



Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness Providers
A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral



Family Engagement Opportunities

Back to School Tips For Parents

A new school year can bring excitement, stress, and major changes to a family's routine. Children may be thinking about new teachers, heavier workloads, friendships, transportation, or simply waking up early again.

Parents and caregivers can ease the transition by preparing gradually and focusing on a few routines that support sleep, communication, organization, and emotional well-being. These back-to-school tips can help children of different ages begin the year feeling more prepared and supported.

- * Rebuild School Sleep Routines
- * Morning Schedule
- * Reset Technology Expectations
- * Create a Family Organizational System

To read the full article & see additional tips, please visit the website:
<https://wellspringprevention.org/blog/back-to-school-tips-for-parents/>



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ATTENTION HH READERS...

If you have a question, comment, or concern you would like addressed in an upcoming issue of *Helping Hands*, please send an e-mail to:

Brianna.Deosca@ecs4kids.org.

We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.

Thanks!
Brianna DeOsca
Editor



Raising Good Neighbors Jazmine Jackson, Education Specialist

Sources: <https://www.nationalgoodneighborday.org/>
<https://www.triplep-parenting.com/us/articles-and-news/post/in-this-together-benefits-of-community-for-parents-and-children/>
<https://www.friendshaverford.org/building-a-foundation-of-connection-why-community-matters-in-the-toddler-years-and-how-to-begin/>



Started in the Early 1970s, National Good Neighbor Day falls on September 28th this year. This initiative aims to encourage people to engage their neighbors with the goal of creating deeper community connections that help to create change and pursue the common good, right where we live. Let's explore some of the benefits of including our littlest learners in community engagement & what you can do this year to Be a Good Neighbor with your infants & toddlers.

Why Community Matters for Young Children

Children begin learning about relationships and belonging long before they enter elementary school. Through interactions with others, they develop empathy, communication skills, cooperation, and an understanding of their role within a larger community. Experiences with peers, neighbors, and trusted adults help infants and toddlers build confidence and resilience while fostering a sense of connection to the world around them.

By nurturing connections with neighbors, classmates, and community members, we help children develop the empathy and sense of belonging needed to become caring citizens. National Good Neighbor Day reminds us that even the smallest acts of kindness can help build stronger communities.

Engaging in Community in Your School Neighborhood

This year, take time to engage in some neighborly kindness around your school with the following suggestions:

- Take a school tour and encourage children to wave or say "hello"
- Place children near one another so they can interact with each other
- Create artwork to give out to other classes or send home with a classmate
- Make a classroom scrapbook – collect photos of your infants or toddlers engaging with one another in a book and regularly look at it with the children

CLASS Connections

Positive Climate: Foster relationships by initiating interactions between children and their peers. Encourage them to cooperate, share, and use respectful language like "Thank you" or "Please".

Facilitation of Learning & Development: Make connections between the neighbors in your school and children's neighborhoods where they live. Ask questions like, "We get our food at school from [Name], who do you get food from when you are at home?" or making statements like, "We have a classroom library to read in, and many neighborhoods have libraries where you can borrow books to take home".

Sources: [Preschool Children's Interest in Early Writing Activities and Perceptions of Writing Experience | The Elementary School Journal: Vol 121, No 1](#)
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.01.002EJ1321772.pdf> Promoting Early Writing Across the School Day
[Penpaloo – Virtual Penpals for Kids & Language Learning](#)

Parents and educators alike understand the importance of facilitating early writing experiences in Pre-K settings. But this month gives us a fun opportunity to make early writing even more impactful! September 1st is World Letter Writing Day and serves as an outstanding chance to make early writing meaningful for your students.

Making Meaning Matters

A 2020 study published by The University of Chicago reported that by integrating children's perspectives in learning, teachers will likely continue to develop children's writing skills, as well as their understanding of writing materials and processes and their interest in writing and further expand their reasons for engaging in writing in the first place. When writing is meaningful to young learners, they enjoy it more. Children benefit from learning about varied purposes for writing. However, early childhood educators tend to focus writing instruction on spelling and handwriting, but evidence suggests that teachers who support the act of composing have students with stronger writing and early literacy skills.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, when children are given opportunities to write in meaningful ways, they are learning that their voice is valued. Writing provides a gateway for sharing our ideas with the world, and this holds true for Pre-K learners as well.

Letter Writing Suggestions

Invite your learners to write letters to whomever they'd like. Some examples include loved ones, peers, community helpers, favorite athletes or TV/movie characters. Additionally, pen pal programs such as PenPaloo are available to connect your children with others around the world to share their letters.

Give your Pre-K learners a chance to engage in meaningful writing this Month by celebrating World Letter Writing Day!

CLASS Connections

Concept Development: Encourage creativity by having children think of different ways to create their letters. Ask questions like, "What materials will you need to make a stamp your letter?". Encourage problem solving and make connections to the real-world by asking things like, "What other ways can we communicate with others besides writing and sending a letter?".



Kids in the Kitchen Jazmine Jackson, Education Specialist

Sources: [National Kids Take Over the Kitchen Day](#)
[The Benefits of Including Kids in the Kitchen](#)

Founded in 2011 by the Young Chefs Academy, National Kids Take Over the Kitchen Day is celebrated on September 13th. This family holiday was created with a noble mission, to combat childhood health issues by teaching children about nutrition and healthy eating habits through hands-on cooking experiences.

Aside from being an essential life skill, cooking with children can result in numerous benefits. According to a study by the University of Glasgow and others, children who are involved in cooking are more likely to eat raw and cooked vegetables during mealtimes. Cooking also teaches many important skills, including fine-motor control and mathematical concepts such as measuring, counting, and fractions, while helping children build confidence and independence.

If you've never considered involving your child in the kitchen, you may be wondering where to begin. Here are a few age-appropriate cooking tasks that you can try out! Be sure to always provide close adult supervision and choose tasks that match your child's developmental abilities.

Ages 6–7 Years

- Crack eggs into a bowl
- Snap green beans
- Pound chicken
- Cut herbs or green onions with kitchen scissors



Ages 8–9 Years

- Beat eggs
- Check food temperature with food thermometer
- Juice fruits using a juicer
- Open cans with a can opener



Ages 10+ Years

- Slice and chop vegetables
- Boil pasta
- Simmer ingredients on stovetop
- Follow a recipe



With so many benefits and opportunities for hands-on learning, it's no wonder National Kids Take Over the Kitchen Day continues to be celebrated each year. Cooking together can help build confidence, healthy habits, academic skills, and lasting family memories. So, grab an apron, choose a recipe, and invite your young chef into the kitchen!

Scaffolding Instruction Through Universal Design for Learning

Robert Kozak, Child Development Specialist

Source: [Rock Your Classroom](#)



Scaffolding instruction and implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices help create accessible classrooms where every child has meaningful opportunities to learn and participate. Effective teachers recognize that children learn in different ways and at different rates, so they intentionally differentiate instruction to meet a wide range of developmental and learning needs. These differentiated strategies should be reflected in lesson plans and adjusted based on children's levels of participation and progress to ensure all children remain actively engaged in classroom activities.

Universal support begins with educators developing an understanding of children's individual strengths, abilities, and special needs. Educators can foster a welcoming classroom culture by discussing differences positively, introducing children to assistive technology, and providing accommodations such as extended time, modeling, specialized instructional materials, repeated instruction, and frequent feedback. These supports benefit not only children with identified needs but also many other learners in the classroom.

For children who require additional assistance, targeted supports can include the use of visual schedules, picture cues, symbols, first/then boards, and transition supports that promote independence and understanding of daily routines. Teachers can also adapt classroom materials for accessibility, present lessons in smaller, manageable segments, and use peer buddies to encourage social interaction and provide appropriate assistance during activities. These strategies help students successfully access the curriculum while building confidence and engagement.

Children with more intensive learning needs may require individualized interventions, including direct prompting, adaptive materials, behavior plans, and simplified task expectations. Breaking complex activities into fewer, more achievable steps allows children to experience success while continuing to build new skills. By consistently applying scaffolding and Universal Design for Learning principles, teachers create flexible, supportive learning environments that maximize participation, promote independence, and ensure every child has the opportunity to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Why Everyday Counts: The Impact of VPK Attendance to Future Success

Jazmine Jackson, Education Specialist

Sources: [VPK Data Packet 2024-2025 Program Year Kindergarten-Longitudinal-Evaluation-Final-1.29.20-1.pdf](#)



With it only being September and VPK having just kicked off, kindergarten readiness may not be on your mind just yet. However, there is a major boost you can provide your child when it comes to their academic success – regular VPK attendance. September is Attendance Awareness Month, so what better time than now to dive into the statistics and learn about the impact of consistent attendance in VPK.

Data collected by the FLDOE and reported in the 2024-2025 VPK Data Packet shows evidence that completing a VPK program plays an important role in children's kindergarten readiness. But did you know that 70% of VPK completers score at or above Level 3 on 3rd grade ELA testing compared to only 49.5% of students who did not attend VPK? Completing VPK can have a lasting impact on your child's future success in school.

This same VPK Data Packet includes information on the frequency of attendance and its effect on kindergarten readiness. Students who attend at least 90% of their VPK program days achieve kindergarten readiness on their final STAR assessment at a rate approximately 3 percentage points higher than students with attendance rates between 70% and 89%. Kindergarten readiness is not only predictive of elementary school success, but there is also evidence it can predict academic success through high school! In a longitudinal study conducted by Cincinnati Public Schools, students who were ready for kindergarten were **118%** more likely to graduate on time compared to students who were not ready.

Despite these measured benefits, only 50% of VPK students in the 2024-2025 school year attended 90% or more of their program hours. September may be early in the VPK year, but this is the perfect time to start thinking about your child's attendance as a means of boosting their future academic success. Families can support strong attendance by establishing consistent morning routines, scheduling appointments outside of program hours when possible, and communicating with their child's VPK provider when challenges arise.

International Literacy Day Jazmine Jackson, Education Specialist

Sources: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/literacy>
https://www.uab.edu/medicine/peds/images/NBFU/Dev_Milestones_of_early_literacy_ROR.pdf

Since 1967, International Literacy Day, celebrated each year on September 8, has highlighted the importance of literacy in creating more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable communities. While literacy skills continue to develop throughout life, the foundation begins in the earliest years. Understanding key early literacy milestones can help families and educators support a lifelong love of reading and learning.

Infants & Toddlers: First Steps Toward Literacy

Even before children can speak, they are developing important literacy skills. Infants and toddlers may reach for books, explore them by touching or mouthing them, look at pictures, point to familiar objects, and bring books to adults to read. As they grow, they begin turning pages, recognizing favorite pictures, and responding to questions such as, "Where's the dog?"

How adults can help:

- Follow children's cues for when they want to continue or stop reading.
- Point to and name pictures, objects, and actions.
- Allow children to explore and control the book.
- Keep reading sessions flexible to match toddlers' short attention spans.

Pre-K and Beyond: Preparing for Reading Success

Preschool-aged children continue building literacy skills through repeated exposure to books and language. They often develop favorite stories, begin retelling familiar books, connect pictures to text, listen to longer stories, and show increasing interest in letters and print. Many children also enjoy pretending to read and using their finger to follow text on a page.

How adults can help:

- Incorporate books and reading into daily routines.
- Connect stories to children's real-life experiences.
- Provide opportunities for drawing, writing, and storytelling.
- Ask open-ended questions such as, "What do you think is happening?"
- Encourage children to tell and create their own stories.

Early literacy begins long before children read independently. Through shared reading, conversations, songs, rhymes, and opportunities to explore books, families and educators help children develop the skills needed for future reading success. This International Literacy Day, let's celebrate the vital role we all play in nurturing young learners and fostering a lifelong love of literacy.

T.E.A.C.H

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program funded by the Florida Office of Early Learning provides scholarships for early childhood teachers and facility/family home directors to work toward earning a degree in early childhood education (Associate, Bachelor's, or Master's), an Infant-Toddler Certificate, Florida Staff Credential, Director Credential, National CDA Assessment, or credential renewals.

Your T.E.A.C.H. scholarship will cover the majority of the cost of tuition and books, a per semester student access stipend, a tiered bonus structure for degree-seeking scholars, and much more!

Contact our office today at 877-FL TEACH (877-358-3224) to see how T.E.A.C.H. can work for you.

<https://teach-fl.org/>



**For CDA information and
questions, please contact
Danesha Davis, Professional
Development Coordinator
904-726-1500 ext.2299
904-536-2119 (cell)**

Local Professional Development Opportunities (Training Calendar)

To register for one of our great training opportunities, please visit our website:

<https://www.ecs4kids.org/programs/regional-training-institute/>

Click on the registration link to see a list of available courses.

Click on a course and follow the directions for registration and payment.

The website provides a list of trainings and descriptions offered each quarter.



VPK Corner Sarah March, Contract Coordinator

VPK FAST Reminders for the 26-27 program year

- * The testing must be completed during the providers VPK instructional hours.
- * Ensure that all children are enrolled within a reasonable time frame of their start date as it takes 24-48 hours for the information to update in Renaissance.
- * Generate the STAR Test Activity report using the Custom Dates so that the correct information will show for the specific PM Window. (If you need directions for this, please email VPK@ecs4kids.org and I will be happy to email them to you.)
- * Parents are to be given the parent letter within 7 days of the child being tested.
- * Keep a copy of the parent letter and documentation that the parent received the letter within the 7 days at your facility (for 5 years) as these may be requested at a later date for monitoring.
- * Generate the STAR Test Activity report prior to the end of your PM window to ensure all children have been tested or marked as non-participating if applicable.
- * Once the PM window has ended generate the STAR Test Activity report and keep it on file at your facility (for 5 years) as this may be requested at a later date for monitoring.
- * If you have any questions regarding the VPK FAST Testing, please email Roushawn (Shawn) Saunders at VPK@ecs4kids.org Or call 904-726-1500 ext 2241

Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford)

Ext. 2227 (Putnam, St. Johns)

Do you have a concern about the health, development, disability, or special needs of a child? If so, call the Warm Line. The purpose of the warm line is to provide advice to child care personnel concerning strategies, curriculum, and environmental adaptations that allow a child to derive maximum benefit from the child care experience.

