

Would driving 300 miles to SMU for a conference on how to better prepare students in math be worth a trip? Denise Blume, a veteran public school teacher from Enid, Okla., thinks so. She was one of 118 teachers who attended the inaugural Research to Practice Conference, a component of the Research in Mathematics Education

But other symbolic bridges currently under way could link West Dallas families, and most notably its children, to endless roads of possibility reaching far beyond city limits.

That's the vision for the new Center on Communities and Education in the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development. The center, formed in October in partnership with the Dallas Faith Communities Coalition, seeks to address poverty and its effects on education in the community.

"Education is kind of the canary in the coal mine. The fact that education in the upper grades is not working is an indicator that a lot of other things in the community are broken," says Regina Nippert, the center's executive director.

"We recognize we can't just fix one of the broken pieces and expect it all to work. We have to fix all the pieces, which is why we refer to it as an educational ecosystem," she says.

SMU brings its faculty and graduate students to the mix with research designed

Special education teacher Julie Bore's students faced daunting obstacles – pregnancy, drug abuse, mental illness, homelessness – in a low-income urban school. But Bore's students faced a compounding challenge; they were in her classroom because they were diagnosed with a disability such as a learning difference or an intellectual disability.

In her new book, *Voices: Stories From a Classroom for Teens with Disabilities*, Bore shares her conversations with 40 students, like Tammy, who threatens to commit suicide; 15-year-old pregnant Michelle, whose boyfriend hits her in the stomach; and Matt, who lives in a homeless shelter. Each chapter ends with a follow-up note on the student.

"I wrote the book to provide insight for teachers, parents, school administrators and policymakers," says Bore, now assistant clinical professor of education at SMU's Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development. "We must improve the education and social outcome of teenagers with disabilities, particularly those who live in poverty."

Research shows that youth with disabilities are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, drop out of school, participate in inappropriate sexual behavior and become



victims of bullies, Bore says. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 13.4 percent of U.S. students receive special education services. But, Bore says, low-income schools and parents often lack the resources to help students with disabilities face social and environmental obstacles.

In her book, Bore says special education teachers are key to helping students with disabilities succeed.

"Special education teachers need to establish trusting relationships with students and

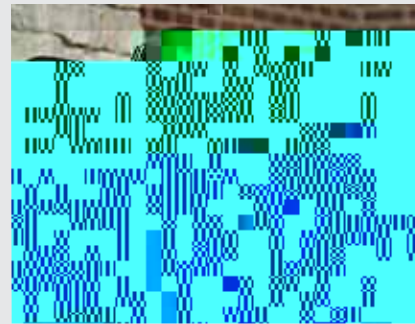
parents in order to serve as a link to these already marginalized children," she says.

The book includes an index of agencies and resources for children with disabilities.

A native of Ngechek, Kenya, Bore says her parents inspired her commitment to children. Proceeds from *Voices* benefit Empowering Children of the Village, Inc., a nonprofit organization Bore helped create to educate and provide medical services to children in her village and neighboring villages.



(center), Simmons dean, moderated a discussion in the spring about the public's ethical role in supporting high quality education. The dialogue was hosted by SMU's Maguire Ethics Center, the Center on Communities and Education and the Simmons School. Panelists included (at Chard's right) Gerald Britt, CitySquare's Vice President of Public Policy and Community Program Development, and Florencia Velasco Fortner, CEO of Dallas Concilio. Read more on upcoming community conversations @Facebook/smusimmons.



Anna K. Lee '09 (left), R. Claire McCormack '09 and Carl G. Dorvil '05, '08 recently chaired activities for Simmons' Young Leaders in Education. They hosted a spring benefit for the school's Mustang Learning Center for Youth, a tutoring service and academic resource for Dallas-area parents, children and teachers. The group raised \$16,000 in support of the program.