

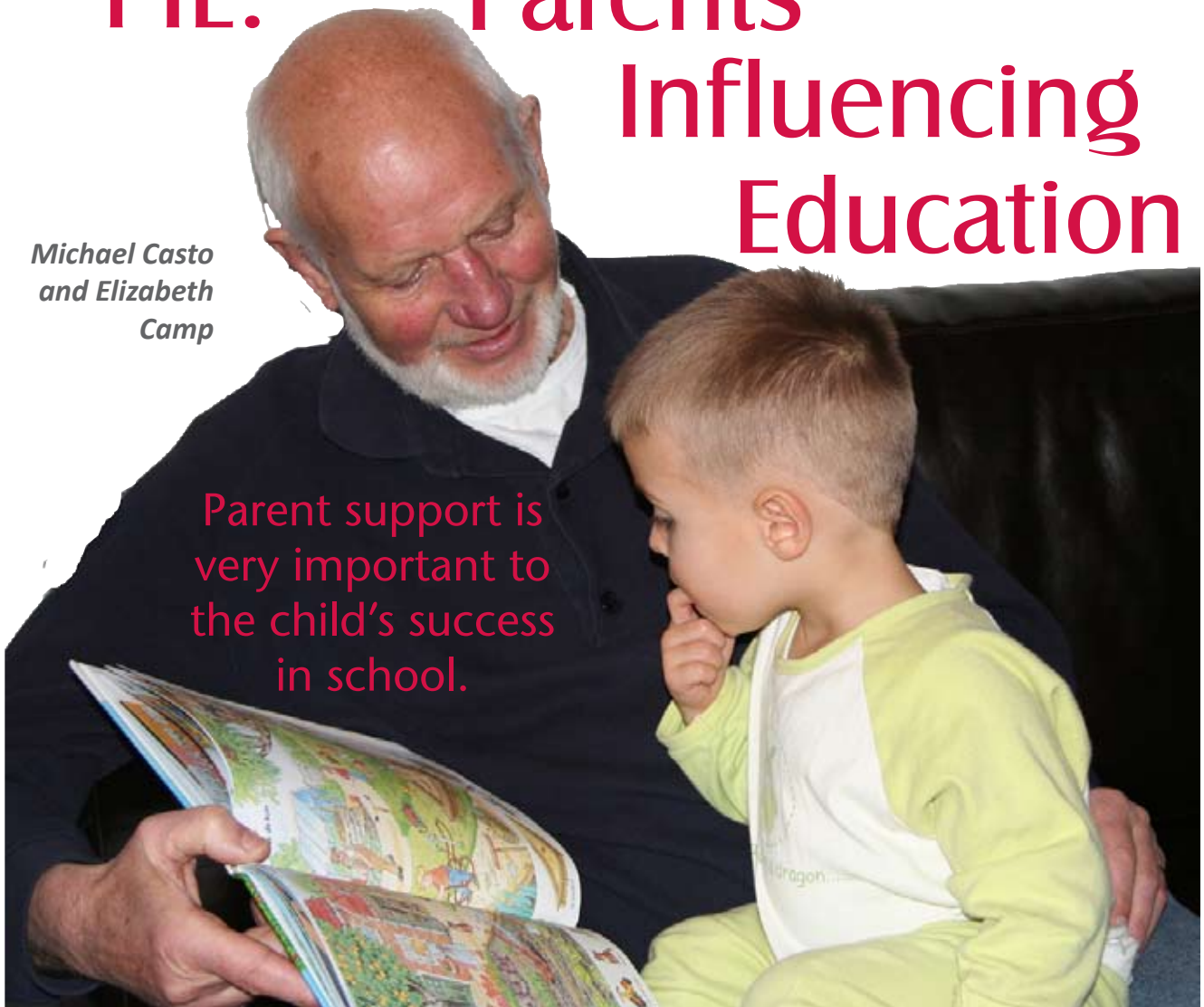
For the past 3 years, Dr. Michael Casto, associate professor in Counselor Education, Rehabilitative Services, and School Psychology at The Ohio State University, has directed the Parents Influencing Education (PIE) Project in local schools. Elizabeth Camp, a Ph.D. student in the Counselor Education program at Ohio State, served as the project coordinator. Held at Indianola Middle School in 2004-2005, Crestview Middle School in 2005-2006, and Weinland Park Elementary School in 2006-2007, this after-school program has made a difference in the lives of children from these schools and their parents. This article focuses on the third year of the PIE Project, held at Weinland Park Elementary School.

The PIE Project is a collaborative effort between The Ohio State University P-12 Project, The Interprofessional Commission of Ohio, and the Columbus City Schools. Master's-level counseling students from Ohio State served as mentors for fifth-grade students from Weinland Park as they tutored first graders in reading comprehension. First-grade students chosen for the program were on the verge of failing reading, yet were strong enough that participation in the PIE Project could help them experience success in reading. Fifth-grade students, along with a few fourth graders who were especially high achieving, were chosen to serve as tutors. The school psychologist was the link to locating appropriate students for the program. All students had to be able to stay after school and have a parent who would sign the permission form.

PIE: Parents Influencing Education

*Michael Casto
and Elizabeth
Camp*

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Ohio State master's counseling students were recruited during the summer before their first year at Ohio State to serve as mentors. They received a letter in the summer inviting them to learn more about the PIE Project at orientation. Approximately 30% of the first-year master's students chose to participate as mentors with the PIE Project. Second-year master's counseling students are leaders in the group and plan icebreakers and other activities for the whole group. Serving in an urban school is a new experience for many of the Ohio State students, one they are eager to have. Generally, one Ohio State student works with a dyad of one first and one fifth grader. The elementary students view the Ohio State students as role models.

While the students were busy honing reading skills, their parents met to learn and practice skills to help their children with schoolwork. These gatherings allowed parents to discuss issues about their children's education that are important to them. This parent support is very important to the child's success in school.



The PIE Project was about establishing relationships with others who become important in our lives.

Reading at School and at Home

Being a small after-school program that meets once per week, the PIE Project offers the chance for highly individualized instruction. The KEEP BOOKS® program, which is part of the Ohio State Literacy Collaborative®, is used to focus on reading. The entire KEEP BOOKS® series consists of seven levels, with 16 books in each level. The total program has 112 books with two extras for the student to write his or her own story. The series includes a parent card with ideas of how to use the books at home to focus on phonics and repetitive reading, and as the name suggests, students get to keep all the books

used in KEEP BOOKS®. Throughout their time in the PIE Project, the students work through the levels at their own pace, with the Ohio State student mentor serving to evaluate whether the content has been mastered. In some groups, the first grader is able to read some, so the first-grade student reads to the fifth grader. If the first grader cannot read yet, the fifth grader will read the books to the first grader, with the first grader taking over when he or she is ready. The goal is to work through all the books in the KEEP BOOKS® series and for the students to read the books to others at home.

Everyone Benefits from PIE

Although the most obvious effect of the PIE Project is the increased reading comprehension skills gained by the first graders, the fifth graders receive great benefits, too. The fifth graders reported

feeling like better leaders, feeling more confident, and being willing to participate again. Fifth graders served an important role in the PIE Project, clearly making a difference in their lives.

Teachers of the students engaged in the PIE Project are also affected by the program. The academic nature of the PIE Project has a positive impact on the school's academic pursuits by raising the skill level of the students. Elizabeth Camp, the PIE Project coordinator, states that "improvement in reading skill acquisition was measured by progression through the KEEP BOOKS® series. The parent involvement aspect of the program improves parent involvement with both their children and with the school. Camp reports that "some of our most productive interaction with parents was during the time when they picked up their kids each week and when we held a winter party and an end-of-the-year party for all parents, students, and siblings."

Fifth graders served an important role in the PIE Project, clearly making a difference in their lives.



The PIE Project models an ongoing commitment of Ohio State to the schools in the University District, doing as much as possible to support those schools. From a university perspective, this shows ongoing commitment to and engagement with students from the University District. The PIE Project was not about “doing something with” the children at Weinland Park, but rather about establishing relationships with others who become important in our lives. Through those relationships, first graders became more skilled at reading comprehension,

fifth graders honed leadership skills and grew more confident, Ohio State students gained valuable experience as mentors and in an urban setting, parents learned more about how to support their children, and teachers benefited from the academic impact of the PIE Project. Camp reports that future plans for the PIE Project include incorporating more parent gatherings and opportunities for parent contact, assessing the reading comprehension of first graders, and assessing the leadership development and self-confidence of the fifth graders. ■

A story from this year’s Weinland Park PIE Project experience was shared by Camp:

We have a first-grade student, Daron, who has been quite a challenge to the staff! He is “very active” and even likes to hide from us sometimes. His tutors, Jarod and Alan, are very patient with him, but I’m sure it is very frustrating for them to work with him. They have never complained and have always remained very positive with him. I asked Alan one day a couple weeks ago what his favorite part of tutoring has been this year. Keep in mind that we play icebreaker games each week and have had a couple pizza parties throughout the year. He looked at me and said, “It was definitely when Daron thanked me one day out of the blue. He thanked me for helping him learn how to read better. I didn’t think he really cared or even really knew my name, but it turns out he does care and that made me feel good.” It was so wonderful to see a tutor, who has stuck with the process, get a very deserving thank-you from one of his tutees.

Alan is gifted with patience and perseverance, and now he has experienced how those investments can pay off for him and for others. Additionally, Daron has made major strides in his behavior and in his reading skills in the past couple of months, and I’m sure this can be attributed to the consistency and support of his tutors and mentors.