Does the Media Disparities in Family Development: Circles of Influence 

Educational Disparities

Extended Family
- Does the child have relationships with other caring adults?
- Are there neighbors/adults friends who are or can be mentors/friends for the child?
- Are grandparents involved in the child’s life?

Parents/Parenting
- Do parents have a warm, nurturing relationship with the child?
- Do parents understand the child’s individual learning needs?
- Is there regular, structured routine in the home?
- Do parents provide proper nutrition/health care?
- Do single parents have support of friends and/or family?
- Are parents actively involved in child’s school or child care?
- Are parents actively involved in the community?
- Do parents teach an appreciation of their own culture/heritage, as well as that of others?

Informal Supports
(parents, siblings, extended family, neighbors)
- Do parents have a positive, healthy relationship whether they are together or apart?
- Do parents have good parenting skills? Do they have access (time, financial resources and availability) to parenting classes?
- Do parents talk and read to children routinely?
- Do parents expect their child to succeed, and are their expectations reasonable?
- Do parents provide children opportunities for learning?
- Do parents teach children social skills?
- Do parents model learning?

Faith Communities
- Do faith communities support public education?
- Do faith communities provide learning opportunities for kids, parents and kids and parents together?
- Do faith communities value learning equally for boys and girls?

Service Agencies
- Do human service agencies take a holistic/ecological approach when they work with children and families?
- Do service agencies involve families as partners?
- Are physical AND mental health screening and related services available for all children?
- Do service agencies provide parent education/skill development?

Informal Supports
(Schools, faith communities, community groups & agencies, business)
- Do businesses demonstrate commitment to diversity efforts at the highest levels of management?
- Do businesses partner with community groups in helping to address the inequities in educational opportunity and access (tutoring, scholarships, for example)?
- Do service agencies provide parent education/skill development?

Business
- Do businesses follow the “culture” of poverty and consider eradicating or reducing it important?

Communities
(Schools, faith communities, community groups & agencies, business)
- Does society understand the concepts of prevention and return on investment?

Policy
(Local, state, national, international)
- Does society value youth?

Society
- Does society as a whole understanding of quality school experience and adequately fund them?

Schools
- Are schools culturally aware and sensitive?
- Are there high expectations and sources of support for all students?
- Does school encourage involvement of parents in and out of school?
- Does the school (or district) encourage (and pay for and reward) professional development for teachers?
- Are community volunteers used to enhance the child’s learning?

Communities in general
- Is learning valued and encouraged in the community?
- Does the community provide opportunities for youth to be involved in learning?
- Does the community offer opportunities for youth to take leadership?
- Does the community feel safe to its residents?
- Are there adequate police protection?
- Does the community offer parent education opportunities?

Family Situation
- Are parents or guardians physically and/or emotionally present in the child’s life?
- Is there sufficient household income to meet basic needs?
- Is the physical environment stable, safe, comfortable?
- Is the emotional environment supportive or stressful?
- Do children have a place to study?

The Child
- Are parents/guardians aware of their child’s strengths and weaknesses?
- Is the child’s Individual Learning Needs?
- Is there a safe, orderly and welcoming climate in the school?

Informal Supports
(parents, siblings, extended family, neighbors)
- Are parents active in the school?
- Are parents involved in child’s learning?
- Are parents involved in child’s learning?

Faith Communities
- Do faith communities support public education?
- Do faith communities provide learning opportunities for kids, parents and kids and parents together?
- Do faith communities provide learning opportunities for boys and girls?

Informal Supports
(Schools, faith communities, community groups & agencies, business)
- Do businesses demonstrate commitment to diversity efforts at the highest levels of management?
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Business
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- Does society understand the concepts of prevention and return on investment?

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(Local, state, national, international)
- Does society value youth?
The model on the reverse side of this insert, *Circles of Influence*, has been created by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium as a way of visually illustrating the multi-layered influences underlying the issue of Educational Disparities.

It is based on the original “ecological model” (The Ecology of Human Development) developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s that is well-known to most family scholars and practitioners. The model has had many permutations and interpretations over the years, but at base level, it recognizes that each individual, as well as the family as a unit, is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping contexts, systems or environments. This includes systems in which the family and/or its members are directly involved, such as neighborhoods or schools, as well as systems that are more distant from direct interaction or influence, such as community, policy and society.

Briefly, the five circles are:

- **The child**: Everything children are born with and how they influence and are influenced by the world around them.
- **Informal Supports**: The influence of parents and parenting, siblings, grandparents, extended family, neighbors, and informal mentors. It includes the quality of the relationships as well as the quality of the home environment.
- **Communities**: The influence of schools, faith communities, service agencies, business and communities at large. Includes access to quality resources, the physical and emotional environment, attitudes, and interaction and integration among people and institutions.
- **Policy**: Public and private policies. The most effective policies consider all the various influences, as well as the intended and unintended impacts on families and children.
- **Society**: Societal beliefs, values, norms, customs and practices, including those of media, technology and the arts.

In addition to the five circles, this model recognizes the cross cutting impact of **race and ethnicity**. Each of the five circles, from individual children to society, are profoundly affected by race and ethnicity. It is critical that these influences be identified, acknowledged and examined.

The *Circles of Influence: Educational Disparities* is an attempt to systematically examine educational disparities using this ecological model. It raises questions about many different aspects of educational disparities and the achievement gap that occur in each of the circles of influence that affect children and their families. These questions are not intended to be judgmental or prescriptive. They are intended to raise issues that research shows to have an effect on children’s ability to learn. Although children’s innate potential to learn is important, these external factors have the capacity to enhance and detract from that potential.

We recognize this framework is a work in progress. We will continue to add, subtract, and modify the contents of this model as our work on Educational Disparities grows over the next two years. Readers will notice the Circles of Influence graphic and the content have both changed since it was first “launched” in the Fall, 2006. This is based on feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

We welcome your comments. Feel free to contact any of our staff, or e-mail our office at cyfc@umn.edu.

Sources used to create this model include the following:

- The collective wisdom of the Family Relations educators with the U of MN Extension Service, Dr. Sandra Christenson of the U of MN School Psychology program, Dr. Harold Grotevant of the U of MN Family Social Science program, and CYFC staff.
- *Working With Families For School Success*, a paper/module by Dr. Sandra Christenson (available on web version)