The Community Engagement Core (CEC) works to address environmental concerns by partnering with the community to identify and discuss issues, developing intervention and prevention strategies and plans, integrating

Aim 1: Facilitate productive bidirectional interactions and relationships between Iowa public school stakeholders and the ISRP. We developed interview instruments for school superintendents, buildings and grounds personnel, and science teachers during spring and summer 2020; we are targeting completing 20 interviews within each stakeholder category. The goal of these interviews is to better understand the perceptions of school stakeholders on chemical exposures in schools. In addition, the interviews serve as an initial recruitment strategy for our new Stakeholder Advisory Board. Starting in August, we began conducting phone interviews with superintendents and buildings and grounds staff.

We currently have 26 completed interviews and 11 individuals have expressed interest in serving on the SAB. Initial cursory analysis reveals that about half have heard of PCBs, but no schools have any formal mechanism or protocol for PCBs in the district. Seventeen indicate that environmental health concerns are a high priority, but participants also responded that fears about costs of remediation, difficulty finding appropriate expertise, time constraints, and competing community priorities are barriers to implementing changes that would improve environmental health in their districts. These interviews will help guide the initial activities of our SAB to ensure that we contribute solutions that are acceptable and useable by school systems.

Aim 2: Facilitate bidirectional interactions between community stakeholders in East Chicago, Ind., and the ISRP. During the current funding period, we have worked with the AESOP Study to craft appropriate report-back materials
for the study population in East Chicago, IN. Because of COVID-19, we have been unable to host any community meetings to discuss the study results, but we are investigating online or other options to connect with community members. The report-back materials are designed to improve the community’s understanding of their own exposure to PCBs, as well as lead and arsenic, two compounds that were of concern to residents.

Aim 3: Facilitate bidirectional interactions between community stakeholders in New Bedford, Mass., and the ISRP. We have been in initial contact with some of our partners in New Bedford, MA to determine the next steps forward.

In addition to the activities outlined in our aims, the CEC has consulted with community groups and schools to advise on PCB communication and remediation. In September 2020, the leaders of the Coosa Riverkeeper, located in Anniston, AL near the Anniston PCB site, contacted the ISRP CEC for PCB consultation. The Riverkeeper staff members were preparing a community presentation to advocate for sediment removal and remediation of the river. CEC staff, along with ISRP Director Dr. Keri Hornbuckle, provided guidance on available data and comparable sites in other parts of the country. In October 2020, the ISRP was contacted by a concerned parent in Burlington, VT, where the local high school had been directed to move to off-site learning because of high levels of PCBs. CEC director Janssen, along with ISRP Director Hornbuckle and Peter Thorne, PI of the AESOP study, consulted initially with the parent and had a second discussion with the chair of the Burlington school board. Our engagement is ongoing in this matter.

Brandi Janssen, PhD, Core Leader

Dr. Janssen is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Occupational and Environmental Health Department of the College of Public Health. Brandi’s research examines the production and marketing strategies of local food producers and their relationships with conventional agricultural production. She has collaborated with area school districts, nonprofits, and community agencies to promote and enhance sustainable food systems locally. As director of Iowa’s Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, she oversees the work of a statewide coalition of public and private organizations devoted to reducing injuries and fatalities on Iowa farms. Dr. Janssen will be responsible for CEC direction and management. As Core Leader, she will serve on the ISRP Executive Committee and work to ensure all CEC activities are well-integrated with the ISRP and supportive of the specific aims of all components, where applicable.

Jessica Andino, MPH, Community Engagement Core Coordinator

Jessica works closely with communities to identify and discuss issues and to help develop
intervention and prevention strategies and plans. She also serves as a Clinical Trials Research Associate/Project Manager at the University of Iowa Health Care. She also directs the social media efforts of the Community Engagement Core.

Scott Spak, PhD

Dr. Spak is the ISRP Research Translation Coordinator and assists with the closely related Community Engagement Core.

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