



# Evaluation *brief*

## **Enhancing Children's Healthy Opportunities** ***From Red Flags to Blue Ribbons: The ECHO Project*** *Sponsored by: The Community Foundation of the Ozarks*

**March 2007**

### **Project Focus**

➤ ***Assist in moving our community from “red flags to blue ribbons” by addressing areas of concern outlined in the “Community Focus Report” (2004) by implementing integrated prevention oriented services in two high-risk schools in Springfield.***

### **ECHO Partners**

***Springfield Public Schools***

***Missouri State University***

***Community Partnership of the Ozarks***

***Burrell Behavioral Health***

*Springfield R-XII Public Schools*  
*Missouri State University*  
*Community Partnership of the Ozarks*  
*Burrell Behavioral Health*

### **Background**

Increasing numbers of Springfield and Greene County children are experiencing problems achieving school and life success, a trend that is occurring in many communities across the country. A recent study of kindergarten and preschool programs in 40 states (52 statewide and regional programs totaling 3,898 classrooms) conducted by Yale University showed a sharp increase in preschool expulsion rates, the most severe disciplinary sanction that an educational program can impose (Gilliam, 2005). Preschool expulsion was 3.2 times the K-12 rate; most expulsions occurred in older preschool children...an important variable when one considers that this traumatic event for child and family occurs just prior to transition to public school. Of the 52 state program reporting the Missouri Preschool Project ranked 10<sup>th</sup> for the total number of expulsions reported with 20% of Missouri teachers having reported one or more expulsions. Our teachers were third highest of the 40 states reporting.

Local evidence of the factors contributing to expulsion rates and the degree to which our children enter school ready to learn can be found in a recent Springfield/Greene County Mayors Commission for Children (MCC) study (2005) of area kindergarten teachers. In the MCC study many of our teachers reported frustration over the sharp increase in aggressive children entering their classrooms each year, as well as increases in the severity of the aggressive outburst. Informal conversation with many teachers suggested that the preponderance of these kids were not “mentally ill” but instead simply lacked the social and emotional skills needed to enter school ready to learn. Teachers agreed with the description of these children as unsocialized.

Findings from numerous studies of resiliency reveal that the negative trends seen in Greene County are being adversely impacted by multiple psychosocial and environmental factors: (1) high and rising numbers of children living below the poverty level or in *working poor* homes, (2) high numbers of births to teen parents, single parents and parents without high school diplomas, (3) domestic violence and child abuse rates among the highest in the state, and (4) rising school dropout rates and steadily rising levels of teacher stress. These realities take on special meaning for the long term health of our community's future when one keeps the following related findings in mind. A recent study of several hundred school dropouts showed that only 35% of former students cited academic failure as a major factor in dropping out. The large majority identified social and emotional barriers to continuing in school. Social and emotional difficulties are present in many children impacted by the trends mentioned above.

## Red Flags

### Community Focus Report

- *“Too many children in our community suffer from the lingering effects of poverty.”*
- *“The needs of many ‘at-risk’ children in Springfield are not being met.”*

## ECHO Goals

- #1 - Increase students’ positive behavior and reduce violence and aggression.*
- #2 - Increase schools’ development of positive behavior management skills.*
- #3 - Provide families with positive parent education activities.*
- #4 - Improve children and families’ physical and mental health.*
- #5 - Develop pre-service teachers’ behavior management skills.*
- #6 - Provide mental health assessment and intervention to improve the school environment & decrease student aggression.*

While the ECHO consortium is aware that increasing numbers of children struggle in their ability to enter school ready to learn, we are equally aware of flaws in many currently employed corrective strategies. Much emphasis has been placed on the need for improvements in academic skill building such as that seen in a plethora of early literacy skill building programs. These programs are well intended and needed, but mounting evidence suggests that even more fundamental is the attention we pay to early social and emotional skill building. For example, a comparative study of over three hundred 8<sup>th</sup> graders that measured the influence of self-discipline (motivation) and IQ on school success found that highly self-disciplined adolescents outperformed their more impulsive peers on every academic performance variable. Self-discipline measured in the fall was a better predictor of gains in academic performance over the school year than was IQ. A longitudinal study of 576 students in the Pacific Northwest provided evidence that school-based social and emotional learning programs curbed early manifestations of antisocial behavior, promoted school bonding and social-emotional skill development, which then improved academic achievement (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). One would assume great improvement in parent and teacher stress levels where high numbers of motivated and self-disciplined youth are found. Research on early childhood brain development clearly suggests that the foundations for social-emotional skills are developed before age 10, unfortunately, we pay little attention to the knowledge we are gaining and we continue to wait until problems become more severe or more visible to the community before we address them (Fleming, et.al, 2005). The majority of funding continues to be directed toward older youth who are experiencing the most severe difficulties.

Many communities and states, such as neighboring Illinois, have heeded these findings and are in the development of social and emotional competency skill programs for their public school systems ([www.casel.org/casel\\_illinois/collaboratingsites.php](http://www.casel.org/casel_illinois/collaboratingsites.php)). In our community as well, we are beginning understand that if we want to impact drug abuse, child abuse and school drop out rates, we need to focus less on initiatives targeting specific groups or problems, but instead on broad programming that helps our community develop a culture of concern for all of our youth and demands that we nurture the strongest most resilient youth to be found anywhere--youth who will make right choices and good decisions not only while in school but as they grow into tomorrow’s citizens.

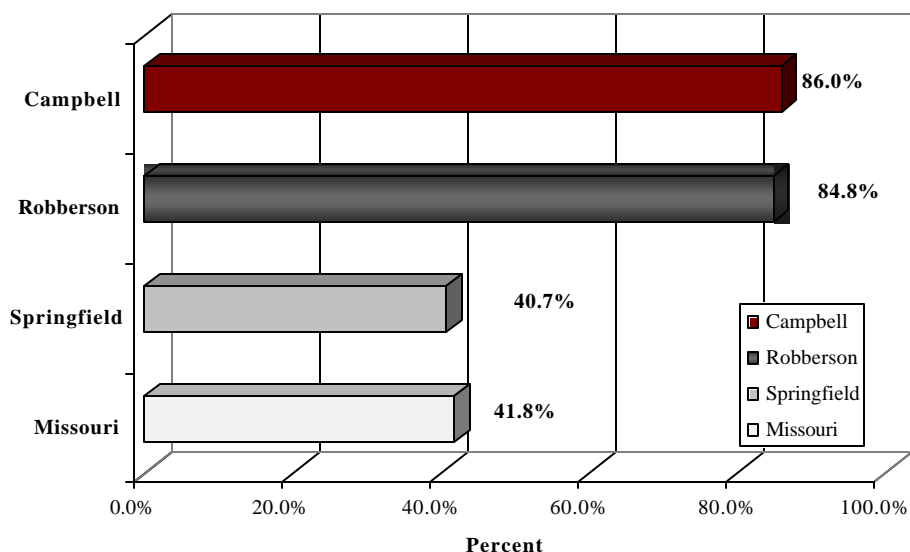
The ECHO consortium considered these research findings when choosing the following initiatives for its school-based pilot project. Each of these initiatives were designed to help our community improve the health of all children not just targeted groups or individuals. The ultimate goal of ECHO is to work in collaboration with our schools, contributing to a positive impact on the culture of the entire community.

***E***nhancing ***C***hildren’s ***H***ealthy ***O***pportunities

### Target Schools’ Characteristics

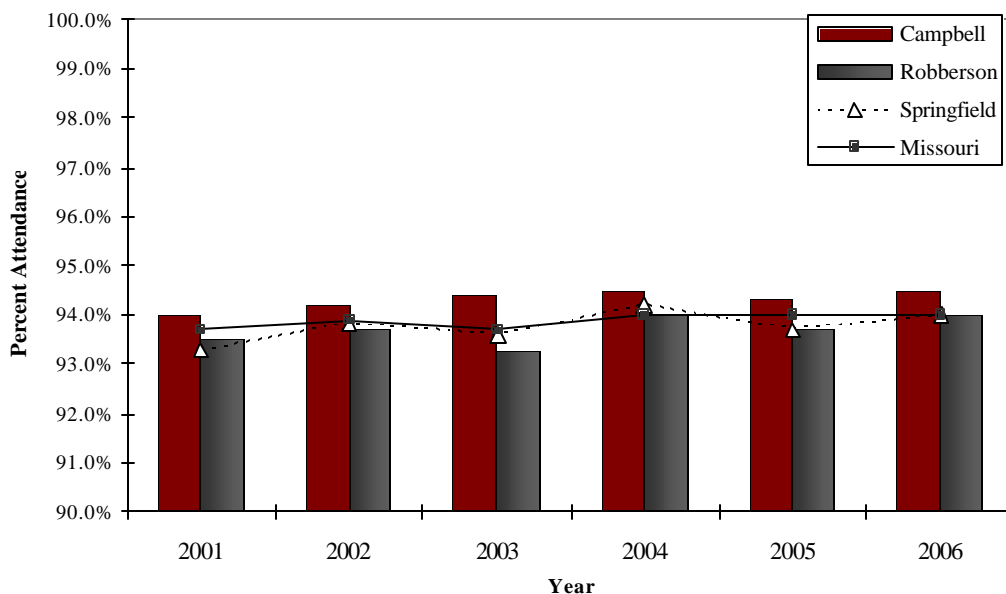
Figure 1 is a horizontal bar chart that shows the percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, per the ECHO evaluation’s base line year, 2005-2006. These data compare the two ECHO schools with all Springfield R-12 Public Schools and all 524 public school districts in Missouri. While the goal of the ECHO project is not to reduce the number of children on free or reduced lunches in the two project schools, it IS our goal to help children living in poverty become successful in school and, ultimately, in life such that they break out of what has been labeled a “generational cycle of poverty.” Campbell and Robberson elementary schools were chosen for this effort because of their high poverty levels AND because both schools have a history of embracing innovative approaches for helping children. Both schools have many, many other helpful programs in place that make the evaluation effort challenging in terms of trying to determine the relative impact of ECHO initiatives.

Figure 1  
*Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch for the 2005-06 Academic School Year*



While the base line year for ECHO is 2005-2006, when possible the evaluation team at MSU’s Institute for School Improvement will perform trend analyses on some data, such as attendance rates depicted in Figure 2. The primary focus of the ECHO team’s efforts is to bring a number of resources to bear on the two schools in an effort to improve overall school climate factors in ways that lead to positive outcomes for children. One important outcome is attendance, so we will examine this outcome very closely over the next several years. We will also examine mobility rates which tend to be related to attendance.

Figure 2  
*Trend Analysis of the Percent of Attendance Rates for Students at Campbell & Robberson Elementary Compared to Springfield and the State*



**GOAL 1**

*Develop students’ social skills in an effort to increase positive behavior and reduce violence and aggression.*

**Objective**

Provide children with the skills needed to:

- reduce violent and aggressive behavior.
- increase respectful behavior.
- develop behaviors appropriate to home, school, and community.

**GOAL 2**

*Assist school personnel in the development of positive behavior management skills.*

**Objective**

Develop school personnel skills to:

- teach social skills.
- reduce youth aggression.
- create safe environments.
- help children succeed in school.
- build skills in high-risk families.

**Activities**

*The Well Managed Classroom*

- Prevent problem behaviors
- Help children build positive relationships
- Promote learning
- Enhance problem solving
- Reduce conflicts

*Girls & Boys Town Site Visits*

- Walk the Halls
- Teacher Interviews
- Principal Interviews
- Classroom Observations

### GOAL 3

#### *Assist families through positive parent education activities*

##### Objective

Develop parents' skills to:

- protect their children.
- build healthy families.
- handle emotionally intense situations.
- help their children succeed in school.
- correct problem behavior.
- encourage positive behavior.

##### Activities

*"Parenting Wisely" program*

- targeting 68 families
- Education Brochures*

- parenting skills
- health and wellness

*Caring Connection Parenting Events*

- Roberson (4)
- Campbell (4)

### GOAL 4

#### *Assist children and families in improving physical and mental health.*

##### Objective

Assist children and parents to improve physical and mental health through:

- encouraging regular physical activity, nutrition, and stress reduction.
- reducing risk of disease through lifestyle changes.
- establishing lifelong health practices which encourage promotion of health and disease reduction.

##### Activities

*School-wide Wellness program*

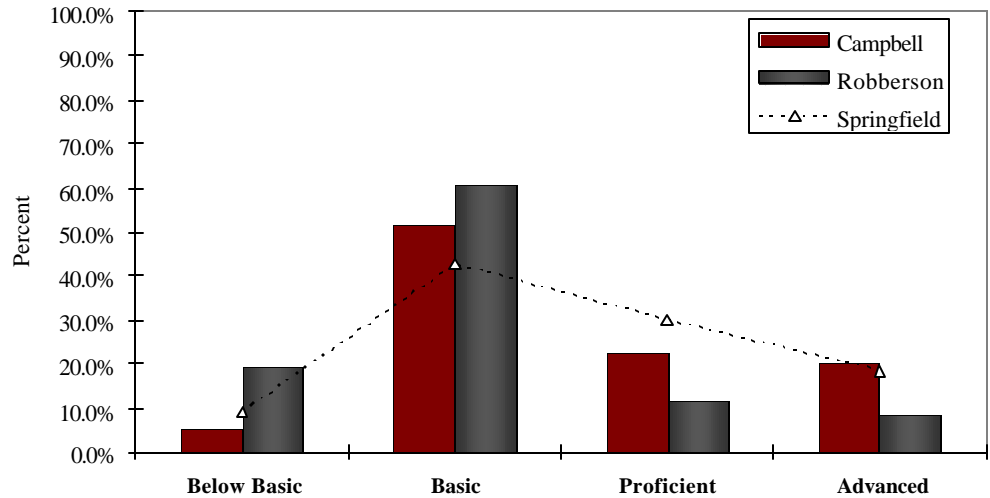
- physical activity
  - nutrition education
  - hygiene / healthy habits
- Awareness & Utilization*

- Tooth Truck
- Care Mobile
- Jordan Valley Community Health Center

Discipline is another variable the evaluation team will scrutinize by examining in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and discipline referrals if and when these data can be made available. Again, a trend analysis will be used to determine if the ECHO initiative can be linked to improved discipline / fewer behavior problems, over time.

Figure 3

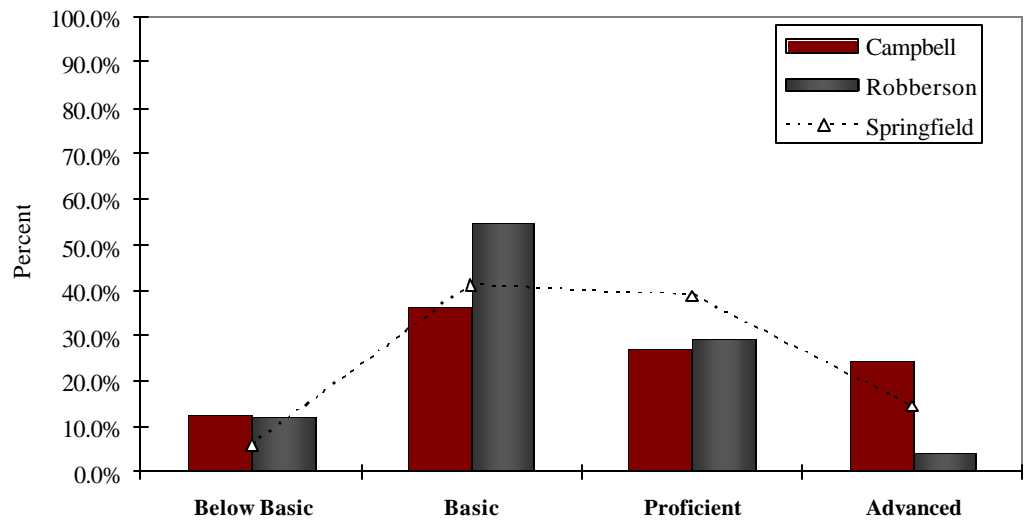
*Average Percent of Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) 2006 Communication Arts Scores for Students at Campbell & Robberson Elementary Compared to the District Average*



Figures 3 and 4 show Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data in communication arts and mathematics for the 2006 school year. Another question guiding the program evaluation is whether or not ECHO initiatives can be linked to improved academic achievement. Again, an underlying goal of the project is to help children break out of poverty, and we think the best hope to achieve this is through education. If children can receive the types of supports that help them achieve success in school, perhaps greater opportunities can and will be realized by these children over time. We will be examining a number of variables and factors associated with student achievement to determine the best way to help children become successful.

Figure 4

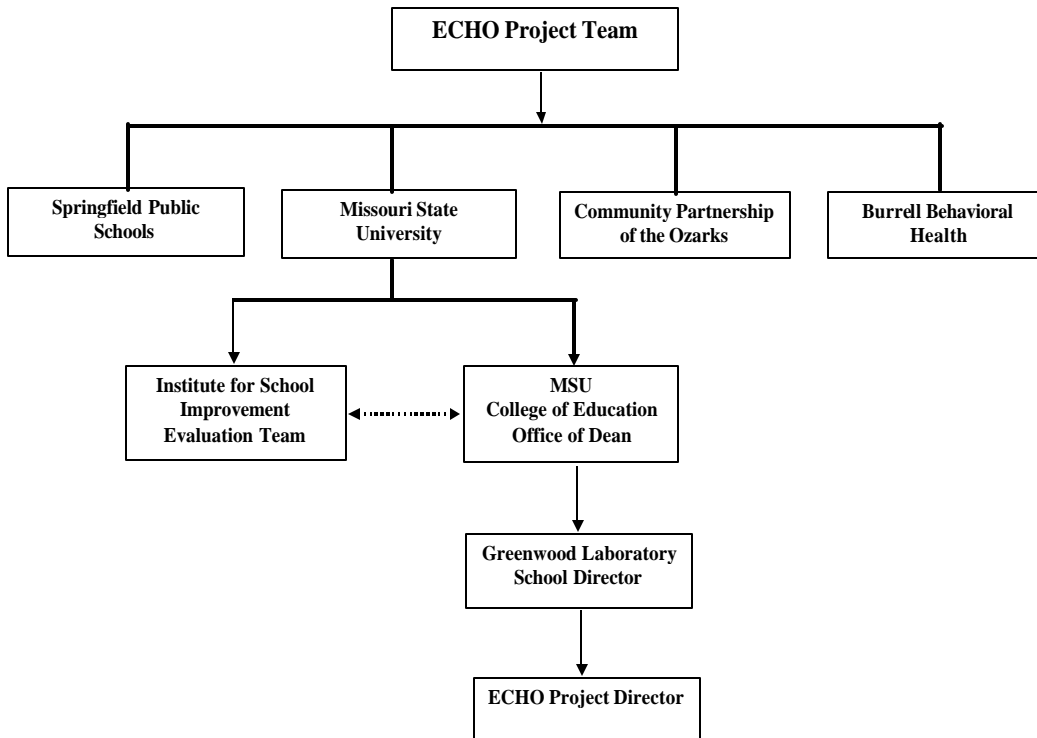
*Average Percent of Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Mathematics 2006 Scores for Students at Campbell & Robberson Elementary Compared to the District Average*



## Project Team

Figure 5 is a flow-chart which displays the ECHO Project Team organizational structure. There are four primary partners in the project which include Springfield Public Schools, Missouri State University, the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, and Burrell Behavioral Health. What follows is a brief description of partner activities to date that have taken place during this initial year of the grant.

Figure 5  
*Echo Project Evaluation Team*



### **Springfield Public Schools**

During the summer 2006, 59 classroom teachers, administrators, counselors and other support staff from two Springfield public schools attended the “Well Managed Classroom” training sponsored by Girls & Boys Town. While many (77.5%) noted they were already implementing some type of positive behavior management techniques, 66.6% also indicated that the training would assist them in promoting positive behavior management in the classroom.

As a part of the “Well Managed Classroom” training, staff from the Girls & Boys Town National Resource and Training Center conducted a follow-up visit to Campbell and Robberson elementary schools during the fall 2006. The primary focus of this visit was to assess the level at which the training was being implemented. A report examining the implementation process related to classroom teachers and school personnel as well as school-wide implementation effects observed was generated and given to each classroom teacher.

In addition, Springfield Public Schools is also focusing efforts to assist children and families with improving their physical and mental health. School-wide wellness programs that promote healthy habits and lifestyle changes such as regular physical activity and good nutrition are aimed at reducing disease and obesity. In addition, the district is focused on increasing parent awareness and use of community supports such as the Tooth Truck, Care Mobile and the Community Healthy Center.

### **GOAL 5** *Develop pre-service teachers’ behavior management skills.*

#### **Objective**

Develop pre-service teachers’ skills to:

- teach social skills.
- reduce youth aggression.
- create safe environments.
- help children succeed in school.
- build skills in high-risk families.

#### **Activities**

*Pre-service teacher education programs focused on positive behavior management techniques.*

### **GOAL 6** *Improve school environment and decrease student aggression by providing mental health assessment and intervention.*

#### **Objective**

Improve the quality and safety of the school learning environment through provision of on-site mental health assessment and intervention for children who are at risk for:

- serious emotional disturbances
- acting out aggressively.

#### **Activities**

*On-site Mental Health worker*

- intervention
- prevention
- consultation

## Evaluation Questions

- **What impact do the various “inputs” or partner activities have on school climate?**

### Inputs:

- o G&B Town Model
- o Metal Health Therapist
- o Wellness Program
- o Parenting Classes
- o Awareness
- o Teacher training

- **To what degree are school climate factors related to various indicators of student success in school?**

### Outcomes:

- o Achievement
- o Discipline
- o Attendance
- o Mobility

## School Climate Factors

### MSIP

#### Advance Questionnaire(s)

- School Environment
- Parent Involvement
- Community Support
- Curriculum
- Belonging
- Teach Quality
- District Support
- Positive Expectations
- Learning Environment

(Note: above are examples of factors extracted from the faculty, parent and student Advance Questionnaires for Springfield Public Schools.)

## Missouri State University

As the leading producer of teachers in the state of Missouri, the College of Education at Missouri State University is dedicated to quality teacher preparation. This includes providing pre-services teachers with behavior management skills that will help make them successful classroom teachers. Teachers with strong behavior management skills are able to provide positive social skills training to students, reduce aggressive behaviors exhibited by students, create safer learning environments, help children succeed in school and build skills with high-risk families.

In addition, Missouri State University’s College of Education and the Community Foundation of the Ozarks is planning to bring Jonathan Kozol to the MSU campus to speak at the annual Public Affairs Conference April 20, 2007. Dr. Kozol is an acclaimed writer who has written extensively on the impact of poverty on American schools. His books include, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools* (1992), *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* (1996), and *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (2006). During this day-long event, teachers and administrators from Campbell and Robberson elementary schools will have the opportunity to meet privately with Dr. Kozol and discuss the impact of poverty on student success in school.

## Community Partnership of the Ozarks

The efforts of the Community Partnership of the Ozarks (CPO) are primarily focused on assisting families through positive parenting education activities. As a partner in the ECHO project, CPO is providing “Parenting Wisely” classes to families of students attending Robberson and Campbell elementary schools. In addition, CPO is hosting Caring Connection Parent events focused on providing families with information regarding parenting techniques and healthy lifestyles. CPO is also providing educational brochures for parents at each of the two school sites to further promote healthy practices.

During the fall 2006, CPO registered 34 families between the two target schools to participate in the “Parenting Wisely” classes with 80% (n = 27) of families completing the program. Data collected from pre/post assessments of parents noted an increase in parents’ overall understanding of appropriate parenting techniques. CPO also conducted two Caring Connection Parenting events during the fall which were well attended by over 100 parents who received information on healthy nutrition practices. Additional events are scheduled for the spring 2007 school semester.

## Burrell Behavioral Health

Burrell Behavioral Health has hired a full time master’s level mental health therapist, Ms. Keri Bell, to serve as a school based clinician and consultant. Ms. Bell has a master’s degree in counseling and several years’ teaching experience at the elementary school level. She provides behavioral consulting, assisting teachers and school administration in the two target schools with children exhibiting behavior problems in the classroom. The goal is to impact not just the child but also the larger classroom and school environment. First, she serves as a classroom consultant, observing children who have been identified as exhibiting high rates of acting out and/or other forms of off-task behavior believed to be contributing to classroom disruption, their own poor academic performance or the academic performance of their peers. The information gathered during these observations is used for work directly in the classroom when the opportunities exist to intervene with the child during the course of the instructional day and/or to model alternative behaviors for the teacher. The observations may also be used as a tool to assist the larger school team (classroom teacher, other instructors, school principal) in planning strategies to improve on-task behaviors for the child in multiple school settings. Recommendations may include changes in the classroom teacher’s behavior so that contextual antecedents evoke a more positive response from the child. In cases where behaviors are particularly troubling or severe the clinician can also provide brief therapy that yields information on ways to effectively impact a particular child -- information that is also shared with the classroom teacher and support staff.

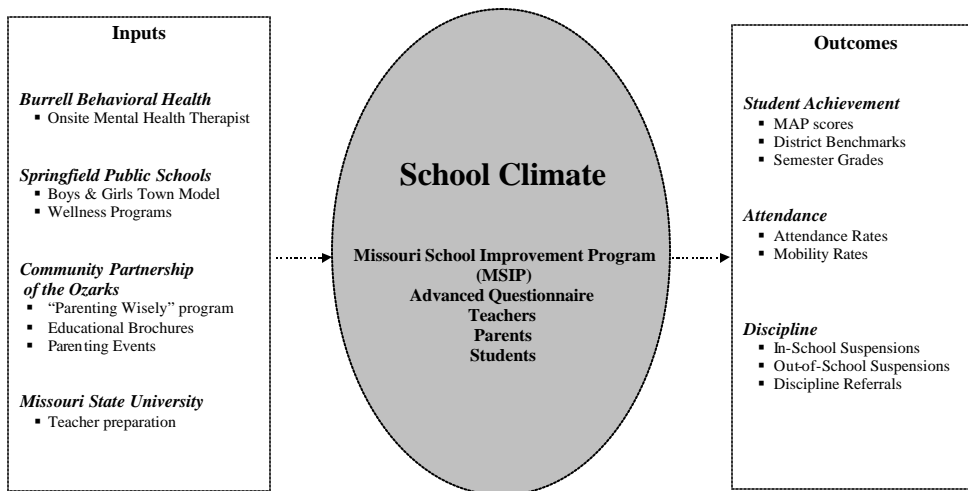
This approach allows both student and teacher to generalize new behaviors to other situations, which ultimately impacting the larger school climate (culture). The student is given the opportunity to receive reinforcement for prosocial behavior and generalizes new behavior to other school, home and community settings. Teachers grow in their knowledge of behavioral intervention and generalize that knowledge to other children with similar problems. In common language, they add to their “bag of tricks” and as a result experience far less stress and higher levels of job satisfaction as their ability to effectively manage the classroom without outside intervention increases. The remainder of the students in the classroom and larger school benefit as the school culture steadily shifts to one of positive learning and prosocial engagement. Lessons learned in the school are also shared with parents, greatly increasing chances that prosocial behavior will spill over into the home and community.

These services fit hand in glove with R-12 efforts to adapt the proven Boys and Girls town model of classroom management into its systems culture. The therapist also refers to and receives referrals from other ECHO consortium partners and works directly with consortium members to help teachers and parents view ECHO as the community initiative that it is. Being viewed as an integrated continuum of care or system of care is critical in modeling a community approach that will serve the greater goal of changing the child rearing culture of our community.

### **Evaluation Model**

The Institute for School Improvement at Missouri State University is conducting the evaluation of the ECHO project. The evaluation model displayed below depicts the conceptual approach used to guide inquiry. Various inputs (i.e. independent variables) from the ECHO partners will be examined to determine their relative impact on school climate. Climate factors, as measured by the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) will then be examined to determine the degree to which changes in school climate are correlated with outcomes (i.e. dependent variables).

Figure 6  
*ECHO Project Evaluation Model*



## ***The Institute for School Improvement***

The Institute for School Improvement (ISI) at Missouri State University is charged with supervising a number of professional development programs for school administrators, faculty and staff. ISI staff, project investigators, and research assistants conduct research and program evaluations and develop special projects that connect communities with schools. ISI publishes an annual report, along with periodic policy briefs, research summaries, and a variety of statistical reports and program evaluations.

As a University “umbrella” organization to manage, supervise, and administer a number of grants and contracts, ISI initiatives contribute to the Missouri State University statewide mission in Public Affairs.

ISI staff work collaboratively with University and community partners to support a number of projects tied to the mission of linking theory to practice.

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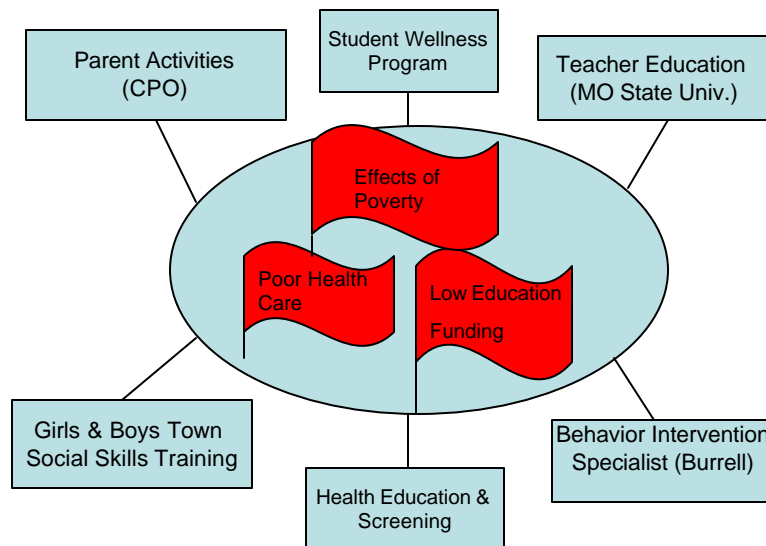
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