Making Pittsburgh Shine As A Child-Friendly City

What began with a discussion of whether western Pennsylvania needs to refine its thinking about how children and families are served has broader initiative to build upon existing resources and improve the well-being of children in the greater Pittsburgh area.

An ad hoc group of advisors to the Grable Foundation, known as the Grable Community Cabinet, has taken the lead in shaping a strategy to rally policymakers, practitioners and the public around an agenda for making Pittsburgh “the best place to be a child and to raise a child.”

To a large extent, the precise steps necessary to achieve that goal remain works in progress. However, two broad approaches have been identified. One is to better weave together people and ideas to strengthen the region’s network of providers of services for children and families. Another is to find ways to amplify the voices of children and youth so they might contribute to the public dialogue on issues that affect them.

“If strength is trying to put the needs and issues of children, adolescents, and families out in a broad public manner that will be much more effective at engaging the community,” Ray Firth, director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development’s Division of Policy Initiatives, said of the initiative, which OCD supports. “In that context, it is a great effort and it links nicely to promoting the region as a place to live and raise a child.”

Technology Redefines Learning

Advanced technologies are today an integral part of most children’s lives, providing highly sophisticated options for entertainment and communication that include games with incredibly realistic simulations and phones that allow them to instantly connect with one another and the Internet no matter where they are.

But in terms of learning, the implications of growing up in this highly hi-tech world are far from being fully understood. Computer-based technologies are simply developing at a pace that scientists and educators cannot keep up with. And that is not likely to change anytime soon.

“With more computer power, we are able to do things that weren’t possible 10 years ago or even 5 years ago,” said Alan Lesgold, Ph.D., dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. “What the technological changes in the future will largely mean is that things that we understand how to do but always seemed too big for us will no longer seem too big.

“Today, you can author videos illustrating culturally complex situations where the videos are entirely animations. We knew how to do it at the $50 million or $100 million level for DreamWorks some time ago, but it is now becoming doable at an affordable level. And that is one of the big changes.”

To be sure, there is no turning back. Historical trends
suggest the cell phones, computers, software, and video games of today will be rendered crude predecessors of more advanced technologies in a few short years. In recent years, the computer industry has been able to roughly double the amount of computer power available to consumers about every 18 months.

A special report on education and technology published in Science earlier this year provides a glimpse of what is being learned about how education is changing in the face of technology, including implications for science and math education, and the impact widespread exposure to technologies outside the classroom, such as video games, has on the skills children develop.

What is clear is that every medium has its strengths and weaknesses and new technologies are no exception. The challenge for researchers and educators is to find ways to capture the potential for learning what technology offers, while taking into account the weaknesses and limitations of these media.

Computers As Tutors

An example of such potential is Cognitive Tutor, a software program developed by Carnegie Mellon University scientists that is used to help teach algebra to students in some 2,600 middle schools and high schools across the United States.

Among its reported strengths is the fact that, unlike many instructional software products, Cognitive Tutor is based on academic research, including the principles of sound, cognitively based instruction. Another strength is the program’s ability to measure a student’s skills and offer instruction tailored to that assessment at different stages in the problem-solving process.

Students are given a series of problems that become more difficult as they progress. Cognitive Tutor’s developers say its fundamental instructional tool is providing students with relevant hints for solving the problem that are tailored to the degree of difficulty each is facing. Students who repeatedly ask for a hint are offered several examples of a similar problem to build mastery of the skill.

The algebra tutor was effective in helping students learn algebra and in raising their scores on standardized tests in a small, randomized study. But, like many new technologies, definitive evidence of its effectiveness awaits further investigation. Two other studies reported no significant increase in test scores. A large-scale study of the program is only now underway.

Outside The Classroom

Research suggests that new technologies influence learning beyond the classroom. One important implication is how exposure to television, computer-based games, the Internet, and other technologies at home and in other out-of-school environments is producing learners with a new profile of cognitive skills, including more sophisticated visual-spatial skills. Studies suggest these media enhance an understanding of pictures and icons, as well as build spatial orientation, spatial visualization, and other visual literacy skills that are important in the world of computers and used in many of today’s professions.

However, as with all media, such benefits appear to come at a cost. For example, while video games are effective at developing visual literacy skills, they do a poor job promoting abstract vocabulary, inductive problem solving, critical thinking, imagination, reflection, and other important skills. And game content is not benign. A significant body of research has found that exposure to violence depicted in video games, television and other visual media, tends to encourage aggressive behavior and desensitization to violence in real life, and decrease prosocial behavior.

A specific example of the benefit-cost trade off associated with technology and learning is seen in studies involving the ability of students to perform multiple tasks at the same time, or multitasking. Adolescents and young adults have been found to be particularly adept at multitasking. Research suggests that video games, for example, promote skill in multitasking. However, studies that look at how well information is processed through multitasking suggest developing such skills come at a cost. In one study, a group of students watched CNN news broadcasts that included anchors reporting the news with “news crawls” – written weather, sports and other news – streamed across the bottom of the screen. A second group watched a broadcast that showed anchors reporting the news, but had the news crawls edited out. The study reported that students who viewed the more visually complex format with the news crawls remembered significantly fewer facts from main news stories than students who watched the visually simple version of the broadcast.

Such findings have implications for schools and educators. “As kids get more experience in everyday life doing 10 things at once, we need to learn both how much attention they need to be paying for a given instruction approach to work and what might shape their ability to attend to that level,” Dr. Lesgold said.

It is one of the many challenges and opportunities that technology poses for education. Others include simply understanding the strengths and weaknesses of rapidly developing technologies, and finding a mix of new media and older media, such as print, that adapts to a more technology literate generation of learners while promoting development of a
Relationships formed between parents and their young children strongly influence children’s development. In fact, attachment theory and research suggests that these early relationships lay the foundation for children’s social and emotional development, as well as their academic skills.

Attachments are unique, lasting emotional ties between infants and their parents. The quality of such bonds is largely determined by the parent. Healthy “secure” attachments are typically the product of sensitive and responsive parenting, while poorly formed or “insecure” attachments can result from insensitive, rejecting or inconsistent parenting.

The quality of these relationships is important. Secure attachment is linked to healthy social, emotional, cognitive, and motivational development. Children who enjoy a secure bond with their parents when they are infants, for example, are more likely in childhood to be independent and self-confident, to get along well with their peers and teachers, be able to manage their emotions, be focused and motivated in school and to have strong problem-solving skills.

On the other hand, insecure attachment forecasts developmental and adjustment problems. Children who were insecurely attached when they were infants are more likely in childhood to have poor social skills, to act out and be disobedient, to have poor communication skills, to be impulsive and easily distracted, and to lack curiosity and motivation in school.

How parents and practitioners can promote healthy child-parent relationships, and promising curricula and programs to help them do so are among the topics explored in the policy brief, Supporting Healthy Relationships Between Young Children and Their Parents: Lessons from Attachment Theory and Research, published by researchers at the Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy.

The report emphasizes, for example, that it is important for practitioners to establish a trusting and supportive relationship with parents when working to improve child-parent relationships. As guidelines for accomplishing this, the researchers suggest that practitioners work on doing the following:

- Help parents understand that two of their principal responsibilities are to comfort their child and to facilitate their child’s exploration of the world.
- Help parents understand typical child development.
- Help parents reflect on their own parenting strengths and challenges.
- Use the parent-child relationship as an “engine of change.”

Researchers also report that several curricula and programs are available to help practitioners support healthy relationships between young children and their parents, and others are currently being developed and evaluated. Those summarized in the report include Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up, The Circle of Security, Partners in Parenting Education, and Promoting First Relationships.

These protocols are specifically focused on enhancing child-parent relationships and can be used alone or in combination with other family support services.

Engaging The Community

In December 2007, the Grable Foundation gathered 10 leaders of nonprofits that work with children and families to explore the status of children in western Pennsylvania, the region’s strengths as they relate to child well-being, whether there is a need to disrupt local thinking about how children are served, and other issues. The nonprofit leaders had been convened to advise the foundation, whose mission is focused on ensuring the healthy development of children.

Information was gathered from a range of sources, including sessions with leaders in education, human services and health care, such as Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh CEO Roger Oxendale, Allegheny County Department of Human Services Director Marc Cherna, and Mark Roosevelt, superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

The Community Cabinet studied other U.S. cities that have citywide children’s agendas, including Santa Clara, Calif. and St. Louis, Mo. and they made a fact-finding trip to Toronto, which has embraced a children’s agenda that includes regular progress reports, a children’s advisory committee that reports to city government, and a 10-year blueprint for providing integrated, comprehensive, high-quality children’s services.

“That was an exciting place to start because it challenged us to think about how Pittsburgh matched up and whether there is more that we should be doing,” said Linda Miller Krynski, who chairs the Grable Community Cabinet.

The information-gathering process produced encouraging evidence about services available in western Pennsylvania and identified areas that can be improved. “We have terrific things happening here for children and families,” said Krynski. “But there are other cities that are further ahead at pulling it all together.”

Among the cabinet’s key findings was that the well-being of children often depends on where they live in the region. They noted that local services could be better coordinated and local government and the community at large needed to work together on a comprehensive children’s agenda. Pittsburgh also lacks a region-specific report card as sources of information and support for children and families, and drafting a partnership agreement in support of a shared vision and commitment to improving child well-being.

Two Big Ideas

The findings helped the Grable Community Cabinet develop two initial approaches to making Pittsburgh one of the nation’s most child-friendly regions. Over the past year, some progress has been made toward adding detail to the strategies, but much work remains.

One strategy is to more effectively connect practitioners, educators, policymakers and others whose work is critical to the well-being of children and families and to kindle greater public awareness of children’s issues. By weaving people and ideas, the cabinet hopes to promote collaboration, innovation, and efficiency in children’s and family services, and support for a comprehensive children’s agenda in the region.

“The goal is efficiency, more collaboration, and more coverage,” said Grable Foundation Program Officer Kristen Burns. “But it also goes hand-in-hand with innovation. When you get all of these smart people together who care about the same issues, things start happening.”

Steps taken so far include establishing a blog on the Grable website devoted to discussion of children’s issues. Another strategy the cabinet recommended was to hold a regional leadership conference for later this year. Such a conference is being organized by Leadership Pittsburgh, Inc. and will focus on children’s and family issues. The conference attempts to replicate the Technology, Education, Design (TED) talks that have been conducted across the country for the purpose of convening experts in select fields to stimulate discussion and new ideas on topics ranging from science and education to economics and world affairs.

Other strategies still being developed include raising public awareness of children’s issues through articles in local publications, creating multimedia materials to disseminate information to stakeholders, strengthening school districts as sources of information and support for children and families, and drafting a partnership agreement in support of a shared vision and commitment to improving child well-being.

The second approach toward creating a more child-friendly region is to give children a stronger voice in the community than they have today.

A stories project, for example, has been developed to teach children to use communications technologies such as gigapan, audio-radio production and online media. In addition, the project teaches them effective ways of expressing their views, ideas, goals and needs.
Earlier this year, the federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs received a significant increase in funding as part of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as the economic stimulus bill, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama.

The act provides increased funding of $1 billion for Head Start and $1.1 billion for Early Head Start. The stimulus money is a separate addition to the funds allocated for the programs’ annual budgets, which total more than $7 billion.

Head Start, begun in 1965, is a comprehensive child development program that promotes school readiness by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other support to low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families. In 1995, Early Head Start was established to extend support to children ages birth to 3 years old when research provided clear evidence that a child’s earliest years are critical periods of growth and development.

Head Start is the longest-running program to address systemic poverty in the United States. It is also one of the most heavily researched programs in the nation. Still, debate continues about the program’s effectiveness.

Recent research, however, makes a case for investing in Head Start as a means of helping low-income children achieve better outcomes. Studies suggest that while gains may be small or moderate in some cases, participating in Head Start and Early Head Start gives children important advantages in cognitive development, health, and other domains. In addition, a recent study suggests that even impacts considered small can generate lifetime benefits that exceed the current $9,000-per-student estimated cost of Head Start.

Cost Effectiveness Of Head Start
A growing body of evidence suggests that Head Start is able to produce a range of short-term and long-term benefits for children who participate. Estimates that take into consideration the value of those benefits and the cost of the program suggest that Head Start is a cost-effective investment—at least as it was operated during its early years through the 1980s, a period for which researchers are more reliably able to track long-term outcomes of Head Start children.

The more difficult questions center on the impacts of Head Start as it is operated today. What long-term outcomes can be expected among the 1 million children in the program? And what is the cost effectiveness of Head Start as it is currently operated?

The impacts of Head Start on children may change over time for several reasons. Head Start itself, for example, has evolved over the years. The kinds of developmental environments that children not in Head Start experience at home and in early childhood programs may also change as, for example, more mothers work outside the home and the range of state, local and federal programs for young children expands.¹

Benefit-Cost Estimates
Significant progress has been made in recent years in identifying the causal impacts of Head Start, which has led to a growing body of research that suggests the program likely became cost effective during its first few decades.²

Evidence of long-term impacts on children were drawn from outcomes of those who were enrolled in Head Start in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. One recent study, for example, found that white children who participated in Head Start in 1980 or earlier were about 22% more likely to complete high school than their brothers and sisters who were in some other type of preschool arrangement. They were also about 19% more likely to attend some college. The study reported that the school attainment gains for African-American children...
were small. However, attending Head Start was associated with significantly reducing their chances of being arrested and charged with a crime later in life. Researchers also report evidence that gains in school attainment for Head Start children are linked to program funding levels. In another recent study, researchers reported that a 50%-100% increase in Head Start funding is associated with a one-half year gain in school attainment and increases by 15% the likelihood that children will attend at least some college when they get older. Such gains were seen among African-American children as well as whites. The estimates were calculated for children who participated in Head Start during the 1960s and 1970s.

Such impacts have lead researchers to estimate that Head Start, as operated in the 1960s through the 1980s, produced $7 in benefits for every $1 spent on the program. That estimated benefit-cost ratio is similar to those found among much smaller, more intense, and more costly model early childhood programs, such as the Perry Preschool Program.

Cost Effectiveness Today
The long-term impacts of Head Start on the children enrolled in the program today will not be known for many years. The absence of such data makes estimating the cost effectiveness of the program as it is operated today a challenge.

Researchers Jens Ludwig of the University of Chicago and Deborah Phillips of Georgetown University undertook the difficult task of projecting the long-term impacts of Head Start on children who are now enrolled across the country and estimating the cost effectiveness of the program as it is operated today.

Their investigation was aided by rigorous evidence of short-term impacts from the recent Head Start Impact Study commissioned by the federal government. The study is a randomized experimental evaluation of Head Start impacts measured within one year of random assignment. In addition to random assignment, the study includes a representative sample of program sites. In other words, rather than being a small, tightly controlled demonstration, it is an examination of a public program implemented in a wide range of circumstances with varying quality. One key question is how large would Head Start’s short-term impacts need to be to suggest that the program’s long-term benefits justify program expenditures.

Researchers examined that question by looking at the short-term impacts reported in studies of other early childhood interventions for which there is also evidence of long-term benefits in excess of cost, and by estimating the dollar value of a standard deviation increase in early childhood test scores. Available evidence on a range of early childhood interventions – from relatively low-cost large-scale programs such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centers to small, very intensive randomized model experimental programs like Perry Preschool and Abecedarian – point to lasting program benefits that outweigh program costs.

Researchers estimated that positive impacts on achievement test scores of .1 to .2 standard deviation are large enough to produce long-term dollar-value benefits that exceed the costs of the program.

The Head Start Impact Study reports that 3-year-old and 4-year-old children in the program as it currently operates had scores within the .1 to .2 standard deviation range for pre-reading skills such as letter naming and word identification, and for pre-writing and vocabulary. Other findings include evidence that Head Start had positive impacts on the overall health of children in both the 3- and 4-year-old groups and in their access to dental care.

Ludwig and Phillips suggest that even given the limitations of available data and methods for estimating long-term impact, Head Start data as operated today likely produces benefits for children whose dollar value exceeds the cost of the program.

Early Head Start
Early Head Start was established in 1995 when researchers began reporting that the infant and toddler years were critical periods in the maturation of the brain during which experience and proper stimulation can play key roles in enhancing development. The program provides early care and education and comprehensive services to low-income children ages birth to 3 years, and support to pregnant mothers and families. In 2006, nearly 86,000 children under age 3 and about 11,000 pregnant women were enrolled in Early Head Start.

Data from Early Head Start Program Information Reports provide a profile of the children and families enrolled in the program and the services and supports they are provided. In addition, recent research provides insight into the impact of Early Head Start on the children and families enrolled.

Families And Children
The most recent data on the children and families enrolled in Early Head Start come from the program’s 2005-2006 Program Information Reports, which sites across the country are required to submit each year. When analyzed, several key findings emerge, including these:

- Early Head Start supports working parents. About 66% of families served included at least one working parent in 2006. At least one parent was in school or in training in 24% of families.
- The program served a diverse range of low-income children, families, and pregnant women. The racial and ethnic
profile included 42% white, 30% Hispanic and 25% African American.

- Children and families had access to a wide range of services. The most widely accessed services were parent education, 65%, and health education, 60%. Children also received dental, medical, and mental health services and 92% of the pregnant women enrolled received prenatal and postnatal care.

- Among the children who did not have health insurance when they enrolled in Early Head Start, 54% obtained insurance during their first year in the program. And 93% of children in the program received all immunizations appropriate for their age.

**Early Head Start Impact**

Among the best evidence of the impact Early Head Start has on the children, families, and pregnant women who participate in the program are the findings reported in a rigorous, large-scale, random assignment evaluation of 17 program sites that was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The evaluation reports that, overall, low-income children and families enrolled in Early Head Start enjoyed modest, but positive outcomes. The study also showed that some of the outcomes the program improved are important predictors of later school achievement and family functioning.

Among the key findings of the Early Head Start evaluation were the following:

- Early Head Start had significant positive impacts on cognitive development among 3-year-old children. On average, they scored higher than children in a control group who did not participate in the program on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development Mental Development Index, an assessment of cognitive development. However, the scores of Early Head Start children still fell below national norms.

- Fewer Early Head Start children scored in the at-risk range of developmental functioning than did children in the control group.

- Early Head Start children scored higher on assessments of language development than peers in the control group. Also, fewer Early Head Start children scored in the at-risk range of developmental functioning.

- Early Head Start was found to have favorable impacts on several aspects of social-emotional development at age 3. Compared to children in the control group, for example, Early Head Start children tended to engage their parents more, were more attentive during play, and were rated lower in aggressive behavior by their parents.

The evaluation also reports that Early Head Start had positive impacts on a range of parenting outcomes. For example:

- Early Head Start parents were more emotionally supportive with their children than parents in the control group who did not participate in the program. Early Head Start parents, for example, scored higher on the Home Observation Measurement of the Environment.

- Early Head Start parents were also more likely to report reading to their children every day and they were less likely than control group parents to engage in negative parenting behaviors. They also reported using a greater range of discipline skills, including more mild strategies and fewer punitive strategies.

- More Early Head Start parents participated in education or job training programs compared to control group parents. However, such outcomes did not lead to significant improvements in family income during the study period.

- Early Head Start had significant favorable impacts on several areas of fathering and father-child relationships. For example, fathers were more likely to participate in child development activities, and Early Head Start children were more able to engage their fathers and be more attentive during play.

The program’s impacts on children and parents were greater among certain subgroups, including African American families and families who enrolled during pregnancy. In addition, the evaluation found that Early Head Start families were more likely than those in the control group to receive a broad range of services and much more likely to receive intensive services focused on child development and parenting.

As with most other Head Start studies, it is unclear how such impacts influence long-term outcomes. However, research suggests that reductions in risk factors and improvement in protective factors may support improved outcomes later in the lives of children.

**References**


This Special Report is based on the publications cited above. It is not intended to be an original work but a summary for the convenience of our readers. References noted in the text follow:


“Everyday people in this city in positions of power are making decisions that affect children whether they know it or not,” Burns said. “They might be decisions about kids and kid’s services or budgets that will come back and rest on the shoulders of kids. It’s hard to imagine a decision that doesn’t in some way affect children and families.

“It is important for those people to hear the voices of children so they can incorporate those viewpoints into their decisions. It is also important for children to know how to express their views and tell their stories in a way that can be heard and it is important to their self esteem to know that people want to hear those stories, that they matter.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the Grable Community Cabinet, visit the Grable Foundation website: www.grablefdn.org/cabinet.html.

balanced set of skills.

And, for Dr. Lesgold, the relentless march of technology raises an even larger question. “When I think about the nature of human existence, I keep thinking about what can we teach people that will give them a happy, productive and survivable role in a world where machines can do more and more of the stuff that used to be valued human capability.”

REFERENCES – This article was largely based on the following publication:
Education & Technology: special section, Science, 323, 53-93, 2 January 2009.

Parenting Guide Series Available From OCD

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The You & Your Child parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children’s fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides
University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development
400 North Lexington Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15208.

The You & Your Child parenting guides are also available on the OCD website as portable document files at: www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingguides.asp.
Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities—and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child’s chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for Parents magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child’s lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents. All columns are available on OCD website at: www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingcolumns.asp

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects.

Free Background Reports Cover Children’s Issues
University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development offers a recently-update series of free background reports providing concise overviews of current topics important to children and families.

New topics in the series, Children, Youth & Family Background, include childhood obesity, foster care, early literacy, parent-teen relationships, and the trend among nonprofit agencies to help support their missions by starting money-generating social enterprises.

The reports, originally produced to keep journalists and policymakers up to date on children’s issues, are available free of charge to anyone interested in learning about the latest developments in areas ranging from education and child development to child welfare and juvenile crime. These reports are written, edited, and reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

All Children, Youth & Family Background reports are posted on the OCD website as portable document files (.pdf) for viewing and downloading at the following address: http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/backgrounders.asp.

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PhotoVoice Teen Project

On April 24, 2009 the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development PhotoVoice Teen Project featured an exhibition of photos captured by teens from Family Support Programs. Photovoice is a participatory action research method that entrusts cameras to persons who seldom have access to those who make decisions over their lives. The specific aim is to promote dialogue about salient issues through group discussion of photographs. In addition, the project explored topics on self-worth, self-awareness and external influences that shape image and feelings. The teens used photography as a conduit of expression, critical reflection, and empowerment. Photos can be seen at the Office of Child Development and teens will present at the Annual Family Support Conference on May 19th at the Westin Convention Center Hotel. Special thanks to the Heinz Endowment Summer Youth Philanthropy Project and the families and caregivers of the Family Support Programs for a successful project connecting with our youth.
Family Support Conference Returns To Pittsburgh In May

The annual Family Support Conference returns to Pittsburgh in May with a focus on parent leadership.

Increasingly, parents are rising to the challenge of helping to change their communities by becoming active, involved and empowered, even during these difficult economic times. The 16th annual family support conference, “Unlocking Resources: Parent Leadership is the Key,” provides opportunities to celebrate and support that movement of change.

The conference is scheduled for May 19 at the Westin Convention Center in downtown Pittsburgh. It is sponsored by Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic and supported by more than two dozen organizations, including the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

This year’s conference features the return of keynote speaker Dr. Adolph “Doc” Brown III. Dr. Brown is a former university professor and administrator, author, family therapist, consultant, and speaker who is dedicated to helping others overcome major stumbling blocks in their lives through self-motivation and self-improvement.

Conference moderators are L. Twila Davis, a parent leader at the East Liberty Family Support Center; Gloria Rodriguez-Ransom, parent leader at the Wilkinsburg Family Support Center; and Robert Nelkin, president and chief professional officer of the United Way of Allegheny County.

The conference offers more than 30 workshops on topics that include strategies for helping parents become effective advocates within the child welfare, education and other systems; men in early childhood; strategies for empowering the teenage parent; raising safe kids; building collaborative relationships with families; and others.

Allegheny County is home to one of the largest family support networks in the United States with more than 30 centers, which are primarily funded by the county Department of Human Services.

The annual conference is designed for parents, human service agencies, neighborhood leaders, faith-based groups, family support participants, community and economic development organizations, advocacy groups, foundations, child care practitioners, educators, counselors, mental health providers, social services workers, public agency staff, policy makers and elected officials.

The standard registration fee is $95. Standard registration deadline is May 1, 2009. Late registration after May 1 is $110.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Doris Dick at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 412-244-3363, or visit www.education.pitt.edu/news/newsdetails.aspx?id=335.