



Working Together For Our Children

October is Month of the Young Adolescent, an annual international collaborative effort of education, health, and youth-oriented organizations. The first three articles in this newsletter address some of the following key messages for the celebration:

- The importance of parents being knowledgeable about young adolescents and being actively involved in their lives
- The understanding that healthy bodies plus healthy minds equal healthy young adolescents
- The realization that the education young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large measure, determine the future for all citizens
- The knowledge that every young adolescent should have the opportunity to pursue his or her dreams and aspirations, and post-secondary education should be a possibility for all.

YOUTH HAPPINESS SURVEY

By Darlene Robinett, Director

Results were recently released from a seven-month study of how various things affect the happiness of America's youth. Through a partnership of MTV and the AP, the qualitative portion of the study was conducted by MTV and Social Technologies and included small discussion groups in diverse American cities, while the quantitative portion was led by Knowledge Networks and interviewed 1,280 youth age 13-24.

The study showed that, generally, young people today are very happy, are optimistic about their future, and have already set some goals to assure their future happiness. While 65% are happy now, 62% think they will be even happier in the future. However, one in five says he is unhappy now, a population needing immediate attention. Race seems to make a big difference, with 72% of whites saying they are happy, but only 56% of blacks and 51% of Hispanics expressing the same level of happiness.

Not surprisingly, teens indicated that their parents were a very positive influence in their lives, with nearly half mentioning a parent as a hero. When responding to the question of what one thing in life makes them most happy, the number one answer was spending time with friends, family and loved ones (46%). An interesting difference: 30% of blacks and Hispanics identified family as making them most happy compared to only 15% of whites. Religion and spirituality was named by 44% as either very important or the most important thing in their lives. These same teens seemed to also be much happier than those who say religion or spirituality is not an important part of life. (See full poll results at http://www.mtv.com/thinkmtv/about/pdfs/APMTV_happinesspoll.pdf)

The survey results have enormous implications for how to improve student achievement. Happiness frees minds to learn new things. The majority of your students are likely to be already thinking positively about their future, relying on their parents to guide them in their educational choices, and allowing their religious beliefs to guide their behavior. If this is true, the connections teachers make with parents and the community are important for developing student motivation to learn and do well in school. By knowing that family plays an even larger role in happiness for blacks and Hispanics, a diverse student population may provide teachers even greater opportunities to improve student achievement by working with families. PPP can be one of your most reliable tools in increasing student motivation to achieve academically.

Dropouts

by Darlene Robinett, Director

Our economy and our future rely on the youth of today. More than 540,000 students are dropping out of high school each year according to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2003), placing the U.S. 17th among developed nations in percentage of youth graduating. Perhaps even more alarming is that U.S. dropouts' literacy skills are lower than those of most industrialized nations. Adding to the concern is the fact that the death rate of individuals with less than 12 years of education is 2.5 times higher than those with 13 or more years, and they earn 50% less than high school graduates. In recent years, male dropouts' earnings fell compared to earlier; and, at any given time, about 50% of young black men (16-24) who are not enrolled in school are unemployed.

We have to address the dropout issue aggressively beginning years earlier, with particular attention in middle school. Efforts to keep young people in school and to reconnect dropouts with opportunities to develop skills for the workplace are both necessary. The years between 16 and 24 are very important developmentally, as young people solidify their self-perceptions and build their networks for taking on adult responsibilities. This is the time to develop skills for participating in the labor market and in civic life. It is detrimental to our nation to simply allow millions of young people to spend these critical years on the fringes of the

labor market and disconnected from the supports of educational opportunities. Danger exists that they will learn their survival skills from the streets rather than from the classroom, workplace, or caring adults.

Energizing parents and the whole community to work together to keep youth in school will certainly help educators reach their goal of leaving no child behind. Practical Parenting Partnerships can help you build these relationships and promote productive communication. Modules from the Implementation Training notebooks can guide shared workshops and provide resources to distribute to families and others. It can also lead to cooperative ventures for schools and businesses. Opportunities to learn must be made available for these youth both at school and through employers – paid work experience, internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and community service. (see more information on dropouts at <http://givekidsgoodschools.org/images/body/pdf>)

Healthy Bodies – Ready to Learn

by Darlene Robinett, Director

A new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* indicates that overweight children may show a collection of risk factors for heart disease by the time they are teens. The risks are for high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol levels, and high levels of sugar and insulin in the blood. Researchers found that overweight and obese children at age 8 were seven times more likely to have a “cluster” of heart disease risk factors by the time they are 15. These risk factors are likely to persist and worsen over time. The study’s findings suggest that obesity must be prevented early on. The combined efforts of schools, parents, health officials and the whole community are needed. Practical Parenting Partnerships can assist you through its training, professional development opportunities and accompanying materials that address healthy development, good nutrition, effective communication, and ways to cooperate.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Darlene Robinett, Director

PPP Fall Regional Meetings are ready to begin with 11 sites across Missouri! This year will bring new family night ideas to you, particularly focusing on helping parents understand grade level expectations and MAP testing. It will also be an opportunity to learn and share more about meeting your district’s parent involvement policy. Visit www.pppctr.org/regionalmeetings.asp for more information and a downloadable registration form. Please participate in this great professional development opportunity!

Training opportunities are in many areas of the state before the end of the year. Check our website www.pppctr.org for more information. Make sure your school has a team of people trained in PPP and you will probably be eligible for a certified PPP school status, where we present a banner and box of books and other resources for your parent library!

It is not too early to plan for attending the **PPP Family Festival**, February 29-March 1, at TanTarA Resort. You can

find the registration form at <http://www.pppctr.org/familyfest.asp>. Be sure to bring a team from your school to get the most out of this unique event. By school personnel and a family sharing in the experience, you should be able to return to your school with solid plans for reviewing your board-required parent involvement policy.

Also, be sure to apply for a **Pearl Award** or nominate someone for a **VIP** award. Applications are on our website, <http://www.pppctr.org/familyfest.asp>. Due date: December 14, 2007

WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

A new website, www.prekinder.org, has been launched to help Latino families learn more about early education options, eligibility and availability in their community in order to make informed and confident decisions about pre-k for their child. The site contains extensive information about early education. Topics covered on the Internet site include sections with basic facts about pre-k, different types and quality of pre-k, the benefits it brings to children, and how to find programs and critical information about the legal rights of parents regarding early education programs. Check out the content and the new TV and radio ads (by clicking “anuncios de tv y radio”). You are encouraged by Pre-K Now to share this new resource with your networks, listservs, media and others to help get the word out.

Scholastic has published a new report on kids and family reading. This 2006 report studied kids’ relationship with reading, the parental role in kids’ reading, the influence of Harry Potter, and the role of technology in youth reading. For a downloadable version of this interesting report, visit: www.scholastic.com/readingreport.

There are several websites out there to help protect our children and promote healthy families. Here are two such groups. Parents Anonymous is a community of parents, organizations, and volunteers committed to strengthening families and building strong communities, achieving meaningful parent leadership and shared leadership, and leading the field of child abuse and neglect prevention. Log on to www.parentsanonymous.org to learn more.

Search Institute is a personal favorite. They conduct research to identify what children and adolescents need to become caring, healthy, and responsible adults, and they provide resources to apply this knowledge and to motivate and equip others in ensuring young people are valued and thrive. Log on to www.search-institute.org for more information.

GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

Toyota Motor Sales, Inc. awards grants for environmental-science education, physical-science applications and literacy. The environmental account teaches students to use natural resources efficiently and work to protect the environment. The physical

science grant sponsors projects relating the laws, principles and concepts of science to phenomena and relevant events in students' lives. The literacy award helps develop literacy skills in the context of science teaching and learning. Middle and high school science teachers, as well as elementary teachers who teach science in the classroom, are eligible. This year, 50 grants of up to \$10,000 each and a minimum of 20 "mini-grants" of \$2,500 each are available to K-12 teachers. For more information: www.nsta.org/programs/tapestry/program.htm Deadline: Proposals must be received by Jan. 28.

The **Coca-Cola Foundation** supports projects which provide youth with the educational opportunities to become productive citizens. The foundation encourages new solutions to problems that impede educational systems and supports existing programs that work. The foundation provides grants to public and private colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools, teacher-training programs, educational programs for minority students and global educational programs. Deadline: Rolling. For more information, call 404-676-2121, or go to www.thecocacolacompany.com/citizenship/foundation_guidelines.html

RECENT RESOURCES

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

Just Say Know by Cynthia Kuhn, Ph.D., Scott Swartzwelder, Ph.D., and Wilkie Wilson, Ph.D. gives parents, educators, and health professionals lots of information that can arm them with the tools to teach their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. For each drug listed, the authors suggest conversations that adults might have with their children about making healthy decisions.

How to Teach so Students Remember by Marilee Sprenger offers seven steps to increase students' capacity to receive information in immediate memory, act on it in working memory, store it in long-term memory, and retrieve and manipulate it in unanticipated situations--that is, to use what they've learned when they need it. I wonder if it works on adults?!

In **The Case Against Homework**, Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish draw on academic research, interviews with educators, parents, and kids, and their own experience to offer detailed advice to frustrated parents. **The Case Against Homework** shows how too much work is having a negative effect on our children's achievement and development and gives us the tools and tactics we need to advocate for change.

In **Ten Talks Parents Must Have With Their Children About Drugs & Choices**, authors Dominic Cappello and Xenia G. Becher, MSW, CSW, offer practical advice on how to begin and what to say--not just about drugs, but about peer pressure, stress, health, the law, and mixed messages in the media. The book contains easy to use, family-tested strategies for kids of all ages.

Making the System Work for your Child with ADHD by Peter S. Jensen, MD, maintains that there is help out there for kids with ADHD, but getting it isn't always easy. Jensen uses his own experience with his son who has ADHD, as well as the experiences

of over 80 other parents to help parents meet the needs of their children with ADHD.

IMPLEMENTATION TRAINING

by Janet Shepard, Training Coordinator

Reaching families of middle and high school students can be more challenging than working with families of elementary students. This month I am writing my column from Arkansas where I have been attending the Arkansas Parenting Education Network (APEN) annual conference. It's been great visiting with our PPP coordinators in Arkansas and sharing ideas with parent coordinators from all over the state!

In the PPP breakout sessions, we talked about family assignments as both a way to support learning in the home and to provide an opportunity for parent involvement at school. This could be great with middle schoolers. Here are some possibilities:

- **Science Projects** – Design and create a science fair project at home then bring it to the Family Science Fair
- **State history** – Ask families to prepare a display of a historical site in the state they have visited (this could be a virtual visit with the computer lab open a couple of nights for families to do their research)
- **Read a book** – Provide a copy to families of the novel that is being read in class and ask families to create a diorama depicting something from the book.
- **Math** – Ask families to make a poster showing how each family member uses math in their daily work.

The possibilities are endless! Staff will want to coordinate so families are only working on one family assignment at a time. I am guessing that two such assignments per school year would be the maximum. If your teaching team does an interdisciplinary unit, this might be the optimum time to try a family assignment.

For a handout on *Tips and Strategies for Working with Parents of Middle School Students* check out our on-line version of this newsletter at <http://www.pppctr.org/newsletter.asp>.

PPP SITE NEWS

by Darlene Robinett, Director

La Monte - The La Monte PPP team planned a successful Back-to-School Bash with over 200 people in attendance. One large draw was the new Spanish teacher, Casarina Warda (a PPP team member), who helped Hispanic parents with school paperwork. A meal was provided and teachers were available to meet families in a relaxed atmosphere with fun and games for the students.

St. Louis City - Lexington Elementary enjoys the contributions of time and support from many parents and community members. For example, the Mark Twain Neighborhood Association, along with an alderman and former alderwoman, donate 2 bicycles per month to help with their attendance initiative! They also stock the incentive store to help with the positive behavior initiative, and they donate books to help with reading programs and the weekly African-American Trivia contest.

**PRACTICAL PARENTING
PARTNERSHIPS**

2412-C Hyde Park Road
Jefferson City MO 65109

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

Email: pppctr@pppctr.org

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Please email me with special announcements from the PPP Center.

Please subscribe me to the PPP Listserv when it is up and running.

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For information on the PPP program, please contact:

PPP Center Staff:

Director

Darlene Robinett
573/761-7761
drobinet@pppctr.org

Program Development Coordinator

Shelly Lock
573/761-7766
slock@pppctr.org

Training Coordinator

Janet Shepard, CFLE
573/761-7767
jshepard@pppctr.org

Resource Coordinator

Vickie Dickneite
573/761-7765
vdickneite@pppctr.org

Program Specialist/Office Manager

Patty Stegemann
573/761-7770
pppctr@pppctr.org

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



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Should My Child Be “Cramming” for a Test?

by Darlene Robinett, Director

Has your child ever seemed to go for days with little homework and then suddenly become tense and study for hours the night before a big test? He or she may have been able to pass the test; but there is a good chance either the resulting grade was not as high as hoped or the material was soon forgotten, making end of semester exams a nightmare.

Have you ever helped your child spend extra time repeatedly going over material already learned? Perhaps you went over a list of the state capitals again and again, past the time when your child could name all the capital cities without a mistake. Was that a good use of time?

Study strategies have been assessed by psychologists to see how well different strategies affect long-term learning. They have found that studying over time, reviewing facts or concepts with breaks in between, is more effective for long-term learning - the kind that you can pull upon years down the road. For example, a CU-San Diego study had two groups of students study new vocabulary. One group went through the list of words five times, with students not getting more than one time perfect. The other group kept drilling for ten times, with students getting it perfectly for at least three times. Then all students were tested one week later and then four weeks later. Surprisingly, the test results for the overachievers at one week later was greater than those who quit studying earlier; but the results after four weeks revealed this advantage completely vanished. The overlearning was not worth the effort.

It seems that “massing” all the study on one topic at once will reduce the ability to retain learning over time. It’s really better to leave a topic alone for a while and then come back to it. The students in the example given would be better returning to some of the same vocabulary words throughout the year than reviewing them over and over in a couple of days. Another study looked at the length of breaks between study sessions and found that those with a longer break between studying the same material actually retained the information better on tests given several months later.

Other studies by psychologists found similar effects with more abstract learning, like math, as well as for rote learning involved in the vocabulary words. Math books tend to encourage students to both use “overlearning” and “massing”, completing homework of 20 problems on the same concept they learned earlier that day when they should possibly be working 20 problems taken from various lessons learned in the past. Your child may be wasting a lot of precious time without reaching the desired results.

You can help your child by reviewing concepts or facts covered in previous lessons. This is where word games or math games prove to be learning tools for children. Any real life situations you and your child share, like cooking or planning meals, may use information learned earlier but perhaps not retained. The studies indicate that many of the activities you participate in with your children really do have big payoffs in academic learning! Parents truly are teachers of their children in many ways.