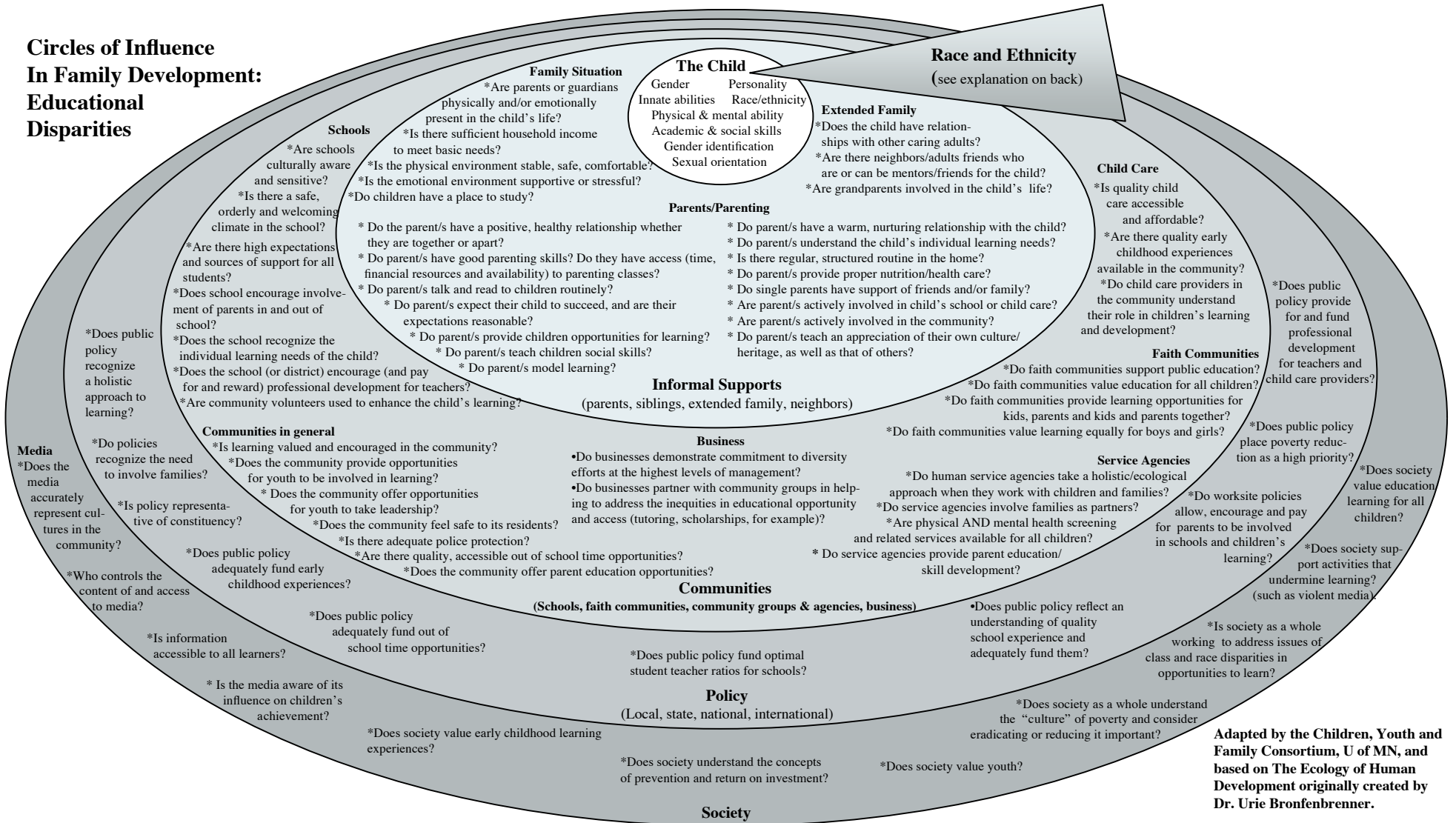


**Circles of Influence
In Family Development:
Educational
Disparities**



Adapted by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, U of MN, and based on The Ecology of Human Development originally created by Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner.

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

The model on the reverse side of this insert, *Circles of Influence*, has been created by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium as a way of visually illustrating the multi-layered influences underlying the issue of Educational Disparities.

It is based on the original "ecological model" (The Ecology of Human Development) developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s that is well-known to most family scholars and practitioners. The model has had many permutations and interpretations over the years, but at base level, it recognizes that each individual, as well as the family as a unit, is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping contexts, systems or environments. This includes systems in which the family and/or its members are directly involved, such as neighborhoods or schools, as well as systems that are more distant from direct interaction or influence, such as community, policy and society.

Briefly, the five circles are:

The child: Everything children are born with and how they influence and are influenced by the world around them.

Informal Supports: The influence of parents and parenting, siblings, grandparents, extended family, neighbors, and informal mentors. It includes the quality of the relationships as well as the quality of the home environment.

Communities: The influence of schools, faith communities, service agencies, business and communities at large. Includes access to quality resources, the physical and emotional environment, attitudes, and interaction and integration among people and institutions in geographic communities (e.g., "neighborhoods") and socio-cultural communities?

Policy: Public and private policies. The most effective policies consider all the various influences, as well as the intended and unintended impacts on families and children.

Society: Societal beliefs, values, norms, customs and practices, including those of media, technology and the arts.

In addition to the five circles, this model recognizes the cross cutting impact of *race and ethnicity*. All of the five circles, from individual children to society, are profoundly affected by race and ethnicity. It is critical that these influences be identified, acknowledged and included in developing strategies to address educational disparities.

The Circles of Influence: Educational Disparities is an attempt to systematically examine educational disparities using this ecological model. It raises questions about many different aspects of educational disparities and the achievement gap that occur in each of the circles of influence that affect children and their families. These questions are not intended to be judgmental or prescriptive. They are intended to raise issues that research shows to have an effect on children's ability to learn. Although children's innate potential to learn is important, these external factors have the capacity to enhance and detract from that potential.

We recognize this framework is a work in progress. We will continue to add, subtract, and modify the contents of this model as our work on Educational Disparities grows over the next two years.

Readers will notice the Circles of Influence graphic and the content have both changed since it was first "launched" in the Fall, 2006. This is based on feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

We welcome your comments. Feel free to contact any of our staff, or e-mail our office at cyfc@umn.edu.

Sources used to create this model include the following:

- The collective wisdom of the Family Relations educators with the U of MN Extension Service, Dr. Sandra Christenson of the U of MN School Psychology program, Dr. Harold Grotevant of the U of MN Family Social Science program, and CYFC staff.
- *Working With Families For School Success*, a paper/module by Dr. Sandra Christenson (available on web version)
- *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, by Richard Rothstein, Columbia University Economic Policy Institute, 2004.
- *Learning From You: All Parents Are Teachers*. University of Minnesota Extension Service, 2000.
- *Going to School: How to Help Your Child Succeed*, By Drs. Sharon L. and Craig T. Ramey, Goddard Press, 1999.