New Program Targets Student, Faculty Mental Health

Portions contributed by Megan Ryder, Director of External Relations, College of Education, University of Missouri—Columbia and David J. Downs, MPERspective Editor

At the 2007 MU Partnership for Educational Renewal summer retreat—which involved more than fifty superintendents, school leaders, and state legislators from across Missouri—school mental health was the main topic of discussion. The result of this important dialogue was the creation of the Mental Health Leadership Academy, in which school leaders, teachers, counselors, nurses, and social workers come together to address this growing concern.

More than sixty representatives from 22 MPER partner districts attended the first academy session, which was held in October and organized by MPER and MU’s Center for the Advancement of Mental Health Practices in Schools (CAMHPS). Presenters at the academy included Jim Koller and Karen Weston, co-directors of CAMHPS; Richard Phillips, executive director of the Missouri Student Success Network; and Wendy Reinke, assistant professor in MU’s Department of Educational, Counseling, and School Psychology. Participants discussed mental wellbeing as a school improvement effort and outlined prevention and promotion activities for students in their early years.

Meeting with like-minded school mental health professionals is a valuable experience, reports Sara Svoboda Gay, Ph.D., School Psychologist for the Hallsville R-IV district and academy participant. “The mere fact that this academy exists shows that we recognize the need to promote student and staff mental health in Missouri schools,” Gay says. “I am hopeful that this academy will help provide action steps toward making mental health a stronger focus in our public schools.” The academy encourages participating districts to design and implement a strategic plan for adopting programs and policies that address the many non-academic barriers to learning.

The Mental Health Leadership Academy meets for its second session in Columbia on Tuesday, January 15, 2008. See page two of this newsletter or contact the MPER office for more information on the initiative.

Important Upcoming Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 8</td>
<td>TFP Monthly Mentor/Liaison Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Mental Health Leadership Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 22</td>
<td>MPER Operations Council Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>MPER Governing Board Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 12</td>
<td>TFP Monthly Mentor/Liaison Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 14</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (West)</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 21</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (East)</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (Central)</td>
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Higher Ed Reaches across Missouri via Polycom

Linda Fox, Mentor Teacher
Dewey Elementary School, Chillicothe R-II Schools

In today’s world, continuing education can take on a new look. No longer must the instructor be within arm’s reach of the students. The use of Polycom video conferencing technology is guiding and aiding education out of necessity. Remote learning centers can take part in study groups guided by an MU faculty member on the campus through the use of this valuable resource.

Chillicothe principal Pam Brobst secured study group funding during the 2006-2007 school year for staff development involving professor Debbie Holland. Holland conducted an initial visit the school to assess faculty needs, and then worked with the teachers in scheduling Polycom sessions. The video conferencing unit connected Holland, located on the MU campus, with the Chillicothe elementary school faculty and staff for these live meeting sessions, bringing the expertise of a college professor into professional development discussions, despite the miles. Participants had the opportunity to brainstorm strategies for teaching primary students about literacy and written communication. Holland’s guidance and knowledge of the best practices for teaching young children played an integral role in this instructional improvement initiative. Polycom technology aided the quest for knowledge for staff and faculty.

Continues on page 2…

MPERspective is interested in publishing articles on partner districts and university departments. Narrative reports on successful improvement initiatives, district and departmental updates, quotes on MPER and affiliated programs, and other feedback are all welcomed for consideration. Submissions may be directed to MPERspective Editor David J. Downs, via email (jdowns@hallsville.org).
Important Information on Upcoming Meetings

Mental Health Leadership Academy
Tuesday, January 15, 2008
9:30 AM – 2:00 PM
Courtyard by Marriott, Columbia

Open Space Forum at MPER Operations Council Meeting
Tuesday, January 22, 2008
9:30 AM – 2:30 PM
Lenoir Community Center, Columbia

The January OpCo meeting will include sharing sessions, allowing districts to learn from one another. The morning will begin with small group discussions on nine hot topics (including embedded collaborative learning time, Positive Behavior Support, new teacher induction programs, tardy reduction programs, student-led conferences, and peer mentoring programs, among others). Facilitators from various MPER districts will begin each dialogue. Participants may move freely from one conversation to the next based on need and interest.

Maps to these events are available online.

Polycom in Chillicothe (Continued from page 1)

In addition to the study group, Polycom video conferencing saves teaching fellows numerous hours of travel time. Chillicothe fellows regularly attend class in Blue Springs on Thursday evenings. Using this technology, fellows are able to remain at Dewey School and take part in course work through the Blue Springs-Chillicothe connection once per month. The teaching fellows are extremely busy with both full-time teaching and master's level course work, so this is a significant savings of time and travel.

As an added bonus, Chillicothe’s schools look forward to participation in the College of Education’s Star Light Reading Program, when MU student athletes read stories to elementary students via Polycom video conferencing. Watching older students read will provide a powerful motivational model for primary viewers. Chillicothe hopes that local athletes attending Mizzou will showcase their literacy skills, but any student athlete will be welcomed warmly by students.

Through the use of the Polycom technology, education is spanning great distances across the state, connecting Missouri as a community of learners.

Columbia School Receives Richard W. Clark Award

Ann Foster, Executive Director
National Network for Educational Renewal

The NNER is engaged in the simultaneous renewal of P–12 schools and the quality of preparation of educators for our schools. Schools and universities work in partnership to advance NNER’s mission of engaging educators in professional development and teacher preparation experiences that result in access to quality learning for all students. It is NNER’s belief that well educated students will continue to improve the democracy in which we live.

The Richard W. Clark Award for Exemplary Partner School work recognizes schools where school-university collaboration advances the NNER mission. Recipients of this award sustain the partner school work and demonstrate the benefits of school-university collaboration to improve learning for all students and advance the education profession in a democracy. NNER has selected Columbia Public Schools’ Paxton Keeley Elementary as the 2007 recipient of this prestigious award.

NNER Executive Director Ann Foster (center left) presents the Richard W. Clark Award banner to Paxton Keeley Principal Elaine Hassemer (center) and Mentor Teacher Sally Widbin (center-right), along with MPER Co-Directors Dan Lowry (far left) and Deb Carr (far right).

“The relationships among democracy, schooling and educational renewal should not be taken lightly. They are interconnected in ways that, taken together, form a magnificent tapestry of human freedoms and dignity.”

—John Goodlad