

Circles of Influence In Family Development: Educational Disparities

Race and Ethnicity
(see explanation on back)

THE CHILD

- Gender
- Personality
- Race/ethnicity
- Innate abilities
- Physical & mental ability
- Academic & social skills
- Gender identification
- Sexual orientation

Extended Family/Peers

- * Does the child have relationships with other caring adults such as neighbors or adult friends?
- * How are grandparents involved in the child's life?
- * Do single parents have a support system?
- * Does the child have friends/peers who are a positive influence?
- * Are parents or primary caregivers able to monitor the child's activities and friendships?

Child Care

- * Is quality child care accessible and affordable?
- * Are there quality early childhood experiences available in the community?
- * Do child care providers in the community understand their role in children's learning and development?

***Parents/P**arenting

- * What do parents understand about their child's individual learning needs? Are they able to advocate for their child at school?
- * What are the culturally specific beliefs, values, rituals, and routines that shape the family life of the child? How do those support learning in school?
- * In what ways are parents involved in their community?
- * In what ways do parents teach about cultural, racial, and ethnic groups that are different than their own?
- * Do faith communities provide learning opportunities for families?

INFORMAL SUPPORTS
(parents, caring adults, siblings, extended family, peers, neighborhood)

Social/emotional/physical support

- * Do children have a place to study?
- * Do parents talk and read to children?
- * Are parents or guardians physically and/or emotionally present in the child's life?
- * Is the physical environment stable and safe?
- * Is the emotional environment supportive or stressful?
- * Is there sufficient household income and community supports to meet basic needs?

Schools

- * What vision does the school principal promote?
- * In what ways are principals and teachers culturally responsive?
- * How does the school include all children, youth and families?
- * Are schools racially and economically segregated?
- * Is the school safe?
- * Are there high expectations and sources of support for all students?
- * How does the school encourage involvement of parents in and out of school?
- * Does the school recognize the individual learning needs of the child?
- * Does the school offer opportunities for youth to take leadership?

***Parents/P**arenting

- * Do the parent's have a positive enough relationship with each other to focus on their children's learning needs?
- * Do parent's have access (time, financial resources and availability) to parenting classes?
- * Does at least one adult in the home have a working knowledge of English or access to an adult translator?
- * What opportunities for learning do parents provide?

Teachers

- * Does the school encourage, pay for and reward quality in teaching and professional development for teachers?
- * What values do teachers have about diversity and what skills do they possess to teach each student?
- * How are new teachers supported?

Safety/Health

- * How has the community integrated immigrant and refugee families?
- * Does the community feel safe to its residents? Is there adequate police protection?

COMMUNITIES
(Schools, faith communities, community groups & agencies, business)

- * Does the community offer parent education opportunities?
- * 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?
- * Are there quality, accessible, safe out of school time opportunities?
- * How is public policy aligned to reflect the different needs of diverse communities?
- * Whose responsibility is it to educate children and youth?

POLICY
(Local, state, national, international)

- * Do all parents have the opportunity to choose where their children learn, and access to their choices?
- * How are people living in poverty understood and treated?
- * In what ways does society value youth?

- * What are society's dominant values and beliefs about education and learning?
- * How do housing patterns and school boundaries create or maintain segregated communities and schools?

SOCIETY

Higher Education

- * What role does higher education take in addressing educational disparities?
- * Do all parents have the opportunity to choose where their children learn, and access to their choices?
- * How are people living in poverty understood and treated?
- * In what ways does society value youth?

Service Agencies

- * Does the community offer parent education opportunities?
- * Do worksite policies allow, encourage and pay for parents to be involved in schools and children's learning?
- * How is public policy aligned to reflect the different needs of diverse communities?
- * Whose responsibility is it to educate children and youth?

* See note about the use of the word parents in the description on the back.

Adapted by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, U of MN, and based on The Ecology of Human Development originally created by Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner.

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CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE...

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, affects and 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, peers, 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 in geographic communities (e.g., "neighborhoods") and socio-cultural communities?
- **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**. All 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 included in developing strategies to address educational disparities.

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. 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 spontaneous and intentional feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

Readers will note the frequent use of the word “parent/s” in the Circles of Influence. The intention is that the use of the word parents refers to any adult/s who serve in a primary parental type role with the child. This maybe be one or more biological parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, guardians, foster parents, or others.

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 and review 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
- *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, by Richard Rothstein, Columbia University Economic Policy Institute, 2004.
- *Learning From You: All Parents Are Teachers*. University of Minnesota Extension Service, 2000.
- *Going to School: How to Help Your Child Succeed*, By Drs. Sharon L. and Craig T. Ramey, Goddard Press, 1999.
- An ad hoc Educational Disparities Advisory Committee convened by CYFC.
- The CYFC Core Advisory Council.