

Introduction

My topic for my personal project is Down syndrome. My project is about making more Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) families—particularly minority families—aware of and able to access Gigi's Playhouse, a Down syndrome achievement center.



Background

GiGi's Playhouse was originally founded in 2003 in Chicago. GiGi's Playhouse Cleveland was started in 2013 by a group of parents who wanted a resource center for their children with Down syndrome. GiGi's Playhouse supports parents who have a Down syndrome diagnosis during and post pregnancy and supports children and adults with Down syndrome through classes, tutoring, activities, social events, and life and job skills training. It is a place where Down syndrome is celebrated, not shunned.

Research

I began my project by doing research on Down syndrome, including its causes, prevalence in the population, and how it presents in individuals. I then set up interviews with multiple people for my project. I talked to Elizabeth Maxwell, site director of GiGi's Playhouse; Jessica Baldwin, executive director of CMSD's special education department; and Timothy Lewicki, who works with the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Survey

I created a survey for CMSD's special education liaisons to determine how many students have a Down syndrome diagnosis. I presented my project to the liaisons at a special education meeting and distributed my surveys. Roughly 60 liaisons responded to my survey. They identified 29 children with Down syndrome in the district. The reported race/ethnicity was 13 Black, 9 white, 4 Hispanic, and 3 no response. From my survey I also gathered what kind of support is already offered in schools to help students with Down syndrome (separate and smaller classrooms; occupational, speech, and physical therapists, etc.) and identified schools to send additional information.

Recommendations

It does not seem that many CMSD families are aware of GiGi's Playhouse. I plan to extend my personal project into my junior and senior year for my DP project. My long term goal is to have a major impact on the diversity of the people that attend the programs of GiGi's Playhouse and also positively affect the Cleveland community by sharing knowledge of GiGi's Playhouse to families that wouldn't otherwise know about it.

Primary References

- Lizz Maxwell, site director, GiGi's Playhouse
- Jessica Baldwin, executive director, CMSD special education
- Timothy Lewicki, intake manager, Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities
- GiGi's Playhouse Cleveland
<https://gigisplayhouse.org/cleveland/>
- National Institute of Health
<https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/down-syndrome>