



EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

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Community Chronicle

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER *Spring News 2022*

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Early Childhood Resource Center is to promote the healthy development of young children by strengthening families, improving the quality of early learning experiences, increasing school and community readiness, and informing public policy.

For information and for center hours, visit our website or call us at 877.691.8521.

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The ECRC Board of Directors plays an important role in providing fiscal and legal oversight, making policy decisions, conducting strategic planning, and more. Chosen for their professional expertise and understanding of early childhood issues, each board member can serve a maximum of three three-year terms.

Early Literacy: The Foundation For Success

Because early literacy skills are the foundation of all learning in school, children who start school with strong literacy skills have a lifelong advantage. And, even beyond school success, many of those skills needed for reading and writing are also important in developing the listening, speaking, and social skills needed to function well in society.

We know that a child's first three years are a critical period when the brain is primed for the development of language. If language development is nurtured, language will develop. If not, the window of opportunity closes, and "The brain cells that would have been nurtured and developed start to fade away."¹

The pandemic interrupted and delayed the development of language and literacy skills for many young children. "About a third of children in the youngest grades are missing reading benchmarks, up significantly from before the pandemic."²

Notes: 1. bit.ly/3v0Knchh; 2. nyti.ms/3JJJ25; 3. bit.ly/3LNojMP

The good news is that "reading experts and tutoring providers say they're seeing students make strong gains with one-on-one support."³

Now more than ever, access to early literacy support is critical. The Early Childhood Resource Center is teaching early educators how to engage young children in innovative, engaging literacy activities designed to help them strengthen those critical literacy skills. We're confident that with access to the right supports, we can set the stage for all children to succeed.

Lots of Book recommendations inside this issue!

WE SUGGEST:

Tomorrow I'll Be Kind by Jessica Hische: Akron Public Schools and families are celebrating Kindness. This is a wonderful picture book that children will enjoy not only for the beautiful pictures but for the rhyming words. Families will love to talk and share ways they are kind to one another and to others as they read through this story as a family.

— Christine Fowler-Mack, Superintendent, Akron Public Schools



THE BEST POSSIBLE START

Dear Friends,

Each of us has two sons. When they were young, one of the best parts of our day was reading time: a quiet time to read to them before bed. We loved the books, especially engaging and colorful ones like *What's in Fox's Sack* and *The Big Red Barn*. This time was special for so many reasons. Reading together was a great way to connect and bond. It also quieted the boys at the end of long and boisterous day.

There are so many benefits to reading to your child. It helps their brain develop, increases vocabulary, sparks curiosity, strengthens concentration, and helps them be ready for school.

From the start, we knew our boys were capable of many great things, but needed to be nurtured to do them. We believe that all children deserve the best possible start in life. Researchers and teachers agree: the best possible start requires the early literacy skills that lead to school success.

The Early Childhood Resource Center is working hard, and partnering throughout our communities, to bring numerous services and resources to families and educators:

- Since 2003, the SPARK kindergarten readiness program has helped more than 17,000 Ohio families get ready for kindergarten.
- Over the past year, we've trained and coached hundreds of educators on how to strengthen the early literacy skills of young children.
- We're currently working with 30 child care centers to train and coach teachers to implement best-practice literacy strategies.
- We help to build children's home libraries: in our Canton location, there's a bottomless book drawer. At every single visit, a child can choose their very own book to keep.

The future looks bright: every day, we're bringing even more supports to even more children, families, and educators throughout our six-county service area. We're so grateful we have the opportunity to make the best possible start a reality.

Sincerely,



KIRSTIN S. TOTH, BOARD CHAIR



SCOTT HASSELMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



WE SUGGEST: *Mel Fell* by Corey Tabor: After jumping and flipping from the safety of the nest, Mel fell...and fell...and fell past owls, squirrels, and other tree-dwelling neighbors trying to help slow her descent. Readers have to turn the book sideways and upside down to follow Mel on her journey from downward fall to triumphant flight! A new favorite at our library!

— Lori Faust, Youth Services Manager, Warren-Trumbull County Public Library



EDUCATION IN ACTION

A Shining Star in Akron

Glory Hallelujah Childcare is truly a blessing for Akron children and families. Margo Slaughter opened her child care center in 2003 with a mission of serving all families and children who have been displaced or expelled because of disability, barriers, behavioral challenges, or academic concerns.

Ms. Margo, as she's known, said the name *Glory Hallelujah* exemplifies how she feels about serving God's children. She believes the name brings together glorious and highest praise, which symbolizes her commitment to her mission.

In March, our staff had the opportunity to participate in a Seussical Birthday Celebration at Glory Hallelujah. The Seuss-themed day included a fully decorated classroom, costumes, and hands-on activities. Ms. Margo said, "I love Dr. Seuss. I believe children need to be encouraged to read at an early age."

This event is just one example of Ms. Margo's continued commitment to family engagement and to fostering the learning experiences that lead to success.

The Early Childhood Resource Center first started working with Ms. Margo through GAR Foundation's Supporting Teachers and Ready Students (STARS) initiative. We provide professional development and intensive coaching on language, literacy, and math for 23 urban Akron child care programs. In this second phase of the initiative, the programs also receive training and coaching on the strategies, supports, and resources that support kindergarten readiness.

When asked about the coaching supports she receives from the STARS initiative, Ms. Margo said, "I appreciate Elizabeth Schilling so much; I don't know what I would do without her. I wear so many hats and she has helped me with so many out of the box ideas to build quality in my program. She is so wonderful!"

Ms. Margo is a great example of the unwavering commitment that so many of our early childhood professionals live each day. We are so proud of Ms. Margo and the impact she continues to make on Akron's youngest children. ♦



Gail Tigner with her granddaughters, Ahleya and Aubrey.

It Takes a Village to Raise Children

"It takes a village to raise children," according to Gail Tigner of Nana's Babies. "Teachers and working parents cannot do it alone. Children deserve to learn, pass their subjects, and excel in life."

Nana's Babies is a licensed family child care home in Youngstown that provides care for children from 6-12 years of age. Gail opened her family child care home in December 2020, after seeing first-hand how her grandchildren were struggling in school during the pandemic. Upon retirement from her teaching career at Youngstown City Schools, she decided to pursue her passion of helping school-age children succeed.

In January 2021, Gail began working with Early Childhood Specialist MaryBeth Bush, who helped her earn her first star with Ohio's Step Up to Quality rating system. Gail recently applied for five stars; it's the highest possible rating.

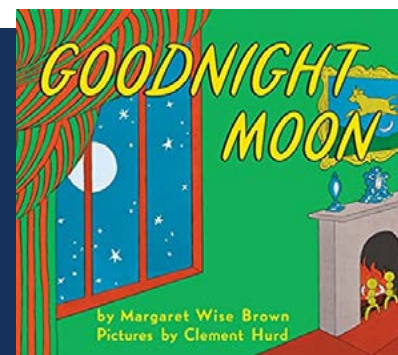
Gail became determined to extend the children's knowledge beyond the classroom, especially in literacy, math, and social studies. Her goal? "To strengthen the home-school connection."

She broadens learning and discovery by using the resources available right in her community:

- Gail reaches out to teachers at Hubbard Middle School to ensure her lessons complement what the children are learning in the classroom, and to address individual children's challenges—academic, behavioral, and social-emotional. Gail also volunteers at the school, helping with fun learning activities and donating supplies.
- To help one child who was struggling with math, Gail reached out to the Hubbard Library for assistance with adding engaging math activities to her lesson plans.
- To help another child strengthen her literacy skills, Gail used the lending library at the McGuffey Centre. The McGuffey Centre offers lots of resources and activities, including a computer lab and before- and after-school programs. Its summer gardening project allows the children to plant, care for, harvest, and eat fresh produce. The children at Nana's Babies eagerly participate.

Stabilization grant funding from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has helped expand the learning as well, by allowing Gail to purchase technology to support lessons.

Gail continues to provide lots of supports that mitigate pandemic-related learning loss for the children entrusted to her care. She offers a great example: a child care provider collaborating with schools and community partners to create wraparound supports that help children thrive. ♦



WE SUGGEST: *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown: Of the many children's books that I've read to my kids at home and my "work kids," *Goodnight Moon* has been a constant favorite. While I can recite several children's books by memory, *Goodnight Moon* is a magical, lyrical bedtime homage to the comforting things that surround the child. Neither I nor my children ever tired of hearing those everyday things listed so magically, nor did we ever read the book without looking at those illustrations. One of the things I miss most about having very young children is the bedtime routine that starts with the bedtime prayer, and includes the reading of this book before the goodnight kiss. A book that was written more than 50 years ago that still retains its popularity is a book that speaks to the essence of a child and parent's safe, predictable and loving bedtime routine.

— Timothy Schaffner, Executive Director, Trumbull County Children Services



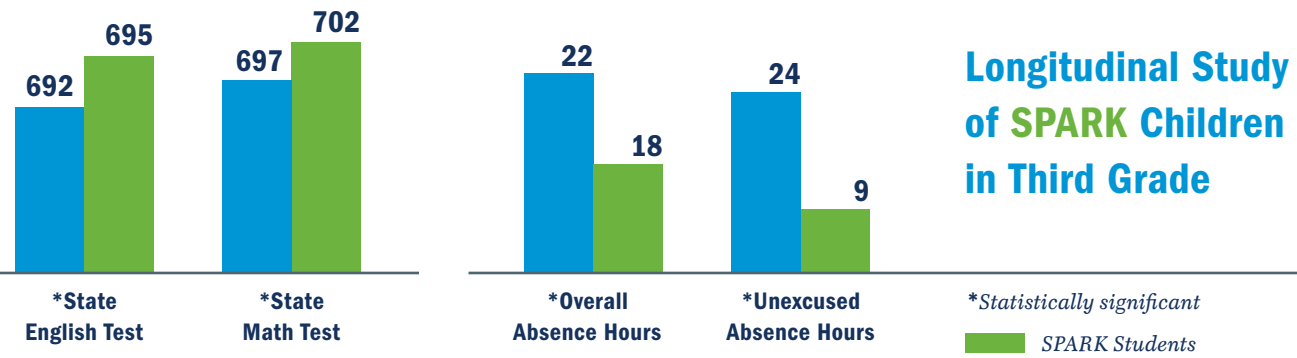
SPARK Supports Children's Continued Success

For some time, the independent evaluation team from Kent State University has been collaborating with the Ohio Department of Education to access data on the performance of SPARK children as they progress through school.

Preliminary data now confirms that the SPARK advantage

stays with children, supporting success in the elementary years. In the third grade, SPARK children are still significantly outperforming their peers—and attending school far more regularly.

Continued analysis will be needed in order to make a thorough study of the effects of SPARK participation. ♦

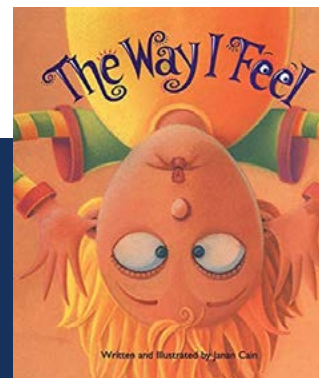


WE SUGGEST: *The Lion Inside* by Rachel Bright. This is a rhyming story about a shy little mouse who sets out on a journey to find his roar. Readers can predict what comes next, and they will LOVE the ending!

—Linnea L. Olbon, Director of Early Childhood, Canton City School District

The Way I Feel by Janan Cain: *The Way I Feel* gives children the language they need to help express their emotions. It helps children to understand and express their feelings in a fun and interactive way. There's also a Note to Parents page, which gives caregivers ideas on how to extend on conversations about emotions with young children.

—Laura McFalls, Early Childhood Specialist, Akron-Summit County Public Library



Fatherhood Coalition Celebrates the National Day of Reading

On March 2nd, the Stark County Fatherhood Coalition partnered with kindergarten and elementary classrooms in Alliance, Canton, and Massillon to celebrate the National Day of Reading. Throughout the day, 59 volunteers from the Fatherhood Coalition read to over 100 classrooms.

The event is designed to recognize the importance of reading daily and to encourage parents to read to their children every day. ♦



A Mountain of Books!!

Again this year, students participating in the teaching programs at Glen Oak, Hoover, and Perry high schools held a book drive asking their peers and family to donate gently used children's books.

For the past four years, the books have been sorted by age and interest and donated to the Early Childhood Resource Center. The books will be distributed to the families in the SPARK kindergarten readiness program, to parents participating in our parenting sessions, and to children who visit the children's library at our Canton location.

We thank all of the students and teachers who helped to acquire, sort, and deliver the books. The children will love them! ♦

Give the Gift of a Bedtime Story

When a parent and child step into the world of a story together, it's a magical time. Bedtime stories are powerful: they strengthen family bonds and capture a child's imagination. Bedtime stories even help children learn language faster.¹ In other words, they're a school readiness secret weapon.

Be a part of the magic!

Your \$10 monthly gift will give bedtime books to one SPARK family for a year. You'll be helping families right in our community as they get ready for school success, one story at a time.

To give securely online, visit bit.ly/ecrcgift

Note: 1. bit.ly/3J6x9U9