TO: Ms. Sandy Smith  
DSS/Economic Independence  

FROM: Ms. Della O. McKinnon, Director  
Project SPArKs  

DATE: January 17, 2001  

RE: Quarterly Progress Report, FY 00-01  
(October 1, 2000 – December 31, 2000)  

The Consortium for Advancement of Suspended Students and their Families hereafter referred to, as Project SPArKs (Students and Parents Advancing Knowledge) has made significant strides in meeting its objectives. Project SPArKs is a family-centered initiative which is based on the underlying assumption that community resources can be mobilize to assist suspended students and their families in need.

On October 12, 2000, continuation funding was sort to extend and expand the project. The project is continuing its efforts to support suspended students and their families. One emphasis for the continuing funding is to provide assistance to parents who are unemployed or under-employed. In order to accomplish this, the project will hire a Social Worker II (50% time). This person would assist families in areas of employment, independent living skills, parenting skills, and to actively seek to involve the fathers in project activities, such as the Fatherhood Initiatives Project.

Because of the challenges faced by the staff to identify participants for the project, we have eliminated the comparison group. Several barriers have made it difficult to identifying students who met the required criteria. We felt that it is most important to devote our energies in assisting the current participants and their families. Our goal is to serve 30 students and their families. Currently there are 27 participants in the project.

There have been some changes with the project staff during the month of December. One of the graduate assistants, Ms. Yu Li Hsu graduated from the university on December 15, 2000. Therefore, she is no longer with the project. We are in the process of interviewing prospective candidates for the position.
**Objective 1:** To assess factors, which precipitate short-term and long-term out-of-school suspension.

*Implementation:* Focus Groups with both schools have been conducted. A round table discussion has been schedule for January 31, 2001, to discuss the implications of the findings from the data collected. Fourteen guests have been invited to participant in the round table discussion from the Durham Schools System, Durham Police Department, Department of Social Services, NCCU, and community representatives.

**Objective 2:** To conduct a family-based need assessment to identify resources and support needed by students and their families.

*Implementation:* A Parent Support Group was developed which meet on a monthly basis. The two hours session are facilitated by Ms. Gail Perry, Consultant from the Department of Social Services. The goal of these sessions is to help parents to communicate with their children and to teach other parenting skills. The sessions were held on Oct. 14, Nov. 18, and Dec. 9, 2000 and will continue to meet on Saturday.

**Objective 3:** To increase the level of self-discipline, responsibility, conflict resolution skills and self-esteem among suspended students.

*Implementation:* On December 13, 2000, Dr. Debra Parker, Project Consultant has administered a second student assessment at Chewning Middle School. The questionnaire will measure the level of self-discipline, self-esteem, responsibility, conflict resolution skills among suspended students in the project. Findings from the assessments will be a point of discussion for the round table on January 31, 2001.

**Objective 4:** To facilitate the delivery of NCCU student services with existing formal and informal human/support services to assist suspended students and their families.

*Implementation:* NCCU students serve as mentors to the participants of the project and chaperons for group events. A curriculum will be developed in January for students to earn 3 hours course credits. At the same time students can complete the requirements of a practicum for their department and earn community service hours needed for graduation. Fifty dollars have been allotted to help support students with expenses for activities with their men tee. i.e., movies, dinner, etc. A public announcement via email resulted in several responses from university faculty in assisting the project. For example, one of the faculty members will serve as an interpreter for the Hispanic family we serve.
Objective 5: To better understand student-teacher interactions and its role, if any, on school suspension.

Implementation: The report from the Teachers Focus Group conducted by Dr. William Roberts, Consultant Psychologist, on September 13, 2000, has not been received. Once we receive the findings from the Teachers Focus Group, a round table discussion has been schedule for January 31, 2001. The purpose is to discuss the implications of the report and how the project can best use this information to better serve the participants and families of the project. This data will be shared with school officials to discuss both teacher and student focus groups.

Objective 6: To convene a two-week Summer Institute at North Carolina Central University.

Implementation: Planning stage for the institute is beginning. The institute will take place the second and third week of June 2001. Our plans are to continue to use the same name as last year, the “Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Summer Institute.”

Objective 7: To provide support services to assist families in improving their employment status.

Implementation: The project is currently seeking to employ a Social Worker II (50%) can better serve the needs of the family of those who are under-employed or unemployed.

Objective 9: To convene an end of project conference to discuss findings and experiences with the expectation of developing a report to include related policy implications.

Implementation: We are investigating possible location to host the event. The tentative conference date is March 2002.

Expenditures
As of December 31, 2000, $109,528.00 total expenses during the last three months, representing 56.5% of the project’s budget of $193,530.00.