

# The Heartbeat

EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

## **FLORIDA VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN (VPK) PROGRAM CELEBRATES ITS 20TH YEAR!**



The importance of early learning is indisputable. Most students who complete Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) get important benefits that will pay off in more ways than one. Students who complete the program will leave fully prepared for

kindergarten and later will be more likely to graduate from high school. Our **CEO Marc Hutek, Ed. D.** believes that a year in VPK can change the course of a child's life. "As children develop and progress through their school years, studies continue to indicate how critical the early years are," explained Hutek.

*"More importantly than ever, the interactions children have with others during VPK and their ability to enter kindergarten "ready" have lifelong implications. Many children who lack necessary skills when entering school may never make them up while those who do are often successful in their years ahead.*

*Today's children are tomorrow's adults and now is the time to provide that foundation for their future success!" — CEO Marc Hutek Ed.D.*

**YESTERDAY'S 2005 VPK GRADS: TODAY'S SUCCESS STORIES**

## 2005 VPK Graduates from Future Care Learning Center



*Zoe Smith, Entrepreneur*

*Michael Hardy, Electrician*

*Allison Rench, Pursuing Business Degree*

*Devon Pearce, Bachelor's in Aerospace Engineering*

The ELC of Polk County is proud of all its VPK graduates but here are four from **Future Care Learning Center** owned by **Jobe Ream** who became very successful. When quality early learning begins in a small VPK classroom the sky's the limit for all the wonderful opportunities that can open up to all of its graduates!

Our **Instructional Support Manager Ashley Sholtz** agrees that valuable learning occurs during a child's year enrolled in a VPK program.

*"We can learn a thing or two from our 4-year-olds. They are not afraid to try new things. They are adventurous. They are curious. We just have to present them with the opportunities to explore and discover." — Ashley Sholtz, Instructional Support Manager*



We are proud that Florida was one of the first states in the country to offer free prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds regardless of family income when the program began in the 2005-2006 school year. Since then, more than 3.1 million children have benefited from the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK).

To enter the program, students need to be 4 years of age and must be a resident of the state of Florida. Parents can select from one of several program options available in different educational settings from private and public providers and specialized instructional services providers. Providers have flexibility to structure daily hours per week to meet the required number of instructional hours.

For more information on how you can register your child for this free program, visit <https://elcpolk.org/families/voluntary-prekindergarten-education-program/>



**PREVENT DROWNING! PLEASE SHARE THESE SAFETY TIPS!**



# Keep Kids Safe from Drowning

Drowning happens when you least expect it.

In Florida, drowning is one of the leading causes of preventable death in children 1–4 years of age. To reduce the risk of drowning, use multiple **layers of protection** and restrict unsupervised access to water sources such as pools, hot tubs, canals, ponds, ditches, bathtubs, toilets and more.



## Layers of Protection

### Supervise

**Proper supervision is the most effective drowning prevention.**

- Know your surroundings and possible drowning risks to your child at home and when traveling.
- Ensure young children are always supervised by a trusted caregiver.
- Assign a Water Watcher and use touch-supervision.
- Never leave a child alone near water, even for a second.

### Swim Safety

- Seconds count! CPR training saves lives.
- Water survival skills training and swim lessons can help reduce drowning risk for children between the ages 1–4.
- By their 4th birthday, most children are ready for swim lessons.
- Swim lessons are not a replacement for supervision.
- Make a family drowning prevention plan and ensure all family members know how to swim.

### Barriers & Alarms

**Use barriers to water access.**

- Install and maintain 4-foot pool fencing and self-closing, self-latching gates and doors.
- Secure and lock all doors, windows and pet doors.
- Install door chimes or alarms.
- Routinely check for needed repairs to fencing, gates and barriers.

### Did You Know?

- While most child drowning incidents occur in a pool, nearly 70% of those children were not expected to be in the pool at that time.
- Distracted caregivers are a primary factor in child drowning incidents.
- Most drowning happens without a sound.
- Drowning incidents are preventable.

To learn more, visit:

**WaterSmartFL.com**

**WaterSmartFL**  
WaterSmartFL.com

**Florida**  
**HEALTH**



**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TIP: DANCING AND SINGING TOGETHER HELPS BUILD  
IMPORTANT BRAIN CONNECTIONS IN CHILDREN**



Believe it or not, singing and dancing can both foster great cognitive developments. Dance and sing with your children. **Their brains will actually benefit from it!**

For more info click

here: [https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/CCAoA\\_Vroom\\_Music\\_and\\_Dance\\_INT.pdf](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/CCAoA_Vroom_Music_and_Dance_INT.pdf)



**POSITIVE PARENTING TIP: HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD TRANSITION SMOOTHLY  
BETWEEN PLACES AND ACTIVITIES**



With the new school year approaching children need to know how to move and transition to new activities, places, and people. In the course of a day there are a number of transitions and once the skill is mastered your child will know what to expect and follow through with the action required.

For more tips on how to practice these transitions click here:

[https://challengingbehavior.org/dockpack/BackpackConnection\\_routines\\_transitions.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.org/dockpack/BackpackConnection_routines_transitions.pdf)





## **SCHOOL READINESS TIP: BOOKS THAT WILL PREPARE FOR THE BIG DAY**



There's an exciting new school year about to begin and preschoolers going into kindergarten need to know what to expect. There are a number of great books about this important transition that you can read together with your child.

Check out this great list that experts say will help to calm those first day jitters! <https://www.startearly.org/post/books-for-kindergarteners/>

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH KINDNESS**

Recently we held a special provider appreciation event for our providers at Polk Theatre near our Lakeland office. Each preschool teacher received a Kindness Connections kit and **Highlights Magazine CEO Kent Johnson**, and our **CEO Marc Hutek Ed. D.** spoke in relation to the importance of preschoolers learning kindness. It also filled a need voiced by Polk County kindergarten teachers when asked what special areas of preparation their students needed most.

Topping the list was kindness. To help give you more ideas on how to promote more kindness with your children, we will be adding a monthly tip from Highlights Kindness Connections in our newsletter. We hope its lessons will build more paths to kindness!



**KINDNESS CONNECTIONS: BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS**



With a new school year beginning it's important to make new friends! Learning how to start a conversation with someone and connecting positively builds excellent social skills.

Click here for more ideas: <https://parents.highlights.com/heres-why-having-friends-boosts-kids-well-being>

**WANT MORE ELC NEWS?**



[Visit the ELC Newsroom](#)

**Have a photo or story you'd like to share with us?**

- Post to our [Facebook](#) page
- Direct Message us on [Instagram](#)
- Tag us on [Twitter](#) using **#ELCofPolk**



- Email pictures to [Belinda Kramer](#)



Early Learning Coalition of Polk County | 115 South Missouri Avenue Suite 201  
| Lakeland, FL 33815 US