

Those Who Excel
Nomination for Child Parent Center Program at Sugar Creek Elementary School
Submitted by Dr. Erika Hunt, Center for the Study of Education Policy, ISU

I am pleased to nominate the staff of the **Child Parent Center (CPC) at Sugar Creek Elementary School** for the Team Category for the 2014-2015 *Those Who Excel* program. The team of the CPC program at Sugar Creek demonstrates all of the merits of this award including demonstrated excellence, demonstrated concern for children and families, positive effect on the school environment, leadership and impact with inspiring others, and going above and beyond the fulfillment of duties.

The Child Parent Center (CPC) at Sugar Creek Elementary is designed with a focus on promoting children's academic success and to facilitate parent involvement in children's education from preschool through third grade. Sugar Creek is a PreK-5th grade building that houses one of the district's two early learning centers. Currently, approximately 300 students and families benefit from the CPC program.

The CPC is an early childhood school reform model that provides comprehensive educational and family support services, primarily in low-income neighborhoods to children from preschool to 3rd grade. Established by the Chicago Public Schools in 1967, the CPC has demonstrated for over four decades that it is one of the nation's most effective education reform strategies. The CPCs in 1967 primarily focused on problems facing Chicago's west side neighborhoods. These problems included; low rates of school attendance, family disengagement with schools, and low student achievement. No longer isolated to Chicago's west side, students in both rural and urban school districts are utilizing the CPC model. Today the CPC program has expanded to schools outside of Chicago's west side meeting the changing demographics and needs of today's schools across Illinois and Minnesota.

In September of the 2012-13 school year, the CPC at Sugar Creek Elementary opened its doors welcoming children and families with a PreK enrollment of 85 students. Now, in its third year, the CPC at Sugar Creek provides a language-rich and activity-based early learning program for three and four year olds while the kindergarten and early elementary grades component provides teacher aides for smaller classes, continued parent involvement activities, and enriched classroom environments for strengthening language and literacy, math, science, and socio-emotional skills.

A champion of the work since its inception, Principal Scott Peters has worked with the CPC staff to create a smooth transition for students and families coming into Sugar Creek Elementary. A CPC Director (Kristy Siebert) and a School Community Representative (Beth Kelly) staff the program. Together Siebert and Kelley have committed to working with families and students as they enter PreK and transition into the K-3 elementary years. With a strong understanding of the benefits of early learning, parent engagement and community resources, Kristy and Beth have created an aligned curriculum inclusive of academics and social-emotional learning while actively involving parents in the process. Their network of support spreads deep into the school and community as well.

Beth and Kristy's offices are housed in a Parent Resource Room that includes a lending library where books and activities can be checked out. Parent workshops are held throughout the year organized around identified needs. As the needs of families shift, so do the workshops. Some of the workshops held include: Financial Planning; Clothing and Book Swap; 3 ABC Literacy Events; School Readiness Workshop. Family fun nights are also held. An incentive program for parents was created to encourage greater parent engagement and student attendance. Recognizing the academic barriers that parents might have, Beth and Kristy facilitated a partnership with the Sharing The Ability to Read (STAR) Adult Literacy Program. Parents can now work with STAR tutors on the areas of learning English as a Second Language or improving their math and literacy skills.

Although each team member serves in a different capacity, it is the collaborative nature by which they work that allows for their individual prowess but overall success of the program. Each of the team members demonstrates concern for children through their work inside the classroom, the school building, community and student's home. Beth and Kristy's work focuses on removing the fear around school that often plagues low income, diverse families. According to one CPC parent, "Without them, I would not have been able to get past my own insecurities about school. I didn't want my child's experiences to be the same as mine. Beth has assured me it won't and I believe her. Today my daughter is in kindergarten and doing great. I also can help her at home because Beth taught me how to practice stuff at home."

Professional Biography

Each of the team members demonstrates concern for children through their work inside the classroom, the school building, community and student's home.

Mr. Scott Peters, Principal

When the CPC program started at Sugar Creek, Mr. Peters knew it would be a benefit to have additional staff whose sole job was to connect not only with our staff but with our families. In the past, parents were not comfortable coming into the school to seek extra assistance. Mr. Peters knew that having a liaison between the parents and the school would help build relationships and get the buy-in from families where they realized, "Hey, this is a great place and we're all working together to help the kids." When a school can build relationships with families, the culture and climate can change for the better. The structure of the CPC program also has allowed for a better ratio with two certified staff in each Kindergarten classroom. Mr. Peters said, "At the beginning of the year, the first week of Kindergarten in the lunchroom was an interesting situation with a lot of scared kids in a new environment. We had all of our early learning staff who had worked with our CPC students last year come down and help us out. Seeing the warm, familiar faces and their greetings really soothed everyone in there. It was probably our best start ever in the Kindergarten lunchroom, and I attribute that to the fact that this was part of our CPC programming. The kids knew the staff and felt that this was their school, and this made the transition easier for all of us."

Mrs. Kristy Siebert, Head Teacher

Mrs. Siebert is an early childhood educator with 18 years of experience in the field. Mrs. Siebert knows the value of considering the development of the whole child and supporting the family system in which children grow. Together with her colleagues, Mrs. Siebert strives to move education into a more comprehensive system of support for the children and families in her classroom (and school building). As the Coordinator of the CPC Program, Mrs. Siebert uses her prior experience in the classroom to build a strong CPC program through a collaborative effort with Mrs. Kelley, Mr. Peters, and the entire Sugar Creek faculty. At the top of her priorities is staying connected with the children and their families

through the many CPC activities. “I know that my relationship with families and guardians and their comfort with the building impact their child’s learning experience. I will work to continue to fill the parent resource room with materials they can use at home, in addition to offering activities throughout the year to support their engagement in the program, and their child’s education.” In addition to reaching out to the families, Mrs. Siebert also provides instructional and coaching support to the teachers serving more in a ‘teacher leadership role’. Her expertise in the early childhood and early elementary grades provides much needed support to the teachers in working with students with diverse needs and learning styles. Sometimes, though, Mrs. Siebert can simply serve as a substitute teacher for the classroom teachers for an hour or more to allow them to visit and observe another colleague’s classroom to learn strategies and practices.

Mrs. Beth Kelley, School Community Representative

Mrs. Kelley worked as a social work for Children’s Home and Aid for ten years before joining the CPC team in 2012. Her work has a positive effect on the school community with the strong emphasis she places on building relationships between school, home and the community. She focuses on removing the fear around school that often plagues low income, diverse families. Home visits offered to all families are a priority for Mrs. Kelley to build these relationships. By building strong relationships with families, Mrs. Kelley has made it easier for the principal and teachers to have the sometimes difficult conversations with parents about their child. According to principal Peters, “The parents know that we love and care for their child and are here to help them. As a result, they accept our help rather than feeling that their child is being singled out by the school.”

Contribution to Education

The CPC team at Sugar Creek **demonstrates excellence in the fulfillment of their duties** by bridging the gap between PreK and the elementary years aligned with the district's vision for the program. The team has done this while traversing the changing demographics of the district/school by promoting a healthy school climate rich in diversity, parent engagement, academic and social-emotional development, and community investment. The CPC at Sugar Creek operates under the following guiding principles and long range goals:

Guiding Principles of CPC at Sugar Creek Elementary

- We believe serving the needs of children at-risk of school failure must begin as early as possible.
- We believe comprehensive and intensive multi-dimension services are necessary to address failure.
- We believe all children are capable of learning, achieving and making developmental progress.
- We understand children develop at different rates and each child is unique in his/her own development, growth and acquisition of skills.
- We believe children learn through engaged, active exploration with their environment.
- We believe children learn in the context of interactions and relationships with family members, caregivers, teachers and other children in their immediate environment and in their community.
- We believe the family is a significant contributor to children's lifelong learning and development and therefore we will build upon the strengths of the families we serve.
- We believe that accomplishments of the mission and vision can only be achieved through a shared ownership and accountability with community partners.
- We are committed to change as driven by data, research and assessment.

Long Range Goals

- We will build district and community commitments and capacities in replicating the CPC model ensure sustainability.
 - We will implement the CPC model with staff to improve the academic life and outcomes children.
 - We will implement the CPC model with families to improve the academic and life outcomes children.
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Each member of the Sugar Creek CPC team **goes above and beyond what would be expected in the fulfillment of their duties** to promote the program's goals.

It is through these multiple roles and expertise that the CPC at Sugar Creek has demonstrated excellence through early outcomes despite the dramatic changes in student demographics at the school¹. Between 2009 and 2013, the percentage of low-income students at Sugar Creek Elementary School grew by 10%, largely due to the inclusion of the CPC program. However, this is also a trend with demographic changes throughout the district and Illinois.

TABLE 1. POVERTY RATE – 51.0%

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sugar Creek	41%	36%	50%	45%	51%
District	24%	24%	28%	29%	31%
State	43%	45%	48%	49%	50%

Similar to the increase in children from low-income families, Sugar Creek Elementary also saw a dramatic rise in the percentage of students with disabilities.

TABLE 2. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES – 31%

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sugar Creek	19%	31%	33%	31%
District	13%	14%	13%	10%
State	13%	14%	14%	14%

Once at a higher rate than the district and state, in the year that CPC started (2011), Sugar Creek saw a drop in mobility.

TABLE 3. STUDENT MOBILITY – 13%

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sugar Creek	24%	18%	10%	17%	11%
District	13%	12%	13%	13%	13%
State	14%	13%	13%	13%	13%

The Sugar Creek Elementary CPC Program has enjoyed positive outcomes. As seen already in its second year of implementation, these included the following:

- Average daily attendance through March 2013 was 91% (% of CPC children present each day on average)
- 87% of Sugar Creek CPC families read to their child 5 or more days per week
- 98% of Sugar Creek CPC families are satisfied with their children’s education
- 98% of Sugar Creek CPC families state that they received ideas for activities to do at home with their child

¹ With the CPC housed at Sugar Creek Elementary School, the former superintendent’s commitment to enroll and transport any CPC child and their sibling to Sugar Creek up to grade 5 has helped with student mobility challenges but also changed the demographics of the school.

The CPC team at Sugar Creek serves families with high literacy and socioeconomic needs as almost all of the children in the CPC program are from low-income and diverse families. To qualify for the CPC PreK program, children must meet certain risk factors and are given a developmental screening. This is where the first contact with families is made. Beth Kelley is at these screenings trying to be that friendly face parents can seek out.

Beth conducts regular home visits and to build comfort levels with the families, she often brings a board game that parents can use at home. Beth surveys parents annually to identify their needs. When the parents do not return the survey, she goes to their home and helps them complete it. Based on their responses, Beth connects with existing organizations to offer free services and programming. She has found ways to offer services at no cost through the simple act of partnership.

Beth and Kristy serve as the bridge of trust between school and home. By building strong relationships with families, they have made it easier for the principal and teachers to have difficult conversations with parents about their child. According to Mr. Peters, “The parents know that we love and care for their child and are here to help them. As a result, they accept our help rather than feeling that their child is being singled out by the school”.

The CPC staff have also had a demonstrated impact on the school environment by bringing community services into the school; therefore removing the divide that exists between school and community. This has brokered partnerships that benefit students and families well beyond academic needs as demonstrated in the following story,

Beth completed an initial home visit with a grandma and her grandson. On the visit the grandma mentioned she was living with her niece because she had been evicted from her apartment. Having her identity stolen, the grandma could not receive her Social Security checks and was unable to pay rent. The grandma had notified the police and there was a pending investigation. Beth provided the grandma with a list of apartments that rent to someone with an eviction record. Beth also provided transportation for the grandma to look at apartments. The grandma was approved for an apartment, but needed the money for the deposit. Beth assisted the grandma with obtaining funds through a local social service agency and the grandma and grandson were able to move back into their own apartment. Since the grandma did not have a car and public transportation did not pick up at her apartment complex, Beth transported her to several school events and appointments. Beth referred the grandma to Scott Center Health to take her and her grandson to medical appointments. The bus driver for Scott Center Health also worked

for a program called Faith in Action that was able to take her to get groceries. As the bus driver got to know the grandma, he shared her story with the board at Faith in Action. Hearing it, the board decided to pay for her rent. The grandma saved the money she would be spending on rent and was able to purchase her own car. With a car, the grandma could be more involved with the school. She also began writing letters to public transportation and encouraged other tenants to do the same. There is now a bus stop at her apartment complex due to her perseverance and willingness to advocate for herself and others. The grandson, who is in 1st grade now, is still part of the CPC program. Without a male influence at home, Beth connected him with a Big Brother. Now that grandma does not have to worry about homelessness and transportation, she is able to focus more on his school work. The grandson is a good reader and grandma works with him every night on homework. Beth has been on home visits when he gets home from school and witnesses the routine that the grandma has set up for her grandson. She checks his backpack and goes over his work with him every night. She also calls Beth often with questions about homework or messages that Beth will relay to his teacher.

This story of the CPC grandma shows a clear example of how Beth and Kristy have **inspired one CPC guardian to not only take steps to benefit herself and grandchild but also her residential community**. This is just one of many similar stories of the difference that this CPC team has made in the lives of students and families at Sugar Creek Elementary.

The impact that this work has had at Sugar Creek Elementary School has resulted in the expansion of the CPC model at the District's second early childhood site. Through a state grant, the district placed a School Resource Coordinator at Brigham Early Childhood Center who will coordinate services between early childhood classes and its feeder elementary schools. Already in place, Beth has collaborated with the new School Resource Coordinator to offer joint services and programs. In addition, any trainings or professional development that Kristy offers include both Sugar Creek and Brigham early childhood teachers.

The work of Scott, Kristy and Beth at Sugar Creek has had a significant impact not only on the school, but on the district and community. Through their example, they model how to broker partnerships between school and community that benefit students and families well beyond academic needs. Their collaborative spirit and tenacity to build and sustain this work both at Sugar Creek Elementary and in the district is tremendous. I cannot think of any more deserving team to represent the true merits of the *Those That Excel* program for Illinois.