Director’s Corner: Community Relations

As we draw near to the end of our NAEYC Accreditation Renewal year, I reflect on the Children’s School’s approach to the final quality standard, #8 Community Relationships, and the many reciprocal benefits of our integration into the Carnegie Mellon learning community.

NAEYC’s standard for Community Relationships includes three levels of relationships: 1) raising awareness and accessing community resources available to educators and families for promoting young children’s health and well-being, 2) partnering with community agencies to share diverse cultural and arts resources with the children during school and to encourage families to access them within the community, and 3) “acting as a citizen in the neighborhood and the early childhood community” to contribute our resources - including expertise – to local, state, and national early childhood enhancement and advocacy efforts, particularly for quality professional development.

• We work closely with Carnegie Mellon’s Police and Environmental Health & Safety departments regarding security and fire safety issues, and we partner with the university nutritionist regarding our food handling procedures and snack menus. We have also built relationships with the health center (which provides free flu shots to our staff annually), counseling center for referrals as needed, and athletics department (for events such as the pool tour and family swim at our recent Family Festival).

• For families, Mrs. Rosenblum shares a broad list of Pittsburgh resources at the start of the school year or when a family is new to town, Miss Hancock coordinates resources on school choices and transitions, busing, and scholarship funding, and Dr. Carver helps connect families with resources for developmental diagnostics and therapy, as well as dealing with family challenges, grief, etc.

• The Carnegie Mellon campus and Schenley Park provide numerous opportunities for enhancing our program via walking field trips, collaboration on children’s programs such as the recent Martin Luther King Jr. event, access to arts performances (such as the recent ballroom dancing demonstration in the Red Room), and opportunities for inspiration by interaction with undergraduate designers (see the Undergraduate Spotlight page).

• In addition to sharing information about university events intended for families (such as the upcoming carnival), we also utilize our newsletter and email distribution list to notify our families of interesting community events. Our Family Social Organization also plans group outings!

• Our citizenship efforts are among the strongest aspects of the Children’s School. From our reciprocal relationships with the Psychology Department, Cyert Center, and local schools sending practicum students to us, we have educators in leadership roles at the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, the International Association of Laboratory Schools, and the National Coalition for Campus Children’s Centers (see article about recent conferences).

• Because CMU provides so many infrastructure resources for our school, we have a generous professional development budget, including funding a “floater” teacher so that there is coverage for staff to participate in conferences, collaborative projects, etc. Grant funding for research projects for which we are consultants and collaborators also supports an administrative team with more depth and breadth than most early childhood programs.

As you can imagine, building and extending these relationships increases our exposure to resources and opportunities, which then enhances our efforts and effectiveness connecting with the community.