

Cowen Institute Funds Faculty Research

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newwave@tulane.edu

The Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University has awarded three grants to Tulane faculty members totaling \$15,000 for projects that benefit the ongoing transformation of public education in New Orleans. The research work will deal with issues relating to violence prevention, nutrition and childhood obesity, and the impact of anxiety disorders.



Peter Scharf, research professor in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, will lead a study of ways to reduce the risk of gun violence by New Orleans youth. Funding for the study comes from the Cowen Institute. (Photo by George Long)

The grants were chosen by the Cowen Institute's Advisory Committee with criteria that included a focus on factors that influence student achievement and school performance in pre-K through grade 12 in public education.

The fall 2008 grants went to these projects:

â€œ**What Works?: Building School-Based, Evidence-Based Strategies to Reduce Violence in New Orleans.**” This work will be led by [Peter Scharf](#), research

professor at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. The research team has proposed to work with the Recovery School District on a joint strategy to design, fund, implement, assess and disseminate a high impact, multidisciplinary, research-based prevention program to mitigate gun violence risks among the youth of New Orleans. This grant will be used to fund a comprehensive review of the literature on proven, evidence-based, risk reduction strategies regarding school gun violence.

â€¢**“Baseline Evaluation of the Edible Schoolyard at Green Elementary School.”** This work will be led by Dr. Thomas Farley, chair of the Tulane Department of Community Health Sciences, and Kathryn Parker Karst, assistant director of the [Prevention Research Center](#), both at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The objective of the project is to gather information on the effectiveness of the Edible Schoolyard at Green Elementary School and determine the feasibility of expanding the concept to other schools. The Edible Schoolyard incorporates gardening and cooking lessons to teach children about ecology, nutrition, healthy food and the connections between the environment and human health. Information on its effectiveness is essential to improving the program and thereby increasing students' ability to make informed choices about nutrition, helping to mitigate the public health crisis of childhood obesity.

â€¢**“Anxiety in the New Orleans Public Schools: Prevalence and Impact.”** This work will be led by R. Enrique Varela, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology. The major aim of the proposed project is to examine anxiety disorders among New Orleans students three years following Hurricane Katrina.

The group also will share information about the prevalence of anxiety disorders within and across individual schools so that mental health resources can be allocated to the areas that need addressing the most. Children participating in the study will be provided with mental health referrals for low-cost treatment options if deemed necessary, including treatment at the Tulane University Anxiety Disorders Clinic for Children and Adolescents.

The [Cowen Institute](#) intends to continue to provide grants of this kind and will work to increase funding for these projects over time, institute officials said.

Amy L. Mahfouz is communications and development manager for the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives