

School Psychology Newsletter

Fall/ Winter 2010



School Psychology Awareness Week

By Mandy Condit, Ph.D., and Jacqueline Scales, Ed.S.



Governor Sonny Perdue has proclaimed the week of November 8-12, 2010 as a time to recognize the contribution of School Psychology in the education of Georgia's children. The emphasis for School Psychology Awareness Week this year is on the positive work School Psychologists do to help students reach both their educational and personal goals. This year's theme, "Today is a good day to...SHINE!" focuses on encouraging simple, positive things students can do to bring out the best in themselves and others.

In Clayton County Public Schools, there are 24 School Psychologists assigned to serve each of the county's 61 schools and programs. School Psychologists provide a wide variety of services to find the best solution for each student and situation. School Psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education, completing a minimum of a specialist-level degree program (at least 60 graduate semester hours), including a year-long supervised internship. One of the services provided by School Psychologists is evaluating children and assisting teachers and administrators by providing information about students' intellectual, academic, social and emotional needs. School Psychologists serve ALL of the students in Clayton County, and provide other services such as counseling, instruction, and mentoring related to social/emotional or behavioral concerns. School Psychologists also promote wellness and resilience, as well as an enhanced understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and backgrounds. School Psychologists further assist students by providing research-based crisis interventions when needed. Additionally, they are available for consultation and training about issues such as learning problems, Response-to-Intervention, behavior management, discipline, the Student Support Team process, and bullying.

In celebration of School Psychology Week, School Psychologists across the district are engaging in activities to give back to CCPS students. For example, the Psychological Services department is hosting Ice Cream Socials for students in Special Education classroom settings at various schools in each of the three CCPS Clusters. School Psychologists will also be providing clothing and household donations for the School Social Work department's Clothing Closet.

Newsletter Committee

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From the Editor's Desk...

"Man is always inclined to be intolerant towards the thing, or person, he hasn't taken the time adequately to understand."

-Robert R. Brown

School Psychologists in Clayton County Public Schools are dedicated to providing high-quality support to all students, recognizing that those we serve are diverse in a number of ways, including culture, race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious/spiritual beliefs, and more. This issue of the *School Psychology Newsletter* focuses on raising awareness about diverse student groups, as well as providing readers with information on how to support CCPS students and their families. As always, please feel free to contact us with any questions - we hope you enjoy the issue!

Jacqueline S. Scales

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Supporting Our Children In Transition

By Sandra Kinard-Rouse, M.Ed., NCSP

Last week we recognized Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, in which the theme was “A Home for Everyone, Everyone in a Home.” Homelessness has been a significant problem in the United States for several decades and particularly in recent years. Given recent economic concerns, a growing number of individuals have found it difficult to acquire and sustain employment; thus, the number of families finding themselves without consistent housing is growing. According to the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY), one in five responding school districts reported substantial increases in the number of students without stable lodging in the fall of 2008. NAEHCY further estimates that more than one million public school students, pre-K through grade 12, are homeless.

The McKinney-Vento Act, passed in 1987 and recently reauthorized in 2001 as part of No Child Left Behind, was developed to ensure that students in transition would be able to reach their educational goals. To accomplish this objective, the Act requires various types of support be provided to these students, including the following:

- When a temporary residence for a homeless student changes, they are allowed to remain at the same school, even if they are in a different area or district. In these instances, the school system is also required to provide the student with transportation to the school.
- Given that students who are homeless may have difficulty providing enrollment documents required by the district, they should be permitted to enroll immediately.
- A Homeless Liaison is required for all school districts to ensure that provisions of the Act are being carried out.

The federal definition of homelessness includes children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. In accordance with this, Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) identifies homeless students as children who:

- live in a shelter
- live on the street
- live in foster care
- live in a campground, car, abandoned building, or other inadequate shelter
- share housing with relatives or others because housing was lost or unaffordable
- do not have a permanent address and/or permanent housing

In addition to the lack of consistent lodging, children in transition also contend with a number of other difficulties, including lack of adequate transportation, food, clothing, and supplies for school. In an effort to address clothing issues, CCPS Homeless Education Department has collaborated with the *America Family Foundation/America's Thrift Store*, located at 7055 Highway 85 in Riverdale, GA. This collaboration allows all donations of clothing and/or soft goods received from CCPS system employees to be used to generate vouchers, which help provide clothing assistance to children attending school in the district.

Each year the CCPS Homeless Education Department also coordinates a Holiday Sponsorship Project, in which our homeless population is provided with donations of clothing, household and personal items, gift certificates, and food. During the 2009-2010 school year, 182 students were assisted during the holidays, and the need is even greater this school year. If you would like to sponsor a family for the upcoming holiday season or make a contribution to help support CCPS students, please contact the Homeless Education Department at 404-362-8894.

References:

<http://www.ckhhi.org/Why%20are%20people%20homeless.pdf>

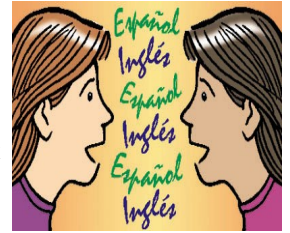
<http://www.naehcy.org/facts.html>

Quiz: Can you name these famous people who were once homeless? (Answers on Page 3)

- 1) Founder/spokesperson of Kentucky Fried Chicken
- 2) Multimillionaire, stockbroker, author of “Pursuit of Happiness”
- 3) Late-night talk show host
- 4) Creator of *Madea*/director/author
- 5) World famous director of *Mission Impossible 2*
- 6) Daughter of a world famous journalist/hostess of the morning talk show “The View” (name the mother)

Effectively Serving Our Bilingual Student Population

By Wannay Paiz, Ed.S., Magdana L. Philossaint, Ph.D., and Monica Militello, Psy.S.



Once a month, the Bilingual Committee, comprised of bilingual School Psychologists, meets to review cases. During our last meeting, we discussed the implications of being an ESOL student within the context of our own educational backgrounds. For example, despite adequate speech and language development in the primary language, one of us was erroneously referred for speech services due to articulation errors after being in the United States for only twelve months! Given that parents were trusting of recommendations made by school personnel, they signed consent for placement without questioning this decision. However, we recognize that times have changed and it is our legal obligation to ensure that we are making appropriate referrals for students who may need additional support.

In Clayton County there are **over 9,000 students** who speak a language other than English and **over 4,500 students** who are provided support through the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. There are **over 90 languages** spoken in our district, with the two main languages being Vietnamese and Spanish. The purpose of this article is to highlight some key questions related to working with students who may speak a different language and who exhibit academic/behavioral concerns, as well as some of the special factors that need to be considered throughout the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. In addition to language factors, consideration regarding cultural factors is also critical when examining student academic and behavior problems.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Ortiz, Flanagan, and Dynda (2002) when addressing cultural factors it is important for educators to avoid stereotypes that may lead to unfounded biases, as well as exaggerated and inaccurate views of a specific individual. Although student populations within U.S. schools are becoming increasingly diverse, training and education toward cross-cultural competency development remains largely inadequate. As such, there are a number of ways in which educators and practitioners can support students and their families. For example, considering the **school culture** is one way we can begin to understand the possible effects of the school culture on students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In fact, students whose backgrounds and cultural experiences differ from those of the mainstream culture may respond in ways that counter the values expected from traditional schooling. **Family culture** is another factor that should be considered when working with this population, as family groups play a significant role in cultivating the growth, development, and psychological well-being of their children. For example, some cultural groups such as those of Hispanic and Latino background, typically view the school system as capable of handling the majority of situations involved with their children. Moreover, when Hispanic families are called by the school, they may suspect they are being contacted because of problems occurring with their children, which may in turn lead to feelings of embarrassment because the behavior of one member of the family is perceived as a reflection of the family as a whole. Next, **communication** is a vital factor when working with children and families of different cultural backgrounds as it may be a substantial contributor to building rapport with these families. Since effective communication is not solely based on verbal interchanges and nonverbal gestural expressions, the assistance of interpreters/translators plays a key role when engaging in dialog with these families.

LANGUAGE CONSIDERATIONS

According to an article by Dr. Jim Cummins, it is important to first understand the basic difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS is the day-to-day language that children will use in informal settings (e.g., at recess, during lunch, riding on the bus). Because this language is considered “social language” and it employs many contextual cues, it is not as demanding as CALP. BICS usually develops six months to two years after arriving in the United States; thus, children may appear proficient in English socially while still exhibiting academic difficulties. CALP, on the other hand, involves academic learning including reading, writing, math, listening, and speaking. Students usually require five to seven years to develop academic skills in another language.

(Continued on Page 6)

Answers to Quiz on Page 2

- 1) “Colonel” Harland Sanders
- 2) Chris Gardner
- 3) David Letterman
- 4) Tyler Perry
- 5) John Woo
- 6) Barbara Walters

Bullying Basics & How We Can Help

By Katie Weakley, Ed.S.



There is a great deal of variation among researchers in the definition of bullying. However, it is considered by most to be a deliberate act of aggression that occurs for no apparent reason and typically involves a power differential between the victim and the perpetrator/s. Additionally, these confrontations can be direct (e.g., engaging in a face-to-face verbal and/or physical altercation) or indirect (e.g., via spreading rumors). As defined by the state of Georgia, bullying is “any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent present ability to do so,” “any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm,” or “any intentional written, verbal, or physical act, which a reasonable person would perceive as being intended to threaten, harass or intimidate” (Statute O.C.G.A. 20-2-751.4, 2007 Georgia General Assembly).

Examples of bullying include saying hurtful or unpleasant things to someone, deliberately excluding someone from a group of friends, telling lies or spreading false rumors about someone, sending mean or nasty notes, using gender or racially degrading names, saying hurtful or unpleasant things to someone via internet chat rooms or text messages, and spreading rumors/telling lies through internet chat rooms or personal web pages (MySpace, Facebook).

In order to help reduce bullying in the schools, interventions should be designed to promote safety and security for all students. Bullying prevention and intervention programs should be designed to eliminate all instances of bullying and teach students how to become involved in these efforts and in the acquisition and use of pro-social behaviors. A key component in this process is mental health professionals, and administrators should work with their School Psychologist, Counselors, and Social Worker to design a program that is tailored to their needs.

Some necessary components of a bullying prevention program include the following:

- Create a committee to manage the intervention efforts to reduce bullying behaviors
- Train all staff members so that the intervention is implemented with consistency and school rules are adhered to by all
- Build a sense of belonging among students and staff
- Be descriptive with praise and use it frequently when positive behaviors are demonstrated
- Develop a rubric that delineates consequences for engaging in aggressive and/or bullying behavior, and ensure that these consequences are administered consistently
- Support the students in reflection after a consequence is given and work through possible alternatives when similar situations present themselves again
- Involve parents with intervention efforts and provide them with feedback about their child’s behaviors
- Support peer bystanders so that students will feel safe when speaking up about bullying

Some examples of Anti-Bullying Programs are: The Olweus Bully Prevention Program, PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies), and SecondStep.

References

http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/bullying/bullying_pg3.html

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/nassp_bullying.aspx

<http://www.maine.gov/education/bullyingprevention/schools.htm>



NEWSLETTER TRIVIA QUESTION

Fall/Winter 2010 Trivia Question:

Can you name at least two suggestions for engaging secondary students?

Please submit answers via e-mail to JScales@clayton.k12.ga.us by Friday, November 19th

Correct responses will be entered in a drawing to receive a **gift certificate** to a local establishment!



Reminder: Answers can be found in previous newsletters, which are archived on the Psychological Services website.

(<http://www.clayton.k12.ga.us/departments/psychservices>)

Family & School Collaboration = Student Success

By Kizzy Taylor, Ed.S.

For many years, the importance of family involvement in students' academic lives has been stressed by educators. Research shows that children whose families take an active role in their education benefit in the following ways:

- Better grades
- Higher test scores
- Better school attendance
- Greater chance of graduating from high school
- Increased possibility of enrolling in postsecondary education



Ensuring that *positive* family-school relationships are developed is an *attitude* not an activity. Although building relationships between the school and family presents itself with many challenges, educators must persevere in their efforts to build partnerships with the families of our students. Those involved in this process must understand that the potential to build positive family-school relationships transpires once both families and educators acknowledge shared goals and collaboratively commit to the process.

Educators can enhance positive family-school relationships by making parents feel they are welcomed in the school. Here are a few suggestions:

- Post parent welcome signs in the school to create a hospitable environment for parents
- Help guide and teach parents how to create a healthy learning environment at home
- Provide at least four positive contacts per school year to a parent (e.g., in academics, positive behavior, and other areas of strength/progress)
- Try to reach out more to families who have the tendency to not attend school functions (At times, this may require conducting a home visit or making a phone call, but may provide the educator with a better understanding of why the parent does not attend conferences and/or other school activities.)
- Consider assigning homework projects that require the involvement of both the student and his/her family (e.g., researching family history, interviewing grandparents, or giving a report regarding their parent's occupation)
- Create a parent center at the school to be used during the school day (e.g., with computers, books, and other materials to help the parent continue their own education and/or further assist their children)
- Create clubs at the school that require both family and student participation (e.g., gardening club, reading club, cooking club, etc.)

Families should also provide a supportive learning environment for their children at home. Some ideas include:

- Teach children the value of education and constantly engage them in conversations about plans for their future
- Assume an active role in advocating for curriculum changes and school reform (e.g., ask school personnel how to be more involved)
- Volunteer at school activities and maintain consistent communication with teachers
- Speak positively about teachers and make sure that children arrive at school on time
- Keep books in the home, take trips to the library, and limit times to watch TV and play computer/video games
- Discuss what children have learned each day in school and celebrate any successes made in school

Educators and families play distinct but equal roles in assisting children with being successful in their academic environment. Without a doubt, family-school partnerships require effort and flexibility from both parties involved; however, the positive impact that it has on our children is priceless.



References

- *Best Practices in School Psychology III*
- <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa100.htm>
- <http://cte.ed.gov/acrn/parents/schoolsuccess.htm>
- *Family-School Partnerships: Information and Approaches for Educators*
<http://www.nasponline.org/educators/HCHSIFamily-SchoolPartnerships.pdf>

Working with Bilingual Students and Their Families

(Continued from Page 3)



PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

When consulting about a bilingual student's educational performance, it will be important to know how long the student has been exposed to English, their progress in the classroom setting, performance on standardized tests (e.g., ACCESS test), and some of the following key questions:

- 1) Has the team consulted with the child's ESOL teacher and involved them in the intervention process?
- 2) Is there evidence of developmental delays in the home or the country of origin?
- 3) Is there a history of academic concerns in the home or the country of origin?
- 4) Is there a history of behavioral concerns in the home or the country of origin?
- 5) Is the child having trouble communicating effectively in the home setting when compared to similar-age peers?
- 6) Has the student ever received additional support outside of the school (e.g., speech therapy, counseling, etc.)?
- 7) Is there a history in the family of academic/behavioral difficulties, or anyone who exhibits similar behaviors?

Below are some additional recommendations to consider when working with our bilingual families:

- 1) Make an effort to inform the parent of the meeting in their primary language.
- 2) Establish and build rapport by learning about how to respect and appropriately greet families during meetings, as well as how to display acceptable exiting behaviors.
- 3) For many of the families in our community, transportation is a concern. Do not automatically assume that parents not showing up to a meeting means they do not care about their children.
- 4) Take into account the socioeconomic status of families. Many students' families may have limited opportunities, which directly impacts educational attainment, lifestyle, social roles, and expectations.
- 5) Ensure that the team is prepared and ready when meeting with the parents. Rescheduling a meeting due to lack of data may place a significant burden on the family due to transportation and job requirements.
- 6) Many of our families bring younger siblings to meetings. Consider having a box of coloring books, crayons, and appropriate toys available to keep them busy.
- 7) Ensure parents understand the purpose of the meeting and what the school is asking them to sign. Use available resources within the school setting, as appropriate.
- 8) Prior to meeting with parents, consider how the student's family may have tried to resolve the problem and how effective they were in doing so. This will make it easier to clarify concerns, develop interventions, and establish goals.
- 9) Many families gather support from individuals outside of their nuclear family, including extended relatives or neighbors. Knowledge of a family's support network and resources may be helpful with educational planning decisions.
- 10) Many of our parents are intimidated by identification badges. Consider not wearing these to the meetings and introducing yourself by name.
- 11) Consider the level of acculturation of the student as well as the family. Be patient as they attempt to work out a balance with their cultural values and those of the mainstream culture.
- 12) Consider your own cultural biases and how your cultural experiences influence the selection of interventions, perception of student progress, and analysis of data.

Most of the families in our community revere those in the education field and will follow our guidance when making decisions about their children. Thus, it is extremely important that we are cognizant of special factors involving individual children and their families, and that we are working collaboratively and making every effort to meet their needs throughout the RTI process and beyond.



References

- Ortiz, S. O., Flanagan, D. P., Dynda, A. M. (2002). Best Practices in Working with Culturally Diverse Children and Families. Thomas & Grimes (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology IV* (pp. 1721-1738). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and Cognitive Language Proficiency* by Dr. Jim Cummins
<http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/bicscalp.html>