

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 8, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: A Community-University Coalition for Child and Family Development

ORIGINATOR: A. McBeath, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Gloria Chalmers

### INFORMATION

**Background:** For the past few years members of the Edmonton community (Appendix I), including a representative from Edmonton Public Schools, and faculty members from the University of Alberta have been working to develop a community-university coalition or alliance devoted to applied, collaborative research on child and family development. There is good consensus that the general functions such a coalition or alliance would serve include:

- promoting collaborative, applied research on child and family development
- ensuring that practitioners, researchers, policy makers and parents contribute to shaping the research agenda
- working to improve graduate and undergraduate education in the areas of child and family development by creating interdisciplinary research opportunities and course offerings
- disseminating reliable information about effective practices to educational practitioners, policy makers, and parents
- providing a contact point between the community and the university to encourage interaction among researchers, practitioners and policy makers
- advocating in the public forum for practices that are supported by rigorously obtained evidence
- finding new sources of funding and attracting outstanding researchers to build a foundation for research on child and family development in the University and community that is innovative, sustainable and highly effective.

Such a coalition or alliance would provide data that is rooted and relevant in an Edmonton and Alberta context. With respect to Edmonton Public, such data would be useful in setting priorities, in informing parents, in eliciting community support and, of course, in assisting the classroom teacher to stay abreast of effective practice. An initial list of specific activities that relate to the functions identified is provided in Appendix II.

**Current Status:** The University of Alberta has provided operational funding for one year and has advised that the initiative will report to a committee consisting of the seven deans of the Coordinating Council of Health Sciences and the Dean of Education. Commitment from the university means that the coalition or alliance will be operative this spring.

Additional partner representatives will be added to the steering committee responsible for getting the initiative to this stage. This revised committee will provide leadership for the next stage of development. It will consist of approximately a dozen members, with half from the community and half from the university. The district is represented on the committee.

The district's contribution involves participation of a staff member on the coalition steering committee and/or at partnership meetings, as well as providing practical expertise and access to data as appropriate.

**Next Steps:** Selection of a director for the initiative is expected to take place in February. The director will be responsible for assembling community and university resources, for continuing to develop the identity and shared goals of the coalition, for creating a sustainable environment for development of the coalition and for coordinating initial research projects.

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APPENDIX I:           Community Organizations and University Centres  
APPENDIX II:         Proposed Activities

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND UNIVERSITY CENTRES**

The agencies listed below have participated in discussions on the development of a community-university coalition for child and family development.

Alberta Home and School Councils Association  
Alberta Ministry of Children's Services  
Alberta Ministry of Community Development  
Alberta Ministry of Health  
Alberta Ministry of Justice  
Alberta Ministry of Learning  
Alberta School Boards' Association  
Alberta Teachers Association  
Capital Health Authority  
City of Edmonton Community Services  
Edmonton Catholic School System  
Edmonton Community Foundation  
Edmonton Public School System  
Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital  
Grant MacEwan College  
Health for Two Program  
Health for Two Parent Support Program  
Mental Health Advisory Board  
Oliver School Centre for Children  
Aboriginal Representative  
Parents

Related research is conducted in many centres or units on campus. Members of these centres come from several faculties, span a wide variety of methodological and conceptual orientations, and have links to practitioners, policy makers, and researchers throughout Alberta and across the country. Directors or representatives of each of the units below have expressed strong support for the development of a community-university coalition. The diversity of research expertise, and the potential for interdisciplinary cooperation, is evident in the titles of the centres.

Applied Developmental Neuroscience Group  
Centre for Research on Applied Measurement and Evaluation  
Child Study Centre  
Centre for Health Promotion Studies  
Centre for Research on Literacy  
Centre for Research in Child Development  
Child and Family Resiliency Project  
J. P. Das Developmental Disabilities Centre  
Perinatal Research Centre

**PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

1. The coalition would promote collaborative, applied research on child and family development at the university and in the community, and it would ensure that practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and parents contribute to shaping the emerging research agenda.
  - a. Prepare and maintain a publicly available directory of everyone on campus who conducts research related to child and family development, with information about areas of expertise and past publication and with links to personal web sites.
  - b. In conjunction with community and university partners, target 2-3 research and/or evaluation projects that could be undertaken fairly soon and begin to seek resources for these projects.
  - c. Proceed with a preliminary, electronic conference to identify intersections between community interests and university expertise.
  - d. Develop cooperative partnerships among the coalition and child-care centres, including the Child Study Centre on campus, for the purpose of identifying and evaluating best practices.
  - e. Develop an administrative structure that will ensure high levels of participation on the part of the community and the university.
  - f. Coordinate efforts to apply for funding for proposed research projects.
2. The coalition would work to improve graduate and undergraduate education in the areas of child and family development by creating opportunities for students to participate in applied, community-based research and by coordinating course offerings in child and family development across the campus.
  - a. Prepare and maintain a publicly available directory of all courses related to family and child development.
  - b. Develop an interdisciplinary graduate course built around a guest speakers series, so that graduate students from different departments would begin to be exposed to interdisciplinary issues and research methods.
  - c. Initiate a campus-wide review of related programs in an effort to optimize resources and target areas for future development.

3. The coalition would develop a “clearinghouse” designed to evaluate and disseminate reliable information about best practices, it would explore ways to optimize the dissemination process, and it would work with other centres around the country and world to ensure that the information being disseminated is up to date and well supported with evidence.
  - a. Survey informational resources available in the Edmonton area and publish results.
  - b. Survey informational resources available on the Web and publish results.
  - c. Based on b and c, begin to design and implement a Web-based clearinghouse that provides local as well as international resources.
4. The coalition would serve as a universal contact point between the community and the university, and it would facilitate educational and research-based interactions between university-based researchers and members of the community.
  - a. See 1a, 1c, 1d, 2a, and 3c.
  - b. Develop a community/university colloquium series, perhaps in conjunction with 2b.
5. The coalition would advocate in the public forum for the adoption of best practices that are supported by rigorously obtained evidence.
  - a. Provide input into local, provincial, and federal initiatives to establish objectives for research related to children and families.
  - b. Participate in local, provincial, and federal initiatives to establish guidelines for best practices regarding children and families.
  - c. Provide clarifications and interpretations of research-based evidence so that practitioners and policy makers can make optimal decisions about child and family development practices.
6. The coalition would work to find new sources of funding and to attract outstanding researchers in an effort to build a foundation for research in the university and community that is innovative, sustainable, and highly effective.
  - a. In collaboration with community and university partners, identify areas of research in which new faculty members are required and lobby for appropriate hiring.
  - b. Initiate fundraising activities to establish at least two endowed chairs in areas related to child and family development.
  - c. Initiate efforts to obtain extramural funds in support of research and development activities (1-4 above).