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# The Heartbeat

EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

## MARCH HIGHLIGHTS AND IMPACT



## **Hello Spring - A Season of Growth and New Beginnings!**

Spring is in full bloom at the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County!

The **ELC of Polk**, believe that learning thrives when it extends beyond the classroom and becomes part of daily family life. We're excited to introduce our **Spring Family Engagement Challenge**, designed to inspire families to support learning at home. Put a spring in your step by **connecting** with your childcare program to explore volunteer opportunities or ways to participate in your child's school, strengthening learning outside the classroom and beyond!

Inside the March Heartbeat Edition, discover a variety of family engagement opportunities—from our **"Raising a Secure Child"** workshop to innovative tools like **MarcoPolo Learning** that help strengthen connections at home. In addition to community impact highlights, this edition is packed with ideas to keep you engaged and inspired. Read on to find out what's happening now and what's coming next!

Spring Forward,

The ELC of Polk Team

**OUR COMMUNITY AT WORK**

**Read Across America**



ELC of Polk celebrated **Read Across America** with **New Beginnings Preschool and Learning Center, LLC,**

a nationwide initiative promoted by the National Education Association (NEA) that encourages schools, libraries, educators, and communities across the country to celebrate reading and promote literacy.

The story "All People Are Beautiful" by Vincent Kelly sparked the children's imagination, as they acted out an expedition to the beach with their pictures and all their friends. A big thank you Nancy Vigil!



Curious about how children learn to read?

Click Here to learn more:

[LEARN MORE](#)

**Happy Birthday Dr.Seuss!**



### Social Media Event!

We had an incredible time celebrating with our early learning community through our “Dr. Seuss is on the Loose!” social media event. Childcare providers across Polk County were invited to tag their programs and share how they brought Dr. Seuss’s stories to life and the response was amazing!

From creative costumes to themed activities and engaging learning experiences, programs showcased the magic of early learning in action. *“Oh, the fun you will have”* with Dr. Seuss!

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

We had fun all around Polk County!



Our team connected with families throughout the community, bringing energy and creativity to a series of vibrant events. We celebrated with the famous **Jack Hartmann** at the **Haines City 4th Annual Children’s Literacy & Art Festival** and enjoyed the whimsical **Bunnyville Bash**, where the **Easter Bunny** delighted children and families alike.

## MarcoPolo Learning

**MarcoPolo Learning** for Families is an award-winning, app-based platform designed for children ages 3-7 to support early learning at home. Children enrolled in a VPK or Pre-K program receive a complimentary subscription through their classrooms, courtesy of the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County.

Reach out to your childcare provider to learn more about accessing MarcoPolo Learning.

Click below to visit the MarcoPolo Learning website.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Articles & Tips

### Ask a Teacher: How to Boost Parent Teacher Communication

This article emphasizes that strong communication between families and educators supports a child's success. By staying involved, asking questions, and keeping in touch,

### The Baby Brain Map – A guide to early development

Explains how a child's brain grows rapidly in the early years through everyday experiences and relationships. It highlights the importance of responsive

parents help build confidence and create consistent, supportive learning experiences at home and school.

[LEARN MORE](#)

caregiving, play, and interaction in building strong connections that support learning behavior and emotional development.

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### **Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University**

#### **5 Steps for Brain Building Serve and Return**

How can you help build a child's brain – even before they can talk? Simple “serve and return” responsive interactions between adults and young children help make strong connections in developing brains. This video shares five simple steps to practicing serve and return and shows adults and young children doing each step together.

**Watch the video below** for simple "serve and return" responsive interactions between adults and young children.

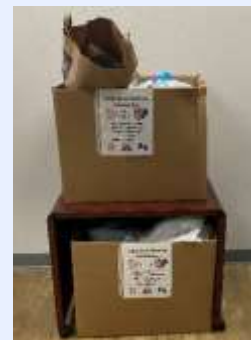


## KINDNESS IN ACTION

### ELC Polk March “Kindness” Team

Our **ELC Polk March “Kindness” Team** continued the organization's mission of spreading kindness across Polk County by turning small acts of generosity into meaningful support for our community. Team members collected and donated gently used clothing to **Talbot House Ministries**.

But the kindness didn't stop there. **The ELC of Polk March “Kindness” Team** shared Kindness Cards throughout the



community, simple reminders encouraging people to recognize and celebrate the good around them.

### Be Kind Polk Initiative: Investing in our Community



ELC of Polk is proud to support our community through volunteer opportunities with **United Way of Central Florida!**

By helping local food pantries and investing in families across Polk County.

A heartfelt thank you to **United Way of Central Florida** for creating meaningful ways to serve

and make impact.

### Looking to get involved?

**United Way of Central Florida** offers a variety of opportunities to invest in our community.



Click below to

**volunteer today!**

[LEARN MORE](#)

### **Kindness Begins at Home: "Kindness is my Superpower!"**

Here are some ways to **nurture** this theme in your home:

- Invite your child and their friends to create **kindness capes** or **badges**.
- Display a **poster** on your **refrigerator** that says, "kindness is our superpower."
- Be a **kindness helper** or **kindness ambassador**.
- **Questions!** "What can we do to help others – friends, family members, or people in our community?"
- Take pictures as they demonstrate "**Kindness is my Superpower!**"



## LOOKING AHEAD: APRIL

### **The Mission: Save Our Children Campaign - April 11th**

**ELC of Polk** is proud to support this organization and the meaningful work they do in our community.

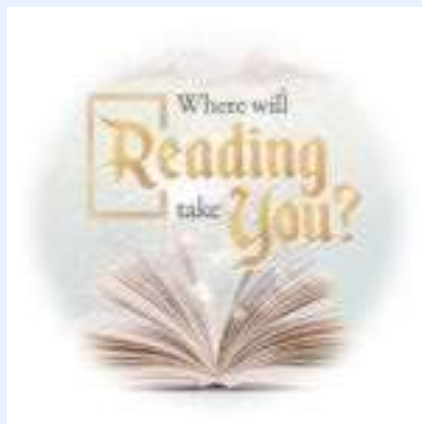
**Date: April 11th, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM**

**Location: 1725 Dr. Martin Luther King, Simpson Park Field, Lakeland, FL.**

Sponsored by Success Express Resource and Referral Inc. and the Paul A. Diggs Neighborhood Association.

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### **World of Reading – April 18th**



Each April, the **Junior League of Greater Lakeland** hosts **World of Reading at Barnett Park**, bringing stories to life through fun, literacy-filled experiences. What started over 12 years ago as a small family event now welcomes thousands of families each year, inspiring imagination and putting free books into the hands of children across our community.

This year, **ELC of Polk** is excited to share that we will be giving away family engagement backpacks to support literacy at home. We look forward to seeing everyone there!

[LEARN MORE](#)

### **Raising a Secure Child Workshop – April 23th & 28th**

Be sure to register for our upcoming **Raising a Secure Child Workshop**, a powerful training presented by Sheila Chambers, M.Ed., Mental Health Director, and Nancy Walker, Vice President of Instructional Services for the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County.

Participants will gain valuable insights into children's attachment needs and the Circle of Security model. Be sure to share this opportunity with family and friends and follow along on our **Facebook page** by liking our page as we continue to share insights and highlights leading up to the workshop.

**Click here to register (Winter Haven):**

**Click here to register (Lakeland):**

[LEARN MORE](#)

[LEARN MORE](#)

### **ELC of Polk Family Training Opportunities!**

**ELC of Polk** offers **family** training opportunities designed to build knowledge of child development in engaging and meaningful ways, through interactive, hands-on classes, families gain practical strategies to support their child's learning and growth at home. These fun and informative sessions empower families to feel confident, connected, and inspired!

**Click here for more information on Family Trainings:**

[LEARN MORE](#)

### **RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES**

#### **New Worlds Reading Program**

**New Worlds Reading** is Florida's free home literacy program for eligible VPK - 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Each month during the school year, eligible children receive a free book tailored to their interests with resources and activities for caregivers and children to use together. Books and materials are available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and braille. To be eligible, children must be VPK - 5th graders who are not yet meeting grade level expectations in reading in Florida VPK programs, public schools, and charter schools.

**Eligibility requirement:** Students in VPK who are yet making age-appropriate progress, identified by:

- Scoring below the 40th percentile on FAST Star Early Literacy (noted on Renaissance Star Parent Report),
- Or are exempt from taking FAST Star Early Literacy.

Click Here to Apply Today: [newworldsreading.com](http://newworldsreading.com).

Click here to access the NWR Family and Educator Literacy Resource Hub

<https://www.newworldsreading.com/en/resources/>

**Open the door to your child's success with High Quality Early Learning!**

♥ **School Readiness**

***Get them ready!***

School Readiness is an early learning program that helps working families and families attending school with childcare expenses while preparing children for school.

[LEARN MORE](#)

♥ **VPK Ready?**

**Let's Get YOU Enrolled!**

The application window is now open! Apply for VPK using the link

below to obtain your 2026 - 2027

VPK Certificate.

[LEARN MORE](#)

 **Childcare Resource & Referrals**

**(CCR&R)**

CCR&R is a service focused on helping families find quality childcare that fits their individual needs as well as providing referrals to other organizations.

[LEARN MORE](#)

**SAVE THE DATE: 6TH ANNUAL FAMILY FUN DAY!**



### **MISSION**

We will lead community efforts in supporting the success of children.

### **VISION**

Children will be prepared for school and life success.

### **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](#)
- Email pictures to [Layla Cribb](#)



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