



The Circle Project: Creating Social Capital for Students and Families

Mary K. Laska, Ph.D
National Children's Advocacy Center
Alabama A&M University
March 2004




Social Capital

- Social Capital can be described as social resources, or the number and intensity of social relationships
- Social Capital provides interpersonal resources for people to use to deal with daily life, seize opportunities, and reduce uncertainties
- These resources are contained in the ties between individuals




Types of Social Capital

- **Bonding Social Capital:** strong ties that exist between family members and close friends
- **Bridging Social Capital:** weak ties between individuals across diverse groups
 - Bridging Social Capital is crucial to the well-being of persons in places of poverty because such capital allows them access to resources outside their immediate neighborhood




Program Description

Children dwell within the circle of family; families and schools reside within the larger circle of community. The Circle Project brings these concepts together into Full-Circle Schools, schools that realize that the goal of educational excellence cannot be met until the entire community is integrated into the circle of support for students and families.



Program Goals

- Coordinating services for children and families
- Overcoming the accessibility issue by bringing services TO children and families
- Increasing capacity of existing quality services
- Building Social Capital in the school environment



Personnel

- Circle Project Coordinator: overall project management from central location
- Circle Project Assistant: onsite management of daily activities at the school
- Subcontractors:
 - Mental Health Counselors: come to the schools to meet with the children/families
 - Department of Human Resources workers: come to the school to meet with the children/families
 - Big Brothers/Big Sisters: mentoring and tutoring at the school

Schools

- Represents the three regional school districts in Madison County:
 - Huntsville City School System
 - Madison City School System
 - Madison County School System

Recruitment and Selection

- Elementary age students and preschoolers and their families are eligible
- The students and families expected to utilize the services may be vulnerable or high-risk
- School staff (teachers, counselors, and administrators) will make referrals to the Circle Project Program
- Parents, guardians, or caregivers will be informed of the services available and may refer their children/themselves for services

Research Questions

- What is the condition of the neighborhood surrounding the school?
- What is the condition of the school?
- What are the characteristics of the children and families being served by the Circle Project?
- What referrals are being made through the Circle Project?
- What is the impact of the Circle Project?
- Is there evidence that the Circle Project is building social capital?

Methods

- 101 referrals were analyzed from January 2003 to November 2003.
- 48 teachers surveyed (response rate of 38.7%)
- 19 parents interviewed (response rate of 23.8%)
- 26 child records reviewed (response rate of 25.7%)
- Additional data collected from Census Data and Alabama Department of Education

Neighborhood Demographics

	Madison County	Madison City	Huntsville City
White	94.1%	70.2%	14.9%
African American	2.9%	25.7%	82.1%
Households with individuals under 18	43.0%	40.3%	42.6%
Adults over 25 high school graduate or higher	66.3%	88.0%	75.6%
...bachelor's degree or higher	10.5%	32.0%	14.7%
Median Family Income	\$39,357	\$53,831	\$35,082
Families below poverty level	9.0%	8.3%	15.1%
Families with children under 18 below poverty level	11.5%	14.6%	19.1%
Families with children under 5 below poverty level	25.7%	7.7%	26.2%

School Characteristics

	Madison County Representative School	Madison City Representative School	Huntsville City Representative School
Year of founding	1949	2001	Approx. 1960
Enrollment	625.9 students	203.9	404.7
Spending per student	\$5614.58 per student	\$5704.08 per student	\$6993.87 per student
Eligibility for free or reduced lunch	49.4%	17.2%	84.7%
Percentage of teachers with Masters degree	50.0%*	54.3%*	46.9%*
Percent of classrooms with internet access	6.6%	4.9%	8.8%
Safety and Discipline	0 incidents reported	1 incident reported	12 incidents reported

2002-2003 school report card
* from 2001-2002 school report card, not available for 2002-2003

Academic Status

	Madison County Representative School	Madison City Representative School	Huntsville City Representative School
Academic Status 1999-2000	Clear	n/a (not in existence)	Alert 1
Academic Status 2000-2001	Clear	n/a (not in existence)	Alert 2
Academic Status 2001-2002	n/a	n/a	n/a
Academic Status 2002-2003	Clear	Clear with Watch	Watch with Priority

For more information, see <http://www.alsde.edu/Accountability/preAccountability.asp>

Conditions of the Referred Families

- **Marital Status**
 - Single 31.6%
 - Married 26.3%
 - Divorced 36.8%
 - Widowed 5.3%
- **Ethnicity**
 - Caucasian 47.4%
 - African American 42.1%
 - Hispanic 10.5%
- **Primary caregiver sex**
 - Male 5.3%
 - Female 94.7%

Conditions of the Referred Families

- **Relationship to Child**
 - Parent 84.2%
 - Grandparent 10.5%
 - Other Relative (aunt) 5.3%
- **Unemployed** 52.6%
- **SSI** 15.8%
- **Total Monthly Income**
 - 0-500 15.8%
 - 501-1000 42.1%
 - 1001-1500 31.6%
 - 2001+ 10.5%

Conditions of the Children

- Household Characteristics similar to parents
- Sex of Child
 - Male 53.9%
 - Female 46.2%
- Ever enrolled in Special Education 42.3%
- Qualifies for free/reduced lunch 84.6%
- Covered by health insurance 73.1%

Conditions of the Children

- Average Standard Achievement Test scores
 - SAT total: 82.42
 - SAT verbal: 80.44
 - SAT non-verbal: 87.17
- Disciplinary Action
 - Nine students had 0 disciplinary actions (47.4%)
 - Of those who had received disciplinary actions:
 - Mean: 4.10 actions
 - Median: 3.50 actions

Referral Patterns

School	Big Brother/Big Sister	Mental Health	Food	Clothing	Insurance	Glasses
Madison County School	23.1%	11.5%	34.6%	11.5%	50.0%	19.2%
Madison City School	38.3%	72.3%	6.4%	8.5%	12.8%	2.1%
Huntsville City School	21.4%	42.9%	17.9%	10.7%	17.9%	3.6%
p-value	0.209	0.000	0.008	0.870	0.005	0.016

Other Referrals: Department of Human Resources, Summer Programs, Tutoring, School Supplies

Reasons for not receiving Circle Project referred services

Reason	Percent
Does not qualify for services	1.0
Missed appointments	1.0
Moved	3.0
No contact	3.0
Parent declined services	1.0
Parent did not return paperwork	5.9
Transfer	1.0
Unable to come out because of new baby	1.0

- ### Teacher Reports of Referrals
- 58.3% of Teachers surveyed referred a child to the Circle Project
 - Referrals included:
 - Counseling
 - Food
 - Clothing
 - Big Brothers/Big Sisters
 - Medical Insurance
 - School Supplies
 - Eye Exam/Glasses

Parent Satisfaction

	Percent
Did the services you received meet your needs?	94.7
Were you aware of all the services offered by the Circle Project prior to this interview?	31.6
Does your child enjoy participating in Circle Project activities?	63.2
Would you utilize the Circle Project again?	100.0
Would you recommend the Circle Project to others?	100.0
Did the services you received meet your expectations?	94.7

- ### Impact
- Teacher report of improvement in child's classroom behavior/performance
 - 51.9% reported positive change in the classroom performance
 - 46.2% reported positive change in behavior in the classroom
 - Increased social capital
 - 101 referrals made
 - 68% of the referred families/children did not know of the services offered before the referral

- ### Future Analysis
- Teacher/Staff interviews
 - Perceptions of the process
 - Teacher Stress Index
 - Child interviews
 - Perceptions of the Circle Project
 - Standardized Child Instruments
 - Additional Social Capital items
 - Number of contacts with social service agencies
 - Number of contacts with family/friends

- ### Issues
- Consistency of Data
 - State Department of Education reports
 - Grades
 - Disciplinary Actions
 - Low response rates for parents/children
 - Parents 23.8%
 - Children 25.7%
 - Not enough time to measure concrete impacts

