



Developments

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Environmental Scan in Allegheny County

More Early Behavioral Problems Seen; Families And Providers Look For Help

Reports of very young children with serious behavior problems are increasing dramatically while concerned parents, child care staff, and early education teachers find few services that can help, according to a University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development study that examines the issue in Allegheny County.

The kinds of behaviors reported are wide-ranging, from separation difficulties and defiance to indifference to others and outright aggression toward peers. They threaten learning during early childhood and increase the risk of children failing in school. They ripple through families, disrupting home life and ratcheting up stress levels among parents.

“This study is a flashing neon light that says, ‘Pay attention to this,’” said Robert Nelkin, Director of Policy Initiatives at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD).

The study, an environmental scan covering Allegheny County, was commissioned by The Jewish Healthcare Foundation. The foundation had been asked a

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The ‘Text Talk’ Approach

Young Readers Find Meaning in The Right Questions About Stories Read Aloud

The story of a dog named Socrates is read to a kindergarten class. The book’s cover shows Socrates to be a white dog with black spots who wears large red glasses. The first page, read by the teacher, is a tear-jerker: Socrates is an orphan – his mother and father were taken to the pound – and he has no friends.

The teacher pauses to ask, “What do we know about Socrates so far?” The first response to her question is, “He needs glasses.”

“There was no attention paid to the text,” said Isabel L. Beck, Ph.D., Professor of Education at the University of

Pittsburgh. “You want them to pay attention to the ideas that are coming through language, but decontextualized language is hard for little kids.”

As difficult as it is, getting young children to grasp meaning from the text alone is essential to developing strong readers. To help kindergarten and first grade teachers meet that challenge, Dr. Beck and her colleague at the Learning Research and Development Center, Margaret G. McKeown, Ph.D., developed an approach to enhancing children’s comprehension and language that hones the time-tested practice of reading aloud and borrows from concepts

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number of times to support training initiatives to help early care and education teachers and staff address children with behavioral problems and wanted a better understanding of the scope of the problem and the range of support available in Allegheny County.

Focus groups and interviews with parents, early care and education staff, and consultants who work with families and early childhood programs enabled OCD to examine the issue from various perspectives. National literature of relevant topics was reviewed. And a Community Advisory Group of practitioners, funders, early care and education leaders, and government officials developed findings and conclusions.

The result is a first-ever account of a growing population of young children with behavioral problems in Allegheny County and the fragmented array of services that fall short of providing all of the help that parents, teachers, and the children themselves need. In addition to the study, OCD has begun projects to improve access to services for programs and families.

Troubling Trends

Parents, child care, preschool and other early childhood programs nationwide are reporting an increase in children with behavioral problems. "Young children with more serious emotional problems are being seen across the board – the public mental health system, schools, pediatricians, child care," said Ray Firth, Director of Behavioral Health Policy, Partnerships for Family Support, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

In Allegheny County, most early care and education providers who participated in the study's focus groups reported an increase in children with behavior problems. They estimated that the prevalence of such problems has increased to a level of 10% to 20%.

Consultants to early childhood programs in Allegheny County said they are fielding more and more requests from parents and program staff for help in dealing with challeng-

ing behaviors among very young children. They said aggression toward other children was the most common problem referred to them. Other frequent referrals were for problems such as aggression toward adults, tantrums, and separation issues.

Concerns about serious behavior problems among young children are also reported statewide, according to a survey conducted by OCD for the Governor's Task Force on Early Care and Education. More than half of the early care and education programs surveyed said they had sought help with aggressive behavior problems during the past two years.

The precise reasons for the reported increase in behavioral problems remain elusive. What is clear is it comes at a time when the characteristics of growing up in America are profoundly changing. Child care outside the home, for example, has become the norm. And more young children are spending more hours in the care of others during developmentally-critical years when, scientists say, relationships and environment are highly influential.

Serious Consequences

Serious behavioral problems at an early age put children at risk for experiencing any number of poor outcomes, particularly failure in school. Behavioral problems, for example, can result in children being excluded from quality child care or preschool – a serious setback to any effort to prepare them for school and position them for success.

In Pennsylvania, evidence suggests many children face such scenarios. Nearly 71% of child care centers and preschools reported they excluded or threatened to exclude a child for aggressive behavior over the past two years, the OCD provider survey for the Governor's Task Force revealed. "We found that startling," Nelkin said. "It is such a high rate of exclusion and it is seen across the board."

"That exclusion affects the kid's development and adds tremendous tension in families and not infrequently leads to trouble with their parent's jobs," Firth said. "We interviewed

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they've seen succeed with older children.

The approach, Text Talk, is being used in kindergartens throughout the Pittsburgh Public School system. The heart of the process is the skillful use of thought-provoking questions to engage children in the text that is read aloud to them.

Reading Aloud

Young children are able to handle challenging content. But their word recognition is still developing and that presents problems. Expecting them to make complex inferences from text when they are encountering new words in print is often expecting too much.

Reading aloud, on the other hand, takes advantage of the fact that children's aural comprehension develops well ahead of their word recognition skills, offering teachers a convenient way to introduce challenging content to children who might otherwise stumble on their own.

To realize the full benefits of reading aloud, children must do more than simply listen. Studies suggest that a key to literacy growth is getting young children to talk about stories in substantive ways – discussing story ideas, talking about ideas when they come up in the story rather than at the end, and giving children opportunities to reflect on what they are listening to.

Text Talk is based on such concepts and shaped by the previous work of Dr. Beck and Dr. McKeown, work that includes Questioning the Author, an approach for engaging older students with written text, and their observations of teachers reading aloud to their students. Both have done extensive work in the field. This year, the International Reading Association awarded Dr. Beck the William S. Gray Citation of Merit for outstanding contributions to the field of reading.

Text Talk

In classroom observations, Dr. Beck and Dr. McKeown found that kindergarten and first-grade teachers often did not encourage children to focus on major story ideas and discuss them.

It was also clear that getting children to focus on story ideas is not a simple task. Text is often ignored by young children, who are more likely to base their answers to questions about the story on the pictures in the book or turn to their own experiences to frame a response.

Although looking at the pictures in a book and children relating their personal experiences are important, relying on those sources alone for a response to questions about the story being read limits the opportunities children have to

construct meaning from text, Dr. Beck and Dr. McKeown report.

"You want them to pay attention to the ideas that are coming through language, but decontextualized language is hard for little kid."

The questions asked by teachers and their interactions with their kindergarten and first grade students are crucial to the Text Talk approach. Dr. Beck and Dr. McKeown have kept tight control over the implementation of the program, training the Pittsburgh Public Schools teachers and coaches themselves in how best to engage students with open questions.

Key aspects of Text Talk include:

- Texts are selected that have some complexity of events and subtleties in expressing ideas that allow children to build meaning from what they are listening to.
- Initial questions are open so that children must describe and explain ideas within the text, not simply recall words or repeat something they heard in the story.
- Follow-up questions are asked to raise the level of children's thinking by using their initial responses to form questions that encourage them to elaborate on their ideas.
- Pictures are usually shown to the children after they have heard and responded to the section of text rather than during the reading.
- To expand vocabulary, certain sophisticated words are selected for elaboration and discussion after the story is read.

No long-term outcomes have been measured among children exposed to Text Talk, a project still very young itself. Results so far, however, have been encouraging, Dr.

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Having Grown Beyond Expectations, OCD Moves Into New Home

Five months ago, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development left the school's main campus in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood, where it had kept its headquarters from the day it opened its doors in 1986. Success, more than anything, was the reason for the move.

Its new home – the basement floor of an Urban Redevelopment Authority building at 400 North Lexington Avenue in the city's Point Breeze neighborhood – better accommodates today's Office of Child Development (OCD), which has grown beyond expectations. Begun with only a handful of employees and a \$150,000 annual budget, OCD today employs 50 people and operates with a budget of more than \$7 million a year.

The initial role of OCD was primarily to facilitate interdisciplinary research and education on children's issues. Some 16 years later, its scope has broadened to include helping organize community initiatives and, in some cases, manage them, and to provide needs assessment, program evaluation, and policy studies to funding organizations, agencies, and policymakers.

With such growth, staff and programs spilled out of OCD's first suite of offices in the university's Cathedral of Learning. Additional space was found in Oakland on the

second floor of 121 University Place, home to the University Center for Social and Urban Research, and at the Penn Plaza Apartments in East Liberty. In all, those three locations provided OCD with about 9,000 square feet of space, said Roger Fustich, OCD Director of Administrative Operations.

But it wasn't enough. And that degree of decentralization presented problems, said Christina Groark, Ph.D., Co-Director, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. "It is very difficult to work across the vision when you are not physically together and it is difficult to oversee programs at different locations."

OCD's new 13, 646-square-foot home has 50 offices, one central reception area, a large training room with capacity of 75-100 people, a board room, conference room, and small meeting room. It is more cost efficient – meeting rooms and support staff can be shared, for example – and more accessible to the community.

Perhaps most important, it gathers all of OCD's talent under one roof. Experts in policy, evaluation, data analysis, and research methodology, people who work in the community, and people who do training are now more accessible to one another. "We really think it will improve program quality in the long run," Dr. Groark said, "and help us continue to be on the cutting edge of new issues." ■

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Beck said. There is evidence that language growth is more marked among children exposed to Text Talk. And the teacher-student interactions in classrooms using Text Talk tend to include more conversation.

Such benefits come with practice, which can be frustrating at first. For teachers, framing a question to elicit substantive responses from kindergarten and first grade students is more difficult than might be imagined. It takes some skill to craft the initial, content-driven question and follow it up with another that leads young children to elaborate. For children, being asked to abandon the comfortable territory of pictures and personal experience and focus solely on text to derive meaning from what is read takes some getting used to. "Some teachers, at first, say the children can't do

it," Dr. Beck said. "But, in time, they can do it."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, the following publications are suggested:

Beck, I.L., & McKeown, M.G. (2001). Text Talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(1), pp. 10-20. International Reading Association.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words To Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., Hamilton, R.L., & Kucan, L. (1997). *Questioning the Author: An Approach for Enhancing Student Engagement with Text*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ■



THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S TEACHERS

Special Report

University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development
Serving Children and Families By Promoting

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While the overall supply of qualified teachers in Pennsylvania is adequate, there are areas of shortage and disturbing trends that suggest deeper problems may be on the horizon, according to a report published by The Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) based on a 16-month review of the quality and availability of teachers across the state.

Quality teaching is perhaps the most necessary ingredient of academic achievement. For most states, the question is whether there are enough good teachers for all classrooms. Recent national education policy places a premium on quality, requiring that all teachers be “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

EPLC examined teacher quality issues, current state policy, the increasing role of the federal government in generating state policy, and the availability of qualified teachers in Pennsylvania. The review included surveying school superintendents and the education deans or chairs of the state’s teacher preparation institutions, and concluded with a series of policy recommendations.

The good news is that Pennsylvania is not burdened by the kind of severe teacher shortages that some fast-growing states, such as California, are experiencing. School superintendents in Pennsylvania, however, report a shortage of teachers in certain subjects, particularly the sciences and higher mathematics. Some urban school districts struggle to find qualified teachers for open positions. And minority teachers are underrepresented in public school classrooms.

Quality Teaching Matters

Research provides strong evidence that quality teaching is a critical factor in improving student academic achievement. For example:

- Recent studies in Tennessee and Texas suggest the effect of teacher quality on student performance outweighs other school variables¹ and can even be more influential than student and family background characteristics.²
- Having high quality teachers, especially in consecutive years, can close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students.³

- Improved teacher quality is considered the chief reason Connecticut and North Carolina have seen strong and sustained gains in reading achievement over the past several years.⁴

Studies suggest quality teachers have several common characteristics, including a grasp of the subjects they teach, an ability to convey subject matter to diverse range of students using a variety of strategies, good verbal skills, and successful experience.

Pennsylvania school superintendents surveyed by EPLC all reported that in hiring teachers they look for evidence of academic prowess and pedagogical skill. Most also look for less tangible skills and attributes they feel contribute to success in the classroom, such as creativity, problem-solving, verbal skills, flexibility, teamwork, and compassion.

States address teacher quality a number of ways. For example:

- To ensure content knowledge, secondary teachers are usually required to have at least the equivalent of an academic major or minor in the fields in which they will teach.
- To ensure pedagogical knowledge and skill, teachers are usually required to complete teacher education programs and clinical experiences such as student teaching.
- States generally try to ensure good verbal skills among teachers through tests of verbal ability and through student teaching experiences.
- To promote successful experience, some states support induction/mentoring programs for new teachers and continuing professional development throughout their careers.

Pennsylvania Policy

Pennsylvania requires teachers to obtain a state teaching certificate appropriate for the grade level and subject the applicant will be teaching. Requirements are relaxed, however, when teacher shortages trigger the use of emergency permits to fill vacant positions.

Certification

Basic requirements for a Level I certificate include earning a bachelor's or master's degree in an approved teacher education program and receiving a recommendation from the program's certification officer. The certificate is valid for six years of teaching.

New standards require aspiring teachers to complete at least three semesters of college-level liberal arts courses and earn a minimum grade point average before entering a teacher education program. The minimum GPA will rise to 3.0 by 2003-2004.

Applicants for certification must also pass a series of state examinations – PRAXIS tests – that measure mathematics, reading, writing, and subject-area knowledge.

Teachers must earn a Level II certificate within six years to continue teaching in the public schools. To do so, they must teach at least three years, earn 24 post-baccalaureate credits, complete a teacher induction program, and meet assessment requirements.

Mentorship

Pennsylvania is one of only eight states that require, but do not fund, induction programs for first-year teachers. Every school district, however, is required to submit a plan to the state Department of Education for the induction of first-year teachers. These plans must include a “mentor relationship” between the first-year teacher and either an experienced teacher or an induction team. Without state support, the intensity of induction programs varies widely.

Professional Development

Pennsylvania requires all teachers to complete at least 180 hours of continuing professional education every five years. And school districts must submit professional development plans that assess staff development needs and at least provide opportunities for teachers to study graduate-level courses, take in-service courses, and participate in other professional development.

In 2001, the state began its Professional Development Assistance Program, which tests all practicing academic teachers in mathematics and reading to measure their knowledge of the content of state standards at the appropriate grade level. According to the state, the results are used to improve professional development programs and are confidential.

Post-Retirement Teaching

Pennsylvania permits retired teachers to return to the classroom if a teacher shortage creates an emergency and the district first tries to hire non-retired teachers to fill the open positions.

Returning retirees are allowed to teach 95 days a year without losing their state retirement benefits. After 95 days,

a penalty is assessed against those benefits. Also, teachers who retire and immediately begin working under an emergency exception may have their pensions “frozen” and be enrolled in a new post-retirement pension separate from their first.

Emergency Permits

School districts can sometimes use emergency permits to fill teaching positions. These permits are issued to college graduates regardless of whether they have had any preparation in teaching or the specific content to be taught.

The Department of Education most often issues emergency permits when districts cannot find certified applicants to fill vacancies and when district need to fill long-term substitute positions. Local superintendents can also issue emergency permits to fill day-to-day substitute positions for up to 15 cumulative days.

The Expanding Federal Role

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which became law in 2002, sets national policy for all children, teachers, and schools, including requirements that every state establish academic standards, test all children in grades 3-8 each year, and that all children achieve proficiency on state standards within 12 years.

Federal policy also requires that all teachers be “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-06 school year. They must be fully certified and cannot have had any certification requirements waived on an emergency basis.

Elementary school teachers must also hold at least a bachelor's degree and earn passing scores on a rigorous state test of reading, writing, math, and other basic parts of the elementary curriculum. Middle and high school teachers, too, are required to have a bachelors degree and they must pass a core content area test or an academic major or equivalent coursework.

The EPLC review found that Pennsylvania teachers meet the criteria with the exception of those teaching on emergency certificates, those teaching in fields for which they are not certified – a physics teacher who teaches chemistry, for example – and seventh and eighth grade teachers who do not have a content area certificate.

Availability of Qualified Teachers in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania faces teacher shortages in some areas and there is some evidence that more serious problems could develop in coming years. What Pennsylvania is not experiencing is a crisis as deep as those in several rapidly growing states where rising student enrollments and teacher retirements and high turnover are creating serious teacher shortages.

Shortages By Subject

Several teaching positions are difficult to fill. Shortages are reported among teachers of physics, chemistry, biology, general science, world languages, special education, technology education or industrial arts, and mathematics, especially higher level math courses.

In the EPLC survey, 16% of the superintendents who responded said there is an insufficient number of candidates for hard-to-fill positions. Another 39 percent said there are not enough quality candidates for those subjects.

The number of teaching certificates are down in all subjects that superintendents say are hard to fill. World language certificates fell 33% from 1996-1997 to 2001-2002, and physics certificates fell nearly 31%. In fact, of all of the hard-to-fill subjects, only biology certificates increased over the past five years – by less than 1%.⁵

Another concern is a high rate of turnover among teachers in Pennsylvania who teach hard-to-fill positions such as biology and chemistry. The rate at which biology teachers and chemistry teachers left their districts increased 45% between 1997-1998 and 2001-2002.⁶

Few Minority Teachers

Racial and ethnic minorities are under-represented in public school classrooms across Pennsylvania, accounting for only 6.3% of teachers in 2001-2002. Minorities account for 21.6% of all public school students and 15.8% of the state's general population.

Only about 5% of Pennsylvania's public school teachers are African American; .7% are Hispanic; and only .3% are Asian.

Shortages In City Schools

Urban school district, in particular, have difficulty hiring and retaining quality teachers.

Evidence of the problem is reflected in the fact that in 2001-2002, half of the 5,174 emergency permits needed to fill vacant full-time positions were issued in the Philadelphia School District. Another 20% of emergency permits to fill full-time positions were in six other urban districts in the state.

Emergency Permits Up

Wider use of emergency permits was not limited to urban school districts in recent years. Pennsylvania schools were issued 16,800 emergency permits during the 2001-2002 school year.

More than half of the permits issued were for day-to-day substitute positions – evidence of how difficult it is to find certified substitute teachers. The 5,174 emergency permits to fill full-time positions in 2001-2002 is a 350% increase over the 1,141 issued in 1999-2001.⁷

Exporting Teachers

Pennsylvania's staffing problems come at a time when there is no overall shortage of classroom teachers being certified by the state's colleges and universities. Each year, more teachers are certified in Pennsylvania than the state's public schools hire.

Lately, Pennsylvania has been a net exporter of teachers with graduates recruited to teach in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and other states. Recruiting pressure is likely to increase with the federal requirement to staff all classrooms with highly qualified teachers.

Regional Imbalance

Deans of education programs report that many graduates of teacher preparation programs who do not enter the profession decide they do not want to relocate where the jobs are, which is largely in urban districts. Such preferences contribute to teachers shortages in urban districts, particularly Philadelphia, York, Harrisburg, and Reading.

Teacher turnover is also high. Although Pennsylvania's 13% turnover rate is less than the national average of 16%, one-third of new teachers in Pennsylvania leave the profession within three years and half of them leave within five years.

National studies suggest they leave for reasons that include poor salaries, lack of administrative support, lack of student discipline, and poor student motivation.

Recommendations

The Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) followed its review of teacher quality and supply in Pennsylvania with policy recommends in several areas, including promoting and professionalizing teaching, improving the preparation of teachers, and monitoring reforms.

Summaries of key EPLC recommendations follow. For more information, see the complete report, *Head of the Class: A Quality Teacher In Every Pennsylvania Classroom*, available on the EPLC website at this address: www.eplc.org/teacherquality.html.

Promoting Teaching

An important first step toward improving the state's ability to attract and retain high quality teachers is to recognize and value the profession. EPLC recommendations in this area include:

- Policymakers, educators and others should genuinely and consistently treat teachers as a key part of Pennsylvania's efforts to strengthen public education and promote the recruiting of teachers as an important public interest.
- The state should terminate the Professional Devel-

opment Assistance Program and use the funds to support training in the use of new evaluation forms. Superintendents report that the data from the PDAP test is not especially useful in improving professional development.

- The state should modify school district planning requirements so that a teacher retention, support, and leadership development plan is integrated into each district's strategic plan.

- The state should consider adjusting the School Code minimum teacher salary of \$18,500 per year, established in 1988-89. Low salaries are factors in teacher turnover and recruiting.

Preparing Teachers

EPLC recommends that policymakers explore ways to reinforce existing quality initiatives and to monitor their progress to ensure that the desired results are achieved without significant unintended consequences. The recommendations include the following:

- When reviewing policy related to teacher preparation this year, the state should survey teacher preparation institutions and school districts to determine whether reforms are improving the quality of teaching candidates and not hindering the hiring of quality teachers.

- The state should provide school districts with funds to pay for substitutes as a way of encouraging classroom teachers to participate in teacher preparation institutional reviews.

Easing Shortages

Among the EPLC's recommendations are several for easing specific staffing problems in Pennsylvania schools. The recommendations include:

- The state General Assembly should enact a targeted teacher recruitment program focused on districts having serious problems filling teaching positions with qualified candidates.

- Increasing the number of qualified minority teachers must be a state goal and steps should be taken to address the issue, including recruiting Pennsylvania residents graduating from historically black colleges and universities outside the state.

- The state law that limits retired teachers to teaching 95 days per year if they return to the classroom should be revised to increase the limit to 190 days, allowing experienced educators to teach an entire school year and participate in professional development.

- Future proposals to enact early retirement incentives for teachers should consider the likely impact on school districts' efforts to retain highly qualified teachers.

Opportunities to address these and other issues will arise in 2003, when the State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education are scheduled to review policies that guide the preparation and certification of teachers.

References

Head of the Class: A Quality Teacher In Every Pennsylvania Classroom, The Education Policy and Leadership Center Teacher Quality and Supply Project. Harrisburg, PA: The Education Policy and Leadership Center. 2003. (Available online at www.eplc.org/teacherquality.html).

This Special Report, written by Jeffery Fraser, is based on the above-referenced report. It is not intended to be an original work, but a summary for the convenience of our readers. References noted in the text follow:

¹ Ferguson, R. (1991). "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters." *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, 28, (2).

² Sanders, W., & Rivers, J. *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement.* Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center. 1996.

³ Haycock, K. *Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap.* Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust. 1998.

⁴ Darling-Hammond. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8 (1). (<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1>).

⁵ Based on data from *Status Report on Pennsylvania's Level I Teachers.* Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Education. 2001 and 2002.

⁶ Based on data from *Status Report on Pennsylvania's Level I Teachers.* Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Education. 2002.

⁷ Ibid.

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parents who had to take medical leaves, had to change their jobs or lost their jobs because of it.”

Desperate For Help

The ideal support system for these children is one that would anticipate and quickly respond to their social and emotional needs and help to improve the confidence and competence of caregivers and parents. With the exception of Early Head Start and Head Start, such a system is not found in Allegheny County or elsewhere in Pennsylvania.

Policy and practices, for the most part, do not reflect evidence that suggests the spike in young children with behavioral problems is an issue to be urgently addressed.

Parents are desperate, the OCD environmental scan on behavioral problems in Allegheny County suggests. They complain that services to help their troubled children are nearly impossible to find and even harder to access. Early care and education staff say there are fewer services available today than in the past. And behavioral health consultants are concerned that without additional training, teachers and aides are not able to adequately help these children.

Many factors make it difficult for parents to find help. Although Head Start and Early Head Start address the mental health needs of young children, few other early childhood programs are equipped to do the same.

The OCD study found other obstacles as well. Parents find a maze of agencies, programs, eligibility rules, and jurisdictions that tends to confuse more than help. Parents and early care and education staff often find it difficult to engage one another on these issues regarding children with behavioral problems. And there is a serious shortage of specialists trained to help troubled children under the age of 5 years.

Building Hope

Only recently has the mental health system begun to broaden its focus to include the mental health issues of young children. In Allegheny County, a Community Advisory Group examined the issues within the county and, as part of the environmental scan, offered recommendations. The group's suggestions included the following:

- Develop effective collaborations.

- Enhance training for early childhood staff and others.

- Increase the number of behavioral health providers with the appropriate expertise to address the special needs of these children.

- Increase funding to improve the identification of early behavioral signs of serious emotional support for preventive mental health services.

One product of the study is Service Pathways, a project begun by OCD that uses a dedicated Internet web site to guide families of children with behavioral problems and early childhood staff and teachers toward helpful resources. The web site will use child-specific characteristics such as age, residence, and insurance benefits to retrieve information about available resources that best fits the family's circumstances.

The web technology will also collect data such as the needs, concerns, and experiences of families with a child who has demonstrated behavioral problems. Gathering this information is expected to widen the understanding of what families go through in trying to find help for their children and inform policy by helping to identify areas where services need to be improved.

Complementing Service Pathways is the Exploratory Study, which provides a case manager or helps an existing case manager work with parents and early childhood providers who are having trouble accessing services for these children. The study will follow one family at a time to examine in greater depth what families encounter in trying to help a child with behavioral problems.

Nelkin said that judging from the demand for copies, the report on the Allegheny County scan “strikes a chord” among concerned parents and early childhood professionals nationwide. Requests for copies from across the state, Midwest, and Northeast have prompted a second printing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, copies of the executive summary and the full report of Are We Leaving Them Behind? The Case for Helping Childcare Providers and Parents Address Behavioral Problems in Very Young Children can be found on the Internet at the OCD website: <http://www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/policy21.htm>.

Training Project Helps Family Foundations Promote Infant Mental Health

Promoting mental health in infants and very young children is perhaps the best medicine for avoiding the kind of emotional and behavioral problems that can complicate childhood, strain families, and lead to failure in school and other poor outcomes. Recognizing this, Early Head Start is sharpening its focus on infant mental health through a pilot training project for staff and parents that counts Allegheny County-based Family Foundations as one of the two dozen programs selected to participate nationwide.

Family Foundations, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development's Early Head Start program, serves 170 children through the family support centers it operates in the East End, Clairton, McKees Rocks, and Pittsburgh's Hill District neighborhood.

Issues surrounding infant mental health are not new to Family Foundations and other Early Head Start and Head Start programs, which have been among the few initiatives nationwide to address healthy social and emotional development in children ages birth to 3 years. The pilot project is intended to build upon existing skills to better promote healthy development.

"We focus on the social emotional development of the infant because we believe that if you do that, if you work on relationships and attachment, the other developmental areas are going to be stronger as well," said Vivian Herman, Director of Early Head Start, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

The pilot project, Pathways to Prevention, is not a response to a particular crisis. And it is not targeted to a specific group of troubled children. Instead, all children and their parents at the selected EHS sites are expected to benefit from the training that seeks to prevent problems by giving staff and parents the knowledge and skills that promote healthy social and emotional development. Much attention is focused on building and maintaining healthy relationships, particularly between parent and child.

Prevention Training

Each EHS site designates a team to receive the intensive training. Last year, a planning session was held with each team and its assigned infant mental health consultant. A training seminar in Washington, D.C. followed, during which the team explored relationships, culture, reflective practice, and other issues, and developed goals for follow-up support with their consultant.

Throughout 2003, EHS teams are meeting with their consultants as they work toward building their program's knowledge about early emotional needs of infants and toddlers. The Early Head Start National Resource Center, at Zero to Three, will work with an evaluation consultant to examine the programs' progress toward reaching their goals. The training centers more on the issues of relationships and attachments than on specific problems. Other issues addressed include identifying areas of concern, providing interventions, supporting staff in their professional development and creating partnerships with others in the community who can support families when needs arise.

At each site, the team takes part in the initial training and pass on what they've learned to parents and other staff members.

"It is the idea that the emotional life of the child begins at birth and is organized mostly by their earliest attachment relationships," said Gerard Costa, Ph.D., the Early Head Start National Resource Center consultant working with Family Foundations. "For that reason, this project is providing relationship-based support to parents of young infants to help them promote healthy relationships between themselves."

Knowledge about infant mental health will ultimately be shared with some EHS partners in the community. "Part of the goal of this project," Costa said, "is not just to keep the goodies within Family Foundations, but to share the information with others outside who also can help families."

Early Years Critical

Research over the past decade suggests early childhood – particularly ages birth to 3 years – is a critical time for the development of such basic mental health abilities as trust, security, communication, paying attention, and regulating emotion.

The research also makes it clear that brain development is about much more than genetics – that relationships and environment are major influences.

Such insight sheds some light on behavioral problems seen among young children. "We have to understand that children are reacting to stresses in their environment," said Emie Titnich, Child Development Specialist, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

"I don't think our society is providing adequate support for those children. What we call problem behavior is a

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(Mental Health continued from Page 10)

child's reaction to a situation he or she can't make sense of or can't handle and people aren't helping in the way he or she needs to be helped. That doesn't mean they aren't caring people or that parents are oblivious. It means the help isn't matching the need.

“Those children go on to develop unhealthy ways of

adapting, which are integrated into their personality and you have a character change in the child. In a way – because we are not giving the support children need – we are creating our own mental health needs. Those of us in the early childhood mental health profession are looking at the kinds of support we can give these children. Early Head Start is one way we can offer support.” ■

Announcements . . .

Workshop Explores Latest Studies On Teen Pregnancy

A workshop reviewing research findings on programs to reduce teen pregnancy will be offered free of charge April 3 on the University of Pittsburgh Oakland campus.

Douglas Kirby, Ph.D., senior researcher at ETR Associates in Scotts Valley, CA, will summarize the important findings of *Emerging Answers*, a review of hundreds of studies on adolescent sexual behavior, risk and protective factors that affect those behaviors, and programs that change behavior. Dr. Kirby will also explore four different groups of programs with considerable evidence of success.

The workshop is scheduled from 1:30-3:30 p.m. on April 3 in the William Pitt Union, Dining Room A. It is presented by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development Interdisciplinary Fellowship for Policy and Evaluation in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.

RSVP to Social Work Continuing Education at 412-624-6902. ■

Family Support Conference Set For Pittsburgh In June

The 10th annual Allegheny County Family Support Conference will be held June 9 and June 10 at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, Downtown Pittsburgh.

This year's conference – “This Is Family Support: Past, Present, Future” – provides opportunities to learn about family and community best practices from leading experts.

It features nationally-recognized speakers and workshop presenters, seven workshop tracks, and more than 50 interactive workshops.

More information will be posted at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development website at <http://www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/>. ■

Health, Sexuality, And Family Issues Covered In PPWP Education Program

Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania is offering a variety of community-based education programs on health, sexuality, and family living issues for parents, adolescents, schools, human service agencies, and others.

Topics range from abstinence, AIDS/HIV, and teenage pregnancy to cross cultural diversity, self esteem, parenting skills, and women's preventive health care.

The nonprofit offers single sessions, multi-session workshops, and ongoing series and charges a fee of \$45 a session.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania Community Education Program, 209 Ninth St., Suite 400, Pittsburgh, PA 15222; (412) 434-8969; or e-mail: community.edu@ppwp.org. ■

Notice to *Developments* Subscribers

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Announcements . . .

OCD Offers Courses In Program Evaluation

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development Planning and Evaluation Project offers a series of training courses designed to develop and enhance evaluation skills and information management techniques to improve service delivery.

These courses are designed to provide directors, program staff, and board members of human services agencies, with the skills needed to meet their evaluation needs. Classes can be chosen, for example, that will help staff or directors develop an evaluation for a program, gain insight from focus groups, and effectively use the data once it is collected.

Spring 2003 Schedule

The courses are held on Thursday mornings at the Office of Child Development, now located in North Point Breeze in Lexington Technology Park at 400 N. Lexington Avenue.

	Name	Time	Date	Cost per Course
I	Developing Models for Evaluation	9-noon	March 13, 2003	\$50
II	Collecting Data	9-noon	March 27, 2003	\$50
III	Designing Surveys (2 sessions)	9-noon	April 10, 2003, April 24, 2003	\$100
IV	Conducting Focus Groups	9-noon	May 8, 2003	\$50
V	Using Your Data	9-noon	May 22, 2003	\$50

To obtain registration information, REQUEST A COPY OF THE PROGRAM BROCHURE by contacting Charlene Nelson at 412-244-7553, fax: 412 244-5321, or e-mail: ocdpep@pitt.edu.

If your organization needs personalized assistance, the Office of Child Development offers training and consultation on evaluation for staff at your site. Contact us for additional details.

Developments

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