

Polk/Burnett Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter



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Schools Support Grandparents

Inside this issue:

Schools Support Grandparents

Topics In Upcoming Issues:

Legal Rights and Options

Discipline Techniques

Life with Grandchildren

One in 10 grandparents in this country will have primary care for a grandchild at some point, typically two years or more. One in 20 American children under age 18 currently live with a grandparent with no parent present. Millions more are cared for by grandparents in less formal situations.

In Burnett County 0.6% (99) and in Polk County 0.4% (173) of households have grandparents responsible for grandchildren (2000 Census figures).

Children who are raised by grandparents are statistically at higher risk for more emotional and developmental disorders than are children raised by two parents. They also are more likely to be average or below-average students. They may experience feelings of rejection and abandonment, while their grandparents may be at higher risk of feeling stressed by caregiving and financial obligations.

Many school districts are beginning to work more closely with grandparents to support them in raising their grandchildren, says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension specialist on aging.

“Schools can do many things to help grandchildren and provide resources to grandparents who are raising grandkids,” Brintnall-Peterson says. “For instance, schools can recognize that many grandchildren are in transitional arrangements and

will need help adjusting to new routines in a new home and a new school. They may need help in making friends, or could benefit from a social group for kids being raised by grandparents.”

A recent study from the Gerontology Institute and Center College of Public and Community Service at University of Massachusetts looks at what grandparents raising grandchildren say they need from their schools and communities.

The list includes:

- Increased outreach from schools to communities.
- Involvement of grandparents in community assessments and referrals.
- Sensitivity training for teachers on grandparent caregiver needs and concerns.
- Information from the schools on children’s health and learning problems.
- Grandparent involvement in in-service training for teachers.
- Grandparent involvement in parent/teacher councils and other committees appointed by school board members and administrators.
- Respite care, such as before-school

Special points of interest:

- Schools can involve grandparents in parent-teacher councils.
- Schools may provide before- and after-school child care.
- Schools may provide sensitivity training for teachers.



- Fact sheets on child development.
- Information on grandparents support groups.

The study found that the need for respite care was the most frequently cited need of grandparents involved in the survey.

Brintnall-Peterson says some school districts already are taking steps to help support grandparent-headed households. Some schools have put together resource packets for grandparents on community resources, support groups and child development information for caregivers who are parenting for a second time. Other districts try to make sure children living with grandparents are assigned to more experienced teachers.

Many teachers have looked at class projects and the language they use when sending communication home to families, to make sure that grandparent-headed homes feel included. For instance, a “Child of the Week” unit featuring a different child each week would invite “family members,” rather than “parents” to participate in the classroom activity.

“Schools can be major players in helping grandparents adjust to new roles and become involved in their grandchildren’s education,” Brintnall-Peterson adds.

“By helping grandparents recognize how parenting has changed dramatically from the time when they were raising their own children, schools can assist grandparents in better understanding the needs of their grandchildren and new parenting techniques.”

“Grandparents also can begin to understand the issues involved with being a child today, and hopefully develop some relationships with other adults who have children the same age as their grandchildren. These new relationships can be beneficial to both grandparents and parents.”

Source: *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin*, coordinated by Grandparents United for Children’s Rights, Inc.; Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources, State of Wisconsin; and University of Wisconsin Extension, Cooperative Extension, Family Living Programs. See <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grgp> for more information.

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Websites:

<http://www.AARP.org/getans/grandparents.html>

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grgp>