Building a better reader

The day they will get their caps and gowns may seem far off, but those open faces and minds will be filled soon enough.

And the most important groundwork for their academic progress is laid before they step through a schoolhouse door. When people talk about education reform, a lot of that energy is focused on K-12.

“The longer I’m in this business, the more I am convinced that to solve this community’s challenges long-term, it will begin long before a student walks in a school door,” says Escambia schools Superintendent Malcolm Thomas.

State Rep. Clay Ingram, who also is the new president of the Greater Pensacola Chamber of Commerce, says workforce development begins long before career academies or community colleges.

“The focus has to be on early education,” Ingram says. “In the third installment of the Studer Community Institute’s education report, we look at the growing body of research that supports the importance of early learning, the importance of getting parents involved in that process at all ages and at two programs working now in the Pensacola metro area to help bridge that gap.”

The Class of 2028 are preschoolers now

INSIDE

Do you know the answers?

Sample questions from the Florida Standards Assessment test

Pensacola Education Report

This is the third of a three-part report on local education by the staffs of the Studer Community Institute and PensacolaToday.com

ONLINE

To read more

Visit PensacolaToday.com or StuderCommunityInstitute for parts 1 and 2
It showed how children learn to recognize letters, read words and comprehend what they see on a page.

Sandy Lyons reads to VPK students at Trinity Learning Center daycare. Preschoolers last year participated in the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University.

Her high profile earned her an invitation to a White House summit on early learning.

“We must have for years. Every story, every day, whatever it is,” she says. “We’ve created an environment where parents feel invited to our school.” It didn’t happen overnight at Oakcrest Elementary School, which got a school grade of F in 2010. Former Principal Danny Wilson worked to change the culture at Oakcrest, which earned an A in 2011 after years of gradual, steady improvement.

One thing that helped Oakcrest was having a family and community liaison on campus. This year, that job belongs to Rodney Ford. In his position, Ford does everything from helping parents fill out insurance paperwork to walking a child from his home to school to making sure he gets there. Oakcrest and Global Learning Academy are the only two pre-kindergarten elementary schools with a F like Ford’s.

“I have found that at Oakcrest, my position is needed,” Ford says. “I would hesitate to say what another school needs, because I don’t know their needs. But my day is full.”

The first step is to build among parents who may not have had the best school experiences themselves. Because like all good educators, he knows that getting a parent engaged in a child’s learning is a critical component of making that child succeed in school. “If they have a bad experience, it can be hard to overcome,” Ford says. “But I would say that as true not just for our parents, but for most parents.”

Often the foundation of strong parent involvement is laid in early childhood. Yet, for years, early learning has been neglected in parlor games as viewed as a less-professional than traditional K-12 schooling in the conversation about improving our education system. That, experts say, has changed.

“That’s the whole point — 0 to 5 is the most important,” says Donna Schuett, a pediatric surgeon at the University of Chicago Medical School. Eighty-four percent of your brain is grown at that time. It is the basis of everything that comes after.

Sukied leads the Thirty Million Words Initiative, a group that leads research into how young children acquire language — and what strategies can help their parents become better teachers.

“Anything we could do to promote literacy, I fully support,” she says. “In kindergarten readiness scores, Trinity Learning Center typically scores in the high fives and sixes. There were children at the center who Skipik behaviors could have benefited from the extra intervention the researchers offered. Of 30 children, only the parents of eight or nine agreed to participate. “I don’t know if they didn’t understand it, or if they didn’t want to,” Shirk says. “It could only help your child, and you don’t get that kind of expertise brought to you on a plate essentially.”

Students who did participate got extra help through weekday, one-on-one visits or small groups working on reading comprehension and listening skills.

The researcher would read a story with a small group, and ask the children questions about what she had read to gauge what they remembered about the story and how they put that information in context.

Because the overall study is not complete, Shirk has not heard from the researchers how her students fared. But she is eager to see the results.

“I would love to know and see what happened, so that we can know what we are doing right and what areas we found that we can do better in,” she says. “People just don’t see it.”

The challenge of bringing parents to the table is one that Bruce Watson knows.

Watson is executive director of the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties. He recalls visiting a school and asking if there were any parents participating in the study.

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Anna Kay Shirk has been director of Trinity Learning Center for nine years. She also has six years of work experience with Title I’s early learning programs for the Escambia County School District. She jumped at the chance to participate in the study.

Watson said getting parents to part-icipate in after-school events has been “problematic at best.” The coalition used to host parent involvement events once a month or so, but attendance was too poor, they stopped.

“I think our efforts are going to have to increase,” Watson says. “One of the traits of people who see reliable on our services is ability to do the things we are talking about. That doesn’t mean you can’t endeavor to try... because every child cared worth saving to the key.”

The School Readiness program offers unsubsidized day care as long as the parent works at least 30 hours a week and makes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level, which for a family of four is $49,000 a year.

The coalition has 115 School Readiness providers under contract.

Watson says getting into churches, community centers and similar places to help young parents get the skills they need — and may lack — is crucial.

“From 1 to 4 that’s where we’re losing ground,” Thomas says. “These language development, their vocabulary, that is the key.”

He recalled visiting a school and asking if there were any parents participating in the study.

Ashley Bolmar hurried through a worksheet without referring to the word- paper study that Finkin's group does its name from.
“Putting a child in front of a TV is not the equivalent of interaction with a live human being,” Bodmar says. “Differences in vocabulary are evident as early as the first year.”

Bodmar is executive director ECARE — Every Child a Reader in Eastside. The nonprofit was launched in 2006-07 by the business community to help get kids ready for school.

ECARE works with childcare centers in the neighborhood that feed into Global Grownup. “We try on them to help 120 kids this school year. The goal for next year is 200,” Bodmar says.

Brenda Dean, owner and director of Come Into Me Little Children preschool on T Street, told ECARE volunteers at the group’s annual breakfast that ECARE’s work with her center has helped her do so much more for her students.

“Without ECARE, I just don’t understand how I would be able to get the kids what they need in order to improve their vocabulary and phonological awareness,” Dean says.

ECARE’s influence has even changed the kind of Christmas presents that Dean gives to kids.

“A list of toys,” she says — and I’ve been guilty of this in the past — we will buy a toy before we buy a book, but that has changed.”

Dean says she now gives kids a book to read or a gift card to buy a book because we want to make a difference.

Back at Oakcrest, creating a culture of family involvement remains a work in progress. “We are just getting our feet wet,” Bonifay says.

The school has 700 students this year, including four preschool classes, two of which serve kids with special needs.

That means going to parents where they are to help schedule appointments to get kids gloves or go to the doctor, hosting regular family nights at school that then include dinner, even hosting parent-teacher conferences at football or basketball games if needed.

“Our families struggle in the school environment,” Bonifay says. “When they were in school, they may not have had a good experience and they struggle with the jobs that they have.”

But Bodmar and her staff never stop trying to build those bridges, especially among the parents of their youngest students.

“The pre-kindergarten teacher meet with the parents often,” Bonifay says. “Early Literacy that’s what I call it. We want parents to read to their children, to have conversations with them.”

Suskind says the impact of the absence of those early literacy skills can seem almost invisible, but it has lifelong consequences.

“People just don’t see it,” Suskind says. “It’s long in the mind; it’s long in the environment, 0 to 3-year-olds look the same. They smile, they react, you can’t just make them learn to talk, talk to them. It’s developing the language for school and the brain connections for school that don’t develop as quickly.”

**The 30 Million Word Gap**

Batty Hart and Todd Risley’s project followed 42 families in three income levels for three years to record the number of words spoken to children in those households.

The key findings

- Children from all three groups of families started to speak around the same time and developed good structure and use of language.

- Children in professional families heard an average of 1.25 million words per hour in the first year. That’s more than what children from welfare-recipient families heard an average of 500,000 words per hour. That’s the difference between poor and middle-class kids:

  - Children in professional families heard an average of 2,153 words per hour, while children in working-class families heard an average of 1,381 words per hour.

  - Children in welfare-recipient families heard an average of 11 million words, while children in working-class families heard an average of 6 million words and children in welfare families.

**SOURCE:** http://www.strategiesforfamilies.org/earlyresearch/aurora走过/Content/3-MeaningfulDifferences.pdf

‘Apes it to you more important than the voluntary, pre-kindergarten, says,” she says. “The number of 30 million words — makes a good headline. But Suskind says what the initiative does is about more than the number.

“Our research program is based on strong science that shows that parents are the foundation of language development,” she adds. “We call ourselves Thirty Million Words because that’s the thing that get people’s attention. But it’s more about quality of the interaction between parent and child than it is about the number. Interaction with children is the food for the developing brain.”

The initiative works with families to teach parents the skills they need to be better teachers themselves. That includes things like The 3Ts: Tune In (to what their children say); Talk More (to your child using rich vocabulary to build the number of words they hear); Take Turns (have a conversation with your child and actively listen to them when they try to talk to you).

The initiative’swebsite features testimonials from parents who have gone through the program.

One mom, identified in a video testimonial, says she has found the importance of stretching with things that intelligence is something you learn.

Frenald, whose findings show that intervention in working-class families can be more effective than intervention in professional families, Suskind says. “One mom, identified in a video testimonial, says she has found the importance of stretching with things that intelligence is something you learn.”

One mom, identified in a video testimonial, says she has found the importance of stretching with things that intelligence is something you learn.”

She says, “I think too often people don’t realize that intelligence is something you develop, it’s not something you’re born with.”

“You have to develop; based on interactions from parents and caregivers,” Suskind says. “We believe you really need to be able to measure differences,” Suskind says.

“Unless you can show that you are making it better, you are just continuing a program that is belied development. We want to be able to show what works and, if something doesn’t work, throw it out and move on to something that will.”

The Thirty Million Word Million Words program.

It’s “an opportunity to make a difference,” Suskind says.

“With all 0- to 3-year-olds look the same. They smile, they react, you can’t just make them learn to talk, talk to them. It’s developing the language for school and the brain connections for school that don’t develop as quickly.”

**The more children hear, the more they learn**
1. Which is 78 rounded to the nearest ten?
   A. 80
   B. 75
   C. 80
   D. 100

2. Which decimal is greater than 0.8?
   A. 0.70
   B. 0.75
   C. 8.80
   D. 0.85

3. A bakery uses 48 pounds of flour every 28 days. It orders flour every 28 days. Create an equation that shows how many pounds of flour the bakery needs to order every 28 days.

4. Create a multiplication expression that you could use to find the area of this model.
   - A: 0.70
   - B: 0.75
   - C: 8.80
   - D: 0.85

5. Choose the correct equation of d = 13 + 12 remainder 2.
   - A: (1+3)+8
   - B: (1+3)+18
   - C: 6+4+4
   - D: 6+8
   - E: 8+40

6. Which is another way to represent 48?
   A. 4×6+6
   B. 4×(6+4)
   C. (4+6)×6
   D. 40+8

7. Create a multiplication expression that you could use to find the area of this model.
   - A: 80
   - B: 70
   - C: 75
   - D: 80
   - E: 90

8. What is the dividend, d?
   - A: 0.70
   - B: 0.75
   - C: 8.80
   - D: 0.85

9. What is the total area, in square units, of the model?
   - A: 0.70
   - B: 0.75
   - C: 8.80
   - D: 0.85

10. Draw a line from each tool you select to the box.
    - A: 0.70
    - B: 0.75
    - C: 8.80
    - D: 0.85

The FCAT is history. The FSA is here to stay. The Florida Standards Assessment is the new standardized test to measure progress and proficiency under the state’s high-stakes accountability system. The Florida Department of Education selected the nonprofit, American Institutes for Research, to produce the test.

We wanted to give readers a sample of the kinds of questions that third- and fourth-graders will be asked when they take the FSA. The FSA is administered in paper and pencil. Students who learn this way can use a calculator, too.

Before the Internet, children in remote places and teacher use a camera, too. To measure progress and proficiency is the new standardized test that third- and fourth-graders will be asked to take. They got their lessons in the mail, did their homework, but they were hundreds of miles apart. They were taught using the radio. Every day at a certain time, everyone is together all at once.

Today, students who live far away from their teacher have classes on the Internet. In some online classrooms, a classroom full of kids can use a special computer program at the same time as the teacher. The students can live in one country, and the teacher can be located in a different country. Still, it’s just like a classroom at your school. The teacher can reach everyone.

It is also possible for students to live in different places and be a part of an online class together. Each person goes to a website for the class he or she is taking. Students who can’t leave home, students who want to take a class they can’t take nearby—all they need is a computer and an Internet connection and they’re good to go!

Online Learning helps students who live far away from their teacher have classes on the Internet. In some online classrooms, a classroom full of kids can use a special computer program at the same time as the teacher. The students can live in one country, and the teacher can be located in a different country. Still, it’s just like a classroom at your school. The teacher can reach everyone.

Online classes can be held whenever is best for the teacher and students. Sometimes, they don’t have to have a class where everyone is together all at once. There are classes where all the materials are posted on the website and students can use them when they need to. They can write questions and turn in their assignments. They can check back later to see if the teacher has left answers or comments on their work. No one ever actually "meets" anyone face-to-face, even if it’s just with a web-camera. Many college classes are taught this way.

Online Learning is an exciting part of life. Learning can happen anywhere. There are kids who learn at a school, kids who live at home and some kids who learn online. Students who learn this way use their computers and the Internet to connect to online classrooms. They use a computer connected to their home computer to let the teacher and other students see them. They can see their teacher and classmates on their screens when their classmates and teacher use a camera, too.

2. Before the Internet, children in remote places sometimes had classes over the radio or used the mail to get lessons and return them. For example, in the past, children who lived in distant parts of Australia were taught using the radio. Every day at a certain time, everyone is together all at once. Today, students who live far away from their teacher have classes on the Internet. In some online classrooms, a classroom full of kids can use a special computer program at the same time as the teacher. The students can live in one country, and the teacher can be located in a different country. Still, it’s just like a classroom at your school. The teacher can reach everyone.

E. Students in the same class should live close to each other.

F. They can check back later to see if the teacher has left answers or comments on their work.

G. Everyone can see and hear everything that’s being said as it happens.

H. The Internet connection and they’re good to go!

I. Kids can ask questions.

J. They can check back later to see if the teacher has left answers or comments on their work.

K. Students use the mail to receive and send work.

L. They got their lessons in the mail, did their homework.

M. Everyone can see and hear everything that’s being said as it happens.

N. The Florida Department of Education selected the nonprofit, American Institutes for Research, to produce the test.

O. Students in the same class should live close to each other.

P. No one ever actually “meets” anyone face-to-face, even if it’s just with a web-camera.

Q. Many college classes are taught this way.

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U. E. Students in the same class should live close to each other.

V. Everyone can see and hear everything that’s being said as it happens.

W. Online classes can be held whenever is best for the teacher and students.

X. No one ever actually “meets” anyone face-to-face, even if it’s just with a web-camera.

Y. Many college classes are taught this way.

Z. Today, students who live far away from their teacher have classes on the Internet.

Draw a line from each tool you select to the box.

Find the answers online

For the answers, you’ll have to go online to www.pensacoladaily.com
Leah Flood watches as her son, Ethan Arnold, 10, reads to his sister, Aaida Flood, 2, during the ECARE Family Night at Global Learning Academy.

Earthly Early literacy coach Melissa Leonard with Vivek Read reads to Monica Wilhem, pre-K class at Global Learning Academy after books were donated by ECARE.
IMAGINATION STATION

The Imagination Station is open to the public at the Community Maritime Park on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 9 a.m. to noon. Tuesdays and Thursdays often have time set aside for special community groups to use the station.

She also has been invited to speak about the project at an annual PBS meeting in Austin to May.

“Parents are so grateful, we voted instead of them bringing their friends, it’s a good feeling,” Hubbs says. “It’s also good because it makes people realize what WSRE does. Our mission is education. We’re committed to our community and it’s just a great way to showcase that.”

A needed community resource

Educational groups with a focus on early intervention and children with special needs are regular visitors at the center, including Autism Pensacola and Capstone Academy.

Allen tutors special education preschool class at Capstone Academy. Many of her students have autism spectrum disorders.

“I love that it’s very similar to a classroom setting,” Ila says. “They have educational toys and books. They love the touchscreen computer with the interactive games.”

Ila plans a trip to Imagination Station once a quarter so parents have time to be involved. She says the time is invaluable.

“If a parent comes, it allows for more one-on-one time,” Ila says. “They learn it and the children have a difficult time learning.”

That is music to Hubbs’ ears.

“There’s no better feeling,” Hubbs says. “That’s really what it’s all about the importance of the early years and just seeing that interaction.”

Growing commitment to lifelong learning

Richard Roselli often brings his 3-year-old granddaughter, Gracie, to Imagination Station. Gracie says one of her favorite things to do is play on the computer.

“I think it’s a place that parents can enjoy too,” Roselli says. “I usually see three or four families with one or two children each time we visit.”

The center is not just a safe, fun place for young children to learn, it helps WSRE fulfill its commitment to learning at all ages.

Parenting skills workshops have been hosted there. Teachers have had continuing education sessions. Schools have contacted Hubbs about hosting family literacy nights at the center. Pensacola State College has hosted financial literacy workshops for adults there and plans call for more similar events.

The center’s fun, nonthreatening atmosphere makes it a safe space for lifelong learning, including continuing education classes, adult-baby courses, parenting skills, even GED classes, Hubbs says.

With more support, she says the program could be expanded.

“It’s limited in Pensacola,” Hubbs says. “We just need to do more things to invest in young children. It would be global, but it’s the truth. The children are the future and a solid foundation in early childhood is the most important thing for success in school.”

Grace Germain, 3, visits with her grandfather, Richard Roselli, at the WSRE Imagination Station.

Pensacola Metro Report

In August 2014, the Studer Community Institute produced the Pensacola Metro Report. This 64-page publication used data from the University of West Florida’s Office of Economic Development and Engagement to provide a snapshot of the two county areas: economic, educational and social well-being. The report used that data as the underpinning for a series of stories that looked at the progress parents for story work has made in the last 20 years, and examined the challenges that continue to face our community.

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Springtime in Florida means one thing — FCAT

But this year, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test — the test used to measure students’ learning gains and to evaluate teachers’ performance — has been largely superceded by a statewide assessment designed to measure student performance in the Common Core-themed curriculum. Four FCAT schools have been using in recent years.

As Florida schools turn to the next test, [the test used to measure students’ learning gains] and to evaluate teachers’ performance, it is the test that it is used to be.

The report used that data as the underpinning for a series of stories that looked at the progress parents for story work has made in the last 20 years, and examined the challenges that continue to face our community.