

# CONNECTIONS

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## Closing the Achievement Gap

By Ellen Galinky for Community Playthings Connect Newsletter

The achievement gap is almost universally defined as a problem of low-income children and the distance between them and their higher-income counterparts in academic achievement. But there is a much larger and more significant gap—a gap whereby all of our children aren't living up to their full potential and aren't gaining the life skills they need to thrive now and in the future. Essential life skills involve the part of our brain (the prefrontal cortex) that weaves together our social, emotional and intellectual capacities in pursuit of our goals.

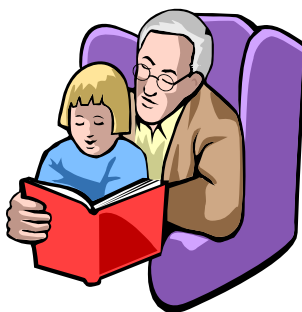
**Life skills are tied to academic achievement**, without question. Take one of these skills—*focus and self-control*. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn of Columbia University and a group of other academics recently reviewed six studies that followed children over time. Out of literally hundreds of analyses, only three competencies that children had when they entered school were strongly related to their later success in reading and math. Two are obvious: The children who were good at

math and reading when they entered school were likely to be good at math and reading years later. But the third is less obvious—*attention skills*. As Brooks-Gunn says, attention skills “allow children to focus on something in a way that maximizes the information they get out of it.”

**Life skills can be improved.** Megan McClelland and her colleagues from Oregon State found that when preschool children improved their focus and self-control during the year, it was equivalent to having an extra month of pre-kindergarten in their gains in literacy skills, and an extra 2.8 months in vocabulary skills.

**Life skills are at the heart of learning.** For example, the skill of *making connections*—that is figuring out what's the same, what's different and sorting things into categories—is a skill that underlies literacy, mathematics, and the sciences. In addition, *making unusual connections* is at the heart of creativity. And in a world where people can Google for information, this is a must-have capacity.

.....continued on page 2



## Happy Mother's Day



Be sure to save this month's calendar for all the upcoming events.

Inside this issue:

CPC news	2
Workshops & events	insert
Calendar	insert
Hull Family Network	3
Parenting Tips	4

Published by Maggie Ollerhead & Joan F. MacDonald

# Hull Early Childhood Advisory Council

## Community Partnerships for Children

### Closing the Achievement Gap

.....continued from page 1

**Life skills underlie good relationships with others.** *Perspective-taking*—understanding what others think and feel—goes far beyond empathy. For children, studies have found links between perspective-taking and reading skills as well as between perspective-taking and being involved in less conflict with other kids.

Another example is the skill of *taking on challenges*. In today's multi-tasking, distracting, complex world, children must do more than cope with challenges—they need to actively take them on.

**For life skills to be effective,** they must be promoted in *age-appropriate* ways. It would be counter-productive to expect a two or three-year-old child to be able to switch from one rule to another when playing the sorting game. They are simply too young to do this. In addition, life skills must be promoted in *playful* ways. There would be nothing worse than taking away the fun in these games—turning them into drill and kill routines that sap their purpose, which is to engage children in learning.

**It is time for real reform** in addressing the achievement gap, but if we do not address the *life skills gap* for all of our children we will not make the gains we as a country, as parents, and as teachers sorely need and deserve.

### From the CPC Coordinator's Desk.....

By Maggie Ollerhead - [mollerhead@town.hull.ma.us](mailto:mollerhead@town.hull.ma.us)

If you registered your child for Kindergarten in the fall make sure you have your Kindergarten Screening appointment set up for either Friday, May 14th or Friday, May 28th. Call the Jacobs School at 781-925-4400 if you are not already scheduled. Also, don't miss the Kindergarten Orientation at 6:00 pm on Thursday, June 3rd.

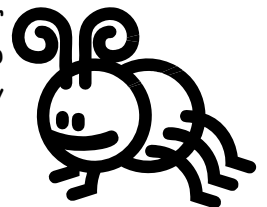
### Safety of Kids and Pesticides



When we welcome spring after this long winter, we know that there will be ants on the sidewalk, and in our kitchen, dandelions or crab grass in the lawn, and pesky mosquitoes to annoy us. We must beware of succumbing to the quick fix of using much advertised toxic pesticides such as grub control, weed killer, insect spray, and crab grass prevention. All of these products are designed to kill living cells, so it should be no surprise that they pose dangers to human health, particularly that of small children because of their size and behavior. In a study of preschoolers, 99% had one or more pesticides in their bodies. When household, lawn, and garden pesticides are used, children are at risk for birth defects, cancers, and learning and behavioral problems.

There are safe alternatives. If you really can't stand the crab grass, sow grass seed, and then when it has sprouted to a fine green haze, broadcast and water in corn gluten, which inhibits germination of crab grass (and other seeds also). If grubs are truly a problem in your lawn, obtain milky spore disease from a garden center, a substance harmless to you but establishes a poisonous lawn environment to grubs for years. Encourage your child to pick dandelions before the seeds set and then dig out as much of the root as possible.

Ants outside are beneficial as they eat the larvae of fleas and certain bedbugs. In your kitchen, deter ants by wiping the counter with vinegar. Mosquitoes breed in standing water so be sure to empty out children's toys and other depressions after the rain. Freshly cut catnip rubbed on the skin repels mosquitoes naturally without the toxic chemicals in most repellants.



## Hull Early Childhood Advisory Council

### Hull Family Network

#### Note from the HFN Coordinator:

Joan F. MacDonald, [jmacdonald@town.hull.ma.us](mailto:jmacdonald@town.hull.ma.us)

Typically in May we are waiting for our continuation grant to be released. This year the Department of Early Education and Care, who funds the Hull Family Network, is anticipating level funding so they released the grant application early. We have completed the application and are now waiting for the state budget process to be finished. If you happen to see Representative Bradley or Senator Hedlund be sure to thank them for their on-going support of the Family Network.

This year I feel more secure that the Hull Family Network will continue to be here for families with young children and that we will find ways to make up for the difference in funding from previous years and our current levels. We plan to be open this summer, offering 4 different weekly play and learn groups and plan to offer 2 family fun activities. Our family events of storytellers and music concerts are being provided thanks to several family donations, the profit from our scrip fund raising and a grant we received from Target this year. If you know of any charitable trusts or funds that we could apply to please let me know.

### Fun Ways to Boost Life Skills



Life skills as written about by Ellen Galisky are skills that children learn of in many ways during play and routine activities with families.

Learning self-control is taught when parents expect their child to wait increasing lengths of time to get their "wants" met. This can be as simple as using a timer to take turns with a sibling for toy usage to not always serving them a snack as soon as they ask. During the family network playgroups children have a chance to practice waiting their turns, sing their requested song, get their snack and to share a toy.

Toddlers love routines: reading the same book, going to the same playground, singing the same song. There is a lot of open ended toys that build on creativity and changing routines such as block building, art activities, dress-up clothes. Changing up the order of how you get ready for bed or get dressed some days. Asking how we should get to the playground, i.e. walk, run, skip, or hop; or what animal can we move like to get there.



**Big Ryan  
returns for  
another fun  
story hour for  
children up to the  
age of 5 years.  
Tuesday, June 1st  
11:15 a.m. at the  
Hull Family  
Network**



WIC is now serving families from Hull in their Weymouth office located in The Pilgrim Church, 24 Athens St., N. Weymouth

During the summer, WIC offers coupons to be used at local farmer markets.

**For more information  
or to enroll please call  
the main office at  
617-376-4190**

# HULL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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events and information at  
[www.town.hull.ma.us](http://www.town.hull.ma.us)  
click on the Hull Schools link

This newsletter is a  
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&  
Community Partnerships for  
Children

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## What is the Hull Family Network?

The Hull Family Network supports all parents and caregivers who have children prenatal through age three. Our goal is to help parents create and maintain a healthy family environment as well as to promote family well being through parent education and community support.

Funded by the Mass. Dept. of Early Education and Care through a grant to the Hull Public Schools, the Hull Family Network provides playgroups, parent education workshops, parent support groups, family activities, and information on parenting and community resources. By providing family recreational activities and playgroups, we hope to help parents build connections that will extend beyond the HFN Center and be a support to them. By providing parent education workshops, support groups, and having an extensive parenting lending library, we hope to help parents enhance their child-rearing skills.

Our programs are free to all residents of the town of Hull who are pregnant or have children through the age of three. Most of our programs are offered at our center which is located at 180 Harborview Rd. We are open Monday-Thursday and are always happy to meet a new family.

## Jam Roll-Up

### Ingredients:

1 prepared 9-inch piecrust	All-purpose flour
Jam or preserves	Vegetable shortening
1 cup confectioners' sugar	1/2 tbsp. water

### Directions

Have your child unfold the piecrust onto a lightly floured surface and spread a thin layer of jam or preserves onto the dough.

With a butter knife, cut the crust into 20 pie slices, then roll up each wedge starting at its wider edge.

Chill the roll-ups for at least 1 hour so that they will retain their shapes during baking.

When you're ready to bake the roll-ups, heat the oven to 450°. Then line a baking sheet with aluminum foil and grease the foil with shortening. Place the chilled pastries on the baking sheet, spacing them at least 2 inches apart.

Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned, then remove the sheet from the oven and transfer the pastries to a cooling rack.

Now have your child stir together the confectioners' sugar and water in a bowl until smooth. Then he can spread the glaze onto the cooled pastries and serve them to Mom.

