

SPARK Advisory Board

- Mary Dunlap
- Patricia Gramoy
- Walter Henderson
- Susanna Krey
- Susan Kunkle
- John McGrath
- Linda Sklar
- Candy Wallace
- Dianne Warren
- Debbie White
- Susan Whitmore

The SPARK Recruitment Process

Recruitment has begun! Beth Holderbaum and Joanne Wilhelm have been hard at work making contacts with area organizations that serve Canton City and Minerva neighborhoods. They are speaking with child care centers, family child care homes, grassroots organizations, neighborhood groups and many others.

SPARK team members have also met with the principals of Canton City and Minerva Local Schools, and each has welcomed the team and the program with open arms. They are thrilled young children from their neighborhoods will get a chance to be part of SPARK, and have graciously provided the team with meeting space, recommendations for parent partners, space for display boards, and more!

Recruitment Coordinators have already conducted the first of their school visits, and

have been welcomed warmly by both the school and enthusiastic parents. To date, 60 children have been enrolled in the SPARK program.

For these recruitment events, we have created brochures, posters, and display boards. These items will also be used for permanent displays in schools, child care centers and local businesses, and will provide parents and teachers alike with more information on the SPARK program. ✨

“What its children become, that will the community become.”

Suzanne La Follette

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The SPARK Plug (continued from pg. 1)

a developmentally appropriate board book with a simple activity card for parents and children to do together. The books and activities, along with an art supply for home, will be tucked inside a special SPARK book bag designed specifically for the program. Currently, we are in the process of choosing books and developing activities for our SPARK 4 year olds.

We officially kicked off the SPARK recruitment process in December 2003, and the program is really starting to take off! The SPARK Team, the Advisory Board, and the Sisters of Charity Foundation’s Board of Directors would like to thank each and every one of you for your dedication and hard work in helping to make this program a reality. We couldn’t have done it without you!



Joni T. Close
 SPARK Project Director



Dear Friends,

Through the long winter months, we’ve been busy laying the foundation for a strong community program and we’re excited! Many of you have asked about the program and its progress, and I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the remarkable things that we’ve accomplished thus far.

Back in April 2003, the SPARK Advisory Board began meeting to develop the infrastructure for the program. Since then, carefully constructed job descriptions were written, advisory board guidelines were established, and search committees were formed. Candy Wallace, Advisory Board Chair, and I have also established standing committees for external communications and evaluation.

Over the past few months, we’ve achieved many objectives of the SPARK program including: hiring SPARK team members in the areas of recruitment, parent partners, transition, communication, and assessment, meeting weekly with the SPARK team, and identifying objectives for the SPARK External Communications and Evaluation Committees.

We’ve also created a wonderful book list for our SPARK children. Thanks to Susan Whitmore and quality funds from the Stark County Department of Job and Family Services, all SPARK 3 year olds will receive

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Spring 2004



Parent Partners: (Front Row- left to right) Jerri Helmreich (Learning Advocate Coordinator), and Parent Partners Tanisha Baker and Delona Yohe **(Back Row- left to right)** Parent Partners Suzanne Vaughn, Lisa Brown, Chante’ Weir, Joanne Wilhelm, and Sherry Laubacher

SPARK Ohio Looks Forward to Spring, And A Wealth of New Recruits

Perhaps the most important development with the SPARK program thus far, has been the hiring of team members. These members will be the primary contacts for children, families and schools.

SPARK team members and our evaluation team –**Dr. Peter J. Leahy** and **Stacey Gardner**, from The University of Akron—meet weekly to discuss project goals and to report on the fast-paced progress of the program. The meetings have proven to be very productive, and have kept the team on track as we move toward our ultimate goal: serving young children and their families.

Our new team members are listed below:

THE SPARK TEAM

Cecilia Schweizer, Ph.D., Assessment Coordinator – As Assessment Coordinator for SPARK, Cecilia will oversee the developmental screening process, in-depth assessments, and the development of learning plans for children.

Cecilia earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology, a master’s in school psychology, and a Ph.D. in counseling psychology; all from The University of Akron.

Currently, Cecilia works as a private practice psychologist at Psychological Solutions. Prior to this position, she served as a school psychologist with Canton City Schools for 26 years, with over 10 years of specialization as an early childhood psychologist.

Cecilia has served as Chair of Canton City Schools’ Early Childhood Assessment Team; Chair of Evaluation/ Grant Committee of Stark County’s Early Intervention Collaborative; and Chair of Canton City Schools’ Preschool Special Education Committee. She has developed and coordinated the Kindergarten Screening Program for Canton City Schools, and has also developed and implemented its Early Childhood Integrated Preschool Program.

SPARK Ohio Looks Forward to Spring, And A Wealth of New Recruits (Continued from page 1)



SPARK Team: (Front Row- left to right) Judith Hynes (Transition Coordinator), Susan Corrigan (Recruitment Coordinator), Jerri Helmreich (Learning Advocate Coordinator) **(Back Row- left to right)** Joni Close (Project Director), Beverly Gallagher (Administrative Assistant), Peter Leahy (Evaluation), Joanne Wilhelm (Recruitment Coordinator - Canton City/ Parent Partner), Stacey Gardner (Evaluation), Suzanne Katusin (Transition Leader- Canton City), Cecilia Schweizer (Assessment Coordinator), Deborah White (Transition Leader- Minerva), Christin Perdue (Communications Coordinator), Beth Holderbaum (Recruitment Coordinator- Minerva)

Patricia Millsaps-Linger, Ph.D., Assessment – As part of the Assessment Team, Patricia will be responsible for completing in-depth assessments for all SPARK children referred through the developmental screening process.

Patricia received a bachelor of arts degree in psychology, a master's in counseling psychology, and a Ph.D., also in counseling psychology; all from The University of Akron.

She has worked with children, adolescents and families in Stark County since 1988. Patricia worked at the Child and Adolescent Service Center (community mental health agency) from 1988-1990; and since 1990, has settled into private practice.

Since 1998, she has shared the practice, Psychological Solutions, with Cecilia Schweizer, Ph.D., who is also part of the SPARK Assessment Team. Patricia has also contracted with the Canton City Schools' Early Childhood Program; working as part of the Early Childhood Assessment Team from 1998-2003.

Christin Perdue, Communications Coordinator – As Communications Coordinator, Christin is responsible for

developing and implementing a marketing plan for SPARK Ohio which includes: quarterly communications, web page development, media relations, press packets and coordination of materials for events and meetings.

Christin received her bachelor of science degree in advertising and certificate in professional selling from The University of Akron, where she is also currently pursuing her M.B.A. in Marketing.

Presently, Christin serves as the Director of Public Relations at WRL Advertising, Inc. At WRL, Christin handles all media relations, press releases, event marketing and public relations campaigns for a diverse list of clients. She also serves as a copywriter and account representative.

Jerri Helmreich, Learning Advocate Coordinator – As Learning Advocate Coordinator, Jerri will oversee the implementation of the parent involvement component of the SPARK Initiative. Jerri earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Ashland University, and her master's degree from Malone College in curriculum and instruction.

Jerri has served in the education field for over 35 years, and has specialized in early childhood

education for 26 of those years. Many will remember that Jerri served on the SPARK Leadership Team, Steering Committee and Networking Team.

From the fall of 1995 through December 2003, Jerri served as Director of Malone College's Weaver Child Development Center and Christian Primary School. There she started the kindergarten program and after 3 years of service, began writing the curriculum and preparing other paperwork in order to receive a state charter.

In addition to her work at Malone, Jerri is active in the early childhood community of Stark County. She also works closely with the Sisters of Charity Foundation's *Quality Child Care Initiative*, having served on the original planning team for the Early Childhood Resource Center. Jerri continues to mentor other directors and teachers, and train early childhood staff in entry-level skills.

We have also hired our **Parent Partners**. They will be responsible for working alongside the parents of SPARK children and providing guidance. By sharing ideas through workshops and home visits, Parent Partners and parents can work together to help children get ready for kindergarten.

The SPARK Parent Partners are as follows: **Tanisha Baker, Lisa Brown, Sherry Laubacher, Suzanne Vaughn, Chante' Weir, Joanne Wilhelm, and Delona Yohe. (See picture on page 1)**

Community Services of Stark County is providing oversight and administrative support for the SPARK recruitment effort. **Susan Corrigan, H.M.**, oversees the hiring and administrative supervision of our recruitment coordinators.

Beth Holderbaum, Recruitment Coordinator: Minerva – As the Recruitment Coordinator for Minerva Local Schools, Beth will be responsible for recruiting Minerva children and enrolling them in the SPARK program. She will schedule presentations during school events and activities in order to "spark" interest in the program.

Beth is a graduate of Stark State College of

Technology with an Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education degree and a Pre-Kindergarten Associate Certificate from the State Board of Education.

Currently, Beth serves as the Child Care Administrator at the Minerva Area YMCA where she oversees three child care sites at the facility: The YMCA's preschool/ day care, before and after school child care, and the YMCA child care site in Malvern.

Joanne Wilhelm, Recruitment Coordinator: Canton City – As the Recruitment Coordinator for Canton City Schools, Joanne will be responsible for recruiting Canton City children and enrolling them in the SPARK program. She will also be responsible for scheduling presentations at events taking place at Belle Stone, McGregor, and Gibbs elementary schools in the Canton City School District.

Joanne is a graduate of Kent State University where she received a bachelor's degree in justice studies. She also brings to SPARK over 10 years of experience as a children's advocate for the Stark County school system.

Prior to joining SPARK, Joanne worked for the Stark County Department of Job and Family Services as a social service aide for foster children and their families. She then joined Head Start as a health technician and provided screening services for children in the areas of speech/ language and behavior/ mental health. She has also been employed as a family resource manager for Pleasant Day Daycare in North Canton.

Judith Hynes, Ph.D., Transition Coordinator – As Transition Coordinator, Judith will be responsible for organizing the transition component of the SPARK Program. In addition, her role will help expand the work beyond Canton City and Minerva Local Schools to the 15 other districts in Stark County.

Judith received her bachelor's degree in kindergarten/elementary education, her master's in reading and administration, and her Ph.D. in early childhood and elementary curriculum; all

from The University of Akron.

Currently, Judith works as the project manager for the Pre-K Initiative funded through the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton. She is also an Accreditation Mentor and Coordinator of Early Childhood Initiatives with the Stark County Educational Service Center. Judith has helped more than 25 preschool sites go through the National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation process. She is a certified High/Scope Trainer and has conducted multiple trainings at the five urban centers.

Judith also serves on the Sisters of Charity Foundation's *Quality Child Care Initiative* Stakeholder Committee and the Early Childhood Resource Center's Advisory Board. Her past experiences include: serving as

Curriculum Director, Building Principal, Elementary Curriculum Coordinator, Preschool Director of Public Preschools in Massillon; Adjunct Professor at Ashland University; and pre-k, kindergarten and grades 1, 2, and 3 teacher.

Suzanne Katusin, Transition Leader: Canton City – As Transition Leader for the Canton City School District, Suzanne will be responsible for overseeing the transition component for Canton City Schools. She will work closely with Deborah White in Minerva and Judith Hynes at the Stark County Educational Service Center to establish institutional readiness committees that are inclusive of teachers, parents, early childhood providers, and agencies.

She earned her bachelor's degree in early childhood instruction and her master's in curriculum and instruction; both from Kent State University.

Suzanne has 20 years experience as a

kindergarten and first grade teacher. Currently she specializes in family involvement with the Public Relations Department of Canton City Schools. She is also an adjunct professor in the early childhood department at Kent State University where she teaches home, school and community partnerships.

Deborah White, Transition Leader: Minerva – As Transition Leader, Deborah will be responsible for overseeing the transitions component for the Minerva Local School

System. She will work closely with Suzanne and Judith to establish institutional readiness committees and to develop joint professional development opportunities for early childhood practitioners and kindergarten teachers. She will also provide advice and assistance with recruitment and identification of

potential parent partner candidates in the Minerva area.

Deborah earned her bachelor of arts degree in English and elementary education from Mount Union College and her master's in guidance and counseling from Kent State University.

For the last 12 years, Deborah has served as the Director of Special Services for Minerva Local Schools. She has been an educator for 30 years; working as the Student Services Coordinator/ Guidance Counselor for Minerva Local Schools and teaching elementary and middle school at Boardman and Plain Local Schools. Deborah also served on the SPARK Leadership Team and will continue as Minerva's representative on the SPARK Advisory Board.

Along with **Beverly Gallagher**, SPARK Administrative Assistant and **Beverly Wilke**, Office Assistant, the core team is in place and ready to go!



EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

How important is it that our children receive quality care and education as they begin their life's journey? If you believe as I do, you feel there is no time in a person's life more critical than the early years.

My name is John McGrath, and I am on SPARK's Advisory Board and External Communications Committee. Our committee is comprised of community advocates whose names may be familiar to you. Our team consists of Chair Susan Kunkle, Pat Gramoy, Susanna Krey, Dianne Warren, Tom Delamater, Todd Locke, Christin Perdue, and SPARK Project Director Joni Close.

We are committed to providing you with information about how SPARK is improving systems that impact the learning process of young children on a long-term basis. Child care and education are critical public policy issues, and we are committed to sustaining a dialogue with our community on these topics.

Our External Communications Committee will meet periodically to:

1) Inform the community of what SPARK is as well as its accomplishments by overseeing the development of written materials targeting community and state stakeholders – including a semi-annual newsletter, press packets, and public interest stories;

2) Organize meetings and events for business and community leaders and local media;

3) Advance state and local support for policies that will sustain SPARK Ohio by identifying key leaders and policy makers at the state and local levels in order to inform them of meetings and presentations; and

4) Sustain SPARK Ohio's key outcomes by disseminating evaluation results and shaping the message to key constituencies as appropriate.

This issue is so important that the community committee called COMPASS, which is examining and prioritizing the most important needs in the community, has endorsed child care and early childhood education as its key area of focus in the education arena.

We value your insights regarding these most important topics. Please give me your feedback regarding this communication and any other insights you might have regarding SPARK's efforts. You may e-mail me at the following address jmcgrath@starkstate.edu.

Sincerely,
John McGrath

SPARK EVENT SCHEDULE Canton City & Minerva Local School Districts

CANTON CITY EVENTS

MCGREGOR

- March 18th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- April 8th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- 30th-** Grandparent Visitation Day, 9 a.m.-11 a.m.
- May 5th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- 30th-** Kindergarten Orientation, 9 a.m.-11 a.m.
- June 3rd-** Recognition Assembly
Grades 3-4- 8:30 a.m.-10 a.m.
Grades 1-2- 12:45 p.m.-2:15 p.m.
Grade 5- 5:30 p.m.-7 p.m.
- 7th-** Family Fun Fest, with a special appearance by *Sparkles the Clown!* 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

GIBBS

- March 17th-** Parent Partnership Meeting, 6 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
- April 7th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- April Parent Partnership Meeting (TBA)
- May** May Parent Partnership Meeting (TBA)
- 12th-** Math Literacy Night, 3 p.m.-4:30 p.m.
- June 2nd-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

BELLE STONE

- March 24th-** Family Math Night, 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.
- April 14th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 7:30 a.m.-11 a.m.
- 30th-** Grandparent's Day, 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

- May 6th-** SPARK Recruitment (Enrollment/Information Table), 7:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- 20th-** Author's Night, 4:30 p.m.-6 p.m., PTO Elections 6 p.m., Spring Program Grade 4 Students, 6:30 p.m.

COMMUNITY

- May 30th-** 2004 Family Fair – Canton Civic Center (Free to Public), 12:30 p.m.-4 p.m.

MINERVA EVENTS

WEST ELEMENTARY

- March 11th-** Parent/Teacher Conferences 4 p.m.-8 p.m.
- April 1st-** Open House, with a special appearance by *Sparkles the Clown!* 6 p.m.-8 p.m.

M.I. DAY ELEMENTARY

- March 25th-** Parent/Teacher Conferences 4 p.m.-8 p.m.
- April 20th-** Kindergarten Registration: All Day
- 21st-** Kindergarten Registration: All Day
- 27th-** Kindergarten Concert, with a special appearance by *Sparkles the Clown!* 7 p.m.-8 p.m.
- May 19th-** Student Pick-ups 2 p.m.-4 p.m.

COMMUNITY

- March 14th-** YMCA Preschool Open House @ First Presbyterian Church with a special appearance by *Spitunia the Clown!* 2 p.m.-4 p.m.
- June 17th - 19th-** Minerva Homecoming @ Minerva Municipal Park 6 p.m.-10 p.m.



SPARK Guiding Principles

- We are committed to children as our primary focus.
- We are committed to providing children the opportunity to realize their full potential.
- We are committed to quality services and equitable treatment of all children.
- We are committed to the importance of families and their right to self-determination.
- We are committed to the recognition and support of the strengths and needs of families.
- We are committed to respect for and sensitivity to diversity and cultural and racial differences.
- We are committed to collaboration with a primary focus on the best interests of children and their families.
- We are committed to respect for and support of all who are entrusted with the care of children.
- We are committed to self-reflection, evaluation, and continuous growth.
- We are committed to advocating for the well-being of children.

SPARK CONTACT INFORMATION

RECRUITERS:

Minerva Local:

Contact: Beth Holderbaum
Phone: (330) 868-5988
Email: bch9182@aol.com

Canton City Schools:

Contact: Joanne Wilhelm
Phone: (330) 833-8000
Email: jwilmom@aol.com

PARENT PARTNER QUESTIONS:

Contact: Jerri Helmreich
Phone: (330) 454-5800, ext. 28
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Email: JerriHelm1041@aol.com

SPARK MAIN OFFICE:

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Contact: Joni Close (Project Director)

Phone: (330) 454-5800
Fax: (330) 454-5909
Home Office: (330) 497-3397
Home Fax: (330) 497-3495
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Beverly Gallagher (Administrative Assistant)

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Email: bgallagher@scfcanton.org

Spark Advisory Board Evaluation Committee Report

My name is Stacey Gardner and I am a member of the SPARK Evaluation Committee, which was essentially created to ensure that the SPARK evaluation plan includes information about all parts of the program. Evaluation is an essential tool that will be used to inform stakeholders about the effectiveness of this early childhood intervention. It is the responsibility of our committee to ensure that important evaluation results are communicated to program stakeholders in a timely and effective manner. Stakeholders include the families of SPARK children, SPARK staff, the Kellogg and Sisters of Charity Foundations, the schools and partner systems involved in SPARK, and education policymakers.

Participating SPARK advisory board members include Linda Sklar (Chair), Mary Dunlap, Walter Henderson, Candy Wallace, and Susan Whitmore. Participating SPARK staff members include Joni Close (Project Director), Peter Leahy (Principal Investigator), and me (Research Assistant). Our committee plans to meet quarterly to refine the SPARK evaluation plan, to monitor the execution of the plan and make recommendations for needed adjustments, to review all evaluation results, to collaborate with other SPARK sites around the country in the national evaluation effort, and to work with the SPARK External Communications Committee to publicize the results of the evaluation. Dr. Peter Leahy and I conduct the evaluation under the sponsorship of the Institute for Health and Social Policy at the University of Akron.

The SPARK Evaluation Committee is greatly appreciative of the anticipated community support and timely return of surveys. The distributed materials provide the SPARK team with necessary information to help children get ready for school and to help schools ease the transition for the children. If you know of a young child who will be attending Minerva Local schools or Gibbs, Belle Stone, or McGregor Schools in Canton City, please encourage their parents to enroll their child in SPARK. Community awareness and involvement will fuel the initiative to prepare all Stark County kids for kindergarten!

Sincerely,
Stacey L. Gardner, MPA

