

School Involvement of Homeless & Highly Mobile Parents

In the Sumner School District

Sumner, Washington

By

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Abstract: An examination of perceptions and school involvement among Sumner School District parents, who were experiencing homelessness and receiving services through Helping Hand House in eastern Pierce County, Washington. Interviews with parents indicate that they were welcomed in their children's schools and that they had access to adequate information about school and classroom events. Parents expressed wanting more information on school curriculum and strategies on how to help their children with homework. Included is a literature review on parent and family involvement.

Key Words: Access to Resources; Community (Awareness of Homelessness/High Mobility); Literature Review, Parent and Family Involvement; School District; Transitional Housing/Shelters; Surveys and Welcoming School Climate

School District and WBPB Profile

School: *Sumner SD #320 – District level team*

Grade levels: *PK - 12*

School District: *Sumner SD #320*

City/Town: *Sumner* State: *Washington*

Website address for the school: <http://www.sumner.wednet.edu>

School enrollment size for 2006-07: *7861 (as of May, 2007)*

Number of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students in 2006-07: *154 (145 students + 9 PK (ECEAP/Head Start))*

Number of educators/teachers involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **2**

Number of administrators involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **1**

Number of parents/families involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **25**

Percent of students eligible for free/reduce lunch: **24%** (*ranges between 18 – 52% between schools*)

Title X : *Sumner SD receives competitive Title X funding*

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Website address for the city/town (if available): <http://www.ci.sumner.wa.us> + <http://www.ci.bonney-lake.wa.us>

Number of public agencies involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **3**

Number of businesses involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **2**

Number of non-profits involved in 2006-07 WBPB projects/actions: **2 + agencies at community presentation**

Population size based on current census data (www.census.gov): **48,600**

High school graduation rate: **84%** - *extended graduation rate*

Other important information about your school community: Housing prices are skyrocketing – it's difficult for families to find a place to live if they can't afford \$900+ per month for rent

Introduction

How do we know that Sumner School District parents, who are homeless or highly mobile, feel comfortable in our schools? Are these parents active in the education of their children and teens? What are the actions that our school staff can take to promote a welcoming climate for parents – and – encourage parent involvement within the school environment? These are the questions that our District’s Web Based Professional Development team sought to address through collaborative work during the 2006-07 school year.

Implementation of Web Based Professional Development (WBPD) Project: In August 2006, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) invited eight school districts within their jurisdiction to apply for the National Center on School Engagement’s Web Based Professional Development Project (WBPD). Sumner School District (SD) decided to participate, with the goal of gathering input and information to enhance our existing McKinney-Vento (Homeless Education) program. OSPI and WBPD agreed to sponsor a district level team from our organization, as a building principal was unable to participate after we committed ourselves to this process. Team members included:

Marilee Hill-Anderson	Director, STARR Project & McKinney-Vento Grant Program Manager
Jennifer Oglesbee, M.S.W.	Intervention Specialist at Victor Falls & Emerald Hills Elementary Schools
Nola Renz, M.N.M.	Executive Director Helping Hands House - Eastern Pierce County

From our start in September 2006, our team studied and applied Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology in the investigation of attitudes and factors regarding the involvement of homeless parents in the education of their children and in our schools. Our work included 11 team meetings to design our project and discuss results; the study of literature on parent/school partnerships; surveys of parents (n = 25) living in Helping Hand House transitional and emergency shelter units; a focus group of Sumner SD parents (n = 6) who lived in Helping Hand House units; consultation and training events with Helping Hand House case management staff; collaboration with the Sumner / Bonney Lake Education Foundation to obtain incentives for parent participation in our work; production of a PowerPoint training module on parent involvement; and dissemination of our project

findings through the Washington State OSPI Homeless Liaison Newsletter, *Illuminations*, and a presentation of our results to a local coalition (Communities For Families of Sumner/Bonney Lake) of social and health service providers.

Investigation

Sumner School District & Helping Hand House Demographics: A brief description of Sumner School District demographics, as well as the demographic factors of families and children served by our community partner, Helping Hand House, helps to clarify why our homeless families and students can so easily remain invisible to school staff.

Geography: Sumner School District #320 is located within eastern Pierce County in the state of Washington. Communities served within the District's 38 square mile boundary area include the entire cities of Sumner & Bonney Lake; as well as portions of the cities of Edgewood & Pacific. The bulk of our students and families live within the 98390 and 98391 US postal zip code zones. Total population of the combined incorporated and unincorporated areas is approximately 48,600 residents.

Enrollment and Income Levels: Our District's student enrollment was calculated at 7861 full time students in May 2007. The District percentage of students qualifying for the US Department of Agriculture's Free and Reduced Price School Meals program was 24% across 13 schools (High Schools – 2; Middle Schools – 3; Elementary Schools – 8.) However, the actual percentages by school ranged from 18 to 53%, dependent upon the community within our District in which schools were located. To qualify for this program, a family of four must make under \$37,000 annually, which is considered to be 200% of the federal poverty level. The average income, per household, is \$53,748 (adjusted gross income), slightly higher than the \$52,660 posted for Pierce County by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004 (<http://www.bls.gov>).

Unemployment within Pierce County has been estimated between 4.7 and 7.8% (2003), depending on the methods used to calculate this rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2007.) The high end of this rate is just slightly above the estimated state average of 7.6%.

History of Homeless Student Education Program: Sumner School District initiated strategies to improve the education of our homeless students in 2001. Between 2001 and 2006, significant improvements had been made within our system in the identification of homeless students and families, as well as unaccompanied youth. Staff training and

development was instituted on an annual basis in all our 13 schools. A District level ‘Homeless Education Coordinator’ (HEC) was hired through McKinney-Vento grant funding. The HEC supported staff (Building Points of Contact) that were designated to assist homeless students in each of our schools. From the district and building level, staff worked to expedite student access to school enrollment, attendance, free meals and transportation services. Access to community resources for our homeless families was improved, through the collaborative work of District staff members and the Sumner Family Support Center, where our Homeless Education Coordinator was stationed.

The District’s official McKinney-Vento student count grew from 70 in 2001, to 206 students per year in spring of 2006. The Sumner School District McKinney-Vento database currently shows that 154 students have qualified for protections and rights under the McKinney-Vento Act during the 2006-07 school year, with one week of classroom time still remaining. Current totals reflect a 25% decrease in the number of referrals between the past two reporting cycles.

Despite these advances in addressing the physical, social and logistical needs of our homeless students, we lacked approaches to engage parents as key stakeholders in advising our McKinney-Vento program. The reduced number of referrals has also triggered concerns about the ability of our staff to discuss the issue of homelessness with parents. Additionally, we knew the voices of our homeless and highly mobile parents were often not included in key school based decision-making processes. The vantage point of these parents was easily overlooked, even though their input was critical to the academic progress of their children, the continued success of program efforts, and required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Helping Hand House – General Census Data – 2007: The Helping Hand House (HHH) demographics for the first five months of the year including the time frame for surveys and the focus groups include 41 families, living in housing units throughout Pierce County. Of these families 25 choose to participate in the survey, (8 surveys completed by Sumner School District families) and 4 (representing 6 adults) elected to participate in the focus group.

Ethnicity: The majority (79) of the clients served by Helping Hand House are Caucasian, with the next largest ethnicity being African American (9 of the total population served.) There were three clients in each of the following ethnic groups: Asian/ Asian

American, Hispanic, and Native American. This is representative of the general population of the communities currently served by the HHH program.

Ages of Adult Clients: Regarding age the demographics show that the majority of adult household members are in the 22 - 44 age range (56 adults, total.) The other adult household members are: 18-21 years of age = 9; and 45-54 years of age = 2.

Ages – Children Served: The total number of children under age 18 served by Helping Hand House to date in 2007 is 117. Forty-five (45) were children 12-17. Thirty-eight (38) children ranged in age from 6-11; and thirty-four (34) children served were infants to age 5. These children attend schools in the Sumner, Puyallup, Orting, Eatonville, White River, Fife, and Tacoma School Districts.

Marital/Household Status: Household status service has been provided to two (2) single men with children, twenty-three (23) single women with children and sixteen (16) couples with children. The largest population represented during the first five months of 2007 has been single women with children.

Unmet Need: Case managers tracked 416 families who were turned away from receiving services, primarily due to the following reasons: 1. Lack of units available at time of need; 2. Background checks disqualifying families (i.e., conviction of a felony crime;) and 3. Families stating their intent to not participate in required program activities, such as required classes on employment and financial literacy skills.

Review of Selected Studies and Research Summaries

It was difficult for our team to find a large number of studies that investigated the involvement of homeless and highly mobile parents in school environments and in the education of their children. It was more common to find studies that addressed the school involvement of low-income or ethnically diverse parents; general parent involvement; or the impact of poverty on student achievement. Additionally, our team was hampered by barriers in accessing online resources, due to fees required for reprints of articles or publications, and lack of access to university library resources.

For background context on our subject, our team relied heavily on publications that summarized research and that were available in the public domain. Additionally, we reviewed evaluations of grants funding housing projects in which our community partner

(Helping Hand House) participated, as well as papers written by past participants in WBPD Cohorts.

Definition of Homelessness: For the purposes of our study and WBPD project work, our team used the definition of homelessness found in the US Department of Education’s guidance to school districts on interpreting the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Section 725):

“The term homeless children and youth is defined as “lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence...; and includes children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds, due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters...or are awaiting foster care placements; children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in the (above) clauses..”

Parents who participated in our survey were currently residing in housing provided by Helping Hand House of Pierce County, our community partner in the WBPD project. This agency supports various housing project models, including emergency shelter (90 days or less within a house, apartment or duplex unit); and transitional housing (residence in a unit belonging to the agency for up to 2 years.) Both of these types of housing models qualify participants as ‘homeless’, under the McKinney-Vento Act.

Themes: A common thread that ran through the information we reviewed can be summarized by a statement made by Dr. Karen Mapp and Anne T. Henderson in their study on parent involvement titled, “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement” (2002). The authors wrote that educators need to “*recognize that all parents—regardless of income, education, or cultural background— are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well.*” Studies, evaluations and inquiries we discovered during our WBPD work all supported this very basic finding. This assumption was critical in our team discussions about whether or not

parents would respond to our inquiries and requests for input; and if parents who were struggling to meet the basic needs of their families would have the willingness to support their children in completing required assignments outside of school environments.

Areas of Parent Involvement: In an effort for our team to define what we would refer to as ‘parent involvement’ within our surveys and focus groups, we chose to consider the well-known parent involvement model of Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns-Hopkins University’s *Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships*. Dr. Epstein cites six basic types of involvement that schools should use in designing strategies for parents to partner with educators in enhancing the academic progress of children:

- (1) Parenting: Assist families with parenting and childrearing skills, understanding development, and how to set up a learning environment in the home. This also includes assisting schools in understanding families.
- (2) Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs, student progress, and other school-based activities through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication strategies.
- (3) Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training opportunities and specific schedules that involve families as volunteers that support their children and other children’s learning and school programs.
- (4) Learning At Home: Involve families with their children in learning activities in their home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
- (5) Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, School Improvement Process teams, committees, etc.
- (6) Collaborating With the Community: Coordinate community resources and services for students, families and the school with businesses, agencies and others.

Dr. Epstein’s definitions of parent involvement became informal criteria for our team, as we decided whether or not to include specific questions in our parent survey. Specific items around school-parent communication and types of school involvement were included, based on Epstein’s paradigm (Epstein, 2002).

Definitions of Parent Involvement: Educators and parents often were found to characterize desired forms of parent involvement differently (Scribner, Young and Pedroza,

1999). Teachers described parent involvement in terms of their presence at school activities, whereas parents identified at-home activities as more important in supporting their children's schooling. The definition of parent involvement was not standard throughout the research studies & commentaries we reviewed. Editors on summaries of research cited the lack of a common definition in this field of study as a drawback in generalizing conclusions cited (Boethel, 2003).

Barriers to Involvement – Barriers to specific types of parent involvement (volunteering at school), include a lack of time and other family resources (childcare & transportation resources), families' distrust or discomfort with school staffs or school procedures, and language barriers (Mapp 1999). In a synthesis of 64 studies on the parent involvement in schools of diverse (ethnically, culturally and low-income) families, over half indicated these barriers to parental involvement on campus at schools (Boethel, 2003.)

Impact of Poverty on School-Parent Communication: Our team reviewed the work of Dr. Ruby Payne, in her book for educators, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Dr. Payne suggests that educators must be aware of the hidden social rules and norms of those living in poverty, when compared to the same areas of norms held by members of our culture's socioeconomic middle class. School staff suggest strategies to parents that, due to the economic stressors on these families, may be unworkable. Additionally, patterns of communication may be very different between parents living with poverty when compared to teachers who earn middle class incomes. Our parents may choose to take and need more time to express their issues by easing into specific points. Teachers, on the other hand, may feel limited by time constraints and want parents to directly address issues without bringing in other topics of conversation. Dr. Payne cited patterns of conflict between these two styles of interaction and found that teachers believed parents were avoiding important issues, while parents characterized teachers as being rude and uncaring. Dr. Payne's work, while not summarized in other research syntheses we reviewed, adds an additional framework with which to examine our survey and focus group input.

Additional Literature and Project Evaluations

Due to the lack of studies that specifically focused on homelessness and parental involvement in schools, our WBPD reviewed project papers posted on the National Center on School Engagement's website; as well as project evaluations from funding sources that

supported our project’s community partner (Helping Hand House). Key items of interest to our team in these items included:

- *Lowry Elementary School – Denver, Colorado:* In 2006, a WBPD team from this elementary school studied parental involvement within their families, with a specific focus on parents and children experiencing homelessness. The WBPD found that their parents were most concerned about working with their children at home, or home-like environment, to assist them in progressing academically. Parents were very concerned about the success of their children in school, but didn’t believe they had the skills to help them with school assignments. The Lowry Elementary School staff created an after school academic assistance program and provided teachers to assist parents as they helped their children with schoolwork. They also encouraged other schools, in their recommendations, to create ‘home-like’ environments, such as special programs, to offer parents the support they needed to be effective partners in supporting the education of their children.

- *Housing Project Evaluations –* The Gates Foundation has been a longstanding provider of financial support for Washington State housing and shelter projects over the last decade. Their latest report and preliminary evaluation (2006) provided information about the school attendance and reduction of mobility between schools with children who lived in units funded by the *Sound Families Project*. As to be expected, children who benefited from stable housing in this program attended fewer schools within a year from their program enrollment date. Other preliminary program evaluation reports indicated that increases in positive behavior and completion of schoolwork occurred with children whose housing status had stabilized.

Our WBPD group found other recommendations from this funder as particularly pertinent to our current project. Specifically, we noted that coordinators of the *Sound Families Project* suggested case management strategies be implemented to specifically address the educational attainment and support of children in school. Most of the agencies that received Gates Foundation funding for housing programs focused on case management objectives with adults, assuming that school achievement and stability would naturally occur as a result of the family’s risks to instability being reduced. They recommended, specifically, that “future projects take into account the needs of children being served” and cited that “increased educational attainment was the best predictor that a family’s members would escape poverty.” These recommendations became pertinent to our team, as we worked with

both parents and case management staff at Helping Hand House over the 2006-07 school year. Our project work uncovered gaps in the understanding of school-based resources that families served by our partners could implement into case management plans.

Focus of Study And Methodology

Our WBPD team chose to focus on the issue of parent involvement in education, by examining factors relevant to this topic: perceptions of school climate; involvement with a child's academic progress; parent-to-school & school-to-parent communication; and examination of barriers that restrict a parent's involvement in their child's school.

In our team meetings, we reviewed the literature cited in the previous section, and decided that our methodology of getting information from parents would include both a survey and focus group. Due to our partnership with Helping Hand House, we knew we would be able to access a group of parents who identified themselves as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act of 2001. By working with these parents, we would be able to avoid the struggles faced by other WBPD from around the country, who had tried to solicit feedback from homeless parents at well-marketed group events, only to have no one attend. Themes from input obtained from our survey and focus group would be compared to themes in the literature we reviewed, as a test of its validity.

Construction of Survey & Focus Group Questions: We determined that the use of a survey with this group of parents would allow us to collect information on variables that could impact parent involvement with this population. The drawback to this approach was that we would be soliciting input from parents who did not have children in the Sumner School District. However, the benefit was that we would be able to compare survey responses between local parents and those with children attending schools in other districts. A subsequent focus group, comprised solely of Sumner School District parents, would then be used to collect additional information and clarify trends that emerged in the survey.

Process: WBPD team members met in November 2006 to study survey options. Sample surveys, used by schools that were previously involved with WBPD were reviewed. Particular attention was given to tools used by Lowry Elementary School in Colorado. We revised one of their surveys by adding questions about variables that interested our team. This survey is included as Attachment 1.

Specific questions in our survey sought information from respondents about:

(a) Demographics and School Attendance:

- Demographics: Number of individuals in the household; ages of children; gender of individual completing the form
- District in which children attended school
- Names of schools
- Number of schools attended

(b) Background Information on Homelessness:

- Type of shelter provided by Helping Hand House (emergency vs. transitional)
- Length of homelessness
- Circumstances contributing to need for housing assistance
- Mobility rate

(c) Impact of Homelessness on Academic Performance & Parent Involvement:

- Perceptions of the impact of homelessness on child's academic performance
- Perceptions of school climate: welcoming vs. unwelcoming; students vs. parents
- Helping children with homework
- Parent-School Communication
- Perceptions of barriers to parent involvement

Rationale: Our WBPD team wanted to know if the variables within the housing status of parents (i.e., temporary or transitional housing), as well as the conditions contributing to the homelessness of our participants negatively impacted their ability to be involved in the education of their children. Demographic information about the ages of their children might also be correlated with the type of school involvement indicated by parents.

Our team discussed whether or not our parents believed their children's schools fostered a welcoming environment, and if this was correlated with parent involvement in supporting education. Barriers to school involvement, if they existed in the opinion of our parents, were also important to note. Epstein's 'Six Areas of Parent Involvement' helped our team determine if specific survey questions were relevant to our topic. The areas of 'communication' and 'learning environment at home' were integrated into our survey as a result. It was decided that we would investigate the remaining areas of parent involvement

through further inquiry within a focus group setting with parents specifically involved with Sumner SD schools.

Screening of Questions and Incentives for Participation: Marilee Hill-Anderson worked with Nola Renz to have Helping Hand House case management staff review the survey during a McKinney-Vento Act training session. Minor changes in the wording of items were made, based on staff feedback, on readability and how they believed parents would interpret the questions. The Informed Consent letter (Attachment 2) as well as incentives available to parents for survey completion were also discussed. (Parents were able to receive a \$5 gift card from McDonald's for finishing and submitting the survey to their case manager.)

Surveys were distributed and collected during mid-December 2006 through early January 2007. Results were tabulated and discussed at our WBPD Team meetings in January and February (see Attachment 3 – Calendar of WBPD Work Events.)

Focus Group: Due to inclement weather in the Pacific Northwest, our focus group had to be rescheduled from late January 2007 to February 27, 2007. The group lasted 70 minutes (6:00 – 7:10 p.m.) and took place in the Sumner SD Central Office Board Room. Invitations were issued through Helping Hand House case managers to their families who had children attending Sumner SD schools, as well as families living in agency shelters within our District boundaries. Participants were promised a \$25 gift card from a local grocery and variety store for their time. (Funding for gift cards had been secured through a request written by our team to the Sumner/Bonney Lake Education Foundation.) Helping Hand House provided a pizza dinner for everyone attending the group, which allowed our Team members to enjoy a meal with participants prior to engaging them in a discussion around the group topic. Team members took specific roles within the group, in order to capture the input given: facilitator (Marilee Hill-Anderson); scribe (Jennifer Oglesbee); and transcriptionist (Nola Renz.)

Of the eight families that were eligible to attend, three families with children in our schools participated. One married couple, who were parents of an infant and who were living within District boundaries, also chose to be involved. Their input was useful to our work, as reaching parents with preschool children is both a priority of the District and of projects designed to offer early intervention to homeless children.

Based on the literature review, our team decided to investigate, the following areas in more depth (a copy of the questions we used is listed as Attachment 4 in this report):

- *Parent/School Communication* - forms & content of communication: This area was important, as we'd received mixed input from survey information. If a parent had children in more than one school, our survey didn't allow parents the opportunity to describe the different communication strategies, or levels of satisfaction with the communication, from the various schools attended by their children.

- *Communication Originating from Parents to the School*: This area of questions involved the perceived ability of parents to communicate important information about their child to the school (teacher, administration, etc.) as well as the opportunities to participate in school wide decision making processes. We asked follow up questions with parents about their comfort levels in sharing difficult information with school officials, including areas of disagreement between the parent and school staff.

- *Welcoming School Climate*: Our team wanted to know if there were additional factors that contributed to parents perceiving that they were welcomed within their child's school, in addition to the feedback regarding 'warm, friendly teachers' that was noted on our survey responses.

- *Helping Children With Homework*: (or school work assigned to children for completion after school hours.) As our survey indicated many parents assisted children with schoolwork, we wanted to know if there were any barriers experienced by parents in this area.

Overview and Discussion of Survey Results

Of the 41 families eligible to complete this survey, 25 submitted responses. Families indicated their children attended schools in the following districts:

Sumner:	8 families – 18 children (include 1 infant)
Orting:	2 families – 6 children
Franklin Pierce:	Note – shared children (2) w/family in Orting
Fife:	3 families – 6 children
Bethel:	1 family – 2 children
White River**	1 family – 1 child
Tacoma:	2 families – 2 children
Puyallup:	1 family – 1 child
Eatonville:	2 families – 6 children
No district noted**:	5 families – 7 children

** *preschool aged children*

Several findings stood out to our group in this simple initial tabulation:

- (1) Helping Hand House was serving families from at least eight school districts at a time.

Impact: This increased the difficulty involved in having agency staff understand school procedures and resources, as practices in serving homeless students varied between Districts around the region.

- (2) Sumner School District had the largest portion of HHH clients with school-aged children, reflecting the number of units owned by the agency within District boundaries.

Impact: Our grant reports had typically underestimated the number of students within our schools that lived in HHH units. While district staff communicated with this agency in order to find housing for families, we had not understood the need to relay information about school related events to case management staff, in order that families might have another avenue to investigate school resources and supports for their children's education.

- (3) Several families indicated they had infants, toddlers and preschool aged children, yet few had any information about local schools, Head Start or ECEAP (state funded program similar to Head Start) or early learning programs.

Impact: In meetings with agency case managers, they were unaware of the developmental preschool programs within school districts, or other early intervention and child development programs. School districts and early learning programs could increase the enrollment of children with risk factors (poverty & housing instability) by collaborating with Helping Hand House and educating both staff and parents about local resources.

Survey Responses – Summary: Key trends noted for our Sumner SD families, around parent involvement, school/parent communication and perceptions of school environment were as follows:

(1) Impact of Homelessness on School Performance (Sumner SD Families): Five (5) families believed multiple moves and transitions between schools experienced by their children negatively impacted school performance. Two (2) families indicated housing transitions of the custodial parent didn't have a negative impact. One parent (a mother) noted that their child was able to stay with their father while the mother searched for stable housing. One parent declined to answer this question.

Reasons for the negative impact were stated as “lack of stability for the child” (3); loss of family member (in the move) (1) ; not knowing other children in the new school (1) ; and that children didn’t seem happy because they couldn’t have access to their belongings (2).

Districts Other Than Sumner: Similar findings were noted on surveys from parents residing outside our District. Of the twelve (12) surveys received, representing 26 children, eight (8) families responded that homelessness negatively impacted their children’s performance in school; three (3) parents noted no impact; and one parent did not respond.

Reasons for negative impact were stated as parents noting a change in the affect of their children (“unhappy”, “less energy and motivation”, “depression and fear of the unknown”.) Other parents described their children’s desire for access to their personal belongings, needing a steady environment, and needing a better living area. One respondent, who reported that they had experienced fifteen (15) moves within the last five years, noted that “when we were house hopping, my son became very withdrawn.” The child, in this family, had attended two schools within this timeframe.

(2) Perception of the School Environment – Sumner SD Parents: All Sumner SD families (8) indicated that they felt welcomed at their children’s schools and that they had the ability to be involved. Responses as to why school climates were considered welcoming included that parents were “accepted by school staff and treated with respect”; “staff (teachers and principal) were friendly and worked with me” – (two responses); and “communication with teachers”.

Suggestions to increase a perception of a positive, welcoming climate included that teachers have more contact with parents, and that teachers and principals be able to have phone contact with parents after work hours.

Discussion: Our WBPD team members were both delighted and surprised at this trend in survey data. Our review of the literature had suggested that highly mobile parents and children were more likely to perceive school staff as judgmental and that they had negative attitudes towards families who were homeless. Our data contradicts those reports, for families within our schools. In subsequent focus group discussion, parents did elaborate on the need for more communication with school staff outside of school hours. These themes were also noted in the literature on parent involvement of low-income families.

Districts Other Than Sumner: 11 of 12 respondents reported that they felt welcomed and were able to be involved in their children’s schools. Reasons parents gave for their opinions included that “teachers send information home”, “a teacher invited me to come to school”, and that “I have never not felt welcomed.” The lone dissenting voice indicated that he had felt judged by a school and was treated differently – due to his homelessness – in comparison to other parents.

(3) *Helping Children/Teens With Homework – Sumner SD Families:* 7 of 8 parents indicated that they helped their children ‘at home’ with homework, while one parent said they did not. Three parents helped their children on a nightly basis; three, on a weekly basis, and one parent noted that they ‘occasionally’ helped their child. About half of our children (n = 10) received homework help daily; about 20% (4) on a weekly basis; and 10% (2) on an occasional basis. A parent of two children did not respond to the question. In the latter response, both children were high school students (grades 10/11.) We were unable to determine predictability, from responses, as to whether or not younger children received more help with homework than their older siblings.

Discussion: Focus group participants elaborated on this survey input, stating they needed more help from school staff so that parents could support children in understanding and completing their homework assignments. However, our data confirmed that parents of children across all grades need and are requesting this type of support, not only parents with children in one specific age range. This information also backs up our conclusion and belief that parents experiencing homelessness and high mobility care about their children’s academic performance and suggests that they are willing to spend time helping their children with school assignments.

Districts Other Than Sumner: 11 of 12 respondents indicated that they helped their children with homework. A slightly different trend was noted, in that 3 respondents with high school aged children indicated that they only occasionally offered help. Elementary school aged children were more likely to get more frequent help at home.

(4) *Parent-School Communication – Sumner SD Parents:* Our survey only briefly touched upon this issue, as our team had planned to investigate it more thoroughly through focus group discussion. In hindsight, if we had included broader questions on this issue, our

feedback would have been more detailed. The question on our survey, which targeted communication, read: *Do you receive regular information about school events and what is going on in your child's classroom? Yes or No – Please explain.*

Six (6) Sumner SD parents answered yes; two (2) said no. Only two parents explained, briefly, that flyers sent home from the school with their child were the main way they received notices about school events. One parent, who didn't get information at home, indicated that their "child doesn't bring home info. (information)." Clearly, the predominant mode of information sharing originating from the school to parents was through printed materials or flyers. If children didn't bring home information, parents would not know about school events.

Districts Other Than Sumner: Nine (9) parents indicated they received information from schools; one (1) said 'no'; and two (2) did not respond. Key methods of communication were: "newsletters and flyers"; "weekly letter and frequent parent/teacher conferences"; "it comes home every night with homework." Two parents gave negative feedback. One parent reported, "My biggest problem is getting my son to bring home papers"; and one responder said, "for one special event I had no notice. I found out about it two days in advance."

Our survey results indicate that children themselves, negatively impacted by frequent moves and experiencing social and emotional impacts (depression, sadness, mental disorganization, etc.) from this, are primarily responsible for getting information home to parents. Secondly, increased communication is tied to a parent's perception of a welcoming school environment. Looking at diversifying our strategies of communicating to parents; and making sure there are ways to get information to parents beyond relying on their children as couriers of flyers, are critical to increasing information flow between 'school' and 'home.'

(5) Perceptions of Barriers to School Involvement – Sumner SD: Parents were asked to write brief statements in response to the following prompt: "We are trying to understand how we might improve parent involvement and create a welcoming community for students in our schools. We are interested in the barriers you and your children may have faced. Please describe, "Barriers parents face for Parent Involvement."

Answers and themes about 'barriers' to parent involvement, given by three (3) of our 8 survey participants, were:

- ❑ “No transportation” – Parents also noted this was a barrier for their student’s involvement in extracurricular activities.
- ❑ “Work schedule: unable to receive calls at work. Kids hide things from me and I don’t find out about things until later.”
- ❑ “Not enough time”
- ❑ “Don’t understand (school) work sent home”
- ❑ “Teachers don’t send home clear directions”

Most parents didn’t indicate barriers to involvement in their child’s (or children’s) school. Three (3) respondents listed “none” – and two (2) did not answer the question.

Communication issues, lack of transportation and an inability to adjust work (job) requirements to allow for involvement were noted. Lack of time, as well, was an issue. Our community partner, Nola Renz, noted that clients of HHH were required to hold down a job or attend school, care for their children, and attend mandatory life skills classes. The clients of her agency have full schedules that could create barriers to having a presence at school activities. These are issues which we can troubleshoot with HHH case managers and clients, so attendance at key events could become part of a family’s case management plan and objectives for success.

Outside Sumner SD: Parents of students at schools outside our district were much more outspoken about barriers they perceived that hampered their involvement. Of 12 (twelve) surveys received from this group, themes and responses about barriers to parent involvement were, again, reflective of what other studies have cited (Boethel, et al, 2003). Barriers and quotes from surveys, which describe concerns, are:

- Work Related: *“I never faced barriers except conflict with work” (1)*
- Transportation Related: *“No rides to school events” and “No transportation” (2)*
- Income Related: *“No money for school activities” (2)*
- Lack of Time: *“Many parents work, attend school, or both. Some are single parents and can’t even find time.” (2)*
- Cultural Issues: *“My junior high student has problems fitting in at school due to lack of Native American / Indian Ed. Involvement.”*
- Communication Issues: (a) *Flyers: “My biggest problem is getting my son to bring home the papers about it.” (b) Perception of tone: “We are involved yet talked down to and the faculty read in to everything. I am a responsible parent who works and goes to school.”*

(c) Resource Information: “No communication, no help for families with domestic violence or emergency situations.”

These comments reflect elements of parent involvement that were articulated by Dr. Joyce Epstein’s model: (1) utilizing effective school-to-home communication strategies; (2) coordinating school and community resources for families; (3) helping schools to understand parents. It, once again, is clear that our parents surveyed could have different expectations around school-to-home communication than what had occurred in their experience.

Our WBPD team believed that our survey comments were truly the qualitative data that echoed the themes found in prior studies and research about the parent involvement in schools of low-income and homeless parents. Our results were varied enough to indicate a need that individualized approaches and problem-solving take place to assist families in becoming involved at their children’s schools. Sumner SD can work with HHH to communicate to parents that we have the means to provide transportation to and from key school events, under Title X (McKinney-Vento) provisions. Investigating new strategies to reach our homeless parents – strategies that are tailored to bridge barriers we noted, are also called for by this feedback. It is clear that continued and enhanced partnership with HHH staff, to facilitate information exchange and parent involvement in school, could be an effective strategy to address some of the concerns raised by parents through this survey.

Cautions: In the tabulation of our survey results, it was evident that our team would not have enough responses to draw correlations between emerging themes, demographic descriptions or housing status of respondents. Future work may want to extend, over a year’s time, survey efforts with HHH clients and parents. Students could also be included. By increasing the number of participants, correlations between the background of respondents and specific barriers to parent involvement – as well as strategies to increase involvement – may emerge.

Focus Group Responses: Overview of Themes

As previously noted, six (6) parents, representing four (4) families, participated in a focus group with WBPD team members on February 27, 2007. Three families had six children between them that were attending four of our 13 schools. The remaining couple had an infant, but lived within our district boundaries. As our District is also keenly interested in outreach to parents of very young children, this couple was asked to offer input on their

perceptions of schools, as well as how to reach and involve parents to partner with them on school readiness initiatives.

Questions from our focus group (see Attachment 4) centered around general themes: school-to-parent and parent-to-school communication; perceptions of school climate (was it welcoming?); assisting children/teens with homework; and barriers parents face in becoming involved in their child’s school.

(1) *Communication*: Several key questions, as well as prompts to clarify and expand responses from our group participants, involved inquiries about communication: “How does your child’s or teen’s school get information to you about general school events?” “How do you know about general events?” “How does (the school) get information to you to gain participation in a school event?” A summary of group responses gave us key insights into effective and ineffective school communication strategies, as follows:

- ❑ Several parents (4) responded that the most frequent way they received information was by flyer or newsletter.
- ❑ Two parents (two families) had children receiving special education services (individual education plans and specific behavioral interventions.) These parents received daily or weekly notes home, which required parental responses to the teacher. Both families appreciated this level of communication about their child’s day.
- ❑ All parents agreed the best way for schools staff to reach them, quickly, was by an individualized phone call. Follow up calls were also important if a note was sent home that needed an urgent response.
- ❑ One parent noted that the coordinator of a federally funded after school program (21st Century Grant site) at his son’s school was key in reminding him of what was going on at school, as well as providing updates on his child’s behavior.
- ❑ 4 of 6 parents had access to email, although not in their housing units. (They accessed email in libraries, etc.) Parents agreed email was a good way to communicate, but not about time sensitive issues.
- ❑ Parents found out about the content and skills their children were learning by monitoring schoolwork that came home. All parents wanted more information about curriculum. They also requested more opportunities to find out about strategies teachers use with students, so they themselves could use like

strategies in a home environment with their children. Parents also wanted to know why schools would suddenly change curriculum approaches in school. The only difference in this feedback was from one parent, who had frequent meetings with his child's school, due to his son's special needs.

- Parents believed their efforts to send information to schools worked (i.e., notes to school or calls to specific staff members.) No problems were cited.

Special Issues Around Communication Between School and Parents:

- *Decision Making Opportunities* (communicating these to parents): None of the parents had ever been asked to sit on an advisory or hiring council, or to give input on an important school-wide decision. All parents we interviewed were very interested in being more involved in this manner. Parents suggested to our team that announcements through school newsletters, surveys (emailed or paper form) or small groups would all be effective ways of getting their input on key issues.
- *Difficult Situations and Strategies*: All parents felt comfortable talking through difficult situations with their school principal or staff (i.e., conflict, behavior, etc.) Two parents, who had struggled to communicate with schools in the past, noted experiences of believing they were listened to and well treated at their current Sumner SD schools. Two parents complimented school staff for offering them strategies to help their children outside of school hours: (a) a parenting class (Love and Logic curriculum) so the parent and teacher used the same behavioral interventions; (b) a teacher who taught a parent's daughter how to better cope with her anger.
- *Suggestions to improve home-to-school and school-to-home communication:*
 - More advance notice of school events (at least 2-3 weeks.)
 - Send reminders home 1-2 days prior to an event.
 - Use the lunch menus, school newsletters, etc. to communicate important information. Parents save these items for the entire month.
 - Put signs up at the school door and classroom door with important announcements.
 - HHH parents noted they had very little flexibility with their employers and work schedules. Notices about special events needed to reach them at least

three weeks in advance in order for them to work with their supervisors for time off to come to school during times they would normally be working.

(2) *Welcoming School Climates*: Our questions were, “Do you feel welcomed at your child’s school? What helps you to feel welcomed?” “What could schools do to help parents feel more welcomed?”

- Many strategies and practices employed by schools to improve communication also enhanced our parents’ perception that the school climate was welcoming. It was clear that, for Sumner SD, a school environment was considered ‘welcoming’ if there was strong & consistent communication between school staff and parents.
- To invite new parents (or parents) with preschool aged children, parents suggested well-advertised open house events with food. They wanted us to make sure flyers went out to the community at large, not only sent home with students.

(3) *Helping With Homework*: Parents responded to the questions, “Are you able to spend time helping your child with schoolwork they are supposed to do after school? How could schools better support parents so they could help their child or children with ‘homework?’ What works or doesn’t work?”

- This was the one area rated by parents that indicated the most need for improvement. Several scenarios were discussed in which parents felt inadequate in their own skills to assist their children with homework. Specific requests our parents made for our schools included:
 - Remember ‘math’ is the most difficult subject for parents to offer help to their children.
 - Parents try to use reading and math strategies they learned as children to help their own children. Methodologies have changed – so, even if they knew the content, they needed teachers to help them communicate the content with children at home, using the same terms that were used in the classroom. Workshops, right after school, were suggested as a good strategy to reach parents who might work evening shifts with this information.

- Parents made direct requests to us to ask teachers to send home “complete directions” in regards to assignments to be done after school.

(4) *Bridging Barriers to Involvement and Other Issues*: While our WBPD team had very specific areas in which we were looking to gain information, it was our intent to honor the input parents gave us on other issues, as well.

Transportation: Other areas in which parents provided comments to us included parents’ appreciation of the McKinney-Vento Act. The parents didn’t use the Act’s specific title, but they described the benefit of transportation provided to their children while the family was making multiple housing transitions. They also appreciated the opportunity to maintain their child’s enrollment in schools when they had moved out of the District’s boundaries (2 families.)

WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning): Unexpectedly, the topic of our state’s required testing was brought up in our focus group. Our team was surprised at the emotion behind parents’ negative perceptions of this testing. One parent told the story of their child being in tears and “feeling like a failure” because he missed standard (passing) in one area by four (4) points. The losses and stress caused by homelessness came out in the child’s description that not passing the test “proved everything was going wrong.”

Another parent expressed anger that so much of his child’s academic progress relied on the WASL. This parent had a child with a learning disability and was unsure if accommodations would be made for him.

Discussion: It was clear to our team that HHH parents needed support and more information about the WASL testing. The fears of parents and their children also need to be communicated to teaching and district staff, so they can be addressed during WASL preparation. Our WBPD team, while staying intent on our goal of listening to parents’ concerns, was also able to share information with parents about where they could go to get more information about WASL testing, help to prepare students, special accommodations, and that children could still advance in grades while not passing all areas of the WASL. Working to understand parents’ concern about the WASL, and to communicating accurate information about the testing will be blended into our Homeless Education Program during 2007-08.

Cycles of Action

As with any WBPD project, cycles of action are not as clear-cut as the original model of ‘participatory action research’ would suggest. Our actions, in response to our teamwork and information gathering, took place throughout the 2006-07 school year.

Defining our cycles of action became more difficult, as our WBPD team was operating on a district, versus school site level. This section of our report will briefly describe the actions we took in response to the information we gained through our project’s investigation process and team building work. Three distinct areas of action occurred:

- (A) Activity due to a strengthened partnership, as a result of joint WBPD work, between Sumner SD and Helping Hand House;
- (B) Information dissemination about our WBPD experience and results of our inquiry strategies;
- (C) Planning for future actions, based on our investigation and initial results of the first cycle of actions.

(A) Strengthened Partnership With Helping Hand House: Our WBPD team met frequently between late September 2006 through March 2007, when one of our members left for maternity leave. It became apparent to all of us that the relationship between the agency and District was working fairly well; but staff worked together only on a case by case basis, when a child’s family needed housing.

(1) Fundraising: As our WBPD team started exchanging information about both District and HHH agency events this fall, we realized our district could work with HHH to participate in fundraising events that would work to address the critical needs of emergency and transitional shelter in our region. Our employee base of 1200 individuals had not been tapped to provide support for this agency – which provided housing to at least 20 – 30 District students on an annual basis.

In response to – and in appreciation of – our WBPD partnership, our District invited Nola Renz to give a short presentation to our District’s Leadership (management) team about the impact of homelessness in eastern Pierce County and the services offered by Helping Hand House. This was done in conjunction with our United Way campaign. A few small donations were made to HHH as a result; but building recognition and knowledge of this agency’s impact on the community was also an important outcome.

In mid-October 2006, Marilee Hill-Anderson recruited seven leaders from the City of Sumner and Sumner SD to attend a morning annual fundraising breakfast for HHH. Again, while raising financial support was the goal of this event, leaders – including the City Administrator, Police Chief and Assistant Superintendent heard testimony from families well served by this agency. Complaints about having ‘homeless shelters’ in our community had been received by our police department. It was valuable for our Chief to have credible information about the impact of HHH on families and children prior to initiating conversations with Nola Renz in response to calls from local citizens. The District hopes to maintain support of this annual event. It is very likely that most of our students sheltered by Helping Hand House would no longer attend our schools if this agency did not operate in our area. No other housing agency exists locally with the capacity to assist us in this manner.

(2) *Housing Vouchers*: The District’s Homeless Education Coordinator and Marilee Hill-Anderson met with Nola Renz and other shelter providers in Pierce County to collaborate on a proposal for state funding to provide housing vouchers for 15 local families. Part of this program would be to require case managers to monitor the grades and attendance of children living in grant funded units. This project, when implemented, will put into practice the recommendations from the Gates Foundation report, which cited that the educational progress of children often went without notice as housing agency staff worked with families on plan objectives that targeted adults in a family unit. In our local project, our District’s Homeless Education Coordinator will be part of a project team that assists HHH clients to increase their family’s engagement in the education of their children, alongside other case management goals.

(3) *Helping Hand House Case Manager Training & Outcomes*: Nola Renz arranged for Marilee Hill-Anderson to present information about the McKinney-Vento Act and surveys to agency staff in December 2006. As a result of this session, two staff members (Pat Williams and Lisa Heinz) were able to learn about legal provisions that required schools to provide Title I support to homeless students. Additional resources for students and families were also discussed.

Our WBPD team asked both Pat and Lisa to give feedback on the value of our McKinney-Vento Act orientation, as well as assistance in connecting with school district resources. While not useful in each situation, staff feedback indicated the benefits from our initial meeting. Comments from these staff were:

Pat: “I did use your input to help a family gain individual counseling follow up. Thanks!”

Lisa: “To me your information was not only helpful but it was also very detailed and informative. However, when I presented your information to my client (Mom) she never followed up on any of the contacts (even when I gave her print outs of the information as well) and just left the situation at her daughter's school alone and went along with the school's suggestions of special education testing. But since our conversation, when I have needed McKinney Act information, I know exactly where to get on the Sumner School District web site. I presented the same information to another new client of mine as she was very interested in learning of what services are available to her daughter and I gave her Molly's (Homeless Education Coordinator) contact info and suggested she get in touch with her as well. So, I guess I am saying you pointed me in the right direction and it has since proven to be helpful for me.”

This training also prompted additional contacts between case managers and District staff. Connections have been made to house more families and address serious issues being faced by Sumner SD students & their parents within the HHH system.

(B) Information Dissemination: Finding an audience for the work completed by our team was not a difficult task. Information about our Sumner SD WBPD project work has been disseminated in various settings and through various means. Discussion about our WBPD involvement was highlighted at two Washington State Title X (McKinney-Vento Act) meetings, sponsored by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, during 2006-07. Initial themes of our inquiry process were highlighted in the OSPI Title X newsletter, Illuminations, that was published for all school district ‘homeless liaisons’ in the spring of 2007. The original article (Attachment 6) was posted on the WBPD website for all schools involved in the 2006-07 project cohort. A PowerPoint presentation (Attachment 7), summarizing key themes expressed by our parents, was developed by a team member. This material was presented to a local community coalition in June 2007. Additional presentations will be planned during the 2007 – 08 school year.

(1) PowerPoint: Jennifer Oglesbee created the PowerPoint presentation that summarized key findings from our survey and focus group work with homeless parents. The intent behind developing this resource was to provide school staff members, who work to

coordinate services for homeless students within each of our schools, with another tool for presentations about the importance of working with homeless families. Our WBPD team hopes that the positive feedback about our schools, offered by local parents who participated in the survey and focus group, will encourage staff to build on the positive practices in place to gain more involvement of families in the schools of their children.

(2) Initial Presentation: In early June 2007, Marilee Hill-Anderson reviewed our team's PowerPoint materials with a local school/community coalition (Communities For Families'.) About 20 individuals at the meeting learned about the WBPD project, our local involvement, and – most importantly – the feedback of our parents about their perceptions of their school involvement.

Comments from those hearing the presentation were positive. Coalition members relayed that our survey and focus group participants expressed similar themes to what they had heard from parents throughout our region, about school involvement. Coalition members also questioned the availability of academic supports to students outside of our schools, in response to parents' concerns about their ability to help their children with homework. Our District will examine whether or not we are providing adequate opportunities for students experiencing homelessness to be involved in after school programs as a result of this presentation feedback. Some additional information, such as more specific quantitative data from our survey and focus group efforts may be inserted, in order to give context to the qualitative data that is overviewed in the text.

(C) Planning For Future Action: Remaining members of our WBPD team (Nola Renz and Marilee Hill-Anderson) are committed to carrying out suggested actions, described throughout this paper, in order to build upon the knowledge we've gained during this past school year through our project work. It is evident that the enhanced partnership between Helping Hand House and Sumner SD will continue to result in financial support for local and regional housing for homeless families and students, as well as an increased information flow about school events, mandatory state assessments and resources to HHH agency staff. Specific strategies, such as continued involvement in agency fundraising events & exchanging email about dates of parent events, have been mentioned in other portions of this paper.

Additional work, which we plan to accomplish during 2007-08, includes:

- Inviting HHH staff representatives to a meeting in September 2007, facilitated by Marilee Hill-Anderson, of regional student support service coordinators. Key parent involvement opportunities, to include Title I service overviews and open house dates, will be shared. The goal of this meeting will be to establish stronger communication among our organizations so we will work more collaboratively in serving families housed by HHH. Our PowerPoint presentation will also be presented, to highlight the voices of local parents who have experienced homelessness;
- Emailing information about local school events directly to staff at HHH on a regular basis, so case managers can share it with families who are most likely to benefit. This would include information to benefit parents of infants, toddlers and preschool aged children;
- Continuing annual training for Sumner SD ‘Building Points of Contact’ (school counselors), as well as school staff teams, on the impact of homelessness on our students and academic progress. We will use our new PowerPoint in training events and make sure we are including all the relevant suggestions of parents in our presentations.
- This report, as well as tabulations of data, will be available for Sumner SD administrators to access. Several federal titles (i.e. Title I, IV, X) ask for this information in annual applications.

Closing Reflections – WBPD Team Members

In closing, it seemed most appropriate to include comments that might normally appear only in the journal entries of our WBPD members. Each member of our team submitted statements that summarized their growth in understanding of the impact of homelessness on our students, as well as the importance of parent involvement in the education of children.

(A) Reflection – Jennifer Oglesbee: In my opinion this project has really raised the awareness of homeless and highly mobile (H&HM) issues to a new level in Sumner School District. Before this project I had a good base of information about working with H&HM but out of our work came a better understanding about the specific needs of the families in our district that we are working with every day.

We gained a lot of information from the surveys that we gave out to families. The information that I felt was most important from the surveys was about a welcoming school environment. It was very reassuring to hear that the families from Sumner School District

felt welcome at their child's school. They felt that the school staff members were friendly and that they accepted them for who they were. When we had the focus group to get a little more information about our District, I was so pleased at what the families had to say. I really valued the families' input about communication between home and school and enjoyed hearing about their personal experiences within our District. One of the families was from an elementary school that I work at so it was really touching to hear the specific stories that they shared with the group. It is extremely validating to hear that what you and your co-workers are doing is really making a difference in people's lives.

Looking back at the journey that we have taken as a group to complete this project, I feel good about the work that we have done and the road that we have started down. I feel that this work is just the beginning of what we will do with the H&HM families in our district in the future. I have no doubt that we will continue learning and improving our work with families for years to come.

(B) Reflection – Nola Renz: *The research sources I read seemed to carry some particular themes. Most impressive to me was stopping and thinking about that child, that family and treating them with respect and dignity at every point of contact. Educating everyone within the school districts regarding the issues that surround families with children who find themselves homeless is just one piece of the many individualized puzzle pieces that will help these families and their children stabilize and succeed. A changed philosophy from not wanting to waste our time on someone who might not be there next week, to using each moment to maximize our contact and assist as appropriate with resources and supports may create the climate that allows the family to begin working on their issues. There is a prejudice surrounding homeless and highly mobile students and their lack of desire to learn, or the fear by the district that their test scores will decline with this population enrolled. Facing these issues and having a district wide policy that will not support a negative attitude can be the starting point for the educational success of homeless children. Equipping staff with tools and knowledge so that they can alleviate fears and promote trust is often the key for keeping these children engaged and in school.*

One common fear of families who are homeless is that they wrongly assume that homelessness alone is reason enough for CPS to remove their children. Training everyone, including the school secretary who often has the most first hand contact with families and

children who are homeless, is part of the solution. Small changes in transportation support such as picking these children up first and dropping them off last help in keeping their situation confidential and builds trust. “We had this image of not just providing a safety net but trying to provide a patchwork quilt that envelopes the kids and doesn’t leave any holes for them to fall through” stated a homeless education steering committee in Baltimore County, Maryland. School districts that collaborate with housing partners and services partners may reduce the frequency of family moves. Frequent moves made by the family often leave children feeling like outsiders making it difficult for them to forge and maintain friendships. High mobility often impedes the child’s ability to reach their full educational potential, which can begin the trap that is called the cycle of poverty.

(C) Reflection – Marilee Hill-Anderson: *I can’t believe the school year flew by so quickly, and – with that – my participation in the WBPD project. It was the first time I’d had the assignment using the ‘participatory action research’ model to investigate a topic of importance to me. Serving our students who are experiencing homelessness has been a key personal priority for several years – in my professional role as the District’s Title X grant manager. WBPD work fueled the transition of my compassion to passion in serving these students and families, who are trying so hard to survive circumstances that, so often, negatively impacts student achievement. WE, in schools, have the power every day to build things that ‘are going right’ vs. wrong - in to the lives of our students. When day to day existence is overwhelming, we can structure a child’s day with predictability, and we can communicate to parents that we know they want the very best for their child, even if life seems to be at its very worst.*

Our surveys and focus group have taught me not to believe statements such as, “That family probably doesn’t care about how their child is doing in school. They don’t have anywhere to live.” I’ll also be very skeptical of preliminary reports about parents who other professionals deem as negative or untrustworthy. The most poignant – and powerful - moment of this entire project for me came as I was facilitating our focus group in February. When I heard a parent state that “The staff at the other school that my children used to go to didn’t treat me with much respect because my speech is so hard to understand, but now people listen to me. Even the school principal takes time to talk to me,” I was so humbled. This parent had been incredibly misinterpreted by many providers who were even, at this

junction, still serving the family. This parent had also been judged for having their child call potential landlords as they struggled to find an affordable apartment. It dawned on me that the family was trying cope with a disability that had, in the past, made even simple phone calls for help into tasks that couldn't be accomplished without a great deal of effort. Providers and educators had allowed the 'ladder of inference', in the words of Peter Senge, to be a barrier in understanding and meeting the needs of this family. First impressions need never be a lasting assumption – about a student – about a family – or about a parent's commitment to their child's success in school. Simple positive overtures when a parent comes to meet with a teacher, a commitment to make sure every parent gets good information about what is happening in the classroom and in the school, and believing that every parent is their child's first educator, will help us make sure every child has a bright academic future.

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List of Attachments

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Attachment 1 | Survey Given to Helping Hand House Clients |
| Attachment 2 | Informed Consent Letter – Survey Participants |
| Attachment 3 | Calendar of WBPD (Web Based Professional Development) Project Work – Sumner School District, 2006-07 |
| Attachment 4 | Focus Group Questions |
| Attachment 5 | Informed Consent Letter – Focus Group Participants |
| Attachment 6 | Sumner School District WBPD Team Article – published In the Spring 2007 edition of <i>Illuminations</i> – Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction |
| Attachment 7 | PowerPoint Presentation – ‘Homeless and Highly Mobile Families of the Sumner School District’ |

What could the school do to help them? _____

(If you would like to add additional comments please use the back of the page)

11. Do you as a parent feel welcome and able to be involved in the schools that your children have attended?

Yes _____ No _____

What makes you feel welcome? _____

What makes you feel unwelcome? _____

What could the school do to help? _____

(If you would like to add additional comments please use the back of the page)

12. What schools offered the most support?

Current _____ Past _____

(Please list names of schools)

High School _____ Pre School _____

Middle School _____ Birth-2 Program _____

Elementary _____

13. Do you help your children with homework? Yes _____ No _____

Nightly _____

Weekly _____

Occasionally _____

Never _____

14. Do you receive regular information about school events and what is going on in your child's classroom? Yes ___ No ___ Please explain:

15. We are trying to understand how we might improve parent involvement and create a welcoming community for students in our schools. We are interested in the barriers that you and your children may have faced.

Barriers parents face for Parent Involvement:

Barriers students face for a welcoming school environment:

Thank you for completing this survey. Our researchers would like to know who completed this form

_____ Male _____ Female

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We appreciate and value your input!

Attachment 2

December 2006

Dear Survey Participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a survey about parent involvement in the education of children. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about the purpose of our survey and how input given through the survey will be used.

Survey Sponsors: Nola Renz, Helping Hand House; Jennifer Oglesbee, Intervention Specialist, Sumner SD; Marilee Hill-Anderson, Sumner SD.

Purpose: To gain information about what helps parents become involved – or maintain – their involvement in the education of their children and youth; and in the schools their children and youth attend.

How The Information Gathered Will Be Used: All data, comments and themes of comments will be tabulated by group sponsors. All comments will be recorded anonymously – no names will be linked to comments made.

Notes from surveys will be reviewed and summarized. Themes and information from surveys will be presented in a paper that Nola, Jennifer and Marilee will prepare to fulfill requirements for a course on improving educational outcomes for children who might have experienced multiple changes in the schools they attend, due to a high rate of mobility or homelessness. The course is called ‘Web Based Professional Development’ – and is sponsored by the National Center for School Engagement. ANY comments or quotes used in the paper will be used anonymously.

In addition to our paper, Survey Sponsors will be using feedback from this survey and focus groups, involving other parents, to help create strategies that will make school involvement easier for parents. This may include better training for teachers and school staff, as well as programs that could involve parents at the schools of their children.

Why We Are Asking Specific Questions: Questions asked are based on studies that have indicated specific things parents and schools can do to help parents be involved in the education of their children.

As a thanks to you for the time you took to complete this survey, your case manager will give you a \$5 gift card to McDonald’s Restaurant, upon return of the completed form to him/her. There is no need to include your name on the survey, and we have asked your case manager to keep all comments confidential.

Thank you again for your help with this important effort. If you have any questions about this survey project, please feel free to discuss them with your case manager. You may also call the survey sponsors (Marilee Hill-Anderson at xxx-xxx-xxxx; or Nola Renz at xxx-xxx-xxxx.)

Sincerely, XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Attachment 3:

**2006-07 Calendar of Web Based Professional Development (WBPD)
Scheduled Activities**

- Key: WBPD Core Tasks and meetings are in standard type.
- *WBPD associated tasks – work enhanced by collaborative partnerships formed & strengthened through WBPD are italicized.*
- WBPD Team Meetings were attended by Nola Renz, Jennifer Oglesbee and Marilee Hill-Anderson, unless otherwise noted.

September 2006

September 20th: Initial Meeting With District Homeless Liaison Regarding WBPD Program (*Marilee Hill-Anderson, Nola Renz, Jess Gotwals (HEC) and Craig Spencer, Liaison*)

September 29th – October 1, 2006: Initial Web Based Professional Development Training in Denver, Colorado (Attendees: Marilee Hill-Anderson, Jennifer Oglesbee, Nola Renz)

October 2006

October 10th: WBPD Team Meeting: Worked on logic model design.

October 25th: WBPD Team Meeting: Worked on logic model design.

Note: *Two other meetings (October 6th and 10th) were held to work on a separate project between Helping Hand, Sumner and Tacoma School Districts, alongside several other community based service providers. The project's goal was to obtain Washington State funding to provide housing vouchers and wrap around case management to 45 families in Pierce County. Fifteen (15) of those families would have been in Sumner. The project was to include collaborative work with our Homeless Education Program Coordinator (HEC) to provide case management of educational services for children in families receiving shelter through vouchers. The partnership between Helping Hand House and Sumner SD was enhanced through our team work on the WBPD Project (i.e., relationships were strengthened between the agency and district prior to the grant project plan development. As of June 2007, the state grant award to Helping Hand House was still under review, pending further negotiations with state and county agencies involved. We anticipate this project will begin during the 2007-08 school year.*

October 27th: Leadership Team Presentation
Nola Renz spoke briefly to all Sumner SD Administrators about Helping Hand House work to help house our homeless students, as well as overall agency functions.

November 2006:

November 1st: Helping Hand House Annual Fundraising

Breakfast (Marilee invited key leaders from Sumner SD and City of Sumner to participate. Presentations included parents served by HHH, as well as agency staff describing program needs.)

November 7th: First presentation in series on 'Parent Engagement.' Research by Dr. Joyce Epstein was presented by Kelli Hoekstra, M.S.W., Puget Sound Educational Service District. Marilee invited Nola Renz to attend this

session, to enhance her understanding of current studies on parent engagement in schools.

November 15th: WBPD Team Meeting: Worked on narrowing project design to one area: involvement of homeless/highly mobile parents in the education of their children. Reviewed project design and surveys.

December 2006:

December 5th: *Second presentation on Parent Engagement, featuring an overview of the work by Dr. Karen Mapp and Anne T. Henderson in summarizing studies on parent involvement in schools. Kelli Hoekstra, M.S.W., presenter.*

December 11th: Presentation & Feedback Session: (a) McKinney-Vento Act - to Helping Hand House Case Management Staff (4). (b) We also reviewed our initial parent survey and received feedback used to adjust our questions. Process for administration and collection of surveys was reviewed, along with the consent letter.

December 11th – 13th: Washington State McKinney-Vento Grantee Meeting in Vancouver, Washington. Marilee spoke briefly about the WBPD Project opportunity and experience.

December 14th: WBPD Team Meeting: Reviewed project work to date.

January 2007:

January 9th: WBPD Team Meeting: Reviewed project work to Date.

Attachment 3 - Continued

January 11th: Consultation with Helping Hand House Case Manager, Lisa Heintz. (Please see outcome comments in text of paper.)

January 13th: WBPD Conference Call with Dr. Alana James and WBPD Project partners.

January 30th: WBPD Team Meeting: Reviewed surveys and worked on tabulation of results.

Note: *Immediately after the resignation of the Sumner SD Homeless Education Coordinator (January 20th), over 20 students were referred to the Homeless Education Program. The STARR Project office dealt with these referrals during this interim period between Homeless Education Program Coordinators. Key factors in this onslaught of referrals included eviction notices being withheld until after the holidays by several local landlords; and District staff not wanting to refer students to the program coordinator – due to her pending departure. Our partnership with Helping Hand House was directly responsible for providing housing to two families who had lost their shelter during this time frame.*

February 2007:

February 1st:

Sumner SD WBPD Team Meeting and
Conference Call with Dr. Alana James.

February 6th:

*Sumner SD interview for new Homeless Education
Coordinator*

*Note: We invited Helping Hand House to designate a case manager to participate, based on our
WBPD project partnership.*

February 15th:

*Washington State OSPI Title X (McKinney-Vento)
Homeless Liaison & School Staff Training.*

*Note: Jennifer Oglesbee coordinated the registration and Attendance of Building Points of
Contact & Intervention Specialists in Sumner SD. Marilee Hill-Anderson worked with Nola Renz
to have two Helping Hand House Case Managers attend, as well as other district support staff.*

February 20th:

WBPD Team Meeting

February 27th:

Focus Group: Helping Hand House clients –
Who were parents of children & teens attending
Sumner SD schools; and / or living within
District boundaries. Dinner provided; each family
Received a \$25 gift card to a local grocery store
for participating.

March 2007:

March 5th:

WBPD Team Meeting

*Note: One of our team members, Jennifer Oglesbee, went on maternity leave from the District
as of March 13th, 2007 – three weeks prior to her 'due' date. Our second March team meeting
was cancelled as a result. Sumner SD (Marilee) also sponsored a large community summit in
late March. WBPD team activities were impacted by these two events. However, anecdotal
information about the surveys and focus groups were shared with District administrative team
members.*

April 2007:

April 19th:

WBPD Project Conference Call with Dr. Alana
James.

May 2007:

May 4th:

WBPD Team Meeting with Nola Renz and
Marilee Hill-Anderson. (Jennifer Oglesbee was
unable to attend.) Course completion require-
ments & agency/program activities were reviewed.

May 18th:

WBPD Team Meeting with Jennifer Oglesbee and
Marilee Hill-Anderson. (Nola Renz was unable to
attend.) New power point presentation was
reviewed, along with course completion requirements.

June 2007:

June 2nd:

WBPD Conference Call with Dr. Alana James and
project participants.

June 1 – 17th:

Final Project: All team members worked on the
final team project (final paper, reflections and
PowerPoint presentation.)

Attachment 4:

Focus Group Questions:

- (1) Our first area of discussion is around parent-school communication. How does your child's or teen's school get information to you about general school events?

About specific things they are asking parents to do?

About the information or areas your child is learning about in school?

What seems to be the best way for schools to communicate with parents?

What do you think our schools could do a better job at in terms of communicating to parents?
- (2) How do you get information about your child to the school?

How do you give information to the school about important decisions the school is making about programs?

What would be some ways in which our schools could improve the ways we get input from parents about important decisions?

About your child –

About school programs?
- (3) Do you feel comfortable talking to your child's teacher or principal about situations your child is experiencing at school? Difficult situations?

What would help you feel more comfortable in talking about difficult situations with school staff?
- (4) Do you attend events at your child's school? (like parent/teacher conferences?)

What helps you to be able to attend events?

What gets in the way of attending events?

What could schools do to help you attend events?
- (5) Do you feel welcome at your child's school? What helps you to feel welcomed?

What could schools do to help parents feel more welcomed at their child's school?
- (6) Are you able to spend time helping your child with schoolwork they are supposed to do after school? How could schools better support parents so they could help their child with 'homework'? (What works? Doesn't work?)

Attachment 5: Informed Consent Letter

February 27, 2007

To Our Valued Focus Group Participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a discussion (focus group) this evening about parent involvement in the education of children. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about the purpose of our group and how input given during our discussion will be used.

Group Sponsors: Nola Renz, Helping Hand House; Jennifer Oglesbee, Intervention Specialist, Sumner SSD; Marilee Hill-Anderson, Sumner SD.

Purpose: To gain information about what helps parents become – or maintain – their involvement in the education of their children and youth; and in the schools their children and youth attend.

How The Information Gathered Will Be Used: All comments or themes of comments will be recorded on easel and transcribed using a laptop computer. All comments will be recorded ANONYMOUSLY – no names will be linked to comments made.

Notes from our discussion will be reviewed and summarized. Key themes from our discussion will be presented in a paper that Nola, Jennifer and Marilee will prepare to fulfill requirements for a course on improving educational outcomes for children who might have experienced multiple changes in the schools they attend, due to a high rate of mobility or homelessness. The course is called 'Web Based Professional Development' – and is sponsored by the National Center for School Engagement. ANY comments or quotes used in the paper will be used anonymously.

In addition to our paper, Group Sponsors will be using feedback from this group and surveys given to other parents to help create strategies to make school involvement easier for parents. This may include better training for teachers and school staff, as well as programs that could involve parents at the schools of their children.

Why We Are Asking Specific Questions: Questions we will discuss are based on studies that have indicated specific things schools can do to help parents become involved – or to stay involved – in the education of their children.

Permission: Form

I, _____, give my permission to use comments made by me in the focus group on parent involvement in the education of children and youth in the following manner:

- (1) Comments, with no identifying information (my name or school association) in a paper to be prepared for the Web Based Professional Development Program, sponsored by the National Center for School Engagement;
- (2) Comments, with no identifying information (see above) in training materials to prepare school staff to work with parents of children and youth, including children and youth who have experienced multiple transitions between schools.

I understand I may contact group sponsors for more information about this project, including the review of materials produced using information from this focus group.

(Name)

(Date)

Dr. Elders Issues Memo on Immediate Enrollment

Dr. Jocelyn Elders, former U.S. Surgeon General, released a memo in February 2007 reinforcing the importance of complying with the McKinney-Vento Act's immediate enrollment provision even when students lack immunization or other medical records.

The Act requires schools to enroll homeless children and youth immediately and then work with parents and previous schools to obtain needed records or arrange for required immunizations or screenings.

Some schools have expressed concern about exposing students to po-

tential health risks when enrolling homeless students without health records. The following is an excerpt from Dr. Elders' memo that addresses this unfounded concern:

"Most homeless students who are enrolling in school...have received all required immunizations and health screenings.

For the few students who have not been immunized, school nurses and McKinney-Vento staff should work together to start the immunization process. Meanwhile, these students and the community are protected by the same

natural public health controls that protect students who refuse immunizations for medical or religious reasons (herd immunity)....

From a public health perspective, there is no reason for these children to be denied access to school....It is imperative that homeless children and youth across the country do not miss valuable school time due to paperwork requirements."

To view a complete copy of Dr. Elders' memo, visit:

www.serve.org/nche/downloads/elders_memo.pdf

MISSED
the 2007 McKinney-Vento State Training?

VISIT www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/resources for materials such as:

- Overview of the McKinney-Vento Act
- Strategies for Serving Unaccompanied Children and Youth
- Annual Data Collection PowerPoint
- And much, much more!

Web-Based Professional Development: A Participant's View

Written By: Marilee Hill-Anderson

I had read that the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) was offering an opportunity for a local team to join the Web-Based Professional Development (WBPD) Project. WBPD's mission is to increase educators' understanding of the impact of homelessness and poverty on the children they serve and improve educational practices for these children and their families.

The three domains of educational practice investigated by WBPD participants are: (1) access to educational services for homeless students and their families; (2) welcoming and inclusive school culture; and (3) development of flexible instructional strategies that meet the individual needs of homeless students.

To join the WBPD project,

districts agree to establish local teams (comprised of a school administrator, teacher, and service provider) and implement team projects using participatory action research (PAR) strategies.

We would study an area related to the education of homeless and highly mobile children, collect information about the educational experiences of local homeless students and families, design strategies to address areas needing improvement, and measure and report the results.

In addition to a weekend seminar in Colorado on WBPD project elements, we would be required to spend time online each month reading required text about PAR, journal about our experiences,

and communicate about our work to WBPD groups from other school sites. Our instructor, Dr. Alana James, would monitor our online progress reports and provide feedback to assist us in our work.

Sumner School District decided to apply for this opportunity. Nola Renz (Executive Director of Helping Hand House), Jennifer Oglesbee (Intervention Specialist), and I agreed to establish a team. After much deliberation, we chose to study the involvement of homeless parents in the education of their children.

Our work has included background reading in the general area of parent involvement (Dr. Joyce Epstein & Dr. Karen Mapp), as well as reviewing

Story continued on page 2



Inside this issue:

Web-Based Professional Development: A Participant's View	1-3
McKinney-Vento Grants	3
Resource Corner: WEA Children's Fund Grief Camp for Children Tu Voz My Venture Contest	4



Web-Based Professional Development (cont'd from page 1)

evaluation summaries of housing and case management programs within the Puget Sound region. We surveyed 24 families experiencing homelessness and held a focus group of parents living in local, transitional housing units.

Additional work has included informal training and feedback sessions with case management staff at Helping Hand House regarding (1) the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act and; (2) how students could benefit from this support beyond the transportation mandates. We have shared our logic models online with other schools and benefited from their input on our project design.

Here is some of what we have discovered:

(1) Parents believed they were well-served by Sumner School District:

All parents surveyed, living within our district, responded that they felt welcomed and had opportunities to be involved in their children's schools. This was great news for our team to read! Every parent in our focus group thanked us for providing transportation for their children to stay in their school of origin. Transportation was key to keeping their child in school and avoiding gaps in school attendance between moves.

(2) Parents most frequently cited that how school staff treated them defined whether or not a school environment was welcoming.

Specific responses to the question, "What makes you feel welcomed?" were: "treated with respect," "accepted," "supportive, friendly staff," and "good communication with school staff." Focus group participants shared stories of specific building principals spending time with them and remembering their names as examples of "customer service" they did not expect from any school. We have given this feedback to principals whose names were mentioned by

parents.

(3) Circumstances and Emotions: Why were parents homeless? Over half of our parents surveyed indicated a job loss precipitated their loss of housing. About a third of parents said domestic violence was a factor in seeking emergency shelter and new transitional housing. Some parents had previous evictions and now cannot find apartments to rent.

Several parents told us about the emotions they and their children experienced as a result of homelessness—including anxiety, despair, and depression. Parent responses varied and every situation was different. One quote on a survey seemed to sum up the sentiments of many: "There has been too much unhappiness, instability, and depression. Not enough money, too much stress, and the fear of the unknown (has impacted how my child has done in school). It's typically that the child just feels awful inside themselves. It's not easy to be positive when your familial circumstances are less than accommodating."

(4) Barriers to educational involvement included lack of access to school staff during the workday.

Many of our homeless parents are working. Several parents cited that they could not take personal or school-related calls during their work hours. Parents of teens said that their children did not bring home school notices—the older the child, the less information parents believed they received from school to "home."

(5) Specific requests our parents made to schools that would help them be more involved in their children's education were:

* Provide more advance notice about events and meetings so parents could find someone to cover their work duties and get to school.

* Provide more detail in homework instructions to enable parents to help their children with assignments.

* Provide additional opportunities to find out what was taught and why specific instructional strategies were used. (One parent raved about his child's increased academic success, fostered by the extra help received at his school's free after-school program. The school is also providing "Parenting with Love and Logic" classes, as well as evening workshops on how to help a child with homework).

* Provide help in finding transportation to school to increase parental involvement and to assist students interested in extra-curricular activities.

* Develop more communication alternatives between the school and the parent. Phone calls are best for urgent issues; notes and newsletters, including classroom newsletters are great; and email (or other Web-based avenues) is useful for general information exchange. (Over half of our parents in the focus group had email addresses and accessed email from public computers at libraries, etc.)

"Team Sumner School District" is still engaged in collecting information, analyzing results, and implementing program changes. Some of the changes we have made are:

Communication Protocols and Training: Our team has begun to integrate the parent feedback into presentations on the McKinney-Vento Act to district and school staff. Our goal is to establish effective communication strategies with parents as part of the protocol for how our schools' Building Points of Contact work with homeless students and their families as well as unaccompanied teens.

Story continued on page 3.

"Everyone at the school has been so nice. The principal met me one time, and she's known my name every time she sees me! She takes the time to listen and shows me respect. I've never felt that way before in a school. People in the school office know me, too, and are always nice to me. It's so important to feel respected and to be treated like everybody else."

~ WBPD Focus Group Participant



McKinney-Vento Grants Available

McKinney-Vento grants are available on an annual competitive basis. All districts, consortia, and Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are eligible to apply. Grants are awarded based upon need and quality of proposal. Applications are currently available on the OSPI iGrant system and are due on May 25, 2007. Visit www.k12.wa.us to access the electronic grant applications.

For 2007–08, districts with less than 30,000 enrolled students may apply for grants up to \$40,000. Consortia, ESDs, and districts with total enrollment over 30,000 students can apply for grants up to \$55,000. Activities authorized under McKinney-Vento grant funding include:

Academic Services:

- Tutoring

- Early learning programs
- Expedited academic evaluations
- Mentoring, before- and after-school programs, and summer programs in which educational activities occur
- School supplies

Administrative Services:

- Fees related to obtaining necessary records for school enrollment
- Coordination development between schools and agencies serving homeless children
- Professional development
- Adaptation of space and purchase of supplies for any non-school facilities providing authorized McKinney-Vento activities

Social and Outreach Services:

- Referring and providing pupil services (e.g., violence prevention counseling)
- Activities to address needs of homeless children arising from domestic violence
- Parent education & training
- Services to engage homeless children in public school programs and services
- Extraordinary or emergency assistance needed to enable homeless children to attend schools
- Health referral services
- Excess cost of transportation

QUESTIONS? Please contact:

Melinda Dyer
Program Supervisor, Education for Homeless Children & Youth

E-mail: Melinda.dyer@k12.wa.us
Phone: 360.725.6050

Web-Based Professional Development (cont'd from page 2)

My department will call Helping Hand House staff about school-based curriculum nights, so case managers can remind parents about these back-to-school opportunities and work with them to ensure parents have the ability to attend. We want to measure the impact of increased communication on the participation rates of parents in these opportunities.

Additionally, we are following the educational progress of specific children served by case managers who received training about how to help families access Title I resources. We are interested in seeing if more children were identified and served by their school of origin in Sumner and surrounding districts.

The close collaboration with Helping Hand House in this project has also brought about other opportunities for our students and families. Sumner School District was chosen as a partner by Helping Hand House in a recent state grant to provide local hous-

ing for homeless families. Our Homeless Education Coordinator will work with agency staff to help case manage the academic progress of children living in subsidized housing units. The project design directly relates to what we have learned through WBPD project research: few housing programs provide case management models that include the educational outcomes of children in families receiving assistance. We want to support our community housing providers in helping all family members be successful—in jobs, in school, and in life.

While formal practices change as a result of one's professional development, it is often the simple realizations along the way that are the most powerful. Our team has taken the opportunity to see our schools through the eyes of homeless parents. The stigma of being "homeless" was a burden to our parents' and students' views of themselves. Time and time again, we heard that parents felt we respected

them when we remembered their names, when they were warmly greeted at the schoolhouse door, when their calls were promptly returned, and when we acknowledged their vital interest in supporting their children's education. Our parents reported believing they would not receive this type of service from school staff due to their housing status.

Our team had assumed some of our parents would not see a child's progress in school as a high priority when they were struggling with the ability to meet basic financial and housing needs. Our research challenged and changed our assumptions. In fact, parents told us that a welcoming school environment and the academic success of their children had the ability to provide inspiration and hope to the entire family.

Marilee Hill-Anderson
STARR Project Director
Sumner School District

Looking for a Support Group?

Providence of Snohomish County currently offers two support groups:

(1) "Standing Together" is a free support group for children (ages 3–18) who have experienced the death of a loved one. Monthly meetings include a free pizza lunch for children and parents.

(2) "Kids Have Many Kinds of Loss!" is a new group for children (ages 4–17) who have suffered any kind of loss such as divorce, moving, problems with school or friends, etc. This free pilot group will meet on June 30, 2007 and includes a pizza lunch, games, and an art activity.

If interested, please contact David Hovland at: 425.261.4771 David.Hovland@providence.org



WEA Children’s Fund Helps Those in Need

Did you know that the Washington Education Association (WEA) has a fund to aid children in need? Any WEA member can submit an online form for pre-approval to make a purchase of up to \$100 per student to address specific needs. WEA members can access and submit the form on WEA’s Web site. Alternatively, request forms can be printed from WEA’s Web site and faxed to the Children’s Fund.

Items of clothing like coats, boots, and mittens are typical expenditures, along with books and school supplies.

Items excluded from reimbursement include: gift cards, food, extracurricular items, medical appointments or items, graduation gowns, and prom dresses. Please note that the above list is not an exhaustive one. If you are not sure whether an item is reimbursable or not, please contact WEA. In addition, the Children’s Fund no longer accepts reimbursement requests for purchases made at Wal-Mart.

Visit www.washingtonea.org for more information. Click on “Members/Services;” then click on the “WEA Sponsored Pro-

grams;” finally, click on “Children’s Fund Charity.” After receiving a quick approval and making the requested purchase, WEA members can either fax or mail a copy of their receipt to the Children’s Fund to be reimbursed for the expenditure:

WEA Children’s Fund
P.O. Box 9100
Federal Way, WA 98063
Fax: (253) 946-7232.

If you have questions, call: (253) 941-6700, ext 7033 or (800) 622-3393, ext 7033.

Save the Date!

**2007 NAEHCY*
19th Annual
Conference**

November 10–13

**Oregon Convention
Center
Portland, OR**

www.naehcy.org

***National
Association for the
Education of
Homeless Children &
Youth**

Free Weekend Camp for Grieving Children

Sponsored by the Moyer Foundation, Camp Erin is a weekend, overnight camp for children ages 6–17 who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Camp Erin offers a combination of recreational activities and supportive discussions to help campers build their trust, self-esteem, and coping skills.

Led by pediatric specialists and trained volunteers, activities include music, arts and crafts, swimming, boating, rock climbing wall, recreational activities, healing experiences, nature walks, and grief workshops. Camp Erin is free for partici-

pants, but an application is required. Applying for camp as early as possible is highly recommended as applications are considered in the order they are received. To register for a Camp Erin in your community, please refer to the following information:

Camp Erin—Snohomish County
Camp Killoqua, Stanwood
August 25–27, 2007
Contact: David Hovland
(425) 261-4771
David.Hovland@providence.org

Camp Erin—Pierce County
YMCA Camp Seymour, Gig Harbor

June 15–17, 2007
Contact: Heather Neal
(253) 272-8266
Heather.Neal@multicare.org

Camp Erin—King County
Camp River Ranch, near Carnation
August 24–26, 2007
Contact: Ward Stern
(206) 724-3862
Ward.Stern@providence.org

Visit www.moyerfoundation.org for more information on Camp Erin.

Act fast because registration closes when all the spots are filled!

Tu Voz My Venture Contest Offers Grants for Young Latinos

In response to the alarming rate at which Latinos are dropping out of high school, MTV Tr3s formed *MTV Tr3s Voces*, a campaign that aims to empower Latino youth to graduate high school and prepare for college, work, and life.

In partnership with Youth Venture and the Gates Foundation, MTV Tr3s Voces will award grants of up to \$1,000 each to groups of young Latinos that have new and creative ideas for

after-school programs, organizations, clubs, or other ventures that encourage and help Latino youth graduate high school and prepare for college.

The contest is open to groups of two or more individuals who are residents of the United States and who are 13 to 20 years of age at time of entry.

Awarded grants can be used toward the development and implementation of team projects and winners are selected

on a rolling basis through June 29, 2007. In addition, the contest will present a scholarship award of up to \$5,000 to each of the top five teams with the most successful projects. Each scholarship award is to be evenly split among team members.

Visit the program’s Web site for complete application procedures and eligibility requirements:

www.mtv3voces.com/dp/Tu_Voz_My_Venture_Contest

Homeless and Highly Mobile Families of Sumner School District

Marilee Hill-Anderson

Nola Renz

Jennifer Oglesbee

What is considered Homeless?

Those who are lacking a fixed,
regular and adequate night
time residence.

This may include:

- "Doubled up" with friends or family
- Hotels/motels
- RV parks/cars
- Shelters

What is needed for the involvement
of homeless parents in the
education of their children?

They need to feel welcome

What makes them feel
welcome?

Students

- Understanding,
friendly
teachers
- Friendly
students
- Equal treatment

Parents

- Friendly,
supportive
school staff
- Communication
with school
staff
- Treated with
respect

Barriers parents face
that inhibit parent
involvement:

- Lack of adequate communication with the classroom/school (Parents work during the day when teachers are available to call or return calls)
- Work schedule/not enough time
- Lack of transportation
- Single parent/divorced homes

Sumner School District

What are we already doing
for Homeless and Highly
Mobile families???

Sumner parents say that they feel welcomed at at their child's school and that they have opportunities to be involved in their child's education.

In Sumner School District...

- Families feel comfortable, respected and treated equally
- School staff know their name and greet them with a smile
- School staff members are good at speaking on a level that families can understand
- Parents enjoy the Love & Logic classes (parents and teachers can then use the same techniques/philosophies with students at home and at school)

Parents appreciate when teachers...

- Send a weekly report explaining what they are doing in class
- Personal phone calls to parents
- Return phone calls quickly
- Send notes home and follow up with a phone call

What parents say they need:

- Contact families in advance for school activities (2-3 weeks before event) and then send a reminder the week of the event
- More frequent communication about what is happening in the classroom including what they are learning
- Schools need to inform families of educational strategies so that parents can help students the "right" way at home

What parents say they need:

(continued)

- Promote/offer parenting classes that use the same philosophies/techniques that school staff are using
- Early communication from teachers when student's behavior starts becoming a problem
- Food gatherings (Ex: barbeques) to help new parents feel engaged and welcome and get to know the school