

Understanding NCLB and its impact on local schools

*America Reads is a program through the Center for Community Work and Learning that hires 40 or more St. Kate's students to tutor at six different sites in the Twin Cities each semester. This article about No Child Left Behind was co-written by three student coordinators for America Reads to address how the law affects the schools they work with. The authors are **Doubara Wis-Wolo**, Coordinator for Longfellow Elementary; **Va Thao**, Coordinator for Homecroft Elementary; and **Carrie Feldman**, Coordinator for Anishinabe Academy.*



America Reads tutor Sarah Krage works with a kindergarten student in Homecroft Elementary School's Spanish bilingual program. Photo by Va Thao

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a law that was passed in 2001 aimed at improving the public school system. NCLB is highly controversial among educators and legislators and directly influences the schools that St. Kate's students tutor at through the America Reads program.

The goal of NCLB is to set high standards and hold schools accountable for failing to educate students. Schools are categorized into five stages based on whether or not they have been making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In Minnesota, AYP is based on test results and school statistics in four areas: participation in testing, proficiency, attendance and graduation. Proficiency is measured through yearly tests in math and reading. If a school repeatedly misses AYP it will be "restructured," which is defined by Saint Paul Public Schools as "significant change to the management and makeup of a school."

There are a number of common criticisms of NCLB. One is that it is not adequately funded to help schools meet its expectations. Another is that the focus on testing forces teachers to "teach to the test" while ignoring higher concepts and untested subjects. Also, many believe that the law disproportionately punishes schools that have student populations who, due to factors beyond the students' control, may have a harder time in the public school system. These populations include students in poverty, minority students, and students for whom English is a second language.

Schools that are inadequately funded and struggling to make AYP often rely on volunteers, such as tutors, to help bring struggling students up to the state-approved level for their grade level. The schools we work with through America Reads have many students who need extra help and one-on-one attention in reading. Tutors are a valuable resource for helping to meet the AYP requirements, although it can still be difficult for the schools. None of the schools we work with made AYP in 2007. In the next few paragraphs, we will talk about the current status under NCLB of Homecroft Elementary, Longfellow Elementary, and Anishinabe Academy.

Homecroft Elementary is a K-6 school in St. Paul that offers both a Spanish bilingual program and an English language program. The English language program is a mix of native English speakers and students who speak a total of twenty other languages. This year, Homecroft failed to meet the AYP requirements and was in the "corrective action" category under NCLB. Due to this and the small student population, the school will be closed down in the fall of 2008. Recently, plans have been made for the school to house a program for students with disabilities and an early childhood center. Most of Homecroft's current students have already selected a new school for next year. Staff are in the process of applying for open positions at other schools. America Reads is exploring other St. Paul schools with whom to partner, and we are hoping to find one with a Spanish language component.

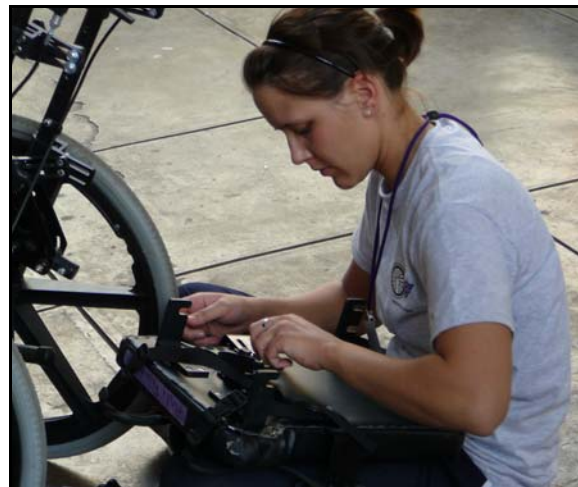
Longfellow Elementary is a K-5 school in South Minneapolis. It is currently in Stage 1 of the NCLB policy and has been placed on the "watch list" because it failed to meet AYP in the 2007 academic year. There are no immediate consequences for being on the NCLB "watch list," but if Longfellow fails to meet AYP next year its status will be pushed down a level to the "needs improvement" category.

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Service and learning abroad: CSC students go to Peru

By Julian Kittelson-Aldred The World Health Organization estimates that there are 20 to 25 million people worldwide who are in need of wheelchairs, most of them living in the world's poorest countries and cut off from access to necessary care. Chair by chair, an organization called Eleanore's Project is changing that number.

My name is Julian Kittelson-Aldred, and four years ago, my family founded Eleanore's Project, Inc. in memory of my little sister who died in 2001. She was born with cerebral palsy and was a life-long wheelchair rider. She was also profoundly deaf and used American Sign Language and alternative communication methods to interact with the world. Her death just before her twelfth birthday forced our family to reorganize and we began thinking about how best to honor her short life. The mission statement of Eleanore's Project is, "To improve the lives of children with disabilities and their families through education and through innovative projects that have potential to produce lasting change." We do this by partnering with organizations which already exist in Peru that identify children who need wheelchairs. Based on the information that our partners send, Eleanore's Project therapists decide what kind of chair is most appropriate for each child and put together a shipment of refurbished wheelchairs which are shipped to Lima, Peru. Since our first expedition in November 2004, we have made three subsequent trips to fit wheelchairs, the most recent of which took place in March 2008.



Becca Gillis, a student in St. Kate's Occupational Therapy program, puts bolts into the back of a wheelchair during a trip to Peru in March.

The March trip to Peru was a groundbreaking one because, for the first time, five students and one professor from St. Kate's joined our team of therapists and wheelchair seating professionals. My mother, Tamara Kittelson-Aldred, is a 1975 graduate of the St. Kate's Occupational Therapy (OT) program and has wanted to include St. Kate's students in the work of Eleanore's Project. Christine Loos, Becca Gillis, Jen Vu, Katrina Erickson, and Sarah Weiszhaar are in their second year as OT graduate students at St. Kate's. Their professor, Kate Barrett, spent more than a year working with my mother to develop the relationship between St. Kate's and Eleanore's Project. Barrett received a Faculty Development grant from the Center for Community Work and Learning to review the existing OT curriculum and find ways to integrate community experiences. The Office of Global Studies at St. Kate's worked with Barrett and Eleanore's Project to coordinate the travel plans for the trip to Peru. As a result of the combined efforts of the OT students and the Eleanore's Project therapists and volunteers, 87 custom-fit wheelchairs delivered to children.



St. Kate's OT students Sarah Weiszhaar (left) and Becca Gillis (center) teamed up with an Eleanore's Project therapist (right) to fit a wheelchair for a young boy from Peru, pictured here with his mother.

The students who came on the March expedition clearly see the connection between international experiences and academic work. Student Sarah Weiszhaar noted, "The work we are doing [at St. Kate's] will make us well-educated occupational therapy students, the work we did in Peru will benefit our practical skills, all of which affect the community and the services we are able to provide to the members of our community."

Becca Gillis also appreciated the variety of skills that Eleanore's Project teams have, saying "Being part of an interdisciplinary team was also helpful, as it emphasized the importance of communication, working together, and how each individual is an important piece to the puzzle."

For the students, the work of Eleanore's Project is more than just bringing wheelchairs and mobility to the children of Peru. Getting a child comfortably, properly seated opens a host of new opportunities that would not be possible otherwise. A child who has spent the entirety of his or her life lying on a blanket in a corner can interact with the world in a whole new way.

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Nursing students educate for a healthier community

By Kamila Zasowska

In November 2006, Community Work and Learning (CWL) staff and nursing faculty member Jeannine Mueller-Harmon started to work on incorporating a service-learning component into one of the nursing classes. After many months of planning, 90 students in Mueller-Harmon's "Nursing Care of the Family" course this semester have the opportunity to participate in a service-learning experience.

According to the syllabus, "Nursing Care of the Family" is a course that concentrates on exploring "the patterns of knowing in nursing as applied to the family." One of the objectives for the course is that students take on the role of educator or counselor. The Center for Community Work and Learning together with Professor Mueller-Harmon helped students meet this objective by giving them the opportunity to address specific, health-related needs at community organizations.

For this project, junior nursing students from Mueller-Harmon's class completed 4 to 7 hours of service-learning at an approved community site. This time was used to develop a teaching plan based on the needs of the community site, become familiar with the site and the community it serves, and deliver a health-related presentation at the community site. The projects ranged from traditional presentations focused on one issue to more broad health fairs covering a number of topics.

Mueller-Harmon and CWL worked together to find appropriate community partners for this assignment. Students had the opportunity to choose from 19 different sites. The variety of organizations allowed students to choose the topic and audience in which they were interested. The topics of the presentations varied. Many students taught about exercise and nutrition, while others presented on topics like healthy relationships. The audience also varied from site to site. Some of the nursing students presented to children in after school programs while other students presented to adults.

Ten nursing students had the opportunity to educate children by working with after school programs at the YWCA of St. Paul. Two students presented information about nutrition and flu prevention. These presentations were interesting and successful. "I was a little nervous at the beginning, but it ended up being a great experience," said one of the students.

Seven nursing students chose to work with adults at the Jeremiah Program in St. Paul, an organization that assists single mothers and their children to break the cycle of poverty through holistic programming focused on safe and affordable housing, life skills education, empowerment training, and post-secondary education. One of the projects at Jeremiah was the creation of a cookbook full of healthy recipes and a presentation on nutrition for the women who live at the organization.

Mueller-Harmon feels strongly about including a service-learning component in this course. She believes that health promotion, health education, and interdisciplinary skills are all essential in nursing, and noted that, "CWL partnerships give students authentic settings in which to be introduced to and begin to use these skills."

In reflecting on how this assignment benefited her students, Mueller-Harmon said, "This was both a humbling and empowering experience for students. They worked with hard-working and committed community contacts. They recognized some of the special challenges that many non-profit agencies face. This activity built on previous course work and taught new skills."

As a pre-nursing student here at The College of St. Catherine I believe this teaching assignment is a great opportunity for the nursing students to incorporate the knowledge and skills they have learned during classroom time with work in the community. I think this class has allowed students to see the real connection between nursing and educating, as well as the importance of being an active community member.



*See Vang, a student in St. Kate's nursing program, asks questions to students at the YWCA of St. Paul after teaching them how to properly wash their hands.
Photo by Kamila Zasowska*

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Eleanore's Project continued . . .

Children who have received Eleanore's Project chairs have gained new independence when they start attending school or visiting nearby family members on their own. The differences are not just physical, they are attitudinal. Kate Barrett said, "We were able to repeatedly see, first hand, the difference a supported seating system can make in a child's ability to support their own heads, use their arms and hands, and most importantly to interact with his or her family and environment."

As I have continued my studies at St. Kate's, a theme has emerged for me: that of theory vs. practice, the gap that exists between what we learn and what we do. After taking several social justice oriented courses, I grew frustrated with simply reading about how to make social change and not having the resources to go out and do something about it. That is where the work of Eleanore's Project and the Center for Community Work and Learning come in. They both offer a real, hands-on opportunity to start making a difference, whether it is by fitting a wheelchair or tutoring at-risk youth.

Working for change must be intentional. Changes do not happen over night. The writer Frederick Buechner said that "vocation happens when our deep gladness meets the world's deep need." For me, and I think for all of the many people who volunteer for Eleanore's Project, the work we do is a calling, a vocation.

There will be a presentation by the OT students about their experience in Peru on Monday April 21st from 11:00 to noon in Mendel 411.

NCLB continued . . .

One of the AYP categories not met by Longfellow is Limited English Proficient (LEP). Longfellow is a school that is bursting with diversity and has a high population of students for whom English is a second language. Being on the "watch list" may be a misrepresentation of the dedication and hard work that is put into making sure students get quality education at Longfellow, which is a great school with committed teachers.

Anishinabe Academy is a school in Minneapolis that is focused on Native American language and culture, and serves primarily Native American students. It is currently in its fourth year of failing to meet AYP, categorizing it as a Stage 3 school. However, the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors and Minneapolis Public Schools have entered a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding Indian education. The MOA is a five-year plan to improve Native American education in Minneapolis. Since Anishinabe is in the second year of the plan, the school is already taking steps to improve its program and will likely not be "restructured" despite its failure to meet AYP. As part of the plan under the MOA, the 9th and 10th grades will be phased out next year leaving the school to be High-5 through 8th grade.

NCLB is an important issue because it affects all public schools around the country—and no one is above being affected by issues of public education. All children legally must attend school, and the quality of our children's education determines the quality of our collective future. As a member of the community, it is important that you educate yourself about issues such as these, speak your opinion and take action if you feel like change is necessary. The way we have chosen to get involved in this issue is to help students get one on one attention and improve their reading while helping St. Kate's students to become knowledgeable about the issues and feel empowered to work for change in the community. With more help from the community, all public schools can work toward success under No Child Left Behind.

While we have only discussed three of the schools we work with, all schools are affected by NCLB. For information regarding other schools, you can visit the Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Schools websites at www.mpls.k12.mn.us and www.spps.org, or contact the school directly.
