

FYI

Staff Update • Institute on Community Integration
College of Education and Human Development •
University of Minnesota

February 14, 1997

ICI Finding Ways to Keep Kids In School

Among middle and high school students, youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities are at highest risk for dropping out of school. Studies have found that the consequences of dropping out for these students are likely to include underemployment, unemployment, and incarceration. Since 1990, the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) has been home to several projects that are developing and testing dropout prevention strategies. The work includes two current efforts – both under the umbrella of the Check and Connect Project – that seek to improve retention in the Minneapolis Public Schools and Dakota County schools.

In the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Check and Connect model previously used in middle school is being applied at the high school level. That model uses a series of strategies to continually assess student engagement with school, and to reconnect students who begin to disengage. A four-year longitudinal study is being conducted with 200 Minneapolis students from ninth through twelfth grade who have serious emotional disorders. This study will allow researchers to work with students, their family members, and school/community staff through their entire high school career and assess the effectiveness of interventions to keep the students in school. In Dakota County, project staff are applying the Check and Connect model within the county's truancy prevention initiative, which is called School Success. In that initiative, middle school and high school students with and without disabilities identified as truant receive a range of interventions, which may include referral to Check and Connect. Implementing the model in Dakota County is providing researchers with an opportunity to further refine the program, addressing the question of how to provide support to students over an extended period of time while also creating openings for new students to enter the program.

In the Check and Connect model, the "check" part of the process tracks suspensions and absenteeism, along with other behavioral indicators of alienation. When the student shows increased risk, efforts are initiated to reconnect the student to school in a number of ways, including connecting the student to a tutor-mentor, assisting the family in negotiating with the school for alternatives to out-of-school suspension, or assisting the student to become involved in a community service program. A critical element of the model is "persistence-plus," which refers to the role of the monitor assigned to each student. That monitor does not give up on the student or allow the student to be distracted from the importance of school (persistence); is available to the student and knows the student's needs from one year to the next (continuity); and, along with other adults, sends the same message over time (consistency) – "Attend classes, be on time, do the work, express frustration in a constructive manner, stay in school, and plan for the future."

The partnership with the Minneapolis Public Schools is funded by a \$700,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and the work with Dakota County is funded through a contract from the county. The project directors are Mary Sinclair, Sandy Christenson, Martha Thurlow, David Evelo, and Carol Davis. For further information, contact Mary Sinclair by e-mail at sin1001@maroon.tc.umn.edu.

Staff Update

- **Staff Arrivals:** Sue Swenson, Associate Education Specialist for the UAP Project; Megan Finnessy, Student Secretary for the Drop-Out Prevention Project.
- **Bob Prouty** will be one of the speakers at "Welcome to the Field," a half-day workshop for direct service workers, on Thursday, February 27 at the airport Days Inn by the Mall of America. This event is sponsored by the Association of Residential Resources in Minnesota.
- **Christopher Watson** is opening a dance school. The Christopher Watson Dance Company and School will hold an open house on Sunday, February 16 from 1:00-5:00 p.m. at its new location in the Calhoun Building at Lake and Lyndale. The school will offer a variety of dance classes and workshops for children and adults. Call 825-6624 for more information.
- **Jean Ness** presented "Youth at Risk: Designing an Environment for All Learners" to the Cloquet, Minnesota, Senior High School faculty on February 5, and "Finding a Path to the Future: The Challenge of Preparing American Indian Students for Post-Secondary School" at the Minnesota Vocational Association of Special Needs Personnel statewide conference on School-to-Work initiatives on February 6.

Dates to Remember . . .

- **February 18:** Future of ICI Meeting, 9:30-11:00, 172 Child Development
- **February 21:** Future of ICI Meeting, 2:30-4:00, 120 Burton
- **February 27 and March 6:** Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Sessions, noon-1:00 and 11:30-1:00, 118 Pattee

From the Front Office

News from ICI's Administrative Staff

- **Copy Room and Kitchen Messes.** The copy room downstairs needs your help. Please return all colored paper you do not use back into the designated bins. Do not put extra paper on the floor by the copy machine or on the tables. Now, about the kitchen. Please clean up the microwave after any spills and please get old stuff out of the refrigerator. You may have noticed the remarkable stench coming from the kitchen – a milk carton with a December expiration date exploded.
- **Future of ICI.** You are invited to attend one of two meetings with Scott McConnell and Bob Bruininks to discuss the future of ICI. They are scheduled for Tuesday, February 18, 9:30-11:00 a.m., in 172 Child Development and Friday, February 21, 2:30-4:00 p.m., in 120 Burton Hall. If you are unable to attend, you can forward any comments to Dean Bruininks, c/o Nan Moore, 102 Burton.
- **ICI Outreach Training.** The Paraprofessional Train-the-Trainer Series, originally scheduled for Winter 1997, is being rescheduled for Spring/Summer 1997. Contact Kathie Wolff at 4-2380 for further information.
- **Civil Service Meeting.** The next Civil Service Informational Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 27 at 10:00 a.m. in room 118 Pattee. The topic will be student supervision tips.
- **P&A Staff Final Reminder.** P&A staff who have not turned in vacation forms recently or last quarter (October - December, 1996), please turn them in to Beth Nelson as soon as possible.
- **Co-sponsorship Defined.** The Office of Risk Management and Insurance and the General Counsel's Office has defined co-sponsorship as an event involving the University along with one or more external sponsors in which all parties are involved in the planning, hosting, and presentation of the event. Until the General Counsel's Office completes a "Co-Sponsorship Agreement," the Office of Risk Management and Insurance asks to be included in the review process of any co-sponsorship arrangement. Direct questions to Becky Hintz at 5-0062.

Miscellaneous

- **Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Sessions.** "Adolescent Drug Predictors in School and Clinical Samples" with Bill Latimer, Kevin Crochetiere, Veronica Svetaz, Rachael Traver, and Myra Dock (Thursday, February 27, 12:00-1:00 p.m.) and "Enhancing Investment in Sustained School Change" with Paul Fossum, Mike Bonner, and Tom Koch (Thursday, March 6, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.) will be held in 118 Pattee. For more information, contact Megan Dushin at 6-8649.
- **UAP Teleconference.** The UAP Media Exchange Teleconference is scheduled for Tuesday, February 18, 1:50-3:30 p.m., 16 Pattee. Contact Kathie Wolff at 4-2380 for more information.
- **Birthdays.** Marie Blackburn (2/16); Lisa Fankhauser (2/19); David Johnson (2/26); Karen Jerzak (2/26); Douglas Anderson (2/28); Amy Richardson (3/3); Shauna McDonald (3/3); Laura Medwetz (3/6); Beth Nelson (3/8); Willa Bates (3/9); Deborah Anderson (3/11); Mary McEvoy (3/13).

Bits and Pieces

Information from the Institute's Research and Technology Consulting Group (RTCG, 110 Pattee, 4-7337) and the Publications Office (109 Pattee, 4-4512)

- **Web Pages**
- **Web Sites to Visit.** Here are a few web pages which may be of interest to ICI personnel:
 - The Federal Resource Center for Special Education (<http://www.aed.org/special.ed/frc.html>) is a project within the Academy of Educational Development. This site has lots of information and links to disability-related sites around the country. If you look hard enough you can even find a link to ICI.
 - A site that contains information of use to those making decisions about information technologies is the Rand Corporation's site (<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR650>). It includes the report, "Universal Access to E-Mail: Feasibility and Societal Implications."
- **Photo Releases, FYI**
- **New Form.** The Publications Office has created a new photo release form that includes the option for electronic/web use of photos. If you are taking pictures for materials that will go online, you can get copies of the form from Vicki (4-6347).
- **Use Us.** Please keep in mind that *FYI* is one of ICI's tools to keep everyone informed on what's happening at ICI, be it presentations staff have given or information on happenings that would interest all our colleagues. If you have an announcement you would like to see posted in *FYI*, call Jessica Mooney at 624-4512 or stop by 109 Pattee.