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FOCUS ON foundations

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2009



Transforming Teaching and Learning Experiences

A Message from CEO Rhonda H. Lauer



At Foundations, everything we do is channeled toward one common goal: improving academic achievement for underserved children and youth. And the first step in this

process is getting young people in the school door – a task that may sound easy, but it is not. According to a recent report by the National Center for Children in Poverty, an estimated one in ten kindergarten and first grade students are chronically absent nationally.

There are many reasons why children miss school, particularly those living in poverty. Some lack clean clothes or reliable transportation; others become

bored, disengaged, or too far behind in their studies to catch up.

As you will read in this issue of *Focus on Foundations*, we are working with our many local and national partners to find new ways not only to bring these children back to school but to keep them there. So they can acquire the skills they need to advance in school and in life.

Many of our efforts focus on helping children meet critical milestones throughout their lives: reading at grade level by grade three, successfully transitioning from middle to high school, and acquiring essential academic and life skills to go along with that all-important high school diploma.

cont. pg. 2

Outstanding Leadership

In fall 2008, Foundations' CEO, Rhonda H. Lauer, received the first annual PA State Representative Dwight Evans Leadership Award from the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation (OARC). This award is given to those individuals who exhibit exemplary leadership and vision in their tireless efforts to serve the Philadelphia community through education, business, economic and work force development endeavors. Rhonda was one of four distinguished recipients of this honor. ☉



Urban farming initiative gives students experience in horticulture, business and science – in nature's classroom.

see pg. 5

foundations 
for a brighter future

Making Connections

Most recently, we have had an opportunity to visit seven “Making Connections” sites on behalf of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. A major goal of this initiative is ensuring that Children are Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School (CHAPSS). Over the next several months we will be supporting focus schools in Denver, Indianapolis, Louisville, Providence, Des Moines, San Antonio and Seattle to advance the goal of all children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. ☀



Photo: Ray Cordero / Interlink Media



Photo: John Henderson

Transforming Teaching... cont. from pg. |

We work closely with teachers in the early grades to make sure they have practical strategies at their fingertips, so they can tailor their instruction to children’s individual learning styles. Digital games and software programs are approaches we are currently exploring to help young children learn to read and do math.

In addition, we must ensure that our young people graduate from high school equipped with more than basic academic skills. To succeed in the global marketplace, they must also be adept team players and users of technology, be able to communicate ideas effectively, think critically and creatively, solve problems, and act responsibly.

Foundations is also currently piloting several programs in arts, technology, entrepreneurship, and even horticulture that not only keep students engaged and enthusiastic about school, but also provide them with ongoing opportunities to acquire vital 21st century “applied skills.” These initiatives provide on-the-ground experience as we develop national programs based on the success of our local models.

And, finally, our programs, services, and dedicated staff inform and uplift parents and families throughout the nation, as they strive to nurture their children and help them navigate critical life stages as they grow up.

There is no one way to educate children. Every child is different; every learning style is different. But we can offer our children and youth a variety of opportunities, both in school and out, that excite them about learning and keep them coming in that school door every day.

Thank you for your support.

Warmest regards,

Rhonda H. Lauer
Chief Executive Officer

Blog: <http://rhondahlauer.wordpress.com>

Donate today: www.foundationsinc.org

To Infinity and Beyond ... School Hours!

Dr. Derrick H. Pitts, Chief Astronomer and Planetarium Programs Director for The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, is this year's keynote speaker at Foundations' twelfth annual Beyond School Hours conference in Burlingame, California. Each year, the conference – nationally recognized as a driving force behind the movement to increase the quality of our nation's afterschool programs – draws educators, administrators, government officials, and community representatives from every region of the United States.

Since 1978, Dr. Pitts has played a vital role at the Franklin Institute including overseeing renovations of the planetarium and observatory and informing the design of the "Space Command" astronomy exhibit at this premiere, 175 year-old Philadelphia science museum. As a renowned astronomy authority, Dr. Pitts' advice is often sought by major television networks, newspapers, and magazines. In 2004, *Science Spectrum* named Dr. Pitts one of the "50 Most Important Blacks in Research Science" for his lifelong work and significant daily contributions to science.

Dr. Pitts' passion for science started early in life. "I can't remember a time when I wasn't absolutely head-over-heels deeply interested in science," he says. "I have always been curious about the natural world, and my pursuit of science is a perfect expression of that curiosity."

And that enthusiasm is one that he eagerly shares with others. He is the voice of astronomy for the Philadelphia region, especially its children and youth, through his ongoing radio presence on WXPB's "Kids Corner" and regular visits to area schools.

The current state of science education troubles him, however. A March 2008 report to Congress addresses his concern: the United States is not preparing enough students, teachers, and professionals in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and our students trail other nations in STEM literacy and achievement.

But Dr. Pitts knows that quality afterschool programs can change this. "I spent time in afterschool programs when I was a kid and I loved it," he recalls. "They were science-related and hands-on. I ate it up. I loved the idea that I had to stay after school for a special program."

Likewise, Dr. Pitts suggests more rigorous science standards, better trained teachers, more affordable higher education, and – yes – a change in attitude. "Unfortunately, our current society values fame and glory," notes Dr. Pitts. "It does not appreciate knowledge, and more specifically, it doesn't appreciate those who pursue science. That's incredibly crippling for our youth interest in science."



Dr. Pitts emphasizes the importance of creating positive science experiences for children, both in and out of the classroom. He credits his own pursuit of science to a middle school teacher who impressed him with her deep, undeniable passion for chemistry.

He also understands the profound effect that out-of-school science exposure can have on young people's lives, as he relates in the following story:

A couple of years ago, I was waiting for a train and reading a newspaper, when a young man came up to me and asked if I was the guy from the Franklin Institute. I said yes. He said, "I'm glad because I watched you when I was a kid growing up and paid attention to a lot of the stuff you did and because of that, I pursued a career in physics. And I'm so glad I did. I'm having a wonderful time, and if it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here. I just wanted to thank you." Then he disappeared. I had no idea that guy was out there. I do what I do because I really love it; but it turns out – looking back on it – that this love for what I do is having an effect on others out there. ☀



Save the Date!

Beyond School Hours XIII Conference
February 17-20, 2010
Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront
Jacksonville, Florida

Attendees benefit from workshops, interactive sessions, networking events, and site visits, all designed to inform and inspire them in their efforts to improve afterschool programming for underserved students throughout the nation.



Photos here and right: Weavers Way

The 3 Rs: Reading, Writing, & Rutabagas

The School-based Garden: A Classroom Like No Other

Never underestimate the ability of nature's best classroom – the garden – to influence young lives. Increased self-confidence and academic achievement. Better eating habits and attitudes towards school. Improved communication and leadership skills.

With Seeds for Learning, the novel urban gardening project at Philadelphia's Martin Luther King High School, students are not only growing and selling produce, but also learning important lessons about science and nutrition, marketing and business, healthy lifestyles and entrepreneurship.

Seeds for Learning is a collaborative, community-based initiative that offers non-traditional educational opportunities, hands-on learning experiences, and 21st century skills training for urban youth. Foundations is proud to partner with a local farming

co-op and other community and business leaders to implement this program.

"Programs such as Seeds for Learning encourage students to take chances, pursue new interests, and develop skills that are crucial for success in today's world," notes Foundations' Executive Director of School Services, Sherrine Wilkins. "Gardens and farms provide the added benefits of fresh air, exercise, and access to nutritionally rich, fresh foods."

Through the program, these inner-city students are also quietly participating in the growing "green" movement and national campaign against obesity: they are learning how to take better care of the earth and themselves by doing more with less – exercising more, eating more locally grown produce, consuming less junk food and pre-packaged products, creating less garbage.

Seeds for Learning has two complementary components. In the Farm program, students plant, maintain, and harvest crops in a dedicated field on school property; in the Marketplace program, students run a school-based cooperative food business, selling the farm's twenty-five different vegetables, healthy snacks, and seasonal items such as pumpkins and gourds. Community members and neighbors may purchase these products on Fridays from 4-7 pm, when students run a farm stand in front of the school.

This year, the Marketplace program benefited from a new faculty advisor, Tom Moffa, a science teacher at MLKHS who was trained this summer in the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) curriculum. Each week, Moffa offers instruction in entrepreneurship, including how to write

a business plan, price and market products, manage finances and allocate responsibilities. Planning is also currently underway for the creation of a youth landscaping business, in partnership with the Urban Tree Connection.

Classes from schools throughout the city have begun visiting the farm, where teachers offered lessons in science, nutrition, and agriculture and area students of all age levels participated in hands-on learning in the field. And, under the supervision of the Farm Educator, student farmers continued to work on the farm after school and on weekends until the weather turned cold. By next winter the work will move to the comfort and warmth of a newly constructed greenhouse.

The new greenhouse, funded by a joint partnership of the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation and Foundations, will allow students to maintain farm activities throughout the year. The greenhouse will also be available for teachers and classes to conduct lab-related projects. Although this winter the focus is on preparing for the spring growing season – organizing and gathering materials, installing watering and growing systems, and selecting plants – in years to come, the greenhouse will be used as a winter production space to grow salad greens, cucumbers, tomatoes, and poinsettias for sale to the local community. ☀

“If you want to live and thrive, let the spider run alive.”

—American Quaker adage




Seeds for Learning
 AT MARTIN LUTHER KING HIGH SCHOOL

Enriching Young Lives

High school senior Brian Ferguson (on left) has participated in Seeds for Learning since it began in April 2008, working diligently in both the Farm and Marketplace programs - afterschool, throughout the summer, and up to twenty hours a week in the fall. Brian is paid for his time on the farm, which often includes weekend afternoons and weekday evenings after football practice.

Brian never gardened before joining the program, but he quickly caught on. “I know basically every type of vegetable now,” he states. He has also acquired some new eating habits. “I found a new favorite vegetable – sorrel – and I like to eat it raw. I had never had it before I began working on the farm.”

Brian also enjoys learning about new plants, digging garden beds, and working in the fresh air. “I’d rather be outside than have an inside job,” he declares.

And, although history remains his favorite subject in school, he’s now thinking seriously about studying agriculture at Penn State University after graduation. ◉

Instructional Coaches: Helping Teachers Teach and Students Learn

It's no secret that teachers are uniquely positioned to influence young lives. In fact, according to the Alliance for Education, decades of research show that a quality teacher, more than any other factor, enables students to overcome obstacles to learning, such as poverty, and can even erase the achievement gap.

Foundations is committed to building the capacity of adults who work with children, particularly those on the front line – the teachers. And in support of this effort, in September 2008, Foundations established a new Center for Coaching to help schools across the country use instructional coaching to increase the quality of instruction for children.

Instructional coaching, a nascent yet promising field, differs significantly from “once and done” professional development of the past. It improves teacher knowledge, skills, and classroom practices by creating collaborative learning environments within schools and offering teachers ongoing, in-classroom, job-embedded learning that addresses their individual needs.

The Center for Coaching works closely with districts and schools serving grades K-12 to develop on-site coaches well-versed in classroom techniques and literacy strategies, school leaders who can promote a culture of coaching and

school improvement, and mentors who provide support for both coaches and leaders. To accomplish this, the Center for Coaching offers in-person and online courses, small and large group networking sessions, one-on-one mentoring in the field, study groups, and in-class observations.

Every teacher can benefit from instructional strategies that cross



Photo: Ray Codero / Interlink Media

content areas, but content area teachers often crave professional development that is relevant to their particular subject matter. “We have heard time and again from our charter and district school partners about the difficulty in finding customized professional development,” notes Gail Meister, Executive Director of the Center for Coaching. “They want professional development that takes into account the needs of individual educators and the context in which

they work. And, that’s what the Center for Coaching does.”

Although many state and national organizations are in the process of developing standards for instructional coaching, no uniform set of evidence-based guidelines for successful coaches currently exists. Foundations’ Center for Coaching anticipates building the field of instructional coaching by contributing to the body of knowledge about successful coaching practices and advocating for instructional coaching as an effective professional development model.

And Foundations’ Center for Coaching is well-equipped to offer such expertise, with years of experience and staff well-trained in this growing field. Foundations has partnered with the Annenberg Foundation and the Developmental Studies Center, based in Oakland, California, to bring instructional coaching to ten

district and charter elementary schools in the greater Philadelphia region. Building on this work, Foundations has also played a leadership role in the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative, implementing instructional coaching to improve student engagement and literacy in twenty-four low-performing high schools across the state.

For more information about Foundations’ Center for Coaching, please call: 888-977-KIDS (5437). ☀

From Elmo to Wii: Literacy Instruction Goes Modern

Learning to read brings children a tremendous sense of accomplishment. For a few, this milestone arrives before they even enter kindergarten; for most others, it comes in first, maybe second grade. But, despite increasing intervention, some children continue to struggle with reading well into third grade and beyond, increasing their chances of dropping out of school. What else can we do to help these children learn to read?

One answer may be technology. Most children are intrigued by computers, video games, and virtually any kind of digital media. Rather than fighting this natural tendency, parents and educators can choose to embrace it.

Joan Gantz Cooney did. Her landmark 1966 study, *The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education*, led to the creation of the Children's Television Workshop and *Sesame Street*. A new center in her name is now focusing not on television, but on digital media – video games, Internet, cell phone – and how these new and emerging technologies can help children read and learn.

Foundations is one of many organizations nationwide that is also exploring the technology/learning connection among children and youth.

Foundations has been working intensely with three urban elementary schools, where 98% of the students are African-American and living in poverty. Once considered some of Philadelphia's lowest-performing schools, they have improved in recent years, especially in the realm of literacy. And a key factor in this ascent has been the use of technology in reading instruction.



Photo: John Henderson

All three schools use a computer-assisted tutorial, SuccessMaker®, to supplement traditional reading instruction, starting in second grade. SuccessMaker® offers standards-based lessons focusing on word identification, reading comprehension, and vocabulary building. Students progress at their own pace, with sessions tailored to their needs. In grades K-2, one elementary school uses the Leap Pad® program, a multi-sensory technology and learning system that creates individual learning paths for each child based on reading ability.

The same school also has a new computer lab this year, equipped with thirty computers for student use. And new computers are in every classroom at another one of Foundations' elementary schools, where students in grades K-2 who are not reading on grade level also have access to Earobics®, a research-based software program that builds phonemic awareness.

Although the use of technology in literacy instruction dates back to the mid-1960s, when Joan Gantz Cooney authored her influential study, its presence in the classroom has increased considerably since then. And research confirms its importance: according to a 2006 study by Scholastic, children who use technology platforms to read are more often those who read every day. ☀

Spotlight on Afterschool Publications



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Moorestown West Corporate Center
2 Executive Drive, Suite 1
Moorestown, NJ 08057



Inside: Transforming Teaching and Learning Experiences

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Photos (below): Harvey Finkle



Middle-Schoolers Go to College

Middle-school students attended the Summer Program of Foundations' Northwest University Scholars Project held at Arcadia University. Funded by the Lenfest

Foundation, the Project prepares students for the important transition from middle school to high school. Activities such as storytelling, role-playing, photo-journaling, and mask-making helped students improve communication skills, self-esteem, and cultural awareness.

According to 7th grader Darius Hurst-Rodney (shown at left), "This program gave me a chance to share my poetry with other people. It gave me something to be proud of." ☀



Every child deserves a first-rate education. Give today and you can help Foundations to strengthen educational opportunities for our nation's children who need them the most.

**Donate
Now**

For details or to make a secure donation online, visit www.foundationsinc.org