for many years. Yet school readiness studies in Minnesota indicate that as many as half of Minnesota children enter Kindergarten not fully prepared to learn. Why is this? One significant reason is that, while there are many excellent early childhood programs and child care settings statewide, a very high number of families, particularly those in lower income brackets, do not

have access to them. These children start school behind their more advantaged counterparts, and often stay behind throughout their school experience.

This issue of Consortium Connections focuses on early childhood, using the enclosed Circles of influence framework as a guide. Articles explore early childhood from the perspective of four of the circles of influence – the child, informal supports, communities and policy.

Articles in the print version of Connections do not contain citations. When they have been used, citations are included in the web version of Connections, along with additional resources related to the articles.

As always, your feedback is encouraged and welcome!

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## What Parents Need To Help Children Be Ready to Learn

By Victoria Vilma Campoverde

*Editor's note: This article uses a question and answer format to address the role of parents in preparing their children for school and learning. Victoria Vilma Campoverde, program director and lead teacher with Joyce Pre-School in Minneapolis, responded to these questions from her perspective as a pre-school teacher and parent educator who works primarily with Latino parents. More information on Joyce Pre-school can be found on p. 6.*

In preparing children for school, it is very important for parents to understand information about the school system their child will attend, and also what is expected of them and their children as they enter kindergarten. There is a great deal of information about what we expect in Minnesota of children entering kindergarten and what we consider "ready for kindergarten." Often parents have some knowledge about the cognitive skills that children need, but the social-emotional skills are just as important.

As for expectations of parents, it is critical that they plan to be involved in their child's school, that they volunteer and get into the classroom. This ensures that parents participate in their child's education both at school and at home. Also, it's important for parents to ask about resources and information about health and social services, as well as educational tips. All these resources should be available in Spanish and other languages.

In particular, we encourage our Latino parents to spend more time with their children reading, conversing, asking them questions, and encouraging them to develop their vocabularies. Often times, we suggest creating a special time and place to work with

What Parents Need — *continued on page 6*

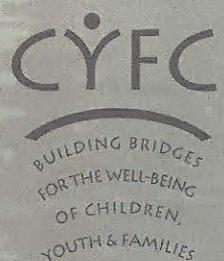
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<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection/index.html>

The web version contains a PDF copy of the print version. In addition, it contains all articles individually, some of which are more extensive than the print versions. When articles contain citations, they are included in the web version. Finally, the web version contains links to resources related to the articles.

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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Winter 2007-2008

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



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Lessons from the Field

2007-08

February 13, 2008

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Impact of Trauma on the Developing Child**

Dr. Abigail Gewirtz

March 24, 2008

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Impact of Family Violence**

Dr. Oliver Williams

May 7, 2008

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Intergenerational Consequences of Attachment**

Dr. Miriam Steele

The above sessions will be held at Great Hall, Coffman Union, and broadcast to 35 Greater Minnesota Host Sites.

May 7, 2008

1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

**Advanced Practice Seminar** (Metro only)

Dr. Miriam Steele  
Anne Garity, Ph.D.

Mississippi Room, Coffman Union  
Smaller interactive session geared for clinicians.

For more information or to register visit our web-site at: [www.cmh.umn.edu](http://www.cmh.umn.edu) or call 612-625-7849.

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# Children's Mental Health and School Readiness: What Can Be Done?

By Cari Michaels

How can children with mental health needs be better prepared to succeed in school? Research offers much information about the prevalence of mental illness in early years and successful interventions to provide needed services and improve health outcomes.

The 1999 *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* defined children's mental health as, "the achievement of expected developmental cognitive, social, and emotional milestones and by secure attachments, satisfying social relationships, and effective coping skills." Mental disorders were defined as, "serious deviations from expected cognitive, social, and emotional development." Early childhood mental health refers to the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children from birth to age six. The terms "early childhood mental health" and "social emotional development" have been used interchangeably to refer to these needs. Although there is limited data, social, emotional, and behavioral problems have been reported in 8%-11% of young children. In Minnesota, 47,402 children (ages 0-18) have a developmental, behavioral, or emotional issue that requires treatment or counseling. Social, emotional, and behavioral problems may also be predictors for later developmental difficulties.

Despite a tendency to define school readiness specifically as age-appropriate cognitive development, the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) promotes a broad conceptualization of school readiness that includes health and physical development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, cognitive development and general knowledge. Research confirms that young children's social and emotional adjustment is related to early school success as well as future success. Young children who exhibit poor mental health are more likely to experience unfavorable educational consequences such as: poor task performance; less participation in classroom activities; greater negativity about learning and school; low peer acceptance and interaction; less acceptance, instruction, and positive feedback from classroom teachers; increased grade retention in the early elementary years.

Untreated mental health problems in childhood are likely to continue into adolescence and young adulthood. These problems may worsen over time, creating significant and costly burdens for families, schools, and society. The promotion of good mental health during the first six years of life can help facilitate the establishment of developmental competencies that will positively contribute to children's school readiness, as well as positive lifelong development. Research has demonstrated that many changes can be made to enhance school readiness for children:

**Research** - Policy-relevant research can discern which aspects of early childhood intervention programs promote optimal development. Research is most likely to affect policy if it addresses questions and organizes answers in ways that policymakers can put directly into action. Research can serve to explore and document the potential economic benefits of investing in different early childhood intervention efforts.

**Families** - Research shows that if parents have access to programs that promote positive parenting behavior during the early childhood years, they can engage in supportive, enriching, and developmentally appropriate caregiving. Families can be supported in taking an active role in the care and treatment of their young children with mental health problems and should be empowered as experts about their children's needs. Parents need greater access to leadership, liaison, and mentoring activities related to children's mental health. Mental health facilities can support family involvement and eliminate barriers (e.g., transportation).

**Communities** - Research also indicates that the presence of accessible screenings and assessments in child and health care settings, along with appropriate services to respond to identified needs, predict which children may require more intensive services later on. High quality and culturally appropriate early childhood education programs significantly contribute to a child's mental health. Program staff benefit from timely access to evidence-based information on child mental health and disorders, staff training in child mental health issues, and access to consultation and referral sources.

**Society** - Public awareness campaigns can help eliminate stigma about mental illness and educate people about how to access high quality mental health services for young children and families. Some research suggests that creating a statewide public-private health infrastructure will address the fragmentation and lack of availability of mental health services for many children. The existence of a well-coordinated, accessible system of mental health assessment and treatment can ensure that young children develop the emotional and behavioral competencies they need to successfully transition to school and accomplish later developmental milestones.

Citations and additional resources can be found in the web version of *Connections*.

# What Young Children Need to Succeed

By Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D.

When we ponder factors that influence a child's academic achievement, an adult's job performance, or even one's ability to be a good neighbor, we would do well to look far back in that person's history for at least some of the answers. A wealth of research points to environments and experiences that increase the odds that a person will thrive and succeed in school and life. As summarized below, these critical experiences begin even before a child is born.

**A Healthy Birth.** A child's first environment is the womb, and its quality depends on good maternal nutrition and avoidance of tobacco, alcohol and other toxic substances. A healthy birth also is influenced by prenatal care — not only formal medical services, but also informal support and care for the mother-to-be.

**A Secure Foundation.** Babies thrive when they have caregivers (especially parents) who respond sensitively to their cues and signals, fostering a strong sense of security. Within safe, predictable, loving relationships babies develop trust in others and confidence in their own ability to express needs and solicit the care they need. Soothed and comforted at times of distress, young children begin to develop the ability to calm themselves and, over time, to regulate emotions and impulses. Self-regulation is central to a child's ability to focus attention, accept direction, and get along with others — essential skills for school and life.

**A Rich Language Environment.** This means having caregivers who talk to a child long before he or she can talk back; engage the child with stories, songs and rhymes; ask "why" and "how" and "what if..." questions that stretch the child's mind and vocabulary; and introduce the child from the earliest months of life to the rich, expansive world of books. The child most likely to thrive and succeed has been engaged as an active, joyful learner, discovering the wonder and power of the spoken and written word.

**Safe and Stimulating Opportunities To Play And Explore.** Infants and young children are naturally curious and eager to explore. They learn and advance their own development through active exploration and mastery of the world around them. Especially with encouragement and sensitive guidance from adults who support the child's growing autonomy, an actively exploring infant or toddler builds motor skills, develops confidence and initiative, and learns important cognitive concepts, such as cause and effect or the properties of — and relationships among — different objects.

**Clear and Reasonable Limits.** Even though children often raise a fuss when

their desires are thwarted, without limits they feel insecure and overwhelmed by their impulses. Without clear limits, young children will be hard-pressed to learn to set reasonable limits for themselves as they get older. To learn and grow optimally, young children need limits expressed in clear, developmentally appropriate language; simple reasons that teach the value behind the limit (e.g. "That's dangerous" or "He feels sad when you take his toy"); natural or logical consequences when they violate limits; and recognition and encouragement when they behave positively. These lessons are magnified when, after a child misbehaves, adults help the child think about what she could have done differently and what she can do the next time a similar situation arises.

**Opportunities to Make Choices and Handle Responsibilities.** The older children become, the more they are required to make decisions and handle tasks without adult supervision and guidance. Preparation for that increasing independence begins early in life — even with something as simple as a toddler's choosing which of two healthy snacks she would like or deciding whether she wants to wear the red shirt or the blue shirt. And when a preschooler puts his toys away before a trip to the park or helps clear the table or fold laundry, he is building life skills and discovering he contributes to the common good.

**Protection from Violence and Trauma.** Abuse, both physical and emotional, has devastating consequences for children's development. Witnessing violence also does long-term harm to children. Longitudinal research shows that violence teaches young children the roles of both victim and perpetrator. Without appropriate intervention, these destructive patterns are likely to continue into future generations. Extreme stress and trauma have not only psychological, but physiological, effects on young children. Early exposure to stress and trauma, especially when not buffered by the presence of a sensitive, loving caregiver, affects brain chemistry in ways that undermine emotional regulation and thought processes.

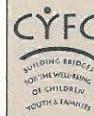
Provided those foundational experiences and environments in the first five years of life, most children will be ready to avail themselves of all the learning opportunities their kindergarten classroom offers. And, given continued support and encouragement from the adults around them, they will be poised to succeed, both academically and socially, as they move toward adulthood.

*Additional resources can be found in the web version of Consortium Connections.*

## CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

Consortium Connections is published three times a year by the Children, Youth & Family Consortium: A University and Community Collaboration.

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# Early Childhood Policy Can Help Kids Be Better Learners

By Sara Benning and Karen Cadigan

When reviewing the Circles of Influence diagram, it may seem that the policy circle is far-removed from the direct lives of children. However, policies, just like the influences identified in the other circles, impact children's readiness for school and ability to learn.

So much of the discussion about what is best for young children focuses on the responsibilities of families, without much attention to the responsibilities of society and public policy. The reality that public education policy starts in earnest when children are about age five is more of a historical artifact than a reflection of children's, families' and society's needs. Whether or not this remains appropriate is getting a closer look in Minnesota.

## History of the Early Childhood Movement in Minnesota

Thanks to collaborative efforts occurring across Minnesota, there is much already being done to move early childhood to the forefront of policy discussions. In the last decade, bipartisan community leaders released the *Action Plan for Early Care and Education in Minnesota* report, calling for the creation of effective, accessible systems preparing Minnesota's children for success. Minnesota Initiative Foundations launched the *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative* after identifying early childhood as a common policy issue facing Minnesota's communities. The creation of the *Early Childhood Funders Network* and the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, and programs like the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development, have also raised awareness about early childhood.

The Itasca Project and the Minnesota Business for Early Learning emphasize the role of business in early learning and school readiness. The Minnesota Department of Education created the *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress* and the *Minnesota School Readiness Studies*, exemplifying developmentally appropriate expectations and assessing school readiness. The bipartisan Early Childhood Caucus formed to educate legislators, create dialogue, build consensus, and provide direction for legislative action.

This brief history of Minnesota's early childhood movement, which includes many other efforts, is important to policy not only because it illustrates who is investing in early childhood, but it's also laying a strong foundation for action on early childhood policy issues.

## Policy Options: What We Know

The roots of educational disparities in Minnesota run deep. In Minnesota, as in other states, children who are from certain ethnic minority groups and children living in poverty are most at risk for school failure. Given the sobering facts that Minnesota has

the largest achievement gap in the nation and that children under five are more likely to be poor than any other age group, it is clear that not all children in our state have access to Minnesota's high ranking educational outcomes. The promising news is that Minnesotans are behind the early childhood movement, and when policymakers tackle social issues like poverty, the achievement gap, homelessness and housing, and health issues, the barriers to achieving equitable and successful early childhood programming for all children are decreased.

School readiness assessments illustrate that Minnesota isn't where it needs to be when it comes to preparing our children for school. Creating common indicators of success across pre-kindergarten programs and services increases the ability to measure progress. Creating, documenting and disseminating benchmarks of success to parents and providers clarifies and unites expectations. Developing data systems that identify the major providers of early education and childcare services provides children with access to early childhood experiences, especially for those the most at need. Adopting an "Age 3 to Grade 3" (PK-3) education model sustains the benefits of children's early experiences, increases alignment with K-12 systems and improves students' odds of success.

Supplying funding for early screening and quality childcare for children ages birth to five provides healthy beginnings, as does creating high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, particularly for children living in poverty. Schools providing a "safety net" of early childhood programs for families facing poverty or other educational challenges help the children the most at risk, and parents who have adequate choices regarding their child's early education and care are able to best decide how to prepare their child for school.

## Conclusion

While early childhood education and care is vital to eliminating the roots of educational disparities in Minnesota's children, it is becoming increasingly difficult for families, even in the middle-income brackets, to afford quality early childhood care and education for their children. When research illustrates just how crucial - and rapid - brain development is from birth to age five, waiting to invest in our children until *after* they've passed a critical period of development is a major missed opportunity. When considering early childhood policies, it might benefit our children and our state more to shift our thinking from asking how can we afford to fund early childhood, to how we can afford *not* to.

*Citations and additional resources can be found in the web version of Consortium Connections.*

## Making and Keeping Minnesota's Promise

Some of the policy options suggested in this article are adapted from Minnesota's Promise, a statewide effort seeking to transform education in Minnesota.

The voices behind Minnesota's Promise are many, and they have identified ten key strategies for moving public education in Minnesota into a comprehensive, coherent vision for a world-class education system that not only meets the growing needs of our diverse students, but those of our state. Investing in early childhood is only one of those ten strategies. To find out more about the other nine strategies of Minnesota's Promise, and to learn about the history behind this effort, please visit [www.minnesotaspromise.org](http://www.minnesotaspromise.org).

The organizers of Minnesota's Promise are grateful to the Minnesota's Promise Partners and other supporters for their thoughtful feedback on this and many other complex issues affecting the children in our state.

# Reducing Educational Disparities: The Child Care Provider's Role

By Jenna Zark

For child care providers, the achievement gap is not an abstract concept; it is embodied by the needs of children they see every day. Children who have special needs, are from low-income homes or are English language learners face more barriers than others in terms of having a successful school experience. In helping children to surmount such barriers, child care providers play a crucial role. They plant the seeds of literacy and introduce young children to problem-solving, sharing and decision-making. They also familiarize children with counting, coloring and scribbling, which research shows is the first step towards early writing skills. In addition, children receive social and emotional support from providers that builds confidence.

The child care provider's role is amplified when children are in full-time child care settings because providers become the child's primary role model and teacher. Whether children are navigating conflicts, exploring their environment or trying to verbalize their feelings, they look to child care providers for nurturing, guidance and support. By introducing children to concepts and experiences similar to those encountered at school, providers help to facilitate children's comfort level in the classroom.

Working with children who have no other cognitive pre-school experiences can be especially challenging if the children have significant needs. One provider's story illustrates how she met these challenges, and how the children in her care have blossomed.

Mary Albert is a family child care provider who cares for six children, and three face challenges related to their abilities to talk, play with others, pay attention and follow directions. Other children in Mary's care are from low-income families with little access to books and resources. All need extra help and attention to get ready for school.

Mary found support through Project Early Kindergarten (PEK), a collaboration between Resources for Child Caring and the St. Paul public schools. Funded by the McKnight Foundation, the project addresses the persistent achievement gap for low income, English language learners and special education students.

Project Early Kindergarten gives providers a new opportunity to forge connections with schools to promote literacy and other skills. Family child care providers, child care center staff and school staff all participate in comprehensive and ongoing professional development. This includes:

- Monthly training sessions conducted by national and local literacy experts.
- Weekly or bi-monthly coaching session in the homes, centers, and schools. Each provider is paired with a coach who works with the provider's individual needs to implement materials from the training sessions.

When coach Allison Breininger first visited Mary, she observed that children could not sit still and did not communicate much. Allison shared ideas to spark the children's curiosity and little by little, Mary began to engage them. She began by implementing a daily community circle. The circle helped to create a time when children learned conversation skills, vocabulary, and listening skills. Mary gave each child a carpeted square to sit on. She started singing a song to let the children know that circle time was beginning and it was time to gather and greet each other. Then she started reading stories to them. If children walked away, Mary followed them, guiding them gently back into the circle. In a few months time, children began putting their squares down on the floor as soon as Mary started singing. When she read aloud to them from books like *No More Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* the children joined in with her. Mary also instituted the use of a pocket chart with words and images that could be changed by the children themselves. She called out words like "duck" and asked the children to find a picture of a duck on the chart. She then taught the children how to recognize the letters of their names.

The children's skills have steadily improved. They read aloud, greet each other and share stories daily. One is starting to talk and the other is gaining more confidence and verbal skills. All the children are using markers to scribble and color. For Mary, the training she has received and the support from her family child care coach have made a tremendous difference.

"I really enjoy doing this work," says Mary. "Some people look at us as babysitters, but we are professionals. This is not about children coming to your home to pass the time. It's about getting them ready for school."

With funding cuts in schools and larger class sizes, children need to be even more prepared for that first day of school. Therefore the role early childhood care providers play in closing the achievement gap takes on an ever greater importance with every passing year.

*Additional resources can be found in the web version of Connections.*

*"I really enjoy doing this work. Some people look at us as babysitters, but we are professionals. This is not about children coming to your home to pass the time. It's about getting them ready for school."*

**Jenna Zark** is the manager of communications for Resources for Child Caring. Established in 1971, Resources for Child Caring is committed to making child care the best that it can be—a solution for working parents, a fulfilling living for caregivers and most importantly, an opportunity to enrich the lives of children in care situations. It works to raise the standard of care for all children so they thrive and contribute to the community.

## Joyce Pre-School

Joyce Preschool in Minneapolis is a two-way immersion, Spanish-English preschool licensed by the Department of Human Services with a strong emphasis on kindergarten readiness, second language acquisition, parent involvement in education and development of early literacy skills.

Joyce offers monthly parent workshops for our Spanish-speaking parents. All workshops include childcare and food, and the times vary to try to allow the maximum attendance (about 75% of Latino parents have attended at least one workshop this year). Parents form a supportive group at the beginning of the school year, and together they identify concerns or questions. The school invites community leaders to address these topics. Topics include school readiness, school choice, healthy nutrition, family violence, appropriate discipline, the effects of television, access to public libraries, financial literacy, and more. Community presenters include ECFE, Minneapolis Public Schools, Casa de Esperanza, Minneapolis Public Library, University of Minnesota Extension, Media Wise, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and more. Presentations are in Spanish with culturally appropriate materials whenever possible. The goal is to empower parents to be advocates for their children and give them all the tools they need to support their children.

Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom once a month. This is a great help for giving students more individualized support, and it also serves as great training for parents. They are much better prepared to reinforce educational concepts at home when they have experienced them first-hand in the classroom.

Teachers meet with parents one-on-one at least three times a year. School readiness and the individual student's progress is the focus for these conferences. Home visits are a great tool for parents and teachers, but are very time intensive. Parents also receive a monthly newsletter in Spanish and English.

Joyce Preschool's website is:  
<http://www.joycepreschool.org/>

## What Parents Need — *continued from page 1*

their children, using items from around the house to work on early math and early literacy skills.

### 1. *What do parents need from communities in order to prepare their children to be good learners?*

The community needs to understand the cultural values of different families and how to best approach these families in a supportive and empowering way. Cultural and linguistic liaisons and programs are critical to bridge language and cultural barriers. For example, translations of information need to be more than a direct translation from English, but in addition they should be culturally appropriate, so that families can take advantage of the information and resources. Also, at Joyce Pre-School, we try to create a web of connections and resources, so families can access many different kinds of services.

There are a great deal of resources in Minnesota, but many new immigrants or non-English speaking families don't have meaningful access to this information, so we have a situation where many families and preschoolers aren't able to access quality early childhood education before they reach kindergarten.

### 2. *Do parents of color have needs that are different?*

Yes they do. At Joyce Preschool we serve approximately 50% Latino families and 50% Caucasian families. As a Program Director, I recognize that the needs of the families are very different. This is due in part to race, but also it has to do with country of origin, culture, language, socio-economic and educational backgrounds of parents.

When our school works with Latino families, we recognize the value system that these families bring, namely the importance of family, community, and personal communication. So we make sure that our school feels welcoming and safe, we create an environment that feels like a big family, and we make sure that all communication is personal and linguistically and culturally appropriate. We also create a space that allows each family to identify their needs and we look at ways to address these together.

### 3. *What do schools need to be best prepared to teach young children?*

Good communication with parents is absolutely critical. Schools have to create a team between teachers and parents and make sure that all are working toward the goal of supporting the students. Teachers don't always have training about how to best communicate with parents or involve parents. The schools and teachers should identify the students' and families' needs, so they can plan accordingly and best support them. Parents need to know how they can extend learning at home and reinforce what teachers are working on in the classroom. Parent workshops in their native language are very important educational tools for parents. In addition, interpreters should be trained as liaisons and advocates, so they can help parents and teachers better work together. If parents feel comfortable with a school, they will project this confidence and comfort to their children.

Sometimes, I think that teachers don't value parents that have a low level of formal education. I think that we, as educators, can learn something from all our parents regardless of their educational background. They can bring to the school their culture and children can feel proud about their heritage.

Finally, for the Latino community it is very important to share our cultural heritage and to have it affirmed. When Latino families feel that our cultural identity is valued and accepted, then we open our hearts and we are ready to fully participate.

# Making School Readiness a Community Priority

By Sheila Kiscaden

The Rochester area has been the site for innovation in early care and education for many years. One of the state's first child care resource and referral organizations (CCRR) was created in the 1970's in Rochester, followed closely by PAIRR (Parents Are Important in Rochester), a successful early childhood family education project that continues today. The work is enhanced by coordinated efforts through a family services collaborative (FACES) that is valued, funded, and used by both public and private organizations.

The Rochester Area Foundation is a relative newcomer to the issues of early care and education, launching its First Steps program just two years ago in 2005. After doing its own needs assessment, the Foundation contracted with Wilder Research to do a baseline study, and formed an advisory committee with many different stakeholders. A comprehensive business plan was developed that called for a commitment by the Foundation to take action and to raise \$4 million to support those efforts.

First Steps' mission is to have ALL children be ready for success in school when they start kindergarten. First Steps has three goals: increasing community awareness and commitment to school readiness, improving the quality of the early childhood experience, and measuring children's and community progress toward school readiness.

The Foundation Board has made a commitment to serve as a communicator, convener, catalyst, and fundraiser for the next five to ten years to improve school readiness in the Rochester area. First Steps does not provide direct services, but rather collaborates and partners with a variety of organizations.

First Steps partnered with Child Care Resource and Referral to develop a curriculum for child care providers, SEEDS of Early Literacy. One fourth of licensed providers have now completed the 17 hour course and many have completed the coaching and mentoring components as well. Through a grant from IBM, the curriculum was adapted to four one-hour sessions for parents. As over 100 IBM employees took the course, the curriculum was tested and modified. It is now available to other employers and groups. Hopefully, other employers will follow the IBM model - employees who have completed the parent course can nominate their child care provider for a \$1500 scholarship to complete the provider course. This pairing of parent and provider education is expected to greatly enhance the impact for children.

Workplace delivery of parent and family life education is a key focus for First Steps. The First Steps Business Alliance was established in Fall 2007 to increase employer attention to the importance of school readiness and to encourage active involvement by local businesses with their employees and in the community. A licensed parent educator hired as the First Steps Business Liaison is meeting with local businesses to identify opportunities for workplace family life education. Family life seminars will be delivered by partner organizations: PAIRR, CCRR, and the Working Family Resource Center.

Rochester Women's magazine has agreed to include a parent education article written by First Steps staff in each issue. To help promote general community awareness of school readiness, a kangaroo mascot, K-Ready, appears at many community events. First Steps also has booths at community events, and has developed print materials for distribution, including a very popular coloring book for young children.

First Steps seeks to bridge organizational limitations and take action on identified needs. As a member of the FACES services collaborative, First Steps has active dialog with other community organizations about unmet needs and opportunities. A number of the FACES findings and recommendations have been incorporated into the First Steps work plan and grant-making.

First Steps also convened two working groups during 2007 to develop cross-organization plans. One group examined ways that Family, Friend and Neighbor care can be enhanced to increase school readiness activities; the other developed a proposal for testing and developing a sustainable process for measuring children's progress toward school readiness at ages 3, 4, and at kindergarten entry. First Steps will now develop formal proposals and seek funding based on the work groups' recommendations.

Fundraising is one of First Steps' key roles. Since the Foundation's resources are limited, it helps develop funding proposals to other foundations and organizations. First Steps also has a mini-grants program that provides small grants of up to \$1,000 for special projects that help launch or sustain early childhood activities.

First Steps has had to reassess and adapt its plans: there have been set-backs and challenges. Yet, it is evident that the Foundation's First Steps Initiative is adding a dimension to the Rochester area's early care and education efforts that would not happen without its involvement.

2007-2008

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**Sheila Kiscaden**, former Minnesota Senator (1992-2006) from District 30 (Rochester and surrounding areas) is the interim director of First Steps. See Who's The Consortium on p. 8 for more detail.

# BRIEFS...

## Symposium on the Intersection of Evidence Based Practice and Culture

The Center for Excellence in Children's Mental Health and the Cultural Providers Network are co-sponsoring a Symposium on the Intersection of Evidence Based Practice and Culture Jan. 28 and 29, 2008. Funded by a grant from the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families, the symposium will feature keynote speaker Ken Martinez, Psy.D., Mental Health Resource Specialist, Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health. Dr. Martinez will be sharing his expertise on the intersection of evidence based practices and culture in children's mental health and strategies for building networks to eliminate behavioral health disparities. For more information, visit the CECMH website at: [www.cmh.umn.edu](http://www.cmh.umn.edu)

## Grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation

CYFC was awarded a three year, \$150,000 grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN Foundation in collaboration with Sustainable Resources Center, Sabathani Community Center, and Southside Family Nurturing Center. The funded project will develop a "cooperative service delivery model" combining healthy housing and family stability services in the belief that family instability hinders the effectiveness of healthy housing intervention and education, and home health hazards destabilize families. We intend to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of this approach in reducing environmental health issues for families and increasing family stability and qualitatively evaluate the process of creating collaboration between these two sectors.

## State Senate Committee on the Achievement Gap

CYFC Educational Disparities Fellow Dr. Audrey Appelsies is leading a research working group whose goal is to provide policy-makers with data concerning the disparities in school achievement between students of color and low-income students and their white counterparts. The working group will explore relevant Minnesota Department of Education data and seek state examples of "beating the odds" schools. The Committee on the Achievement Gap, led by Senator Torres-Ray of Minneapolis, is expected to make policy recommendations to the Senate in 2008.

## Who's The Consortium?



**Read Sulik** is the Medical Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry St Cloud Hospital Behavioral Health Services. A member of the steering committee for the Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health, Dr. Sulik oversees the development of inpatient and outpatient psychiatric programs for children and adolescents at St. Cloud Hospital. He is involved in numerous community-based interdisciplinary and advocacy projects in Central Minnesota, which include the Children's Emergency Assessment System Coalition, the Children Exposed to Violence Initiative, Independent School District 742's Crisis Triage System and the federally funded Safe Schools / Healthy Students Mobile Wellness Center. Dr. Sulik speaks extensively regionally and nationally on depression, anxiety, ADHD, trauma, suicide, and violence in children and adolescents and also on models of integrating mental health and primary care.



**Betty Cooke** is a Lecturer in the Family, Youth and Community program in the Curriculum and Instruction Department, College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. She teaches courses in the parent education licensure and new certification program, coordinates development and preparation of these parent education courses for online delivery, and advises master of education students. Prior to joining the University of Minnesota faculty, Betty worked for many years with Early Childhood Education programs at the Minnesota Department of Education, and had a significant role in the development of the Minnesota school readiness assessments. Betty will serve as the 2008 president of the Minnesota Council on Family Relations.



**Sheila Kiscaden**, former Minnesota State Senator (1992-2006) from District 30 (Rochester and surrounding areas) is the interim director of First Steps in Rochester. Recently appointed as a senior fellow with the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health's Division of Health Policy and Management, Sheila has a consulting practice through which she provides organizational development, planning, and team building with government and human service organizations. Sheila is a 2004 Bush Leadership Fellow, where she has been studying participation, development and social change. She has volunteered for many years as a team leader for Global Volunteers, working in developing communities.

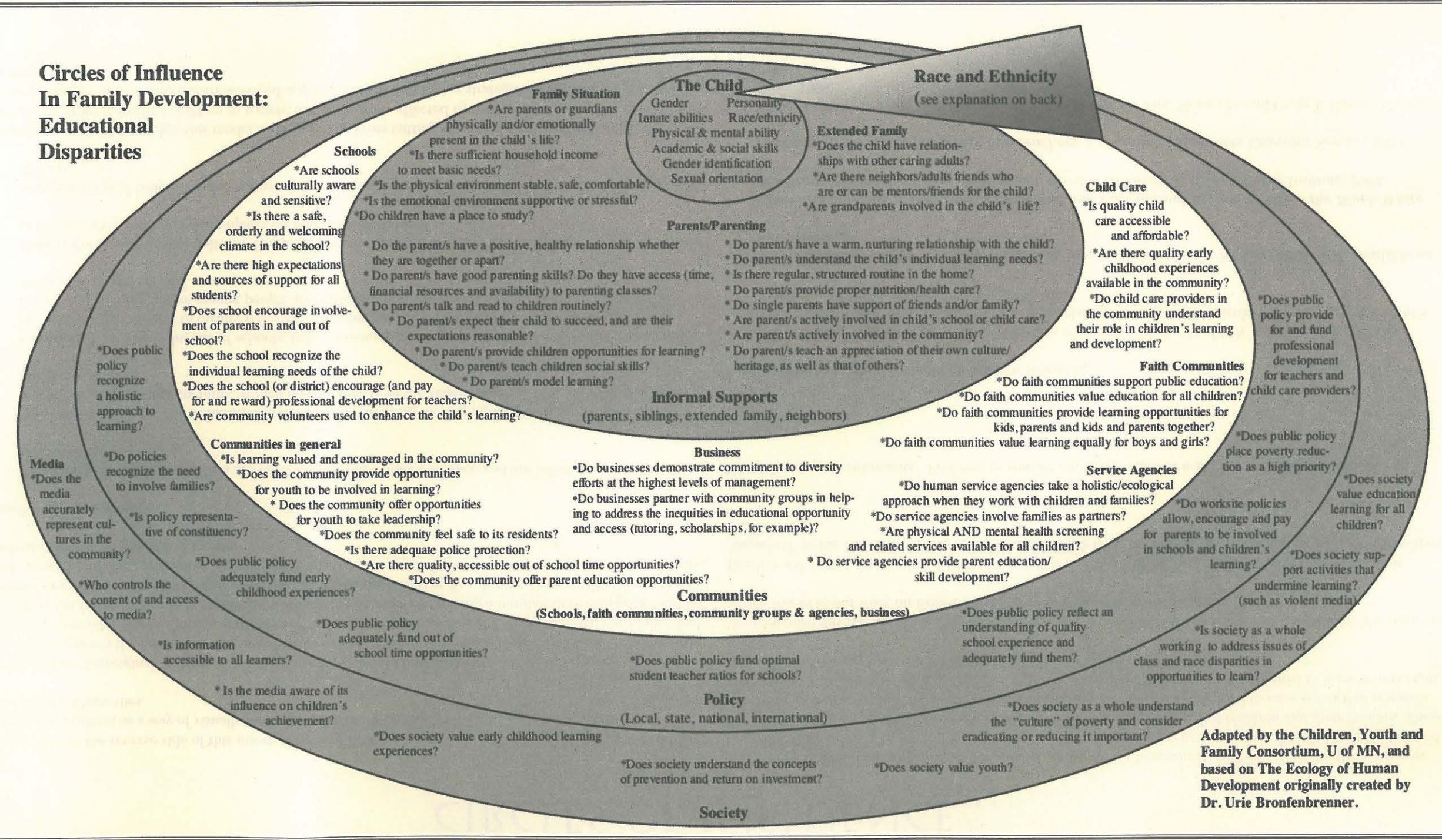
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# Circles of Influence In Family Development: Educational Disparities



Adapted by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, U of MN, and based on The Ecology of Human Development originally created by Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner.

# CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE...

The model on the reverse side of this insert, *Circles of Influence*, has been created by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium as a way of visually illustrating the multi-layered influences underlying the issue of Educational Disparities.

It is based on the original "ecological model" (The Ecology of Human Development) developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s that is well-known to most family scholars and practitioners. The model has had many permutations and interpretations over the years, but at base level, it recognizes that each individual, as well as the family as a unit, is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping contexts, systems or environments. This includes systems in which the family and/or its members are directly involved, such as neighborhoods or schools, as well as systems that are more distant from direct interaction or influence, such as community, policy and society.

Briefly, the five circles are:

- **The child:** Everything children are born with and how they influence and are influenced by the world around them.
- **Informal Supports:** The influence of parents and parenting, siblings, grandparents, extended family, neighbors, and informal mentors. It includes the quality of the relationships as well as the quality of the home environment.
- **Communities:** The influence of schools, faith communities, service agencies, business and communities at large. Includes access to quality resources, the physical and emotional environment, attitudes, and interaction and integration among people and institutions in geographic communities (e.g., "neighborhoods") and socio-cultural communities.
- **Policy:** Public and private policies. The most effective policies consider all the various influences, as well as the intended and unintended impacts on families and children.
- **Society:** Societal beliefs, values, norms, customs and practices, including those of media, technology and the arts.

In addition to the five circles, this model recognizes the cross cutting impact of **race and ethnicity**. All of the five circles, from individual children to society, are profoundly affected by race and ethnicity. It is critical that these influences be identified, acknowledged and included in developing strategies to address educational disparities.

*The Circles of Influence: Educational Disparities* is an attempt to systematically examine educational disparities using this ecological model. It raises questions about many different aspects of educational disparities and the achievement gap that occur in each of the circles of influence that affect children and their families. These questions are not intended to be judgmental or prescriptive. They are intended to raise issues that research shows to have an effect on children's ability to learn. Although children's innate potential to learn is important, these external factors have the capacity to enhance and detract from that potential.

We recognize this framework is a work in progress. We will continue to add, subtract, and modify the contents of this model as our work on Educational Disparities grows over the next two years.

Readers will notice the Circles of Influence graphic and the content have both changed since it was first "launched" in the Fall, 2006. This is based on feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

We welcome your comments. Feel free to contact any of our staff, or e-mail our office at [cyfc@umn.edu](mailto:cyfc@umn.edu).

Sources used to create this model include the following:

- The collective wisdom of the Family Relations educators with the U of MN Extension Service, Dr. Sandra Christenson of the U of MN School Psychology program, Dr. Harold Grotevant of the U of MN Family Social Science program, and CYFC staff.
- *Working With Families For School Success*, a paper/module by Dr. Sandra Christenson (available on web version)
- *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, by Richard Rothstein, Columbia University Economic Policy Institute, 2004.
- *Learning From You: All Parents Are Teachers*. University of Minnesota Extension Service, 2000.
- *Going to School: How to Help Your Child Succeed*, By Drs. Sharon L. and Craig T. Ramey, Goddard Press, 1999.