



Investing in School Readiness

READY!

Nominate an extraordinary educator. Details on page 3.

News for Early Childhood Educators • Winter 2009

Fifth Annual Symposium Examines the Hard Work of Play

On Saturday, April 25, 2009, Fairfax Futures, Fairfax County's Office for Children and Fairfax County Public Schools will host the Fifth Annual School Readiness Symposium at the Fairfax County Government Center. This year, the topic will be the role of play in supporting children's school readiness. Featured speakers include Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play, and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, nationally known expert on child development.

Essential to Development

With a background in medicine and psychiatry, Brown has just published *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens*

the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul. His research has shown him that play is a vital state of being which can be accessed and used by children and adults alike. Play, according to Brown, is as important to humans as vitamins or sleep. He educates organizations, corporations, universities and policymakers about the importance of play in everyone's lives and about the unexpected, serious consequences that occur when play is neglected.

Play Equals Learning

Golinkoff holds the H. Rodney Sharp Chair in the School of Education at the University of Delaware, directs the Infant Language Project and conducts



Stuart Brown and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff

research on play. She asserts that children will learn best when learning is embedded in a playful context. Among the books she has written or co-authored are *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool* (reviewed on page 2), *PLAY = LEARNING* and *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards*.

While there is no charge to attend the symposium, pre-registration is required. Invitations will be mailed in March. For the latest information, please visit www.fairfax-futures.org.

New Guide Smooths Road to Kindergarten

"Paving the Way to Kindergarten" helps early childhood educators in child care, preschool and elementary school programs to work together to support children's transition to kindergarten. Drawing on the experiences of four neighborhood school readiness teams in Fairfax County, as well as on national research, the guide offers best practices that can be used to support the transition to kindergarten for children and their families. The guide includes a community calendar and tips on ways that educators can:

- ▶ Reach out to link with families and early childhood settings.
- ▶ Reach backward in time to establish links before the first day of school.

As the guide notes: "Creating community relationships, assuring continuity of support for children and families, and partnering with parents during the early years and early grades can increase the odds that children will experience early and sustained success in school and beyond."



"Paving the Way to Kindergarten" can be downloaded at www.fairfax-futures.org.

Read more about neighborhood school readiness teams on page 5.

New Grant Supports School Readiness Project for 2009

Virginia's definition of school readiness, which highlights the importance of ready children, ready families, ready schools and ready communities, could be the motto for Fairfax County's Neighborhood School Readiness project. Each of the communities currently participating is in various stages of joint planning and shared professional development activities. Each brings together child care, preschool and elementary school programs, as well as other neighborhood or county resources that can help support school readiness. All work toward providing a smoother transition to kindergarten for children and their families.

This year's activities have been made possible in part by a new grant to Fairfax Futures from the Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative. Established by the Washington Area Women's Foundation, the collaborative is supported and



Smoothing the transition are (l to r): Kathy Dinnison, St. Mark's Montessori School and Day Care Center; Helen Luk, Lynbrook Elementary School; and Gayle Gregoire, St. Christopher's Preschool.

directed by corporate funders and local and national foundations. Transition teams will work on capturing additional information about the number of families attending kindergarten orientation, the number of children visiting school before entering kindergarten and changes in parents' understanding of the kindergarten transition experience for young children.

"This project helps to ensure that our children enter kindergarten

well prepared for success," noted Vera Steiner Blore, executive director of Fairfax Futures. "When that happens, our whole community benefits."

Fairfax County's Neighborhood School Readiness project is coordinated by the county's Office for Children and Fairfax County Public Schools, working in partnership with Fairfax Futures.

Transition Teams

Participating neighborhoods as of March 2009 feed into the following elementary schools:

- ▶ Annandale Terrace
- ▶ Centre Ridge
- ▶ Freedom Hill
- ▶ Hollin Meadows
- ▶ Hybla Valley
- ▶ Lake Anne
- ▶ Lynbrook
- ▶ Providence

Learning Begets Learning

It's a given: Education is most effective when it ensures that learning builds from one year to the next. The good news is that at least 30 states now have coordination initiatives that encompass education from the preschool years through college or graduate programs. But according to a policy brief by the Foundation for Child Development, the not-so-good news is that many of these initiatives focus on the "back-end" of the learning continuum as students graduate and seek employment in the work force.

In this report, "The Case for Investing in PreK-3rd Education," author and educator Rima Shore contends that coordinated, enhanced learning opportunities every year for 3- and 4-year-olds through third grade offers the best chance for raising achievement.

Attaining this coherence and sustained quality won't be easy. "As things stand, [p]rekindergarten and elementary-grade teachers tend to work in isolation from one another," Shore writes. "They have few (if any) opportunities to work cooperatively."

Build a Network

The report advocates collaborative efforts among early childhood educators. "When teachers work together across grades and levels, the links become more explicit and children benefit.... The goal is not to push down academic work or assessments into the [p]rekindergarten or [k]inder-garten years. Rather, it is to identify and enhance the connections between the different activities and expectations that can be found in different grades and classrooms."

Shore heads the Educational Leadership Department at Bank Street College of Education. The foundation's report may be found at www.fcd-us.org.



Which Educator Will You Nominate?

Fairfax Futures plans to honor three early childhood educators who make an extraordinary effort to help children and their families forge a successful transition to kindergarten. The winners of this year's School Readiness Educator Award will be announced at the Fifth Annual School Readiness Symposium on April 25. The deadline for nominations is April 13, 2009.

Do you know of a family child care provider, a child care center or preschool teacher or administrator, or an elementary school teacher or principal who has demonstrated exceptional support for children and their families in preparation for that first day at school? If so, then please download a nomination form at www.fairfax-futures.org.



Operators Are Standing By

Well, not exactly. But we are interested in what you would like to see in future issues of *Ready!* Are you interested in more articles on research and other early learning resources? What about more information on professional development opportunities around the community? Or other readiness-related programs in Fairfax County? Send your e-mail to info@fairfax-futures.org. Thanks!

Stay Informed with Fairfax Futures' E-News

Fairfax Futures now offers a bi-monthly electronic newsletter that features current information on early learning and school readiness. The next issue will be devoted to the relationship between school readiness and play. To sign up, go to www.fairfax-futures.org.

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Ready-to-use Resources

The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally

David Elkind, Da Capo Press, 2007

Most early childhood educators have encountered what the media calls “hyperparenting.” Though the term is applied to a variety of behaviors, it most commonly refers to a tendency for some parents to groom their children for academic success in ways that may not always be developmentally appropriate. While flash cards

and computer programs may have their place in early education, Elkind writes, they are often overemphasized at the expense of creative, imaginative play.

An emeritus professor of psychology at Tufts University, Elkind bases his arguments on several decades of professional experience and observation. Children, he says, learn best when they are allowed to be children—that is, to engage in the kind of free, unrestricted, “natural” play that has characterized childhood for centuries. To well-intentioned parents worried that such play is not “productive,” Elkind provides comfort and reassurance, as well as practical strategies for encouraging children’s natural creativity and joy. Those strategies include:

- ▶ Limiting the use of MP3 players and other electronic entertainment.
- ▶ De-emphasizing competitive athletics (but not physical activity).
- ▶ Using humor to reduce the anxieties at the root of hyperparenting.

Though its findings resemble those of *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool*, Elkind’s book is aimed at the general public and contains less reference material. Early childhood educators will nevertheless find much of value in what the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* calls “an easy and enjoyable read.”

A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence

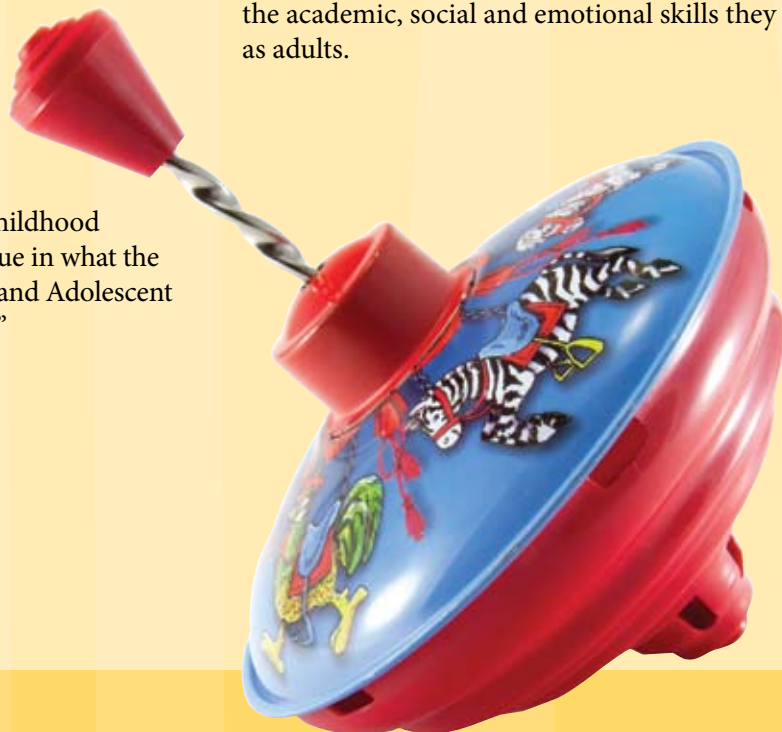
Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Laura E. Berk and Dorothy G. Singer, Oxford University Press, 2008

Amid the increasing emphasis on standards and assessment in preschool education, are policymakers losing sight of the value of play? This book, by four distinguished investigators in the field, suggests that they are. After reviewing decades of research, the authors conclude that “children need both unstructured free play and playful learning under the gentle guidance of adults to best prepare them for entrance into formal school.”

Among the authors’ other findings:

- ▶ “Drill-and-practice” does not engage young children in developmentally beneficial ways.
- ▶ By neglecting play, many preschools are no longer teaching “the whole child.”
- ▶ It is a mistake to distinguish between play and learning.

The authors do not dispute the need for assessment. They argue, however, that “the current emphasis on assessment in higher grades” has prompted preschools across the country to limit play in favor of flash cards and other drills. This shift, in their view, neglects the growing evidence that it is through play, not “work,” that young children gain the academic, social and emotional skills they will need as adults.



West Group Invests in School Readiness

West Group—a full-service real estate development company in Tysons Corner and throughout the Washington, DC, metropolitan area—continues to support early childhood education as a business partner in the *School Readiness Network*.

“If children come to school curious about the world and with a passion for learning, they are more likely to be successful in school and throughout their adult lives,” said Keith Turner, senior vice president of the company. “Joining the *School Readiness Network* as a business partner allowed West Group to demonstrate its support for quality early childhood education.”

Turner added: “West Group has always understood the importance to Fairfax County of having the best schools and educational programs for all ages. Business investment in education helps increase the opportunities for students’ success in school and beyond. It is also



in the self-interest of Northern Virginia companies to sustain a strong economic climate and quality of life here, [which] will encourage continued business investment and economic development in our region.”

Founded in 1962, West Group encourages its employees to serve in the community in a volunteer capacity. The company has also provided support to a variety of educational institutions and programs in the region. Among them are College Access Fairfax (Fairfax Scholarship Fund), Fairfax Education Foundation, George Mason University, Marymount University, Marshall High School, McLean High School, Northern Virginia Community College Education Foundation, PHILLIPS Programs, The Virginia College Fund and Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges. Information on West Group may be found at www.west-group.com.

Members of the *School Readiness Network*

AAUW (Fairfax City Branch) ■ ACCA Child Development Center ■ Almost Home Family Childcare ■ Annandale Christian Community for Action ■ **Apple Federal Credit Union** ■ Arts Council of Fairfax County ■ Black Women United for Action ■ **Boeing** ■ Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington, Fairfax County ■ Burke Child Care Connection ■ **Capital One** ■ Children’s Science Center ■ **Cox Communications, Northern Virginia** ■ Creative Play School ■ **Deloitte** ■ Devotion to Children ■ **Dominion Virginia Power** ■ Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce ■ Equal Footing Foundation ■ Fairfax City School Board ■ Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce ■ Fairfax County Child Care Advisory Council ■ Fairfax County Council of PTAs ■ Fairfax County Department of Community and Recreation Services ■ Fairfax County Department of Family Services/Office for Children ■ Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services ■ Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations ■ Fairfax County Health Department ■ Fairfax County Public Library ■ Fairfax County Public Schools ■ Fairfax County Retired Educators ■ Fairfax Education Association ■ Fairfax Library Foundation ■ Falls Church-McLean Children’s Center ■ **Freddie Mac Foundation** ■ George Mason University College of Education and Human Development ■ Greater Little Zion Baptist Church ■ Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce ■ Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce ■ Herndon/Reston Family Child Care Association ■ Herndon United Methodist Church Preschool ■ His Church/Life Acts ■ Hispanics Against Child Abuse and Neglect ■ Homestretch Transitional Housing ■ Hopkins House ■ **ICF International** ■ Infant/Toddler Family Day Care ■ Inova Health System ■ Jewish Social Service Agency of Northern Virginia ■ Junior League of Northern Virginia ■ Laurel Learning Center ■ League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area ■ Literacy Council of Northern Virginia ■ Little Flock Christian School ■ Main Street Child Development Center ■ Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children ■ Northern Virginia Community College ■ **Northern Virginia Community Foundation** ■ Northern Virginia Family Service ■ Northern Virginia Technology Council ■ Parklawn Family Center ■ Plymouth Haven Christian Preschool ■ **PNC Financial Services Group** ■ **Raytheon Intelligence and Information Systems** ■ Reach Out and Read ■ **Reston Limousine** ■ Robert E. Simon Jr. Children’s Center ■ **Rolls-Royce North America Inc.** ■ Seven Corners Children’s Center ■ Share Literacy Mid-Atlantic ■ **Training Solutions, Inc.** ■ United Christian Parish Preschool ■ Vienna-Tysons Regional Chamber of Commerce ■ Virginia Alliance of Family Child Care Associations ■ Voices for Virginia’s Children—NoVA ■ **Washington Area Women’s Foundation** ■ **West Group** ■ Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts ■ YWCA Children’s Center ■ Zonta Club of Fairfax County

Welcome to the *Network*

The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce has joined some 80 businesses, public agencies, community organizations and other early childhood education advocates in supporting school readiness for all of Fairfax County’s young children. Other chambers of commerce that are members of the *Network* represent the Dulles region, Fairfax County, the greater Reston area and the Vienna-Tysons region. This commitment to school readiness is echoed in “The State of American Business Report 2009” by the U. S.

Chamber of Commerce, which urges policymakers to “seize the opportunity” to “improve early learning programs.”

“Our investment in human capital must begin early and continue at every level so that all members of the community achieve their fullest potential,” noted William Lecos, president and CEO of the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce in a recent interview with Fairfax Futures. “Doing so benefits individuals, the companies for which they work and the communities in which they live.”

For general information on the *School Readiness Network*, go to www.fairfax-futures.org/SRN-about.htm. Interested in becoming a corporate member of the *Network*? Contact Vera Steiner Blore at 703.324.8126 or at vera.steinerblore@fairfax-futures.org.

Portage “Works Perfectly for Me”

Reina Linares heard good things about the Portage curriculum from a friend who was using it. Having provided bilingual family child care for the past three years, she decided to learn how to use the Portage curriculum with the children in her own program. And now she’s delighted.

“My friend was right,” Linares explains. “I really like this. It works perfectly for me.... It helps me know what to do [with the children] to get them ready for going to school.”

Family child care providers like Linares, who are participating in the pilot Portage training and mentoring project, are starting to use the Portage curriculum to help create individualized assessments and to work with parents to set age-appropriate goals for their children. Participating providers often find that implementing the Portage curriculum becomes easier the more regularly it is used. Working with their mentors, these providers have a chance to ask questions, address any challenges and learn new strategies for supporting the school readiness of the children in their care.

According to Hazel Osborn, one of the project’s mentors, the Portage curriculum sets forth “a framework that makes it easier for the providers to support children’s social, emotional, physical and intellectual development as they get ready for school. As mentors, our job is to build their skills and confidence as educators in implementing this curriculum successfully with the children in their programs.”

The mentoring project is made possible through grants from Boeing and Fairfax County’s Partners in Prevention Fund.



Family child care provider
Reina Linares (l) and her mentor,
Hazel Osborn (r).

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