



the improve groove

Successful Transitions in the K-12 Education System

By Elizabeth Radel and Marian Kimball Eichinger

Children go through several major transitions during their years in K-12 education. Between the time they start kindergarten and prepare for high school graduation, children transition from elementary to middle school and then from middle to high school. These transition periods can be challenging for any family. However, these periods are often particularly challenging for families of children with special needs; these children may need more time to adjust to major transitions in their lives. Successful school transitions for this population require special planning efforts. In our work we have learned about collaborations and programs that make transitions more manageable for children and their families.



Graduation from high school is an early step towards successful transition into adulthood.

Children that are unable to independently care for themselves require some on-going support when they reach adulthood. After graduation from high school, these young people and their families may consider vocational programs to help support their employment needs, and many young people also consider moving out of their parent's home into a supervised living arrangement. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 mandates that school staff help prepare children with disabilities for life after high school. The 2004 amendments to this Act have defined transition services as a "results-oriented process... focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities."

In our work with the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Waiver programs, we have witnessed firsthand how teams of school staff, county case managers, vocational staff and families facilitate these transitions for young people with developmental disabilities. Successful transition requires input from all these people and organizations as each plays a different role in the transition process. School staff have usually established a long history with the student for up to 17 years; they are often the first to present post-graduation service options to the student and their families and work with students as they begin a vocational program. Vocational workers help acclimate the student to the work environment. County case managers are experts in service and funding availability in the region. When these teams begin transition planning as early as possible, they help families understand options and to secure a funding stream before the student graduates from high school. Additionally, advance planning allows the student time to adjust to their new circumstances and to transition with people that are already familiar.

Other difficult transitions facing young people are those from elementary to middle school and middle to high school. Programs we work with such as Uniquely ME! (a Dove/Unilever Foundation and Girl Scouts USA partnership) and District 16's Small Learning Communities (Spring Lake Park, MN) help youth to make these transitions.

(Continued on pg.4)

The Quarterly
Newsletter of the
Improve Group

ISSUE 9
SEPTEMBER 2007



- 1 - Successful Transitions in the K-12 Education System
- 2 - FEATURED CLIENT
Katie Haggerty
Montalvo Arts Center
- 3 - Company News
- 4 - Evaluator Bear
- Upcoming Workshops
- 5 - Measuring Transitions
- My Summer at the Improve Group
- 6 - Upcoming Grants & Requests for Proposals

FEATURED CLIENT

Featured Client: Katie Haggerty - Montalvo Arts Center

By Deborah Mattila

Deborah Mattila: How long have you been the Education Director at Montalvo Arts Center and what are your major responsibilities?

Katie Haggerty: I have been Director of Education for five years. As a multi-disciplinary arts center with an international artist residency program, Montalvo is a rich and complex organization. My primary responsibility is to provide educational experiences to the K-12 community throughout Santa Clara County. Students experience live performances, gallery tours and artist-led workshops that integrate with school curricula. In addition, I oversee professional development programs for teachers, developed in partnership with our County Office of Education. Beyond our school programs, I manage a variety of other education programs including a classical music lecture series for adults, summer camps, art classes and Starry Night: Art & Astronomy Festival for members of Montalvo.



Theater arts will be the first artistic discipline used in the Artist as Example curriculum.

DM: How does education programming align with the mission and broad goals of Montalvo Arts Center?

KH: Montalvo's mission is to forge meaningful connections between art, artists and the community, through creation, presentation and education in extraordinary ways and settings. Our education program furthers this mission by providing students and teachers with exposure to world-class artists and opportunities to engage in the creative process. In addition to enriching our local community, Montalvo's education program is committed to creating innovative programs and materials that contribute to the field of arts education beyond our region.

DM: Why is arts education so important for students? What does a high school student gain by learning from a professional artist?

KH: Today's high school graduates need to be

critical thinkers, problem solvers and effective communicators to be successful in today's competitive world. Working with professional artists offers students powerful opportunities to build these important life skills.

DM: How does Montalvo Arts Center see its role in the broader education system of California?

KH: Montalvo understands that the years of little or no arts education funding in California have negatively impacted student achievement and teacher preparedness. We see our role as one of partnership to our public school system by providing opportunities for students to experience quality arts programs, often for the first time. Perhaps our greatest role is contributing to the professional training of classroom teachers, those responsible for teaching the arts to our young people on an on-going basis. We are committed to making our programs accessible to all students and, to that end, provide programs free of charge to underserved schools.

DM: How did the Teaching Artist Fellowship program come about and what are its next steps?

KH: The idea for Montalvo's Teaching Artist Fellowship was first conceived of four years ago to establish the first national award dedicated to professionals in the teaching artist field.

While in residence in Montalvo's Lucas Artists Programs Artist Residency, Fellows will contribute to our education program in a variety of ways, including collaborating with Montalvo arts programs to deepen patrons' personal engagement with performing, visual, or literary arts events. And perhaps most significantly, the Teaching Artist Fellow (TAF) will work in-depth with our partner high school, Downtown College Prep, to lead the creation of the new "Artist as Example" curriculum that focuses on the use of artists in the classroom to inspire lifelong commitment to creative practice and observation.

This past June, we held the TAF Summer Intensive, which brought together our first four fellows, school faculty and Montalvo staff to jointly develop the program's goals and objectives. In August, fellow Carol Ponder of Nashville began her residency and work in the school to begin building the Artist as Example curriculum.

The Improve Group's website, www.theimprovetgroup.com, continues to develop new ways to help you in your research, evaluation and planning. Now featuring monthly quizzes, white papers showcasing our staff expertise and a regular blog feature on engaging participants in your work, you can find ideas and information your organization can use.

After working together to help the City of St. Paul's Planning and Economic Development Department prepare for the future, Strategy1 and the Improve Group developed a partnership to help our clients with their organizational development, strategic planning, research, analysis and evaluation needs. With years of experience in management consulting and private industry, Strategy1 consultants developed a system to help public agencies become competitive and improve their bottom line.



Company News By Leah Goldstein Moses

Between getting to know new clients, traveling to different programs and some active personal lives, we have been quite busy in the past few months!

INTERNSHIPS

Over the summer we greatly enjoyed working with Collin Cunningham. Mid-way through her master's program at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, Collin shared a great deal of enthusiasm for evaluation in public systems. She split her time between our project with the Department of Human Services, visiting five counties' Health and Community Based Services Programs and assisting in helping us prepare and analyze data for a number of other projects. In fall, Collin will be a teaching assistant for the Topics in Social Policy: America's Constitutional Crisis, with the Walter Mondale class at the Humphrey and coaching high school diving. See Collin's article on p. 5 about her summer.

STAFF NOTES

Our staff has been traveling a great deal for both our evaluation and planning work. We recently made visits to Marshall in Southwestern Minnesota, as well as Yellow Medicine, Wadena, Pope and Douglas counties for our work with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Out-of-state trips include one to San Francisco to begin an evaluation project for Hispanic Scholarship Fund and to San Jose to work with the Montalvo Arts Center and Downtown College Prep, designing an evaluation for their new artist residency program.



Rebecca Stewart and Meleck Davis on their wedding day (August 17, 2007).

You may have noticed our fourth installment of Evaluator Bear on p. 4 features his life-changing marriage. On August 17, Becky Stewart (Research Manager with the Improve Group) and Meleck Davis (the talented Evaluator Bear cartoonist)

were married. All of us at the Improve Group extend heartfelt congratulations to the newlyweds!

Staff also made several trips over the summer; Eric enjoyed his reunion at Carleton College in Northfield, Susan took her boys to South Dakota and family travels to the North Shore kept Leah, Deborah and Jules relaxed in July.

Lastly, we were greatly saddened to learn that Susan's brother, John, died unexpectedly in April. Our condolences seemed inadequate; all of us have experienced loss and know that Susan needed a lot of support in the months since. Our thoughts are with Susan and her family.

NEW PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

We have recently started several new projects:

1. Our work with Montalvo Arts Center (CA) and Downtown College Preparatory Academy began in May. The new Teaching Artist Fellowship program will host one artist each semester to work in the school, studio and community.
2. Also in May we began working with Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council. After receiving a Communities Empowering Youth grant from the U.S. Department of Human Services, NWHHSC engaged both established and emerging local programs to identify key needs in the community; the Improve Group assisted in the background research requested by these organizations.
3. The Its All About Kids Collaborative, a partnership between Lutheran Social Services, Minneapolis Public Schools and Minneapolis Public Housing Agency, hired us in July to help evaluate both implementation and outcomes. In particular, the Kids Collaborative hopes to improve stability, self-sufficiency and school success among families who have experienced a great deal of mobility.
4. The Hispanic Scholarship Fund's Peer Counseling Program developed at first

informally when scholarship recipients began mentoring local high school students in an effort to give back to their communities. Their efforts have since been supported with a grant from the Lumina Foundation. In July, the Improve Group began working with staff members in San Francisco, San Antonio and Atlanta to develop an evaluation of the program.



From left: Scott Raub of Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) Leah Goldstein Moses, Jacqueline Rosier (HSF), Ruben Rodriguez (HSF) and Rebecca Stewart.

5. In July, the Improve Group hosted its first workshop series. The inaugural classes, titled *How Do I KNOW That? Creating Tools to Understand Program Outcomes and Inside Knowledge, Outside Perspective: Evaluating Your Organization From Within* were great fun to develop and deliver. We will be offering them again in October and adding advanced classes in 2008. Several of the attendees were in the midst of developing evaluations for their own organizations. Visit our blog at <http://www.theimprovegroup.com/weblog> to read participant comments.



In our workshops we describe evaluation as a way to tell a story; this photo shows an exercise in which participants diagram the accomplishments of their organization.



Successful Transitions in K-12 Education,
(continued from pg.1)

Uniquely ME! is designed to foster positive self-esteem in girls between the ages of 8 and 18. Girl Scout councils who receive Uniquely ME! funds design a program tailored to the specific needs of the girls in their communities. One council designed a curriculum to serve girls in the fifth and eighth grades, on the verge of transitioning to middle and high school. In order to successfully address the needs of these girls, this council administered a needs assessment survey prior to curriculum development. In addition, council staff spoke to girls who had already made these transitions, asking them to reflect on the process and what they wished they had known beforehand. There are several characteristics that the council attributes to its success in easing the transition for these girls: exercises and activities to build self-esteem and creative self-expression; exposure to resources in the community; bringing older girls as guest speakers; exercises and activities that help girls deal with peer pressure, bullying and relationships. Council staff say that the most important aspect of the program is that they listen to the girls and are flexible, allowing for the girls' needs to come first.

The District 16 Small Learning Communities program also addresses the issue of transitions to high school. Small Learning Communities hopes to ease students' transition into high school through several structural changes designed to increase student connectedness and achievement: flexible schedules; opportunities to personalize education by reducing the number of core teachers each student has; increasing the opportunities for students to discuss their academic progress with teachers; increasing teacher proficiency through professional development to support student learning of all styles and in all topics; and increasing student, staff and family involvement in the school.

It takes a multi-faceted, collaborative approach to successfully ease the transitions of young people of any gender and capacity. Providing support, security and resources is essential, as is finding a way to communicate across traditional programs to take into account the individual youth's needs.

Sources for this article included:

IDEA - building the legacy of IDEA 2004, Secondary Transition.
<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalArea%2C14%2C>



Evaluator Bear

By: Meleck Davis



Today was the happiest day of Evaluator Bears life. Unfortunately, he did not feel that way.

His life was about to change, and Evaluator Bear would just as soon measure change in a t-test than go through it in his life.

But change can be positive or negative, so the question is, do I think this is a positive change?



©2007 Meleck Davis

Learn how to evaluate your programs.

Watch for our evaluation workshops offered on October 3rd and 4th, 2007. Taught by Marian Kimball Eichinger and Leah Goldstein Moses, these workshops can help organizations do meaningful evaluation work.

"This intensive overview of evaluation covered a whole semester worth of material in a clear, to the point manner in a language that was understandable to both the novice, and the seasoned professional. I would recommend the workshop to any friend or colleague seeking fresh insight on evaluation principles."

- Nathan Salzl - Greater Twin Cities United Way

Visit www.theimprovementgroup.com for more information and to register for the workshops. Registration deadline is September 27.

Measuring Transitions

By Deborah Mattila and Marian Kimball Eichinger

There are unique challenges to evaluating transitions, especially when the transition involves a participant leaving a program or organization. When beginning to evaluate a transition it is important to identify the benchmarks of that transition. What are the qualities of someone just entering the transition stage? What accomplishments must they make as they go through the transition? What are the qualities of someone who has successfully transitioned into a new stage? Once these benchmarks have been identified, indicators of a successful transition can be developed and applied to individual participants. When the success of a transition depends on benchmarks or achievements after a participant leaves a program, it is of utmost importance to develop a method for tracking those participants at regular intervals for an extended period of time after they have left the program.

For example, in a program to help students transition from high school to matriculation in a 4-year college or university, it is important to define whether registering in courses, obtaining a degree, or maintaining a certain grade point average indicates success for the transition program. In any of those cases, the program will need to track and collect data on various measures over months or years. This could be accomplished in many ways:

- Create an electronic survey that is completed by the participant at least once per semester. A prize may be helpful in obtaining high response rates from participants.
- Obtain information from parents either through phone or

paper surveys. Permission from the participant may be required for this method.

- Obtain records from the college or university that the participant attends. Written permission from the participant will be required for this method.

Sometimes, however, tracking program participants after their withdrawal from the program is impossible or difficult at best. For example, if you are evaluating a pre-release program for incarcerated adults or youth, records of participants are most likely not available after their release. If that is the case, success will be measured using standard program evaluation tools such as pre- and post-test or post-/retrospective pre-test participant surveys, focus groups, interviews and program record reviews. A close collaboration with community organizations that come in contact with or work with former program participants may also provide anecdotal data on how the participant is coping with life after the transition, so it is important to develop supportive relationships and educate your participants about resources within your community. You can also help participants realize the importance of the evaluation and encourage them to stay in touch, but if they are no longer receiving any services their motivation to keep providing data will be limited.

Clear definitions of success, finding ways to track participants after program completion and maintaining relationships with community members involved in post-transitional work are all fundamental to accurately measure transitions.

My Summer at The Improve Group

By Collin Cunningham

My name is Collin Cunningham and I am in the Master of Public Policy program at the University of Minnesota. I spent my summer gaining evaluation experience as an intern with the Improve Group. I filled two major roles, marketing and research intern. I worked with the marketing team on several interesting proposals. My tasks included conducting research, preparing presentations and helping with research design. I also composed material to enhance and update the company website and contributed to the blog. Furthermore, I gained valuable insight into what it takes to effectively manage a small business.

In my research role, I had the opportunity to tour through Greater Minnesota with the DHS Waiver Review team. With the generous instruction of Liz, Eric and Leah I gained experience in data collection, qualitative analysis and reporting. Besides reviewing countless case files on these site visits, I had the unexpected opportunity to learn unique facts about the counties, tour the towns and visit every possible Dairy Queen.



Intern, Collin Cunningham

In the fall, I will return to my graduate studies at the Humphrey Institute. I will also be working as a teacher assistant and a high school diving coach. I will be able to use valuable lessons from this experience when designing my capstone project in the Spring and as I pursue my career in social policy.



Upcoming Grants and Requests for Proposals

By Susan Murphy

With the new school year starting we are all reminded of the important role education plays in shaping lives and expanding our opportunities. The Improve Group puts a high value on supporting education. We are highlighting the following opportunities for those giving and receiving the gift of knowledge. Please contact me at susanm@theimprovegroup.com with your questions on applying for funding opportunities.

THE ACTUARIAL FOUNDATION

The Advancing Student Achievement Mentoring program of the Actuarial Foundation awards monetary grants to schools and groups across the United States who are developing a mentoring program involving actuaries in the teaching of mathematics to children in public and private schools. The foundation feels the use of real-world mentors increases student interest in mathematics. The maximum grant is \$30,000 and there is no deadline for applications. Details on past recipient projects and application guidelines are found at: <http://www.actuarialfoundation.org/grant/other.html>.

THE SURDNA FOUNDATION

The Surdna Foundation's Arts Teachers Fellowship program strives toward artistic revitalization for outstanding full- and part-time arts faculty in public arts high schools. Twenty awards of up to \$5,000 each, with a complementary grant of \$1,500 to the fellow's school to support post-fellowship activities, will be made. The deadline for submission is November 17, 2007. Go to their website at http://www.surdna.org/programs/programs_list.htm?attrib_id=12040 to view requirements for this grant and other education funding opportunities including new support for teen creative writing residencies.

PATHWAYS WITHIN

Pathways Within, a non-profit dedicated to improving child literacy, conducts a bi-annual Book Donation Program for Small and Rural Communities. Book donations are made to school, after-school, summer, community, day-care and library reading and literacy programs. An annual organizational budget limit of \$95,000 is an eligibility requirement. Non-profit organizations with 501(c) 3-tax status, faith-based and grass-root organizations in underserved communities may apply. There are very specific restrictions on what they will donate to. You can review their guidelines at: <http://pwirtr.org/biannual.html>.

Phone and Fax toll-free at:
877-IMPRVGP (467-7847)
www.theimprovegroup.com

2051 Killbuck Drive, Suite 620
Bloomington, MN 55425-1805

Research Managers
Marian Kimball Eichinger
Deborah Matilla
Rebecca Stewart

Executive Assistant
Susan Murphy

President & CEO
Leah Goldstein Moses

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 3197
ST. PAUL, MN

the Improve Group™