

PROGRESS 2009

Ready to Learn = early childhood success

Research has shown that the quality of a child's early care and learning experiences have a direct impact on his or her future success in school and in life.

United Way of Adams County began coordinating Ready to Learn in 2003. The broad mission of this early childhood education initiative is to partner with others in the community to ensure that our youngest citizens are prepared to succeed as they enter kindergarten in Adams County.

The accomplishments of United Way of Adams County Ready to Learn are the result of ongoing collaboration between vital community partners including our county's six public school districts, parents, families, Adams County Head Start, Child Care Information Services of Adams County, early learning centers, Lincoln Intermediate Unit # 12 Education Programs, PathStone Corporation, private and faith-based nursery and pre-schools, in-home child care practitioners, HACC-Gettysburg Campus, Adams County Library System, Collaborating for Youth, Early Intervention, state and local government, civic organizations, county and state agencies, business partners, and United Way of Adams County.

Over the past five years, Ready to Learn has provided outreach and education stressing the importance of quality early learning to parents and the community-at-large; initiated and maintained stronger links between school districts and early learning centers and home-based child care providers; engaged community members in early learning activities; promoted state initiatives improving early childhood education such as Pennsylvania Keystone STARS, PA Pre-K Counts, and



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Pennsylvania's Promise for Children; and advocated for quality early childhood education at the local, state and national level.

In 2009, Ready to Learn goals include expanding outreach to parents; further engaging government, business, and the community in early learning efforts; continuing to strengthen partnerships between school districts and early childhood educators and care providers, with an emphasis on enhancing activities that are offered to families as their children transition from early care and education to kindergarten. Ready to Learn will strive to empower parents to become actively involved in their child's education now and into the future.

Ready to Learn activities include speaking engagements, coordination and participation in community events, providing news articles, conducting radio interviews, and the creation/distribution of educational materials that parents, guardians and early educators can use to better prepare children for school. Engagement activities include the participation of elected officials, business owners, human service agencies and community members in local early learning



PHOTO COURTESY READY TO LEARN

READY - According to Ready to Learn, children who receive quality early care and education experience are much more likely to complete high school

and more likely as well to pursue higher education and/or successful employment after graduation.

events and activities. Efforts to connect early learning providers with school districts in their area will continue and expand in 2009.

The 6th annual "Bridging the Gap" Seminar will be held in March and bring together teachers and school administrators from each of the county's six school districts, early care and education practitioners and various other stakeholders who strive to improve school readiness for all children in Adams County. One outcome of previous seminars has been the formation of a countywide School Readiness Committee. In 2009, the committee will work on the expansion of the Kindergarten Transition Activities Project DVD which was produced in collaboration with Upper Adams School District in 2008. In 2009 the committee will work with Gettysburg and Littlestown Area school districts to improve transition activi-

ties for pre-school children by creating a "virtual tour" DVD which will introduce each young student to their new school environment, in a child-friendly format which they may enjoy viewing with their families again and again. The DVD also offers information to families on school readiness activities that they can easily incorporate into their daily lives. This project will benefit approximately 350 children in Adams County who will be entering kindergarten in the fall of 2009.

There are always challenges to accomplishing goals! How is it possible to reach every Adams County family with young children? While families face the stress of hard economic times, how do we best approach them in offering information on the importance of quality early learning for their children and provide them with easy-to-use educational materials?

How do we continue to engage government repre-

sentatives while they strive to balance our state and local budgets in a struggling economy? Some citizens without young children may not be attuned to the necessity of these efforts and may need to be informed of the increasing data showing that the quality of early learning in our community impacts each of us in many ways.

Children who receive quality early care and education experience more successful transitions into school and are less likely to require expensive special education and intervention programs. They are much more likely to complete high school and more likely as well to pursue higher education and/or successful employment after graduation. These same citizens are much less likely to engage in criminal activity, choosing instead to become a contributing member of society.

From a business perspective, employee rela-

bility, work quality and job retention are far superior in an employee who knows that their children are in a safe, nurturing environment while they work. Business leaders must remember that the children we're educating today are their future employees, and it is vital that we do all we can to guarantee each child is educated and prepared to enter and succeed in our future labor force.

With minimal financial resources, we have been successful, but there is more to be done and we welcome your assistance and support.

To learn more about our activities, or how you can help ensure all our children are "ready to learn" when they enter kindergarten, contact me at United Way of Adams County Ready to Learn, by phone at 717-334-5809 ext. 24 or toll free at 1-866-R2L-UWAC; or by e-mail at uwacgifts@planetcable.net.