



## Let's Get Wired

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Students today have been surrounded by all kinds of digital media since they were born. Some people believe that this environment may even cause children's brains to be wired differently than preceding generations. Will we be able to ignore the technological landscape and continue to teach and connect with students and families in the same old ways? Will curricula and teaching methods need to change soon? The answers seem obvious when we consider the 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation study that found 8 to 18 year olds now spend more than 44 hours a week using media outside of school. They read, surf the internet, play video games, watch television and listen to music, often doing several of these activities simultaneously.

Standardized tests geared to assessing acquisition of facts can no longer measure the depth of student knowledge. The learning process is changing, with students participating more, rather than soaking up knowledge. Through the internet, they are constructing knowledge, developing their own identity and communicating with one another in new ways. 93% of 12 to 17 year olds go online, with 64% creating their own original content. Amazingly, even before young children enter school, they may be creating their own music, cartoons or videos. The NCES has reported that 67% of pre-school children are using computers.

Educators must concentrate on developing students who can search for information and evaluate it, becoming better critical thinkers, not simply rote learners. Perhaps this will help narrow much of the achievement gap now existing in schools. Students lacking prior experience or knowledge can use search engines to learn about a topic in order to understand new information, and teachers can provide more opportunities for individual help through multiple technologies.

How do we encourage parent involvement in this digital age? First, we can acknowledge that cell phones and the internet have become part of the daily lives of the majority of families. At one time, a common fear was that these new devices would interfere with the feeling of closeness of the family unit. However, a recently released report, "Networked Families" by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, found that traditional nuclear families use cell phone calls, emails, and text messages to stay in touch, with 85% of parents saying their families are as close or closer than the families in which they had grown up.

Parent-child communications are common by telephone: 42% of parents with cell phones and 35% with only land lines say they contact their children at least once a day by telephone. Contacting parents by phone also remains the number one means of home-school communication. 51% of parents report they browse the internet with their children, and that number is growing. They enjoy sharing the opportunity to say "look at this" and then discussing what they both see.

An easy way to build parent-teacher contact through the internet is by creating a blog. Blogs are easier to contribute to and maintain than a website. A teacher can list schedules, explain homework assignments and provide resources for parents and students. Students can post original writing and book or movie reviews. There is something inherently special about knowing that one has an audience. Not only can parents access the blog, but they can send links to other family members and friends.

One idea is the use of media in take home projects. Addressing individual student needs to improve reading and writing fluency or spelling through technology has been successful in many schools. One program uses MP3 players with a recorded story to take home, along with the book, questions to answer, and activities to complete. The child listens to the story being read, then records his own reading aloud of the story, and maybe traces letters or sings along. The child is also required to discuss the assignment with a parent or other adult family member, who then completes a checklist or fills in a comment. The next day, the teacher speaks very briefly with each child about the assignment and how it relates to that day's lesson.

Another activity for parents and students to extend learning in the classroom is to use Google maps to trace locations of a story, the cities along a flooded river, the location of various U.S. government buildings in Washington, D.C. or other curricular-related places. A number of schools have a check-out system for students without computers in the home to borrow a computer for such projects.

Technology is an integral part of our children's lives and the center of much of their families' communication and connectedness. A new phenomenon is young people now spend more time using computers, cell phones, and other technological venues than they do watching television. According to the Pew survey, only 58% of young adults age 18 to 29 report watching television every day as compared to 80% of adults over age 50. Schools can take advantage of technology to create new learning opportunities that are relevant and meaningful in today's world. They can also seek additional ways to increase parent involvement through new technological connections.

## PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

This month we are pleased to announce that we have met some of your requests! You have asked for:

- The ability to pay by credit card for resources and registration. You will find a link to [PaySchools](#) and additional information on our website at [www.pppctr.org](http://www.pppctr.org).
- An annual conference with more breadth and depth. **Partnering for Success: School, Family and Community** will be held April 3 and 4 at Tan-Tar-A. The flyer, registration forms and call for presentations are posted on the PPP website.
- Publications for parents. The newly revised [Parents Guide to No Child Left Behind](#) is available in English in print and in English and Spanish on our website. The [Parents Guide to the MAP](#) is still under revision. PPP is working closely with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to be sure we provide accurate and user friendly publications for you.

We are always open to new suggestions. Please let us know your needs and ideas on how PPP can best meet your needs.

## PPP SITE NEWS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

On October 25, 2008, Bowerman Elementary in Springfield, MO hosted their first Fall Harvest for their school families. Recent concerns with drugs and crime in the community prompted the school staff to promote an event where families have fun, but also learn about resources available to them. Red Ribbon Week seemed like a good time to tie family fun and drug education together.

Typically, parents have been reluctant to attend school functions, but the organizers of the Harvest were hopeful for a good turnout. The day was a huge success! 300-350 PARENTS attended with their children. Families made crafts, enjoyed a meal, visited with school and community leaders, and played games together. Several families complimented the organizers on the fantastic day and were excited to be a part of the festivities. Top sack race honors went to Principal Jason Steingraber, who competed against the teachers. The families attending enjoyed themselves so much; they did not want the day to end. Mr. Steingraber finally had to get on the school intercom to thank everyone for coming and let them know that the festivities had come to an end. Congratulations, Bowerman Elementary on a successful activity partnering families, school, and community!

## WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

*Adolescent Shorts* is a bi-monthly newsletter co-published by the DHSS Adolescent Health Program and Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. It addresses a multitude of health and safety issues which affect adolescents and young adults. The *Adolescent Shorts* Newsletter, along with other adolescent health related publications, is available through the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) website at <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/AdolescentHealth/Publications.html>. The latest issue is titled "**Pro-Anorexia/Pro-Bulimia Websites: A Dangerous Influence.**" The newsletter addresses current issues and promotes best practices in adolescent health care. For more information on *Adolescent Shorts*, contact Patti Van Tuinen, at 573-751-6188, [Patti.VanTuinen@dhss.mo.gov](mailto:Patti.VanTuinen@dhss.mo.gov).

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/PRC/> The Parent Resource Center is "everything you need to keep your family safe online." It gives information regarding using technology safely and discusses three main risks associated with technology. An iKeepSafe Video Series is a great free tool for parents and children to learn about risks involved and keep up with the most current technology information available.

[http://www.thenewpress.com/resource\\_files/BeyondtheBakeS\\_080918165823\\_8232.doc](http://www.thenewpress.com/resource_files/BeyondtheBakeS_080918165823_8232.doc) is a book study guide for *Beyond the Bake Sale: the Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* by Ann T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies. If you own this book, the study guide (developed by Melissa Whipple) is definitely worth checking out and downloading as a companion to the book.

## GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

### **Goldman Sachs Foundation and Asia Society recognize middle and elementary schools for international education**

**Eligibility:** Public or private elementary or middle schools with focus on raising American awareness of the world and bridging the international knowledge gap.

**Deadline:** Dec. 1, 2008. **Funds:** \$25,000.

**Contact:** Asia Society, 725 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021; [gsfprizes@asiasoc.org](mailto:gsfprizes@asiasoc.org). The Goldman Sachs Foundation, along with the Asia Society, supports international awareness through education. One of the foundation's awards to honor Excellence in International Education goes to excellent elementary and middle schools that work to bridge the international knowledge gap. Schools that are eligible to win the foundation's \$25,000 grant will be those that: offer rigorous curricula integrating international content; emphasize learning world languages; commit to engaging students in learning about the world through various subject areas; form partnerships supporting the international part of the curriculum; use technology to promote international

education; show strong professionalism in the schools' leadership; and provide measures of students' success. Apply online. The deadline for applications is Dec. 1, 2008. For more information, go to [www.meaf.org/grants-inclusion.php#incchamp](http://www.meaf.org/grants-inclusion.php#incchamp)

### **NEA Foundation Offers Funding for Public School Library Books**

The NEA Foundation, in collaboration with the National Education Association, is accepting applications for Books Across America Library Books Awards. The program will make awards of \$1,000 each to public schools working to provide economically disadvantaged students with new books in their school libraries.

To be eligible, an applicant must be a practicing preK-12 school librarian, teacher, or [education support professional](#) in a U.S. public school. At least 70 percent of the students in the applicant's school must be eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Approved awards will be payable to the applicants' schools. Only one eligible applicant per school may submit an application.

The NEA Foundation will make approximately 50 awards of \$1,000 each. Funds may be used only to purchase books and other reading materials for public school libraries. Visit the NEA Foundation Web site for complete program information. Deadline for entries is November 20, 2008  
<http://www.neafoundation.org/programs/BAAawards2008.htm>

**RGK Foundation**--The RGK Foundation awards grants in the broad areas of education, community, and medicine/health. There is no deadline for submitting an electronic letter of inquiry. Foundation staff reviews electronic letters of inquiry on an ongoing basis and typically responds within two days, but asks that applicants allow up to two weeks for a response. The foundation will send an e-mail message either declining each applicant's request or inviting the applicant to submit a formal application packet for further consideration. Grants are made only to nonprofit organizations certified as tax-exempt under Sections 501(c)(3) or 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code and classified as "not a private foundation" under Section 509(a).

**Funding Amount:** While the foundation does award some grants of more than \$25,000, it is anticipated that most grants awarded will be under \$25,000. For more information, go to:  
<http://www.rgkfoundation.org/public/guidelines>

## **RECENT RESOURCES**

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

The two books that follow were recommended by one of our trainers, Kathy Dothage, a Human Development Specialist with the University of Missouri Extension. Both books are about single parenting. The helpful thing about both books is that they include a special section for single parents with positive ideas to help children understand the situation they are in. One note of caution, however; both books are written with an absent father in mind. Many single parent families with the father as primary caregiver may not find the books as helpful as some resources on the market.

*Do I Have a Daddy? A Story About a Single-Parent Child* by Jeanne Warren Lindsay, 1991.

*Goodnight Daddy* by Angela Seward, 2001.

## Home Visits with Alternative School Students

by Janet Shepard, Director

Recently I learned that many alternative schools around Missouri are doing home visiting. One of the more comprehensive plans is at the alternative school in Center School District in Kansas City where all new students referred to the program receive a home visit. The visit is a requirement for acceptance in to the program.

Information about the school is shared with the family. Visitors emphasize their commitment to the student's success. The visitors ask how the student and his or her family view success and how the staff can assist with the achievement of the named success.

The staff also shares with the family at this time their expectations of parents. Expectations may include signing a parent contract, attending parent-teacher conferences, and more.

These same ideas could be adapted for alternative programs at all grade levels, in-school and out-of-school tutoring programs and more. As with any other visit, special program visits may take place anywhere that is comfortable for the family. PPP does offers a six-hour training on school-based home visiting. Sessions are scheduled this school year in Kirksville, St Louis, Webb City, Springfield, Maryville, Cape Girardeau and Jefferson City. Check the web-site or give us a call for more details.

## Kindergarten Transition Data

by Janet Shepard, Director

The National Center for Education Statistics recently released a study on kindergarten readiness. The randomly selected national sample was comprised of parents of children ages three to six who were not yet enrolled in kindergarten. Parents were asked what they felt they needed to teach their child before the child started kindergarten. Teaching about sharing was the most important thing to teach according to 62% of the parents responding. Teaching the alphabet was named by 56%, and 54% mentioned the importance of teaching numbers. Fifty-five percent of all responding parents report they read to their child every day. Only 40% of children living in poverty were read to daily. Data on maternal employment, television viewing, the child's speech and several other factors were also collected and analyzed.

Kindergarten transition planning teams should find this study useful in planning for and with parents. It might even prompt ideas for questions you wish to ask parents of children who will be entering kindergarten in your school. You will find the complete study at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008051.pdf>.

## Family Schedules

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

It seems as though everyone I talk to replies with one word when asked how things are going, "Busy!" Schedules are a true challenge for many families. Chances are the children in the family have more on their plates than just school. As children develop, so do their school, social, and extracurricular responsibilities. After school activities taking place in the home are often replaced by out of the home obligations such as dance lessons, cheerleading, karate, or soccer practice as children get older. Does this mean that parents' schedules lighten up to accommodate the busy schedules of their children? Typically, the answer is no. Exposing your children to a variety of activities has its benefits, but as the choices increase, so does the temptation to give them a taste of everything under the sun. It seems there's something for every type of child – from ceramics, cooking and computer classes to sports, music, art and foreign language, and what seems like everything in between. Being too busy and over-scheduled isn't good for most kids, and managing those busy schedules often increases the stress of parents.

Juggling schedules can be quite a task. The fact that there are only so many hours in a day means families with full schedules could have a problem balancing everything. Being unable to properly handle a busy schedule can lead children to experience constant fatigue, stress, or failure in the classroom. Here are a few tips that can help balance a busy schedule.

### 1. **Stay Organized**

Lack of organization can cause many problems, short comings, and failures in all arenas of life.

Teaching children the importance of organization will help them balance their current schedules and will provide a foundation for organization in their lives to come. Modeling this concept, although not an easy thing to do, is a great way to reinforce the importance of organization skills. Parents and teachers can help children organize their schedules with:

- calendars
- school planners
- post its
- message boards

This can be fun for children. They might use stickers and crayons to fill in time spent for lessons, practice, and schoolwork, or to mark completed items.

### 2. **Focus on Good Health**

Help your child make healthy food and beverage decisions. Soda, chips, cookies, and sugary fruit juices may taste great, but they don't fuel the body in a useful manner. Instead of prolonged energy, these things supply a brief spurt of unfocused energy followed by a crash. This can make children more likely to experience problems focusing in school as well as decreasing the amount of energy for after school activities and homework. Eating healthy will increase the amount of focused energy children have, making it easier to compete a day's schedule. If your child's schedule does not include physical activity, it is important to work that into the day as well; physical activity helps increase brain function!

### 3. **Put Academics First**

On days when there is so much going on in your child's life, he or she might be forced to choose between schoolwork and other activities. Whenever this is the case, it's important that they choose in favor of academics. This oftentimes takes prodding from the parent. While there may be an initial gain from choosing dance over studying, in the long run it will not set a good precedent and can affect future decisions. Success in school typically leads to success in life more so than success in extra curricular activities. Help children understand the value of an education.

### 4. **Reserve some free time**

Don't forget that your children are children. They still need time to hang out, play with their friends, goof off and even get bored once in a while. Before you sign them up for a new activity, look at their schedules. If they're running from one thing to another, eating dinner on the fly, and there are no empty spots on their schedule, start to pull back and let them have some time that isn't committed to an organized activity.

No matter how busy or open your family's schedule is, schedules and routines are important for children because they need to know what's coming next. If the schedule is consistent, children learn the pattern. When children have too many unknowns, anxiety builds up, and they start showing emotional reactions to the inconsistency.

- Consistency gives kids security.
- Schedules help build trust between kids, parents, and educators.
- Inconsistency creates emotional anxiety.
- Flexibility within the day is important.

As you continually make adjustments to the schedule, always keep what is best for your family in mind. Before you sign your child up with a gymnastics club, dance studio, or club sports team, carefully research what is expected of the whole family, both financially and in time commitment. Be sure your family can handle the commitment in addition to the other things it's already involved in.

## PaySchools

*Online Payment Processing System*

### Make payments online!

PPP is pleased to bring you the online convenience of our new payment processing system, PaySchools. This program allows you to make school-related payments online via e-check or credit card at your convenience all from our Web site.



### How it works

Access our online payment processing system from our Web site at [www.pppctr.org](http://www.pppctr.org) look for the PaySchools logo or links. You can pay for our Annual Conference, Professional Development workshops, Trainings, and Resources.

The first time you access PaySchools, you will be asked to create a username and password. After you login, simply select the item(s) you wish to purchase then choose to pay by e-check or credit card. To pay by e-check (directly debiting your bank account), you will enter your bank's ABA routing number and personal bank account number. To make your purchase by credit card, enter the account number and expiration date for your VISA, MasterCard or Discover credit card. After you complete your purchase, an e-mail confirmation and receipt will immediately be sent to you. PaySchools uses "Secure Sockets Layer" (SSL) software, requires passwords throughout the program, and **does not store personal bank or credit card information to ensure privacy and security for users.**

We are currently accepting online payments for the following items:

- Regional Meetings
- Trainings
- Partnering for Success Conference
- Resources

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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:

PPP Center Staff:

Director	Janet Shepard	573/761-7767	jshepard@pppctr.org
Program Development Coordinator	Shelly Lock	573/761-7766	slock@pppctr.org
Resource Coordinator	Vickie Dickneite	573/761-776	vdickneite@pppctr.org
Office Manager	Patty Stegemann	573/761-7770	pppctr@pppctr.org

Phone	573/761-7770
Fax	573/761-7760



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS  
*Working Together for Our Children*

November 2008

## PHARM PARTIES

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Although the use of illegal drugs among teens is down, the Not My Child organization gives the disturbing estimate of 1 in 5 teens having used prescription drugs to get high. Youth mistakenly believe that prescription drugs are safer. However, when pharmaceuticals are combined and/or used in large quantities, they can be extremely harmful, perhaps even lethal. Across the country, teens are participating in “pharm parties” that involve bringing a mix of drugs they have gathered from their own home’s medicine cabinet or have taken from other relatives or friends. A few pills here and there may never be missed. At the party, youth may experiment with various combinations of drugs. Sometimes everyone throws their gathered pills in a big bowl and then takes a handful. Other times, they may simply trade pills with one another. The result can simply be getting high or a little sick, but it can also be reactions severe enough to be taken to the hospital or worse.

Surveys have shown that parents are reluctant to admit this dangerous activity exists; only 6% of parents were found to worry about their children misusing prescription drugs, although they do tend to worry about access and abuse of illegal drugs. Why would young people be tempted to try something that they have been warned about as full of potential danger? First, teens often believe they are invincible; bad things only happen to the other guy. Risky behavior is common. Their brains have not yet fully developed. They may look like adults in many ways; but their brains continue to develop until they are well into their twenties. The last area of the brain to develop is the one for logical thinking and decision making. Second, peer pressure is at its highest during the teen years, as they seek to establish independence and individual identity. They have to test out various behaviors within their peer group, always being aware of how they fit in. Third, movies and songs to which they are constantly exposed often show people inappropriately using drugs to get high without any harsh consequences.

What can parents do to protect their children? In prevention of any dangerous possibilities, parents need to regularly communicate with their children. Talking with your child and truly listening to what he is saying, monitoring his activities, and letting him know you are always there for him are the best ways to sustain a solid relationship with your child. Studies continue to show that youth who have a consistent, loving relationship with their parent(s) are more likely to avoid the pitfalls of drug misuse and other dangerous behavior. They are stronger in their ability to say no to their friends.

Parents can also teach their children specific strategies. For example, tell her to just blame you for not participating in a particular activity. Perhaps she can tell her friends she has to be home in an hour. Brainstorm possible strategies together, including using a cell phone with a number where you can be reached. Some families develop a clue word for kids to let parents know they are in an uncomfortable situation and need help. Talk constantly; be aware of your children’s friends; monitor any changes in your teen’s behavior. Your teen will probably act like you worry too much or are being ridiculous; but she may secretly appreciate your efforts. Keep those lines of communication open!

