Nurturing Children's Language Skills Could Help Shield Them From Depression

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At the earliest stages of development, kids learn language by interacting with parents, through being read to and listening to conversations in which they aren’t involved.

These language skills will prove critical to forming relationships with family and peers as they grow. And recent research suggests stimulating this type of early language development in the home environment may help reduce a child’s risk for developing depression later on – where, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 2 percent of children ages 3 to 17 have a current diagnosis of depression.

“The connection was logical to me that language was really the foundation for academic success and social success,” says Keith Herman, a professor of counseling and school psychology at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Kids who struggle socially often struggle in school as well, and academic incompetence has been linked to increased depression risk. So Herman recently led research published in the journal Prevention Science in July evaluating the role of early learning stimulation in the home, like exposure to language through conversation and books, and language delays on child depressive symptoms.

The study, done in Hawaii, looked at the effect of the home environment on kids acquiring these integral language skills, evaluating kids in mostly low-income families. The in-home assessment included counting books and printed materials that were accessible to the child in his or her home, Herman says. Researchers also took into account how much language was spoken to the child and around the child to determine whether home environments were adequate for learning. Even accounting for variables such as poverty, child temperament and maternal depression, the research found that children in homes with low levels of language and academic stimulation at age 3 more frequently experienced language delays and, Herman says, were three times more likely to develop depressive symptoms by age 8.

Talking Through Depression Risk
Many factors affect depression risk for kids and adolescents, from a family history of depression to temperament to childhood abuse. “The biological genetic risk as well as the environment play a significant role in how a child will grow and develop,” says Dr. Manpreet Singh, an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine in Stanford, California. At the heart of the calm or the storm is often the family – and parents have a literal say in their kids’ mental health. “This study really underscores … the impact that early nurturing can have in even preventing the development of serious mood problems in kids down the line,” she says.

Herman suggests taking a narrative approach to interacting and playing with young children. Rather than asking lots of questions, this involves parents narrating aloud what they're doing with children, and letting children direct the activity. “We find when we train parents to interact with kids in that way, it’s both developing their vocabulary and also developing their relationship skills,” he says.

As kids get older, being able to clearly communicate with peers and adults about what’s bothering them can also improve mental and emotional wellness. “Parents can help by paying attention to their children’s feelings and asking open-ended questions about things happening at home, at school or with peers that may be bothering them,” says Meredith Gunlicks-Stoessel, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Minnesota Medical School in Minneapolis. “Responding to children’s emotions calmly and non-judgmentally, seeking to understand rather than to correct and expressing support can help children to manage their emotions.”

Children are more likely to talk about difficulties with their parents if they feel a close connection with them, she adds. Finding time daily to engage in an activity the child chooses, expressing curiosity about a child’s interests and praising the child’s strengths and efforts can help build a positive relationship.

**Getting Right at Home**

In about 30 to 50 percent of cases where a child develops depression, research finds a parent has been diagnosed with depression as well. Along with the genetic component responsible for this strong link, when parents are depressed it disrupts their ability to properly nurture kids, and that can also undermine the mental health of children.

As Singh has found in her own research, a chaotic family environment contributes to disconnectivity in important cognitive networks in the brain that are responsible for regulating emotions. Other research has found that brain changes in children whose parents have depressive symptoms can increase impulsivity and risk-taking, only further contributing to disruption in the family and children’s lives. In such cases, experts say, it’s critical parents seek treatment. “If they can get themselves treated, they [will] be in a much better position to effectively parent,” Singh says, and to promote resilience in their kids.

The upshot for parents who have been previously diagnosed with depression is that they may be more attuned to the issue, Singh says, if their child should experience it. “So I try to inspire parents to believe that they are their children’s best experts – they know their children better than
anybody else – and that they ought to work towards promoting wellness in themselves, if they want to see wellness in their children.”

**Dinner Table Conversation**

As with a parent seeking treatment for depression, addressing subtler issues – like parents who are serially distracted by technology at the dinner table – can improve interactions that can enhance language development in kids. Simple changes, including taking time to talk with kids over a meal or reading more frequently to them, may not only set children up for academic success later, experts reiterate, but help foster mental well-being.

“All important message of the study really was these are aspects of the [home] environment that can be changed – and can be improved,” Herman says. “It is important for parents to know that depression [in children] can be both prevented and treated.”

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**University of Missouri's medical school focuses on diversity**

COLUMBIA, Mo. — The University of Missouri School of Medicine’s problem is a common one: It wants and needs to improve diversity, but has to compete against every other school with the same goal.

On top of that, the school's self-imposed policy of recruiting almost exclusively from Missouri makes the potential applicant pool even less diverse, according to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges.

And still, Warren Lockette, the school's senior associate dean for diversity and inclusion, says he wants the school to be No. 1 in the nation in diversity one year from now.

This goal might sound pretty far-fetched. In fact, when Lockette said it recently in front of School of Medicine Dean Patrice Delafontaine, his boss questioned whether it was realistic in the short term.

After all, last year only 5 percent of students enrolled in the medical school were underrepresented ethnic minorities. But Lockette is serious.

"I would like to have every dean of every medical school sending me an email saying, 'How did you do it?'" Lockette said. "I want us to be a leader. I'm just not happy with slow incremental improvements."
Whether changes are slow or drastic, the school has to improve its diversity in order to keep its full accreditation status from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, which accredits medical schools. The committee flagged diversity and three other areas, including student mistreatment, as noncompliant in its June 2016 evaluation of the medical school.

The school must send the committee a detailed plan for improvement by December. If the committee decides that there hasn't been enough improvement, the school could be put on probation.

The committee's findings weren't a surprise, Delafontaine said. But he doesn't think there's any realistic chance MU will be put on probation. He sees the accreditation report as highlighting what the school can do better. Since receiving the report in June, he's created task forces of faculty, staff and students for each piece of the action plan.

"We really are a top school, so to get citations like this is really the norm," Delafontaine said. "I don't know of any LCME accreditation visit where there's not a citation. The chance of this going to probation or loss of accreditation is extremely low."

The school's lack of diversity stems from multiple sources, and there's no simple solution. Medical schools across the nation have long been competing to attract the same underrepresented students, according to a study in the Journal of the National Medical Association. Once they get them to enroll, the school environment must be inclusive and comfortable enough for them to remain.

The school has lacked diversity in its student body for years. The committee identified student and faculty diversity as a problem in its 2008 evaluation, noting that there were no black students in the first-year class. There wasn't an administrator leading diversity efforts or a strategic plan to address the issue.

Following the evaluation, the school hired Lockette's predecessor, Ellis Ingram, and enhanced programs meant to encourage underrepresented students to enter the medical field. Black and Hispanic faculty increased, as well as rural and low-income students, but the numbers of students from underrepresented ethnic minorities largely remained stagnant.

The school also hired Traci Wilson-Kleekamp as its diversity coordinator with a special focus on recruiting underrepresented students. She said she believed the school wasn't serious about increasing diversity and had no infrastructure to support her efforts.

"They have a cultural ideology about equality or inclusion that is antithetical to having a more diverse environment," Wilson-Kleekamp said. "A lot of them think if you have diversity, the person you're interested in is automatically unqualified."

She said MU rejected almost all the students she recruited in the five years she was there, even though she was promoted to director of diversity and outreach initiatives. Frustrated with the lack of support, she quit in 2013 and said she felt like she was forced out.
School of Medicine spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said it was the school's policy not to discuss personnel matters so she declined to comment on Wilson-Kleekamp's remarks.

Delafontaine and Lockette weren't at MU for the last LCME visit. Delafontaine became the school's dean at the end of 2014, and Lockette was hired shortly after when Ingram retired. But they're the ones tasked with finding a solution when the committee determined in this year's evaluation that the school hadn't improved enough.

Recruiting underrepresented minorities is challenging for any medical school because of a limited applicant pool. But MU has another barrier to increasing diversity: its focus on applicants from Missouri, which has an even less diverse applicant pool than the national average, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Delafontaine said the school focuses on in-state applicants because Missouri is facing a significant physician shortage, especially in rural areas.

According to Association of American Colleges data, 76 percent of MU's 2015 entering class was from Missouri. Out-of-state applicants are unlikely to be admitted unless there's a "compelling reason" for the admissions committee to make an exception, such as a strong tie to the state of Missouri, according to the admissions website.

The policy is meant to keep graduating physicians in the state of Missouri, and it has worked: More Missouri physicians come from MU's medical school than all other medical schools in the state combined, according to the Association of American Colleges.

However, the focus on admitting Missouri students also works against the school's diversity efforts. Few Missouri applicants are from underrepresented ethnic minority groups, which include black, Hispanic and American Indian students.

In 2015, 9.3 percent of Missouri's applicants were from one of these underrepresented groups, according to Association of American Colleges data. Nationally, underrepresented minorities made up 14 percent of the applicant pool.

Just 19 underrepresented minority students from Missouri enrolled in medical school in 2015: 16 black students, two Hispanic and one American Indian. Underrepresented minorities made up 13 percent of the national first-year class, but only 7 percent of Missouri's.

Delafontaine knows the school's diversity is limited by its focus on in-state students. He said the school tries to compensate by placing high value on diversity for the out-of-state students it does admit.

More underrepresented students applied and were accepted to the school in 2016, Delafontaine said, likely because of an increase in scholarship support.

"We're very happy with that," Delafontaine said. "I think it's a good start, but I want to see our school more diverse overall. I don't want to be near the average in that area. I really don't."
Seven of the 129 scholarships listed on the school's website give preference to underrepresented ethnic minorities. In the future, Delafontaine also hopes to partner with historically black universities or those with higher proportions of minority students to increase recruitment.

But these small improvements aren't enough for Lockette. He wants a medical school class that represents the demographics of the United States, which he knows would take significant work. However, he believes the school's leadership has the right mindset to make that wish a reality.

Improving diversity and inclusion isn't just about recruiting, Lockette said. It's also about creating an inclusive environment and making students feel welcome once they've enrolled.

Connecting with faculty and older students as mentors is an important part of that environment. Dale Okorodudu, who graduated from the School of Medicine in 2010, knows that firsthand. He's now an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and a physician at the Dallas VA Medical Center.

Okorodudu said he was an undergraduate when longtime faculty member Ellis Ingram sought to persuade him to attend MU's medical school.

"He was instrumental in terms of finding students he saw potential in and mentoring them," Okorodudu said. "He went out of his way to make sure we were doing what was necessary to succeed."

The mentoring he received inspired Okorodudu to participate in the CALEB science club, a program Ingram created to connect younger students in the community with the health professions.

"It was ingrained that this is what we're supposed to do," Okorodudu said. "This is how to make society better: Find people who have great potential, be there for them and help them succeed."

Okorodudu wanted to keep helping these students when he left MU for his residency at Duke University, but long-distance communication was a challenge. The desire to maintain those relationships led him to create Diverse Medicine, an online community for underrepresented medical students and professionals. The network now includes more than 2,000 members. He also founded Black Men in White Coats, a video series which aims to increase the number of black men in the medical field by featuring black physicians.

The pool of underrepresented minorities applying for faculty positions is also limited. Only 4.6 percent of the School of Medicine's 569 full-time faculty came from underrepresented minorities as of 2013, according to the LCME report.

Lockette wants to change that so more MU students can create connections with mentors from similar backgrounds. He said Delafontaine has made efforts to attract more underrepresented faculty, such as creating a diversity lecture series with successful speakers who are minorities.
"It's important for students to have ideal role models," Lockette said. "Students live up to the perceptions and expectations you have of them. When you have accomplished faculty that are minorities, it sends an implicitly strong message to minority students."

School of Medicine assistant professor Camila Manrique has learned that improving race relations is slow, steady work. She's been examining the racial climate across MU for the past year and a half as a member of the Faculty Council Race Relations Committee.

Manrique said the committee openly discussed issues of race in a respectful environment, and she found that was effective in opening members' minds to views and experiences outside their own. Now, their goal is to seed similar discussion groups within individual schools and departments across campus.

Manrique has connected with other professors in the medical school who she said are willing to listen and engage. She's hopeful that there's a will to make changes among faculty and administrators.

Medical students have also taken the initiative to start discussions about the school's climate. After graduate student Jonathan Butler began a hunger strike last fall calling for UM System President Tim Wolfe's resignation, a group of students set up roundtable discussions about diversity, second-year medical student Benjamin Vega said.

While starting discussions is one important step, increasing diversity in the school isn't a simple or easy process, Manrique said. She believes it will take years of investing in local communities to widen the pipeline of underrepresented students going to medical school.

"We need to do more," Manrique said. "It's a joint effort of everyone involved in the medical school to create a more diverse environment."
MU students told to expect smaller Bright Flight awards

COLUMBIA — MU students on state Bright Flight scholarships learned on Wednesday that they will receive less money in the spring.

The 1,916 MU students scheduled to receive the award, which is based on ACT and SAT scores, were informed by the campus Financial Aid Office to expect $1,200 for the spring semester — $300 less than they received this semester.

Liz Coleman, director of communications and marketing for the Missouri Department of Higher Education, said funding ran short because the number of Bright Flight recipients was larger than expected.

The Higher Education Department plans to seek the additional funds when the Missouri General Assembly convenes in January.

"The Department of Higher Education has requested $1.5 million of supplemental appropriation," Coleman said. "If that's approved, they'll get their full award amount."

If the supplemental appropriation is approved, an additional $300 will be given to every Bright Flight Award recipient, according to the email.

"The timeline is not really definite right now," Coleman said. "A lot of it will depend on when that supplemental appropriation is approved and when the Department of Higher Education receives the funds."
One year after protests, police prepare for Homecoming parade safety

COLUMBIA - Officers with the MU Police Department and Columbia Police Department have been trained for dealing with potential disruptions at this Saturday’s Homecoming parade.

At last year’s parade, Concerned Student 1950 protested in front of the car driving former University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe.

This year, Major Brian Weimer with MUPD said officers have been prepared to respond to protests or other actions intended to disrupt the parade route. “There are operational plans in place for different things that may happen during the event that gives our officers guidance on how to handle it,” he said. The plans are fluid and every instance depends on the facts and circumstances of the situation, he said.

The parade route flows between both MUPD and CPD jurisdiction and Weimer said the two departments will work together to ensure the safety of all attending.

He said if any disruption were to occur, it is best for parade-goers to distance themselves from the incident.

“Most importantly is just don’t get involved in the incident itself,” Weimer said. “Allow the officers to show up and do their job.”

Elle Miller, one of three MU Homecoming directors, said she doesn’t anticipate there being any issues along the parade route. “Things are great on campus,” Miller said. “We’ve had a really great Homecoming celebration thus far and we’re really optimistic that things are going to go well.”

She said, in case of emergency, the steering committee has a plan to respond.

“We have communication through walkie talkies and cell phones and we’ve got kind of a control center to contact to be in direct communication with the police department to handle the issue,” Miller said.
Overall, she said she anticipates the parade to run smoothly.

“We’ve been in touch with MUPD and CPD about security and we’re going to trust them to handle the security,” Miller said. “We’re taking care of everything else and really optimistic that the parade is going to be successful this year.” The Homecoming parade will begin Saturday at 9 a.m. For more information about the parade route, visit MU Homecoming’s website.

University of Missouri Seeks New Director of Greek Life

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) – The University of Missouri wants to hire a full-time director of Greek Life because of the increasing number of fraternity and sorority members on campus.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that Janna Basler, a senior associate of Student Life, is currently doing the job of director of Greek Life. Basler was placed on administrative leave Nov. 11 after a video showed her physically confronting a photographer during a demonstration on campus. She returned to work in early December.

University spokesman Christian Basi reports Basler will keep her current job.

Basi says in 2015, 27 percent of undergraduates or 7,600 students belonged to fraternities and sororities. That’s an increase from 21 percent in 2005.
Before MU Homecoming, another closed session for curators

COLUMBIA — The UM System Board of Curators will meet Friday afternoon in Columbia ahead of a packed Homecoming weekend.

Although no public word has been said about a new president for the four-campus system, rumors have been floated about Ohio University's outgoing president, Roderick McDavis. McDavis' name was mentioned as a potential candidate last week.

Interim President Mike Middleton has served for almost a year, since Tim Wolfe resigned Nov. 9 following race-related protests. Curators are expected to name a new president before the end of the calendar year.

As part of a process that has been secretive, the presidential search committee has met privately with candidates whose names have not been made public.

The curators will meet at 12:30 p.m. on Friday at University Hall. Because the session is again closed, spokesman John Fougere said he could not comment on the agenda for the meeting.

University of Missouri Board of Curators May Pick New President this Weekend

University of Missouri Board of Curators Meeting this Weekend


Recovery-focused housing to continue despite vacancies

MU students recovering from drug and alcohol addiction will still have the option to reside on campus in recovery-focused housing next semester despite the designated rooms sitting vacant this semester.

The initiative started following conversations with students in recovery who wanted a place where they could feel supported by others in similar situations, Wellness Resource Center Director Kim Dude said.

Dude said the reason the available rooms in Discovery Hall are empty is because students either chose not to come to MU or to live somewhere else, not because of insufficient accommodations.

“We have been given no indication that they felt that their needs were not being met,” Dude said. “My understanding is that most decided not to come to Mizzou.”

MU spokesman Christian Basi said that these spaces will continue to be held throughout the academic year.

“The Wellness Resource Center is going to work closely with Residential Life, Admissions, Off-Campus Student Services and the transfer office to attempt to get the word out to students about this opportunity,” Dude said.
Dude said the Department of Residential Life has been very supportive of the initiative.

The Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors Survey noted that 4-7 percent of college students in Missouri reported being in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction.

Results from the study showed that there are a variety of popular treatment types for students who identified as sober and in recovery. Thirty percent indicated moderation management, 28 percent indicated 12 Step approaches, and 13 percent selected treatment based. The other 29 percent said they utilized religion or religious-based treatments for their recovery process.

The Wellness Resource Center continues to educate the community about excessive alcohol consumption and provide counseling. The “Alcohol Prevention Strategic Plan” is an attempt by the center to reduce binge drinking, increase the number of students who make responsible decisions involving alcohol and restrict the access and availability of excessive amounts of alcohol to students.

Dude said she is hopeful their initiative will be a success in the future. She also said that across the nation, campuses who have recovery housing have said it takes a couple of years to get it off the ground.

What would happen if Donald Trump refused to concede this election?

Donald Trump’s refusal to say whether he would accept the outcome of next month’s US presidential election if he were to lose is unprecedented and chilling, legal experts have said.

But although the failure by a major party nominee to concede defeat on election night would throw American democracy into uncharted territory, from a legal standpoint, it would hardly make a difference, experts from across the political spectrum said.

“Frankly, under our system, it is irrelevant whether the loser concedes or not,” said James Bopp, the conservative constitutional lawyer. “The vote of the electoral college is conclusive.”

In the third and final presidential debate on Wednesday night, Trump twice declined to say whether he would accept defeat if he felt the outcome was “rigged” against him, a statement that appeared intent on sowing doubt about the integrity of the electoral process.
The moderator, Fox News anchor Chris Wallace, pressed him, noting that the peaceful transition of power is a long-respected principle of American democracy.

“There is a tradition in this country, in fact, one of the prides of this country is the peaceful transition of power,” Wallace said. “And no matter how hard fought a campaign is that at the end of the campaign, that the loser concedes to the winner.”

“I will look at it at the time,” the Republican nominee replied, drawing gasps from the audience. “I will keep you in suspense.”

“That’s horrifying,” his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton interjected. “I am appalled that someone who is the nominee of one of our two major parties would take that position.”

In a speech on Thursday, Trump raised new questions about the issue, saying first: “I will totally accept the results of this great and historic presidential election if I win,” and then adding: “Of course I would accept a clear election result, but I would reserve my right to contend or file a legal challenge, in the case of a questionable result.”

Trump’s reticence does not appear to be shared by those closest to him. Just hours before the debate, Trump’s running mate Mike Pence, his campaign manager Kellyanne Conway and his daughter, Ivanka Trump, all insisted that the campaign would accept the result of the election.

Under the electoral college system, Americans do not directly elect their president. They choose a slate of electors who pledge to vote for a certain presidential ticket. A candidate needs to win 270 electoral votes to win the election.

Though a winner is usually projected on election night, the official vote of the electoral college does not take place until some weeks later.

In those intervening weeks before the electoral college vote, Trump could mount a legal challenge to contest the result or demand a recount under certain circumstances but unless the vote margin is slim his chances of his case being successful are low.

“He could try to litigate,” said Rick Hasen, a University of California-Irvine professor who runs the Election LawBlog. “But if he loses by a wide margin he’s not likely to get far in court.” Current polling suggests Trump is careening toward a landslide defeat.

Hasen said he is more concerned that Trump’s comments, which he called “appalling and unprecedented”, will lead to violence on election night if he does not win.

“There was no hedging from Trump, as in ‘of course I’d accept the results unless the results were very close and there was room to contest things’. Nothing like that. This is the full Breitbartization of the election,” Hasen wrote on his blog after the debate, referring to Breitbart, the alt-right website that has become a cheerleader for Trump’s campaign. “It makes me worry about violence in the streets from his supporters if Trump loses.”
After the debate, Trump supporters tried to deflect scrutiny of Trump’s comments by pointing to the recount in 2000 following the extremely close race between George W Bush and Al Gore. But legal experts reject the comparison.

“This is not Bush v Gore,” said Richard Reuben, a University of Missouri law professor. “There were legitimate questions about the vote after the votes were cast. The case went through the legal process and Gore graciously accepted the supreme court’s decision, as problematic as that was.

“This is a premeditated attempt to delegitimize the result of any decision that doesn’t go his way – unprecedented in American politics in my lifetime.”

Trump’s reluctance to accept possible defeat echoes his months-long effort to in effect declare the outcome of the election invalid well before the first votes were cast. This week he raised the prospect of 1.8 million dead people voting for his opponent, and he has called on his supporters to monitor polling booths for instances of fraud.

Under the US system, it is possible to win the popular vote and lose the electoral college, which is what happened – it eventually transpired – in 2000. Bush lost the national popular vote to Gore by 0.51% but won the electoral college by 271 votes to 266.

After initially conceding to Bush on election night and minutes before he was due to formally admit defeat, Gore famously phoned Bush back to explain that circumstances had changed and he now wanted to change his mind.

“You’re calling me back to retract your concession,” Bush said.

“There’s no need to get snippy about it,” Gore shot back.

The election result hinged on Florida, where the margin of victory was so slim it triggered a recount. Gore sought recounts in a handful of counties and Bush sued to stop them. A case was ultimately brought before the US supreme court, whose 5-4 decision stopped the recount and in effect awarded Bush Florida’s electoral votes.

Gore disagreed with the decision but conceded nonetheless. In his concession speech, delivered days before the electoral college vote, Gore quoted Stephen Douglas, who lost the presidency to Abraham Lincoln: “Partisan feeling must yield to patriotism. I’m with you, Mr President and God bless you.”
MU Bridge Program filling a gap for children who need mental health help

COLUMBIA — A school-based program for children in Boone County who need mental health treatment is getting high marks from people who've seen how it works.

Nurse managers and psychiatrists from the MU Bridge Program have been visiting Columbia public schools and offering mental health services each school day since March 2015. School-age children from private schools who reside in Boone County can also participate if there is a need.

The program had served 394 students in the Columbia, Centralia, Hallsville, Harrisburg, Sturgeon, and Southern Boone school districts as of June.

Among 28 programs funded by the Children’s Services Fund in 2015, the MU Bridge Program is the only school-based mental health program in Boone County.

“Many parents appreciated that the environment is familiar and more relaxing for their children,” said Carole Schutz, the nurse manager of the program.

A bridge between schools and community

Here’s how it works:

When school counselors identify a child with a behavioral or emotional problem — such as anxiety, depression or aggression — the program’s team contacts the parent or guardian. An MU psychiatrist conducts an initial one-hour evaluation of the child in his or her school or a nearby school. The child can also have two to three 30-minute follow-up treatment sessions.

During the treatment, nurses track the child’s progress and medication effectiveness, if medicine has been prescribed. Nurses also coordinate with parents, schools and community psychiatrists or therapists.

For example, last year a student with poor attendance was referred by a school mental health staff person who was concerned that the student might self-harm. After receiving treatment from the Bridge Program, the student reported feeling much better and attendance improved, said Lou Ann Tanner-Jones, director of the Boone County Schools Mental Health Coalition, which assists county school staff in making referrals to the program.
All treatments are free and appointments are made within one week in most cases, said Dr. Laine Young-Walker, coordinator of the program.

When the child's condition has stabilized, he or she is discharged from the program. At that point, the Bridge Program refers the child to community psychiatric services.

According to the program’s data, more than 60 percent of children experienced a clinically significant improvement on mood, attention and behavior at the end of the treatments. Fifty-four percent of them are rated by teachers as having significant improvements in disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Ninety percent of them attended community appointments after discharge.

**Improving access**

The MU Bridge Program “fills the gap in children’s psychiatric services, with immediate services serving the population at high risk,” said Kelly Wallis, director of Boone County Community Services Department.

In the 2013 Community Input Report, Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs of MU examined school-based mental health services and found a lack of communication between parents and teachers, shared understanding and knowledge of mental health for children.

“We are at the forefront being able to tackle this issue of access and improve the access,” Young-Walker said, adding that going into schools is a “novel way” to enhance existing services.

For the families, the program not only provides quick access to treatment but also increases their knowledge and helps them learn how to navigate the system of mental health services, she said.

“Families have told us ‘I don't know what I would've done without the program,’” Young-Walker said. “And ‘I don’t know where to go, and what numbers to call.’”

In the last Boone County Children Services Board meeting on Oct. 13, the county renewed the program for 2017, and the board is deciding how much money to give it. In 2015 the program received $488,163 from the Children's Services Fund.

**Further steps**

Despite the success of the program, it has not addressed the systemic problems in mid-Missouri. Children in other counties are out of reach, and more psychiatric professionals are needed.

The program has been able to serve only students who live in Boone County, Young-Walker said, not children who live elsewhere and attend schools in the county.

“If the population could levy a tax, that will help kids who are now with no help, and maybe we could spread it to other counties,” Young-Walker said, "Access to children psychiatry is a problem across the state and the nation.”
A workforce map from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) in 2015 shows a lack of children mental health professionals in the U.S.; with the exception of the District of Columbia, states face a "high shortage" or even "severe shortage", under AACAP's standard of 47 psychiatrists per 100,000 children. For Missouri in 2015, there were 9.48 psychiatrists for every 100,000 children according to the data.

In a debate among the four candidates for Boone County Commission Oct. 8, Fred Parry, a Republican running for Southern Boone County commissioner, described Columbia and Boone County as a world-class health care community that is terrible at mental health care. Brenndan Riddles, a Republican running for Northern Boone County commissioner, said he wants to put the county’s sales tax for children’s mental health to more effective use.

Tanner-Jones called for more child psychiatrists and nurse case managers to get involved in mental health services for children. At the same time, more mental health professionals in schools would increase the likelihood that children get help early.

Tanner-Jones said, “Many kids don’t get the social and emotional help and support they need early enough to prevent problems from developing.”

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**The Chronicle of Higher Education**

**Admissions Offices Scramble to Comply With New Overtime Rule**

*By Eric Hoover OCTOBER 21, 2016*

**No MU Mention**

An appetite for long hours, a stomach for low pay. Those are unofficial requirements to enter the college-admissions field, where 12-hour days are common and starting salaries meager.
But a new federal rule is changing the landscape. A recent update of the Fair Labor Standards Act makes more full-time salaried workers eligible for overtime pay. Starting in December, campus employees who earn less than $47,476 a year and work more than 40 hours a week must be compensated for overtime. To follow the law, colleges must give raises to those below the threshold, pay them overtime, or scale back their hours.

Those are especially difficult — and potentially expensive — options for admissions offices. The field has long relied on cheap labor to execute time-intensive recruitment campaigns, and many staff members’ salaries are well below the new mark.

Context matters here. For years the demands on admissions staffs have grown as colleges’ ambitions have soared. Amid escalating competition for applicants, admissions officers are expected to visit four or five high schools a day and college fairs at night, while scheduling one-on-one interviews at Starbucks, meeting with community-based organizations, texting answers to applicants’ questions, hosting campus events, returning emails from inquisitive parents, and reading a record number of applications.

The new law forces colleges to reckon with the value of all that labor. In an era of tight budgets, many colleges are opting to convert lower-paid admissions officers to hourly status, despite the logistical challenges that poses. Other institutions, wary of adding up all the night and weekend hours put in by admissions road warriors, plan to raise their salaries. That could necessitate increases for senior staffers, who now make about $50,000.

While weighing strategies, admissions leaders are also grappling with how the law might, for better or worse, change the profession’s all-hands-on-deck culture. The new rule is meant to ensure that employees are paid fairly. But will admissions officers who are required to submit weekly time sheets end up feeling more — or less — valued than before?

"It could go either way," says Tom Weede, vice president for enrollment at Marietta College, in Ohio. "My hope is the law could signal to colleges that this is a serious profession, and that we need to treat our young employees well. But a lot of people are worried about the morale effects of telling them, ‘You’re no longer a salaried employee.’"

When the new rule was announced, this past spring, Mr. Weede knew that Marietta couldn’t afford big raises. Six of its eight admissions officers earn less than $47,476, he says; only one is close enough to bump up.
The other five, he explains, very likely will get a choice. They can become nine-month employees, earning about $35,000, a prorated salary based on the new threshold that would exempt them from overtime pay. (For some, that would be a raise.) Or they can remain year-round employees earning what they do now, but paid hourly and eligible for overtime. "It’s not an easy question," Mr. Weede says.

‘Underpaid and Overworked’

Transitioning to an hourly system requires managers and employees to plan ahead as never before. Erica Sanders, director of undergraduate admissions at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, has learned that firsthand.

After a legal review of campus policies a decade ago, officials there made admissions officers eligible for overtime. That meant supervisors had to sit down with employees regularly to estimate how many overtime hours each one would need in the forthcoming two-week period. The estimates varied according to individual travel schedules, evening recruitment events, and so on. Eventually the admissions office adopted a model in which each person gets a "bank" with a certain number of overtime hours that he or she can use as needed.

"That provides some autonomy. They know they’re not going to exhaust their bank if they stay an extra hour," Ms. Sanders says. "The nature of admissions counselors’ jobs is to be independent, with leeway to manage their calendars. You can still give your staff autonomy — you just have to manage it."

The university also has tried to reduce the time admissions officers spend responding to emails and calls, by shifting some of those duties to a call center. "A triage model," Ms. Sanders calls it. "The goal is to make them feel like part of a team instead of feeling that they are the only one who could answer a question."

These days, each of Michigan’s 17 admissions officers works, on average, 112 to 120 overtime hours a year, which costs the university a total of about $63,000.

Elsewhere, some colleges facing the new rule have determined that raising salaries to the threshold is the most cost-effective plan, not to mention the simplest. "It would be really difficult to calculate overtime during fall travel season, asking when does a trip start, when does a trip end," says Greg MacDonald, vice president for enrollment management at Lafayette College. "And we have people reading applications from the moment they wake up until they go to bed, with an hour for lunch."

Lafayette’s admissions office recently increased pay for beginning staffers, which will take some of the sting out of the costly plan to bring all salaried admissions officers
up to the new mark, Mr. MacDonald says: "Entry-level staff members have been underpaid and overworked here for many years. This is a step in the right direction."
The University of Delaware’s admissions office has created an intermediate position—assistant director—for those who, with two or three years of experience, have taken on additional responsibilities. Christopher Lucier, vice president for enrollment management, plans to move seven of his 12 admissions counselors into those jobs, with salaries high enough to exempt them from the new rule. The other five staffers will become eligible for overtime, at an estimated total cost of $12,000 a year.

Mr. Lucier sees several challenges ahead. One is making sure that those above the threshold don’t take on too much work. "It will be a balancing act," he says. "It will be incumbent on us as leaders and managers to make sure there isn’t too much trickle-up."

At the same time, supervisors must help overtime-eligible admissions counselors manage their heavy workloads. That means keeping an eye on their hours while also keeping them motivated.

"These are dedicated people, and they might say, ‘That’s OK, I’ll put in the extra time,’” Mr. Lucier says of young admissions counselors. "And we’ll have to say, ‘No, stop. Those hours have to be approved ahead of time.’ That’s a culture shift."