



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS

## *Working Together for Our Children*

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### **PROMOTING RESILIENCE**

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Today's economic woes may be a test of our collective resilience. How do we face adversity? Do we have confidence in our strengths to see us through? Several years ago, resilience factors were buzzwords in educational reform efforts. Both educators and community leaders studied protective and risk factors in children's development. Changing school climates and structures to promote student resilience was making headway in schools' organizational patterns and curriculum planning. Now, as so often has happened in education in the past, those efforts seem to have been buried beneath the clarion calls for basic reading, math and test-taking achievement skills. Pushed to produce ever higher test scores, schools offer professional development that heavily emphasizes classroom management and skills development, sometimes neglecting the years of research indicating diverse influences on student lives than can help or hinder their ability to learn in the classroom.

Developing resilience means that we believe in every person's capability for change so that we focus on creating healthy systems, not on "fixing" individuals. "The process of resilience is the process of healthy human development, of meeting the basic human needs for caring and connectedness, for respect, challenge, and structure, and for meaningful involvement, belonging and power." (Bonnie Benard and Kathy Marshall, 1997) Promoting resilience focuses on protection, strengths, and assets rather than risks and deficits. Promoting resilience is a long-term effort. It involves the child having supports in their environment, recognizing inner strengths, and developing interpersonal skills.

One environmental support that directly or indirectly effects students' capability of overcoming obstacles to achieve well in school is parent involvement. A study back in 1994 by Connell, Spencer and Aber found that student perceptions of parental involvement (a contextual variable) influenced how they saw themselves (in general self-concept, their efficacy in school, and their perceived quality of interpersonal relationships.) These self processes in turn influenced emotional engagement (their satisfaction with school) and behavioral engagement (such as attending school or completing homework). Depending on the level of engagement, outcomes were either negative (perhaps indicated by low grades) or positive (maybe high attendance and better grades). Promoting resilience in children by encouraging parent involvement was also evident in a research study by the Practical Parenting Partnerships Center. It showed that the adverse effects of poverty were mitigated by parent involvement, especially as encouraged by openness of teachers to encourage that involvement.

Working together we can help children develop resilience to feel competent and hopeful in problem solving situations they face now and in the future. PPP can be at the core of building positive school climates, structuring policies, and focusing curriculums to provide students optimum opportunities for success in school and in life. The PPP conference in April features ideas for cooperation among individuals, families, and organizations to build student capacity for resilience.

## PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

No fooling, the first day of April finds the PPP Center Staff busily putting the final touches on our annual conference! Response has been very good with nearly 500 registered. Our Partnering for Success conference will feature traditional and alternative school teachers and administrators, school social workers and nurses, parent liaisons, community partners, and families coming together as a community of teachers and learners. If you can't join us in person, please consider participating through a social networking site.

We will be using Twitter during and following the conference to keep communication lines open among our community. Our Twitter name is Partner4Success. I hope you will follow us. Check the Facilitation Tips column this month for ideas on using Twitter to communicate with parents.

PPP is on Facebook too! If you are on Facebook, please join the Practical Parenting Partnerships group. This can be a great place for us to share ideas, communicate quickly and keep one another up to date.

April is Child Abuse Prevention month with the theme, "For a Better Tomorrow, End Child Abuse Now". Many activities are planned around the state. You will find details on the [Missouri Kids First](#) blog. Friday April 17 is Go Blue Day. The PPP Staff will be participating by wearing their Go Blue T-shirts. Your PPP team might want to plan something to bring attention to this important effort in your school and community. If you have a local child abuse and neglect (CAN) prevention council, this could be a good school – community partnership. Help raise awareness about child abuse and neglect. Encourage individuals and communities to support children and families by sharing the information on <http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth>.

## PPP SITE NEWS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

**Hayti R-II** high school kicks off MAP testing by hosting a fun family "Guitar Hero" Night where the parents battle the students. Testing information is shared with parents and students throughout the evening. Pizza is provided. As a follow-up to testing, students are presented a pencil stating, "I did my best on the test!"

## WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

<http://www.readwithkidschallenge.com/> and [www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org) From April 1-June 30, 2009, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) and US Airways are working to help children nationwide discover the joy of reading. Join the **Read With Kids Challenge** to help meet the goal of collectively logging 5 Million Minutes of reading with kids. Families taking this challenge have the chance of winning a family vacation and other prizes!

TROUBLED TIMES -- HELPING TEENS & PARENTS <http://sn.im/troubled-times> This timely resource created by the National Association of School Psychologists and adapted by the

Teachers and Families web community, recognizes that for students "tough economic times can be as distant as a television news story or as close as an unemployed parent or leaving the home they know." Included are methods for spotting signs of stress, ideas about easing children's fears, and, in particular, "What teachers and schools can do." One important piece of academic advice: All schools should strive to help students "build a better understanding of real world economics and financial basics so that similar financial crises can be averted in the future and our students can be better stewards of the world economy."

## GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

[American Honda Foundation](#) makes grants to schools and youth-focused nonprofit organizations for programs that benefit youth and scientific education. Maximum award: \$60,000. Honda of America places its priorities on the development of programs (particularly education), and not supporting annual operating budgets. Honda believes certain qualities contribute to success in any endeavor, including creativity, innovation and imagination. **Deadline:** May 1

[AT&T Foundation Grants](#) focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning through the effective use of technology, developing workforce skills for the information technology industry and advancing diversity in education. Accredited public and private elementary and secondary schools, accredited public and private two- and four-year institutions of higher education and educational nonprofit organizations are eligible. **Deadline:** Rolling.

The [Women's Sports Foundation](#), with support from the [Gatorade Company](#), sponsors the GoGirlGo! Ambassador Team Awards - rewarding high school girls for their leadership in inspiring other girls to participate in sports and physical activity. The program will award a total of \$50,000 (twenty grants of \$2,500 each) to teams across the United States in recognition of their efforts to involve girls in physical activity. Eligible applicants are school, amateur, community, and/or nonprofit affiliated teams whose members are female, enrolled in 9th through 12th grade, and residents of the United States, its territories, or protectorates. Teams must lead a project designed to involve girls in their communities in sports and physical activity. Projects must be completed by the program **deadline** (July 17, 2009), and must be original, current work and not previously submitted to the program. Projects will be judged on their impact, quality, and creativity.

The [Terri Lynne Lokoff Child Care Foundation](#) created the Terri Lynne Lokoff/Children's Tylenol National Child Care Teacher Awards to acknowledge the critical role of child care teachers in providing quality early care and education. Child care teachers from all fifty states and the District of Columbia are invited to apply.

As part of the application process, each applicant is asked to design an enhancement project for the children in their classroom illustrating the educational, social, and emotional benefits of the project. Award recipients will receive \$1,000 in total — \$500 for the teacher's personal use and \$500 to implement the project. **Deadline:** December 9, 2009

[Youth Service America](#), the [YSA National Youth Council](#), and [State Farm](#) have announced that they are offering five grants of up to \$2,000 each to individual youth or teams of youth (ages 12-25) to plan and implement semester-long service-learning projects with a service-learning coordinator or educator. The goal of the Dollars for Change initiative is to support high-impact semester-long projects. Selected projects will be youth-led, engage at least one hundred youth volunteers (ages 5-25), and demonstrate youth voice and leadership in all aspects of the decision-

making process. Upon successful completion of projects and evaluations, grantees will become eligible to compete for the Harris Wofford Youth Award in 2010 and be recognized as a YSA Service Star. **Deadline:** April 30, 2009.

## FACILITATION TIPS

by Janet Shepard, Director

Social networking is center stage right now. The morning news programs and the afternoon talk shows are all talking about social networking. Many of our elected officials are tweeting to their constituents and to one another. Social networking sites can also be a great way for schools to communicate with families and community members. In the Center Update article this month I mentioned that PPP is using both Facebook and Twitter. I really like the way two schools which I follow on Twitter are Tweeting with families.

The Broward County Florida School District, which is the sixth largest district in the nation, sends messages to parents on a regular basis using Twitter. Twitter has a 140 character maximum so messages are brief. Sometimes they are reminders of scheduling such as early out day while others carry a link to a press release or to more detailed information for families. There are now district tweets encouraging parents to follow the building where their students are enrolled. The possibilities are endless. Obviously this means of communication won't replace the old standards, but it is an innovative way to share information.

In a third grade classroom in Minnesota students take turns tweeting throughout the day. Some add their names and others do not. Their account is protected and they are not following anyone. They are using it as a way to share their day with family and friends. It is also a fun way to practice spelling and writing.

Teachers are tweeting, too. A secondary school teacher in Maine uses Twitter, among other things, to help students expand their thinking. He may tweet a question to his followers that begins with, "Help my student think about ...." This is a good example of the way these tools can be used for brainstorming and surveying.

Ning is another free social networking site and is one which we use for our PPP training team. It is more private than Facebook and has many of the same capabilities plus blogging. There are also numerous free blog spots available.

There are lots of new ways to communicate. Why not pick one to try with the families of your students? Post a message for us on Facebook and let us know how it works for you!

## KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

by Janet Shepard, Director

We begin PPP's Kindergarten Transition training by asking participants to share a memory of their own kindergarten experience. This helps focus attention to the importance of communicating with parents about today's kindergarten program. Even for very young teachers, the kindergarten of their memories is very different from the kindergarten program in which they teach.

A very thought provoking report on some of the changes in kindergarten is available on the [Alliance for Childhood](#) website. The report entitled *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children*

*Need to Play in School* is available for download in its entirety. The authors are Edward Miller and Joan Alman with a foreword by David Elkind. Your transition team may want to review the article. It would also make a thought provoking study group for kindergarten teachers.

Two opportunities remain this school year to participate in transition training. We are scheduled in Kansas City April 23 with the location to be announced. Rosalee Johnson, PPP Area Coordinator is currently working with interested schools in the greater St. Louis area to set a training date. Please notify Rosalee or the Center if you want to be included in this session.

## HOME VISIT

by Janet Shepard, Director

Home visits are a great way to build relationships with families and to support learning in the home. We have at least three training opportunities remaining for this year and our [special price](#) is still available

The next opportunity will be in Kansas City April 24. The location and other details will be sent to those who register.

Southeast Missouri is scheduled for April 29. The web shows this training scheduled for Cape Girardeau, but the location can be somewhat flexible. Doniphan is considering participation in this one so Poplar Bluff might be a better location. Let me hear from you if you are interested in this one and have a suggestion for location. We can also flex a little on training date.

May 1 here at the PPP Center is the final session scheduled for this school year. We are always willing to bring the training to you. Call for details!

## SPRING FEVER

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

What is spring fever? According to the Webster Dictionary, it is “A feeling of restlessness, excitement, or laziness brought on by the coming of spring.” Who experiences spring fever? Perhaps everyone is at risk of catching spring fever! The feelings that accompany spring vary for each of us and are reflective of changes we each face as spring time arrives.

Spring is a time of change. We see change in nature with the budding of trees, the grass turning green, flowers beginning to bloom, climate changing and days filled with longer periods of daylight. Spring also brings about changes in school. Schools are wrapping up curriculum, trying to get in everything necessary to prepare students for the next year. Students and teachers are counting down the days until summer break begins. There is anticipation for a change in daily schedule, a break from homework and rigorous schedules, and excitement for summer fun. Children are growing and changing. About three-quarters of the way through the school year, students may make major developmental leaps. They may speak more, read more, understand more, and process more.

Families also face changes in the spring. For some, there is anticipation of an empty nest as children go off to college or their next phase of life after graduating. Families of younger children face the challenge of what to do about child care over the summer months. Older children may seek summer employment. Families switch out clothing from one season to another. Families plan for summer activities that will enrich their child and bring family bonding

and fun throughout the summer including camps, vacations, summer sports and family activities. With so many changes taking place in the spring, it is no wonder we get spring fever!

Spring can be a great time to enjoy together as a family. Families can take advantage of nice weather and spend time outside together playing games or planting a garden. Open communication is important during this season of change. All family members should have the opportunity to express excitement and apprehension about what is to come in the spring and summer months (job, camp, change in household, etc.). Change in routine can stir up many different feelings.

Adults and children face changes and various emotions that go with these changes in the spring. When we recognize this and prepare for it, we are more likely to embrace the changes. How adults deal with spring fever sets the tone for how children deal with it. Sometimes it is so easy to get bogged down with the anticipation of what is to come that we forget to enjoy the moment! Take time to enjoy the spring season!

*PPP Family Systems, Notebook 1: Module 1.III.A, Communicating Within The Family* can be a great resource for families as they face, share and discuss changes in the season of spring.

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## ARE YOU AWARE?

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Reality may lie just below our level of awareness. All parents surely recognize that what we see or expect from our children is not always the case. The responsibilities of parents are many; but the most important thing we give our children is our time. Simply being there is important, and children who are confident that we will be there when they need us will tend to develop in healthy ways. Research (Shek, 2002) found that children whose families meet their needs are more likely to feel healthy, satisfied with their life, good about themselves, and confident in their abilities to achieve. Parents, then, seem to be the base for everything else in a child's life. A number of research studies of parents and children under stress reveal somewhat surprising results.

Children are strongly affected by their parents' emotions whether expressed openly or hidden below the surface. Control of anger is very important but difficult as parents are guaranteed to experience upsets and disappointments during child-rearing. A study by Katz and Woode in 2002 found that 58% more conflict was produced in the family by people who are quick to react with hostility. There was also a 47% decrease in the feeling of cohesiveness in the family. Other studies have shown that all of us tend to retain memories of emotional outbursts of a parent; but we are often unable to remember what led to the outburst. A study, also in 2002, by Lindsey, MacKinnon-Lewis, Campbell, Frabutt and Lamb revealed that children are about 30% more likely to feel uncertain of their relationship with their parents when they perceive them to be upset about something - even when the problem has nothing directly to do with the children. Stressors outside the family, such as work issues, carry over to the mood at home. Parents must guard our trusting relationship with our children, a basic need to be met.

Some strong, upbeat children are not seen by adults or peers as having significant problems that need attention; but these assumptions can be wrong. In a 2001 study by Tyagi and Kaur, the researchers found that there was similar agreement among parents, teachers, and friends when rating these upbeat children's behavior, happiness and satisfaction. Those results, however, significantly differed from the students' own self-perception by 31%. This disparity can lead to problems when no one reads the signs of needs in these children. Parents may see their children as bright, busy, and uncomplaining and fail to see they are vulnerable to problems just like every child. The child's friends may depend on him or her to resolve issues or to give advice; but they may never listen to this strong child's comments of frustration or requests for help. Unanswered for a long time, small issues can grow to big problems before others are even aware of a hint of trouble. Parents must try to listen to our children and assess how they see themselves, not always depend on our own perceptions or what we want to see.

No matter the pressures we feel as adults, good parenting takes time, attention to details, and constant communication.