



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS

Working Together for Our Children

Volume 13, Issue 7

March 2009

EDUCATE YOUTH TO FUNCTION WELL IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

We increasingly hear employers lamenting the skills of their pool of potential employees. Many blame American schools for young people's lack of preparation. Others point their fingers at youth culture and non-involvement of parents that they claim have eroded traditional values, a strong work ethic and the motivation to achieve at high levels. What are the necessary skills most often cited by employers? According to a publication of the Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group, not only the usual culprits of science and math skills are mentioned, but also added to the list are the abilities to interact effectively with others, work as part of a team, and think creatively. Attainment of the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities hinges on how we as an adult society view and accept our roles in supporting the healthy development of American children and youth. Schools by themselves can not do it all alone. Besides making informed decisions in how we allocate limited resources for our schools, how do we work as partners in moving our children ahead?

1. We can support children's physical and social development as strongly as their intellectual development, as all three are intertwined. For example, body image becomes more important in establishing self-worth as the young person heads toward puberty, yet more young people are becoming obese at the same time as "thinness" is idolized in popular culture through internet, television and movie images. Promoting physical activity, providing healthy eating choices, and evaluating the role of technology in children's lives are critical issues right now that need to be addressed at home, at school, and in the community. Parents can limit their children's computer, TV and other inactive pursuits and encourage at least a half hour of vigorous exercise each day. They can limit the amount of sugared snacks and drinks in the home. Teachers can build in movement to various curricular activities throughout the day and lunch programs can concentrate on offering healthy food choices. Communities can persist in their efforts to provide inviting places for walking, biking, and other activities. Another example is the role of sleep in students' ability to function well at school. Teachers have been reporting increased numbers of students who are sleepy in class. Parents can monitor their children's sleep habits more closely, while schools and communities can coordinate activity and sports schedules to allow youth to be home for sensible bedtimes. Proper exercise, healthy eating and sufficient sleep contribute to feelings of competence, thus preparing children to learn more easily.

2. We can concentrate on developing children's "sense of understanding" as described by Stanley Pogrow in the February 2009 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*. Spurred by NCLB requirements, educators have recently emphasized the basic reading and math skills to help young children, particularly those in poverty, avoid falling behind their classmates in later years. However, Pogrow states that grades 4-5 are a boundary where children's learning needs change dramatically and in such ways that have not been well understood in many of education's reform efforts. The reliance on remedial basic skill practice and test preparation that makes sense in K-2 loses its effectiveness in third grade and beyond, where students meet curriculum that asks them to create ideas and generalize information. Memorizing content does not develop advanced thinking processes, because new information must be linked automatically to prior information for it to be retained in long term memory. Thinking skills are critical for both retaining content and applying it. Here is where home and community environments that children encounter become very important. How to work with ideas comes most naturally through everyday conversations. Children build their vocabulary, experience challenges to their ideas, are forced to think about different ways to do things and make comparisons, and they will probably have to explain

why they did something. These conversations aid intellectual development by helping children understand how adults expect them to deal with information and come up with ideas. Sitting around the kitchen table and discussing family issues is one way; participating in small group discussion led by an expert teacher or engaging in conversation with a mentor, coach or after school adult leader may be others. Learning content in depth and solving problems depend on growth in thinking skills that can not be developed through constant drill and review of the same material. Adults have sometimes believed certain children were either incapable of learning at a higher level or were too unmotivated and lazy to learn when, in fact, they have not yet developed a “sense of understanding.” Engaging students in meaningful learning may become the most pressing concern for educators.

3. We can push the belief that achievement is a result of effort, not an inborn and predetermined personal characteristic. In the December 2008 issue of *Principal Leadership*, Laurie McGarry Klose says, “motivation is the underlying reason for human behavior.” Very young children are eager to learn and become more competent in their environment. Even in the early elementary grades, most children have a desire to learn as they focus on their own little world. However, as they grow older, children and youth begin to look more outside themselves to see how they compare with others. Motivations become more complicated. A student’s classroom behavior will reflect if he believes that doing well is trying his best to learn material, or if he believes that doing well is only gauged by how his grades or performance stacks up with that of his classmates. A school’s system of rewards may be interpreted differently by the student according to his beliefs. A reward handed out for a particular task may be seen as merely information about that task or it may be viewed as a statement of general ability and status. For example, it is far less damaging to a student’s self-image if he refuses to do a task than to try something and fail to meet expectations. Recognition and appreciation for a child or youth are important to his feeling of self-worth. Public comparisons like charts detailing accomplishments of individual students can be motivational for some but disastrous for others. Feelings of confidence to tackle new concepts and skills, is necessary for any individual to put forth effort in a task. Families, educators and community members all play a role in helping children become engaged and motivated to learn new things. They can help children set realistic goals, choose achievable tasks, avoid comparisons with others and emphasize personal growth. A lifelong love of learning occurs when a student’s perceptions of his capabilities are positive - only then can he be highly motivated to achieve academically.

The workers employers are looking for in the years ahead will have gained the needed skills of communicating and working with others, solving problems creatively, and relying on their grasp of math and science content, if their homes, schools, and communities have forged true partnerships to promote children’s well-being, more complex thinking and positive motivational orientations. Use PPP to clarify and enhance your efforts.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

Recognition for your innovation, breadth, depth, enthusiasm and years of participation will be given at our annual conference. The conference name has changed and we have new partners, but we will take time on Friday evening to honor our awarding winning schools and individuals. You can nominate someone from your school to be honored as [PPP VIP](#), application due **Friday March 6**. Winners will receive a pin, certificate and have their names listed in the program.

You may also apply for a [PPP Pearl Award](#), application due **Friday March 6**. Pearl applications address your implementation of one, multiple or all of the PPP Dimensions of Parent Involvement. Pearl winners receive a \$200 coupon to be used for PPP registration, resources or merchandise.

The first annual [Founders Award](#) will be presented in honor of PPP’s Founding Director Darlene Robinett. Submit your innovative idea. We have sent letters to all five and ten year schools inviting you to complete and

return a description of your PPP efforts and to be celebrated at the conference. All applications are on the website and are due in our office this **Friday March 6**. Please let us know if you have questions.

We also have a certification program designed to recognize PPP trained administrators, facilitators and schools. The application is on the web or in your PPP implementation training binder. Facilitators and administrators receive a lapel pin and certificate during the school year following the receipt of the application. We are still catching up on those of you who applied in past years. Certified schools receive a banner to display in the school. This year we have added a personalized PPP Certified school logo to be added to the district or building web page. Schools must complete and return the annual report in order to receive an updated logo for the following school year.



Awards will be presented during the Winners Circle time of the conference. Chris Martin, retired NFL player from Kansas City will share a few remarks about Winning Teams – Winning Families.

“THE STATE OF OUR STATE”

The State of our State is the title of the opening keynote address, which will be given by Dr. William Elder, Director of OSEDA (Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia). OSEDA is responsible for collecting and disseminating MSIP school data and the Missouri Kids Count data. Bill will share social and economic trends in Missouri and discuss the challenges for our schools and communities. Bill has a gift for making data come alive and helping his audience apply data to their daily work.



Bill's doctorate is in Rural Sociology from MU and his areas of interest are social change, communities and public policy particularly public education. He is a former National Library of Medicine Fellow in Health Informatics. At OSEDA Bill is responsible for program leadership and works projects concerning demographics, public school improvement, community information systems and program evaluation. He has authored dozens of articles and reports many available on the OSEDA webpage.

You won't want to miss our Keynote speakers:

*Dr. Hal Lawson, a Professor of Educational Administration and Policy Studies and also Professor of Social Welfare at the University at Albany, The State University of New York, will participate in sessions throughout the conference, collecting and integrating the highlights of what he has observed and heard. He will share insight into how to take what we learn and plan at the conference back to our communities. He is a co-author of *Family-Centered Policies and Practices*.*

Loretta Washington, Storyteller from St. Louis, MO, will lead our closing celebration of the work accomplished at the conference and provide motivation to continue the work at home.

PPP SITE NEWS

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Jonesburg Elementary School, Montgomery R-II School District

Do you think you can play checkers as well as your second grader? How about all cover in Bingo before your fifth grader? Feel a little competition stirring? Jonesburg had a Great Family Game night on Monday February 23, 2009 and we learned who was the champion of the families.

With over 110 people in attendance everyone had fun and learned some cheap and easy family game night skills. Did you know that with just a deck of cards you could play hundreds of games? Family fun doesn't have to cost a lot of money. In this hard economic time many do not have the extra cash to spend on a family night out! Why not make dinner and play a game that is already in your family fun closet? Togetherness is not about the money you spend on your family, but the time you spend with your family! Jonesburg Elementary Family Game night proved that!

Humboldt Elementary School in St. Joseph, MO is proud to promote community and parent involvement together in our school. We recently held our annual Agency Day/ Health Fair/ Chili Cook-off. Our goal for this evening was to give families the opportunity to see what resources are available in our community as well as to raise money for a worthy charity. There were 29 community organizations here. The organizations from our community represented health, education, and safety. Some examples of those were Adult Basic Education, Vatterott College, Albany Regional Center, Family Guidance, Social Welfare Board, Health Department, WIC, Fire Department, Police Department, Legal Aid, and Workforce Development. We had agencies set up all over the gym with the contestants of the Chili Cook-off along one side. While families tasted chili they had the opportunity to visit the booths and get information from each. Each class had a chili base prepared by our school cafeteria and each class decided on their own secret ingredients. Families put money into the chili jar of their favorite class. The class with the most money wins the traveling trophy. The money collected will go to a worthy charity chosen by student council. This event has been one of our most successful parent involvement activities this school year.

WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

[FINE](#) – The Family Involvement Network of Educators through the Harvard Family Research Project, has a great newsletter supporting family involvement and communication. I especially liked the article on Home-School Communication in the January newsletter. Log on today to join their mailing list. This is just another great site to promote your parent involvement efforts!

[ThinkFinity](#) and [Read, Write, Think](#) are two great sites for teachers, parents and students. Search the Ides of March (March 15), and find a lesson on superstitions perfect for Friday the 13th (two months in a row)! Search Women's History Month, and find lessons for every day.

[Exploratorium](#) - Spice up your math class and celebrate Pi Day for Albert Einstein's birthday-March 14- with this silly site! Check out the Exploratorium website, where you'll find a "short history" of Pi, Pi Day activities, Pi limericks, posters and haiku, and offsite links to other Pi resources.

[America's Career Resource Network](#) (ACRN) believes (like PPP) that the best way for students to succeed in school and in life is for parents to be involved throughout the school years. This site contains links and shares ideas to help our students explore their interests and learn about potential careers.

GRANTS

Matching Book Grants Available (Pre-k thru 1)

Deadline - *Orders must be received by April 30th, 2009.*

The Literacy Empowerment Foundation has increased the size of the Matching Book Grants available to \$20,000.00 per school. A school can now order \$40,000.00 worth of books and pay only \$20,000.00. (Any amount purchased from \$100.00 to \$20,000.00 will be matched.) You can view the titles in each collection available in the Matching Book Grant program by clicking on the individually highlighted collections. Matching Book Grants allow your school to double its purchasing power. This is a limited time offer that requires no special screening or applications. Information and a matching book grant order form are available at: <http://www.lefbooks.org>

[Do Something](#) and [Mountain Dew Voltage](#) have announced a new grants program for groups of young volunteers working to improve their communities. Deadline – March 9, 2009.

The Power in Numbers program will provide ten groups of friends with grants of \$10,000 each to expand or implement their project or idea.

Program teams must consist of a minimum of three and a maximum of ten young people. Each team member must be between the ages of 13 and 25 and must be a legal U.S. resident. Grants will be provided through a qualified 501(c)(3) organization. Go to <http://www.energizeyourcommunity.com> for more details on how to apply.

PPP IS NOW ON FACEBOOK!

Becoming a Facebook member is easy. Just log on to www.facebook.com and follow the prompts to set up your Facebook page. If you already have a Facebook page, search Practical Parenting Partnerships and become a member of the PPP group. Check in for updates on what's happening in the center, and find out about events that you won't want to miss!

If you are a member of Twitter, you can also follow PPP Director, Janet Shepard at www.twitter.com/PPPJanet as she gives updates on our Annual Conference and other pertinent information.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE TIPS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

Here are some things that facilitators may want to share with participants before the conference:

This year's Annual Conference has an emphasis on collaboration among school, family and community. We are encouraging you to attend as a team and have built time into the conference agenda for networking and sharing. Regional Breakout sessions are planned for Friday morning, and Hot Topics/Open Forum sessions are scheduled throughout the conference.

We hope you will take the time to meet as a team before the conference to discuss your goals, plan which sessions to attend, and anticipate how you might share the experience upon your return.

If you have family members on your team, remember they may need additional information prior to the conference and some guidance once they arrive. Having a staff member or parent leader attend with families provides a model for conference participation who can answer questions about the conference program or facilities. Partnering with your attendees before the conference will help you all to have a better experience and provide your school with more return for their investment in the conference.

A photographer will be available in the Exhibit Hall. You may wish to use this service to have a record of your attendance and a photo to use in a news release in your school district or community. A general news release will be provided in your conference packet.

If you haven't preordered conference t-shirts and would like to purchase them at the conference, they will be available at the conference registration table in limited sizes and quantities.

Hotel room check-in is 3:00 p.m. See the front desk to store baggage or check room availability. See the list of activities (and fees) offered by the hotel. You may want to participate in one of these on Saturday afternoon.

If your school is paying your way, they are only paying the room charge. If you wish to be able to charge other services such as food or activity costs to the room, you will be asked to provide the hotel with a credit card upon check-in and must pay these expenses when you check out.

Remember to check in at the conference registration desk to get nametags, meal tickets, etc.

Dress ranges from casual to business casual. There may be a lot of walking involved, so wear comfortable shoes.

Remind your children, especially, that they may want to pack a swimsuit.

You may purchase additional meal tickets at the Conference registration desk if needed. Meals may be different than you and your children are used to. Please be aware that the cost of meal tickets may be greater than the conference registration costs.

Review the sessions with others attending in your group, choose your schedule and check their room assignments. You may want to divide the sessions so your school is represented at as many as possible. If you have questions, please ask at the conference registration area, PPP and MSSN booths in the exhibit hall or look for anyone wearing a "conference staff" ribbon. They are happy to help you.

Elementary age students or younger must be accompanied by an adult in the sessions.

If you are assigned a room in the estates, which are a short distance from the main building, a shuttle service will provide transportation if you choose to use it.

In the exhibit hall:

- PPP and MSSN Booths
- It is okay to pick up one each of free items.
- Some items will be for sale, including books and materials authored by a few of our presenters.
- Participants should not be in the exhibit hall after exhibit hours.

Children wandering in the hall during meal times and other functions may be asked to return to their parents for their own safety as well as for the convenience of the hotel staff who are serving our meals. Other than mealtime, they may be asked to wait for you at the conference registration desk. We do not offer childcare through the conference, but you may wish to check with Tan-Tar-A (1-800-TANTARA) about possible arrangements.

This sounds like a lot to think about, but some advanced preparation helps participants prepare for an unfamiliar situation and helps everyone get the maximum benefit from the opportunity. We want everyone to have a great time at the *Partnering for Success – School, Family and Community* Annual Conference!

Meet these and other exhibitors at the Partnering for Success Conference!

- [National Association of Social Workers-Missouri Chapter](#)
- [Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services/Genetics and Healthy Childhood](#)
- [Elsenpeter Productions](#)
- [Missouri Humanities Council](#)
- [Missouri's Youth/Adult Alliance](#)
- [Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services – Tel-Link Program](#)
- [Missouri National Education Association](#)
- [Missouri PIRC \(Parent Information & Resource Center\)](#)
- [Children's Mercy Family Health Partners](#)
- [MOST – Missouri's 529 College Savings Plan](#)
- [Missouri Vocational Enterprises](#)
- [State of Missouri, Office of Child Advocate](#)
- [HealthCare USA](#)
- [Pages of Parenting Bookstore](#)
- [Discovery Toys](#)
- [Missouri Student Success Network](#)
- [Practical Parenting Partnerships](#)

GEARING UP FOR TEST TAKING

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Spring is around the corner and with the welcomed change in season comes standardized test-taking time in schools. Many schools help students and families prepare for the MAP and other tests by hosting a MAP family night. These interactive family nights can give families greater insight into: the purpose of the test, the structure of the test, ways to help students be at their best physically and mentally and how wellness affects their performance on the test. PPP resources are available to guide and supplement a school MAP night. The newly revised [A Parent's Guide to Grade Level Assessment](#) serves as an outstanding tool for schools to use in communicating with families about the MAP and test taking. This document is on the PPP website and is downloadable.

Schools can also use modules out of the *PPP Wellness Notebook 3* to communicate with families about overall health and the impact that has on student performance. Specifically, *Module 3.II.B* offers information on making healthy choices. This is a timely message to get across to parents with test taking coming up, but really should be shared throughout the school year. The *Home-School Relationships Notebook 4* might also be used to strengthen the partnership between parents and teachers as the school year wraps up and decisions are being made for the following school year regarding student placement. *Module 4.III.A* might be used to help parents understand the learning styles of their child and ways that they can support learning year round. For some students, anxiety comes with test taking. *Module 3.III.A* in the *PPP Wellness Notebook 3* offers ways to deal with this added stress that schools can share with families.

As your school prepares for test taking time, evaluate what is shared with families, how it is shared, and what changes are made in the home as a result. This information can be helpful in future years and the results of these efforts can have a positive impact on test results. It's a happier spring when schools and families work together and are well prepared for testing.

A newsletter published by the PPP Center for parents and educators participating in the PPP program.

The Practical Parenting Partnerships program was developed with funding from the Danforth Foundation, St. Louis through the MO Dept of Elementary & Secondary Education. For information on the PPP program, please contact:

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Is Your Child Motivated to Learn?

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Motivation is a tricky thing. It depends on how we see ourselves. Do we feel confident we can face new situations? Have we experienced success and approval before? Our children need us to help them be motivated to learn at school. What might we do?

Set goals that can be achieved. Consider your child's age and personality before setting expectations. You wouldn't ask your child to sit at a formal dinner and join in adult conversations while using all the utensils in the "proper" way, if you had never shown him how to cut the meat with a knife.

Monitor progress toward the set goals. Pay attention to your child. Ask questions and listen carefully.

Encourage your child to continue toward the goal by acknowledging positive progress. Let your child know that you are aware of his efforts and that you will be there to help him.

Avoid comparing your child with others in the family or neighborhood. Realize that your child is an individual with strengths that can be used in different ways. Just because her older sister could carry on a great conversation with an elderly neighbor does not mean your younger daughter is not as caring when she rarely answers questions with more than one word. Also, stand up for your child when anyone else tries to make comparisons between your child and another. Your son may not be able to hit a baseball across the yard like Johnny next door, but he can run like the wind.

Try rewarding your child's effort in completing a task rather than giving a reward for the outcome. If he spent a half hour reading an assigned chapter without distraction, congratulate him.

Talk with your child about persistence toward a task, not giving up when faced with a challenge, but rather looking for new ways to approach it. If she storms off to the other room when she can't solve a homework math problem, you may want to help her calm down, ask her to review it with you, have her call a friend in the class, or perhaps arrange to get to school early to talk with the teacher.

Discuss how you see yourself and your child and vice versa. Talk about feelings of anxiety and self-worth. Let your child know everyone has doubts and special abilities.

Communicate with teachers throughout the year and plan together how you can help at home. For example, you might watch television advertisements with your child and discuss elements of persuasion and how to question what is said.

Always realize that children's motivations to achieve in school may be complicated. They will be prepared to learn if they believe in their capabilities and that what is being taught is relevant to their lives; if they appreciate that effort, not happenstance, brings accomplishment; and they know that help is nearby.