

# WARNER

educator

## ScienceStart!

Capitalizing on How  
Preschoolers Learn

## In this issue ...

Decision Making in School Leadership

Counseling Internship, Healing and Helping



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MARGARET  
**WARNER**  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION AND  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Think. Learn. Grow.



**On the cover**  
*ScienceStart!* on location at  
the Strong Museum  
photograph by Jan Regan

## Alumni Invest in Warner's Future

Thank you to the alumni and friends who gave financial support to the Warner School in 2003–04. Your continued support has made it possible for Warner and its students to attain much success. Thank you for your generosity!

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## Faulkner Joins Warner Development Staff



Many Warner alumni soon will meet the latest addition to the Warner Development and Communications staff, Preston Faulkner. He joins Warner as the associate director of individual giving and will be working with alumni, friends, and community leaders to advance the mission of the Warner School by garnering financial support and gaining alumni and community involvement in Warner's programs and initiatives.

The first order of business is for Faulkner to get to know Warner's alumni and friends. He's eager to gain an understanding of their

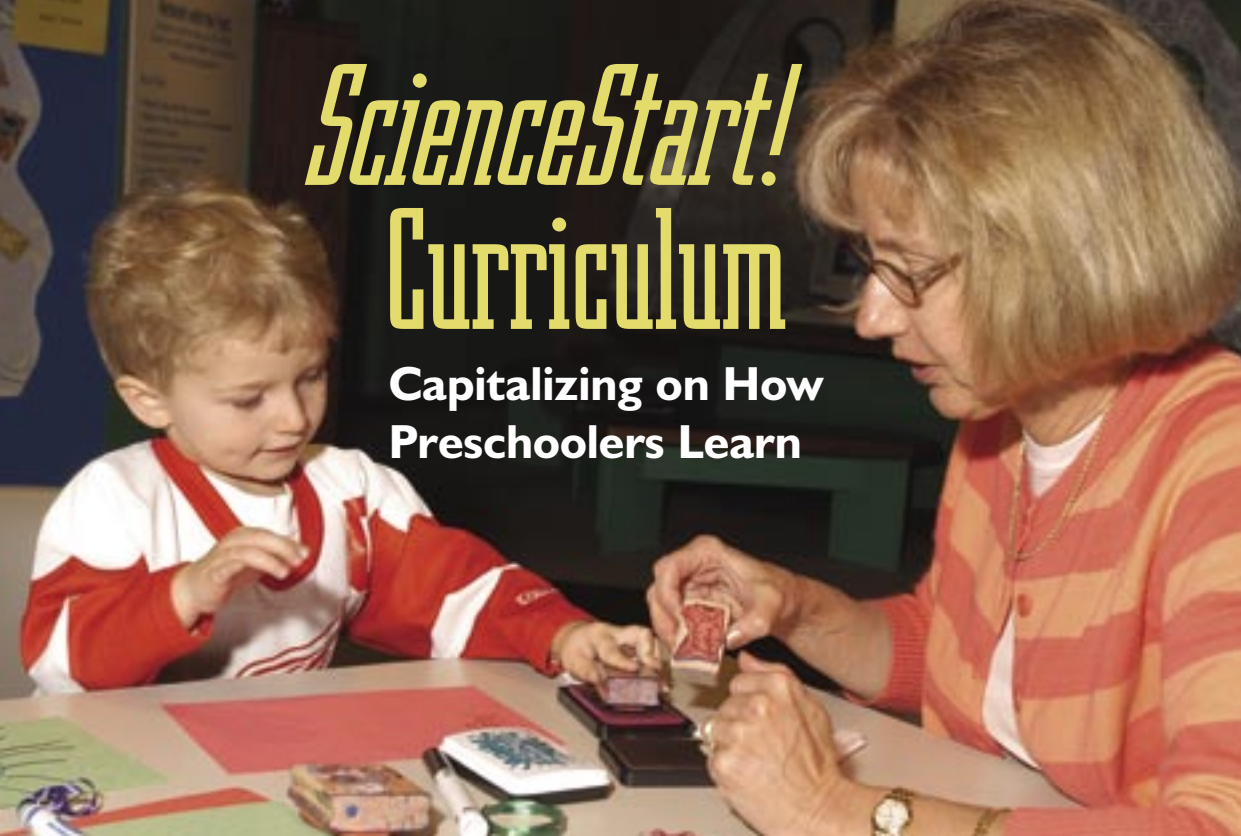
experiences at the University of Rochester as well as their interests in and contributions to their fields. He will be calling on Rochester-area alumni and friends and traveling across the United States to learn the stories of Warner graduates and to update friends about the work of the Warner School and its people.

Faulkner invites alumni to drop him a line and tell him about their experiences at the University of Rochester. He can be reached at (585) 275-3564 or by e-mail at [faulkner@rochester.edu](mailto:faulkner@rochester.edu).

Faulkner, a graduate of St. John Fisher College, is the founder and former director of Best Health by Design. He also served as an advisor for Mass Mutual Financial Services.

# ScienceStart! Curriculum

## Capitalizing on How Preschoolers Learn



The Department of Education grant made it possible for the *ScienceStart!* staff to work locally with 30 programs, 98 teachers, 61 paraprofessionals, and 2,258 children over the course of three years. During that time, more than \$110,000 in books, supplies, and equipment was provided to Rochester-area preschool programs.

*ScienceStart!* differs from most early childhood programs that squeeze scattered science activities throughout a child's schedule. The curriculum embraces science—and the cycle of inquiry that advances it—as an essential part of the preschool experience. "It is a child-centered class-

room where children learn through guided discovery," says Nancy Forand, *ScienceStart!* project manager.

Classrooms following the *ScienceStart!* curriculum use science as the basis for everything children do during their day. For example, in an exercise to learn about magnification, children use a plastic cup, plastic wrap, and water to create a magnifying glass that gives them the ability to look at objects they place in the cup. In another hands-on exercise, they use food coloring to learn about color mixing, primary colors, and how to predict color changes. Through both exercises, children learn new concepts and language skills.

Preschoolers in these classrooms have made large gains in their language skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and the ability to give explanations. "Children are hungry for content at this age and by learning more concepts, they learn more vocabulary," says French. The children have also made significant gains in their knowledge of science content and ability to engage in science processes, as documented by French. Teachers, administrators, and parents involved with the program have given overwhelmingly positive feedback.

*ScienceStart!* continues to gain momentum and broaden its impact. A new \$3.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Early Reading First program creates a partnership between the Warner School and the Rochester Diocese Catholic Schools to establish Rochester preschools as centers of educational excellence. See related story on page 5.

The Warner School's science-based preschool curriculum project, *ScienceStart!*, has been making big changes in the way young children are taught—and it hasn't gone unnoticed. Recently, when the *Sesame Street* television program needed national experts for its upcoming season, it turned to Warner's *ScienceStart!* team for help.

*Sesame Street* contacted Lucia French, associate professor in teaching and curriculum and counseling and human development—and the mastermind behind the *ScienceStart!* curriculum—for help on its programming. The children's show was planning to focus its next season on the concepts of science, nutrition, and physical activity. Along with Kathy Conezio, Warner doctoral student and research associate, French traveled to New York City to give a presentation to *Sesame Street*'s 80-person creative staff of scriptwriters, artists, musicians, and songwriters.

For their presentation, French and Conezio discussed the importance of understanding that science education involves learning concepts, learning and practicing problem-solving skills, and relating this knowledge to everyday life—all key components of the *ScienceStart!* curriculum.

*ScienceStart!* is a unique program that capitalizes on children's natural curiosity about the world around them and uses science as a vehicle to develop language, literacy, and school readiness skills among preschoolers. "Science meets every child's need to understand the world through active investigation," explains French.

French began the curriculum several years ago and has received more than \$1.5 million in support from the National Science Foundation and U.S. Department of Education to write and field test the program.



## Decision-Making Focus Improves Preparation of School Leaders

Offering state-of-the-art programs for preparing education practitioners has long been a critical component of the Warner School's mission. For programs in educational leadership, this means a strong focus on preparing school leaders who have outstanding decision-making skills.

Warner recognizes that many programs preparing school leaders do not devote enough resources to developing the skills these future leaders will need to make good decisions about school policies, curriculum, facilities, personnel, assessment, professional development, budgeting, and distribution of resources. Also, many full-time educators find it difficult to complete a doctoral program and see the relevance of the work required for a dissertation.

A grant of \$44,000 from the Wallace Foundation's Ventures in Leadership Project helped the Warner School reorganize its educational leadership curriculum to create more effective doctoral programs that meet the needs of those pursuing higher administrative positions. With help from this grant, Warner redesigned its Ed.D. programs in school administration to enable more practitioners to

pursue a doctoral program and better prepare them for the decisions they would face as superintendents, principals, program coordinators, and other school leaders.

Warner faculty in educational leadership, including Tyll van Geel, Earl B. Taylor Professor and chair; Brian Brent, associate professor; and John Eckhardt, part-time faculty, reviewed the latest literature and research about decision making and school administration to inform the redesigned program structure. New courses were created to capitalize on the existing body of research and "best practices" regarding decision making in various fields and help educational leaders rigorously and systematically come to decisions about important variables, ethics, and political and psychological dimensions that are factors for administrators.

In addition, new options were created for the Ed.D. dissertation. Doctoral students in educational leadership can now complete their program by doing a traditional research study, by conducting a rigorous program evaluation, or by using research to inform important decisions.

"This is a good example of how even a small grant can become a catalyst for trans-

formation," says Borasi. "I am very satisfied in how it has led us to making the Ed.D. programs in educational leadership more competitive and innovative. They are now better than ever."

New courses in the program include  
**EDU 515** · Administrative Decision Making in Schools and Universities: Processes and Promises

**EDU 516** · Educational Decision Making II: Making Decisions in Schools and Universities

**ED 520** · Introduction to Program Evaluation

**EDU 521** · Advanced Program Evaluation

For additional information on these courses and the new program or the project funded by the Wallace Foundation, visit [www.rochester.edu/warner/researchprojects/decmaking/](http://www.rochester.edu/warner/researchprojects/decmaking/).

### Administration Certification Programs Reregistered with the State

New York State has required that all programs leading to certification in school administration be submitted for reregistration and approval by the state. The Warner School used this mandate as an opportunity to look closely at its programs preparing entry-level K-12 school administrators and identify areas for improvement.

As part of the process, all programs leading to New York State certification in school administration were reviewed in light of the standards and recommendations developed by relevant professional organizations. The overall curricula were analyzed, course content revised, and new courses added to differentiate more between certification at the building level and district level. In addition, the internship time was increased to the equivalent of 15 weeks, as required by the state.

The restructuring has received approval from the state, and students will be admitted in the new programs starting with the November 2004 admission cycle.



## Growth Through Tragedy and Grief: One Intern's Experience Healing and Helping

When Amy Buel began her internship in school counseling at Geneva Middle School in Geneva, N.Y., she was no stranger to emotional triage. Buel, who completed her master's in counseling at Warner in 2004, is an experienced parole officer, career counselor, and addictions counselor, who has helped numerous individuals and families work through personal crises. As a mother who lost her 12-year-old son, Sean, to bone cancer, she also was keenly aware of the issues surrounding grief and loss.

These collective experiences proved invaluable during nine intense months as an intern at Geneva. During her tenure there, the school experienced a number of major incidents, and the counseling staff was called upon to help students and staff come to terms with one tragedy after another.

In just a few months' time, a recent Geneva graduate committed suicide, a beloved sixth-grade social studies teacher was killed in a car accident, an 18-year-old girl was found dead in a burning building, and an eighth-grade girl was missing for two months and later found dead near her home. Any one of these situations would have afforded Buel a closer look at crisis management than any intern would hope for. As it turned out, this particular year provided an ongoing lesson.

Buel's prior experience earned her a more active role on the counseling team than many interns. Buel says her mentor, middle-school counselor Trish Wiltse, knew that she had been counseling for a while, so she gave her

a lot of reign. She noted that she felt like "a member of the team" when she contributed to teacher/counselor meetings. "I was able to give feedback from a place of experience," she explains.

Buel recalls that the death of the eighth-grade girl was especially difficult because the crisis began with her disappearance in December and continued throughout the year. "It was a tough year for teachers, staff, and students," she admits.

Following the discovery of the eighth grader's death, Buel established a weekly breakfast club for friends and classmates. "My concern was for her peers, both for those who knew her and those who might feel guilty about the way they treated her," she says. "At this age, kids are playing around with the idea of death, but they don't understand it." An incident like this may prompt kids to fear that they can't count on life, she says.

Buel knows all too well that coming to terms with the loss of a friend or loved one takes time. In her own case, her enrollment at the Warner School marked the beginning of the healing process. At the time of Sean's death, she was a single mother with a young daughter to support, but she knew she couldn't return to her counseling job for at least a year.

Although her emotional reserves were exhausted, her will to carry on was not, so she decided to invest Sean's college fund in herself. She applied to Warner—and only War-



ner—because she wanted to "do it right." In her mind, Warner's reputation for excellence made it the obvious choice.

For a year, Buel dedicated herself to her daughter and her studies before returning to her job at Finger Lakes Addiction Counseling and Referral Agency (FLACRA). Even so, long days, summer coursework and a lot of support from friends and family allowed her to earn her degree in two and a half years. Now the search is on for a school counseling position. In the meantime, just working full time will seem like a breeze.

### **\$3.8 Million Grant Creates Partnership to Reach Excellence for Children in Rochester**

A \$3.8 million grant to the Warner School will establish a national preschool Center of Excellence in the Catholic schools of Rochester. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Early Reading First program, the project is part of a national effort to transform preschools by raising the quality of the programs and giving more support and resources to teachers and parents.

The funding supports a collaborative effort among the Warner School, the Department of Catholic Schools of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, and the Warner Center for Professional Development and Education Reform. Building on Warner's ScienceStart! initiative (see page 3), the project will provide the means for

intensive support and professional development in classrooms that serve preschoolers from low-income families at four area Catholic schools in urban Rochester.

"This is an important opportunity to serve the local community and, at the same time, to advance knowledge about preschool education that ultimately may help to ensure the success of at-risk children across all of Rochester and the nation," says University of Rochester President Thomas H. Jackson.

During the three-year project, the schools will serve as regional and national preschool model sites, demonstrating the power and potential that quality curriculum, professional development, and

teacher support hold for educating young children, especially those most at risk for school failure.

"We have an extraordinary opportunity here. Not only will we improve the outcomes for the children directly involved in this effort, but teachers will receive the kind of intense support and education that will transform their practice to affect thousands of children over their careers," says Lucia French, associate professor in teaching and curriculum and counseling and human development, who will direct the project. "In addition, we will share what we learn and open these classrooms to the larger educational community, such that Rochester can lead the way for quality preschools nationwide."

## Warner Doc Student Takes It to the Hill

Since she was 15, Cecilia Rios Aguilar has been involved with social programs aimed at helping the poor and illiterate in her native country of Mexico. At a young age, she even created and became an active member of a foundation to help poor Mexican children.

This past summer, Rios Aguilar, who earned a master's in educational administration from Warner in 2003 and is currently working on her doctorate in the same area, had a rare opportunity to impact policy that affects Hispanic American families.

Through a highly competitive process, Rios Aguilar was selected as a graduate fellow in the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. The Initiative supports the Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans and advises the Secretary of Education, Rod Paige.

In her Washington, D.C., position, Rios Aguilar conducted research for Initiative projects, attended conferences and presentations that are relevant for education of Hispanic Americans, and helped establish contact with other researchers and institutions interested in Hispanic issues. Her efforts ultimately will contribute toward the goal of creating policy and initiatives that will close the educational achievement gap of Hispanic Americans.

"Working for the White House Initiative gave me the unique opportunity to make



Capitol photo by James Pauls

concrete contributions that can change the lives of Hispanic families," says Rios Aguilar. "I was able to conduct research that may contribute to the design of more effective policies."

Rios Aguilar says that learning about policymaking at the federal level and understanding how policies can impact individual lives has inspired her in personal and academic ways.

"It has changed my perspective and strengthened my research interests and skills," she says. The internship helped Rios Aguilar narrow the question that she will

attempt to answer in her dissertation. She is interested in knowing if Hispanic family involvement has an influence on the educational outcomes of Hispanic students, and if so, how big this effect is.

"Changing the 'status quo' of Hispanic education in the United States will contribute to increasing the quality of life for millions of Hispanic Americans and, of course, Mexicans. Knowing that I can make a difference has really strengthened my passion for education."