TO: Ms. Sandy Smith  
DSS/Economic Independence  

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

DATE: January 18, 2001  
RE: Quarterly Progress Report, FY 01-02  
(October 1, 2001 – December 31, 2001)  

The Consortium for Advancement of Suspended Students and their Families (CASSF) hereafter referred to, as Project SPArKs (Students and Parents Advancing Knowledge) has made significant strides in meeting its objectives. The project is continuing its efforts to support suspended students and their families.

Currently there are 28 participants in the Project SPArKs. The project is based on the presumption that all students can achieve academically within a nurturing and encouraging community. While initially working with students from Chewning Middle School and Southern High School, the project has established partnership with eight additional schools (Lowe’s Grove Middle School, Shining Sword Academy, Turning Point Academy, West Millbrook Middle School, Githens Middle School, Hillside High School, CIS Academy and Northern High School) due to transfers, relocations, and expansion. After meeting with the principal at each school site, they support our efforts and have offered relevant information for each participant. Having met our goal to serve 30 students and their families, some of the participants have requested to terminate services due to lack of interest by the student and/or parent, family relocating, and income criteria of families who earned 200% above poverty level.
Major Activities

- Mentor Focus Groups
- Participant Focus Groups
- Mentor Recruitment
- Family Recruitment
- Monthly Parent Groups
- Project SPArKs Advisory Board Meeting
- NCCU Homecoming Parade and Game
- UNC Football Game
- Skating Party
- Bowling Party
- Train-the-Trainer
- Updating the Web Site for Project SPArKs
- Completed All Family-Based Needs Assessments

Project Outcomes

Objective 1: To assess factors, which precipitate short-term and long-term out-of-school suspension.

Implementation: Levi Dawson, Hearing Officer for Durham Public Schools and advisory board member of Project SPArKs shared with the group that over the past three years the number of years who have been recommended for long term suspension has shown a significant increase. Some are unrelated to gangs and not the same students. Found that some suspensions are students’ way of getting out of school prior to the holiday. Continuing efforts are made to assess factors, which precipitate school suspension.

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

Implementation: The Coordinator for Support Services has completed all of the families needs assessments. Ms. Mays trained a group of social work students to conduct the assessments and then met with them weekly to discuss their experiences.

The Social Worker Intern Student and Case Management Team, supervised by Ms. Mays, completed 6 of completed family assessments. Through information provided by the assessments, Ms. Mays was able to help six (6) families find computer classes, emergency service, legal services and jobs and independent living services for youth.

A parent survey was developed and mailed to the parents on December 17, 2001 to assess parents’ opinion of the project’s services. The survey also
included a section about what kinds of activities the parents are interested in participating in. Along with the survey, a letter was mailed informing parents about updated services including mentor expectations, tutoring services, calendars of events, school monitoring and a new parent group called PAL (Parents Achieving Leadership) (Appendix A).

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

*Implementation:* October 6, 2001, Project SPArKs had its second bowling party. This activity was intended to bring mentors and participants together. October 10, 2001, one participant and one mentor participated in the Mr. Irresistible Pageant. They learned leadership skills by participating as ushers. October 20, 2001, Project SPArKs convened a focus group for the new and old mentors. Its goal was to identify and help resolve issues that mentors may encounter with their mentees and family. October 27, 2001, six (6) mentees, one mentor, 7 student volunteers, and three (3) staff members participated in NCCU Homecoming Parade and Game. They learned how to organize and share responsibility. October 31, 2001, six (6) participants and three (3) staff persons volunteered at the first mentee focus group. Its goal is to teach new behavior skills and talk about issues participants may face on daily basis.

November 7, 2001, six (6) participants, (2) mentors, and (3) staff members attended the second focus group. The group focused on problem solving. November 17, 2001, Project SPArKs had its second skating party at Wheel’s Skating Ring. Three (3) project participants, one mentor, and 2 staff members participated in the activity.

December 1, 2001, 41 UNC basketball tickets were given to Project SPArks by Nortel Network to take participants to the game. December 11, 2001, nine (9) participants, (2) two mentors, (2) two staff members and a keynote speaker, Caressa McLaughlen from the Health Department, attended the focus group. Its purpose was to educate participants about sexually transmitted diseases and the consequences of irresponsible sexual behavior. (Appendix B)

**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:* In October, staff of Project SPArKs went to the student cafeteria to recruit students to be mentors. As a result, information about Project SPArKs was distributed to interested students. Students were encouraged to complete their community service requirements by volunteering as mentors.
Training was held for NCCU students interested in being focus group leaders. Four (4) students attended this training on October 18, 2001. They learned skill building techniques, token economy systems and group dynamics. These students have proved useful in not only leading groups, but also helping to train other student leaders.

**Objective 5:** To better understand student-teacher interactions and its role, if any, on school suspension.

*Implementation:* Continuing efforts are made by the staff and Advisory Board members to discuss the findings of the teacher focus findings by Dr. William Roberts. Two areas of in particular have received our attention, 1) school official awareness of cultural diversity and sensitivity and 2) school staff and student relationship.

The Train-the-Trainer Workshop was held on days of December 4-6, 2001. During the training, Dr. William Roberts and his associates talked about teacher’s concerns about classroom management as well as school policy that governs suspension. At the end of the training the participants formulated plans that would assist the school in dealing with the suspension problem and brought them to their administrators. Mr. Roberts will return to follow-up with the eleven (11) participants of the training. The teachers were from Chewning Middle School, Southern High School and Lakeview Alternative School. Each participant completed a workshop evaluation to assess the objectives, training and presentation of the Train-the-Trainer curricula. (Appendix C)

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

*Implementation:* During June 11-22, 2001, Project SPArKs held its second Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Leadership Institute with orientation. The purpose of this two-week institute was to provide the participants with a wholesome productive and nourishing environment.

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

*Implementation:* Ms. Jennifer Mays has continued to assist families who are 200% below the poverty level. For each family she develops a family plan to promote their quality of life. Parents who are unemployed have been referred to DSS Work First Program. Other services include assistances on how to obtain a GED degree, getting a hearing aide in order
to work, Medicaid Insurance for a parent who is disabled and computer literacy training for parents.

**Objective 8:** To assess the efficiency of the delivery of human services to project participants and their families.

*Implementation:* The data collected from the focus groups, student assessments and family needs assessments is being analyzed to measure the delivery of human services rendered to project participants.

Jennifer Mays, Coordinator of Support Services has continued to provide assistance to parents who are unemployed or under-employed. Ms. Mays has assisted 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. On November 10, 2001 Ms. Mays held a parent group called the “Mothers Appreciation Day”. During this event, the mothers were given Mary Kay facials and taught how proper self-care can promote healthy self-esteem. The mothers were also provided with “Women’s Survival Kits” and certificates of appreciation. Three mothers attended the celebration. Ms. Mays and Mr. Green also set up a father’s sports night in collaboration with The Seasoned Ticket restaurant in Durham. This affair was intended to bring the fathers, and other male influences of the participants together to tell them more about the program and to increase participation. One male mentor attended this event. (APPENDIX D)

**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:* A conference will be scheduled for mid May 2002. The conference will be held at Durham Public Schools Training Center on Hillandale Road. The keynote speaker will be Dr. William Roberts, who serves as a consultant for the project.

**Expenditures**

*As of December 31, 2001, $254,511.00 total expenses during the last three months, representing 66% of the project’s budget of $387,060.00.*