

A Brief Overview of the Research Base behind the Schools Attuned Program for Educators

Beginning in 1987 and through the late 1990's, Dr. Melvin Levine and his colleagues worked with over 5,000 educators across the country to develop a program for schools based on his theoretical framework for understanding the neurodevelopmental functions and variations of learning. The All Kinds of Minds (AKOM) Institute, founded in 1995, incorporated the *Schools Attuned* program into the array of services that the Institute would offer educators to help them better understand and manage students who are struggling due to a learning difference.

Since the piloting and field-testing of *Schools Attuned*, All Kinds of Minds has collected annual program evaluation data from participants regarding its value and usefulness in changing teaching and school practices. From the Dodge Foundation evaluation in the early 90s to the national survey responses from 800 participants in the 1999-2000 program implementation year, the data indicated that *Schools Attuned*:

- has a positive impact on the school culture;
- has a positive economic impact on the Special Education system;
- has a positive impact on parents; and
- improves the academic and personal outcomes of students who are struggling in school.

In 2000, All Kinds of Minds re-launched *Schools Attuned* as a yearlong, professional development program to equip educators with new knowledge, skills and strategies so that sound, defensible professional judgments can be made about best instructional practices with struggling learners. Our goal is that this program, when used by educators, will help students measurably improve their success in school and life. With the standardization of the content and delivery of *Schools Attuned*, and the increased number of educators prepared over the last few years, we are now placed in the position of initiating a more systematic study of the program.

AKOM has begun deliberate, continuous, documentation and evaluation to support the research base for *Schools Attuned*. This documentation and evaluation provides evidence in each of the following areas:

- 1. The content of our curriculum is grounded in a synthesized body of knowledge from various scientific and educational disciplines.** The program content for *Schools Attuned* consists of a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing differences in learning based on applied research regarding the neurodevelopmental functions and variations of learning developed by

Dr. Mel Levine and his colleagues. In *Schools Attuned*, this is referred to as the construct modules. The development of this body of work is encapsulated through such texts as:

- Levine, M.D. and Oberklaid, F.: *Early description and prediction of developmental dysfunction*. In Lewis, M. and Taft, L. (eds): *Developmental disabilities: Theory, Assessment, and Intervention*. New York: SP Medical and Scientific Books, 1982.
- Levine, M.D.: *Developmental Dysfunction in the School-Age Child*. In Behrman, R., et al (eds): *Nelson's Textbook of Pediatrics*, 12th edition. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1983.
- Levine, M.D.: *Neurodevelopmental dysfunction during childhood: The high impacts and policy implications of insidious handicaps*. In Rogers, D.E. and Ginzberg, E. (eds): *Improving the Life Chances of Children at Risk*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990.
- Hooper, S.R., Montgomery, J.W., Levine, M.D., et. al.: *Measurement of written language expression*. In Lyon, R. *Frames of Reference for the Assessment of Learning Disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 1994.
- Levine, M. D. and Reed M.: *Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders* (2nd Ed.), Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1998.
- Levine, M. D., Carey W., and Crocker A. (eds): *Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics* (3rd Ed.). Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1998.
- Levine, M.D.: *Educational Care* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 2002.

2. **Our professional development program design is based on consistent findings from solid research in this area.** *Schools Attuned* is designed to reflect the most current research and standards on professional development that changes teaching practice and has a positive impact on student outcomes. Beginning in 2000, the *Schools Attuned* program was completely redesigned to incorporate the findings from over two decades of research on teacher professional development. Subsequently, the *Schools Attuned* staff at All Kinds of Minds and other experts have annually reviewed the program against the current National Staff Development Council's standards (NSDC, 2001) and new research on professional development programs that

advance student learning (e.g., Borasi & Fonzi, 2002; Bransford, et al., 2000; Laine & Otto, 2000; Little, 1993).

In addition, ongoing Program Evaluation is utilized to document the degree of consistency of the training across the country, teachers' ability to use new knowledge with fidelity of intent, and perceptions of effects of program on teachers, classrooms, increased student achievement and other measures of success. The *Schools Attuned* program evaluation model is based on the premise that the first step in improving students' lives in school through the professional development of educators is to ensure that educators participate in a program that they value, find useful, and from which they gain knowledge and skills. (Guskey, 2002; O'Sullivan & Page, 2000).

- 3. *Schools Attuned's* agenda for impact assessment is founded on scientifically rigorous principles, including the gathering of evidence from independent researchers.** Having established a solid history of program evaluation at *Schools Attuned*, All Kinds of Minds has more recently turned its attention towards early efforts to document the impact of *Schools Attuned* on teachers, students, and schools. The primary purpose of our impact assessment research is to test the hypothesis that educators who use the processes, tools and approaches of *Schools Attuned* are better able to help struggling learners achieve measurable improvements in academic performance and other indicators for success in school and life. It follows that the outcomes of this research involve the **impact on student learning** in terms of the targeted student and whole class effects resulting from **impact on teacher practice** — as these are intended outcomes from the *Schools Attuned* program. Additionally, program evaluation results reported unintended positive **impact on the educational system**. Student outcomes and teacher practice appeared to have positive spillover effects on the system at both school and district levels.

Independent researchers have initiated investigations into these outcomes using a variety of methodologies across numerous settings. For example,

- In North Carolina, O' Sullivan and Associates examined achievement results for 83 students that had been attuned with the *Schools Attuned* tools and methodology. North Carolina End of Grade Tests in Reading were used to measure program impact. This study showed that growth in reading scores for the student sample was greater than the average state projected growth for students in their grade category.

- The Oklahoma Department of Education and Education Evaluation Associates in Norman, Oklahoma, associated with the University of Oklahoma, conducted an evaluation of Schools Attuned at six Oklahoma schools (public and private) that had been using Schools Attuned since 1999. Results indicated that teachers demonstrated a high level of willingness to work with students on an individual basis, and attributed positive results in part due to the implementation of accommodations, interventions, and approaches recommended by Schools Attuned. In addition, Schools Attuned achieved positive results in student outcomes, including improvement in academic performance and positive self-concept. Details of the methodology and outcomes can be found on their web site www.beyondutopia.net/akom/results.

In order to expand the growing body of evidence gained through independently initiated research, the All Kinds of Minds Institute released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in April 2003. The purpose of this RFP is to identify and support up to six (6) studies that will advance evidence-based scholarship about the work of the All Kinds of Minds Institute and the impact that its *Schools Attuned* program has on students, teachers, and schools.

To read more about the independent research studies that have been submitted to All Kinds of Minds to date and the research to be conducted under the RFP, click on the Research and Evaluation section of the All Kinds of Minds web site at www.allkindsofminds.org.

Document References

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- Bransford, J. D. et al. [National Research Council] (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Academy Press: Washington, D.C.
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