

# BUILDING Blocks

Studer Community Institute Parent Magazine

**BRAIN BUILDERS**  
BUILD WORDS  
INTO ALL YOU DO  
WITH YOUR CHILD

**PLAY SMART**  
ADD EARLY  
LEARNING TO PLAY

**EARLY LEARNING**  
THE KEY TO  
KINDERGARTEN  
READINESS





COVERING THE

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FROM PENSACOLA TO PANAMA CITY

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# Welcome

... to the biggest adventure you will have in life — parenting.

The first 1,000 days of your baby's life — from birth to age 3 — are a crucial window for how his or her brain will grow.

You have the power to make the most of that time.

The more words children hear by age 3, the more likely they are to have the language skills they'll need to succeed in school. That's why we hope this magazine is part of a journey your family takes together that makes learning part of everyday life.

This magazine can be a guide to help you make the most of those first three years of your child's life.

And it isn't just for parents. We hope grandparents, families and caregivers find in it some tips and tools for how talking to your child can help develop your child's brain.

Our passion is to make our community the best place to live and raise a family. To us, that means giving parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles a deeper understanding of how important the first three years of life are to a child's intellectual and emotional development.

Children are our lifeblood. They are the future of their own families — and they are the future of our entire community.

We want our community to become a place that supports early brain development, parent engagement and school readiness for all of our children — an Early Learning City.

We hope this magazine is part of the roadmap to becoming the kind of community our children will be proud to inherit.

Because when you build a brain, you build a life — and you build a community.

**Shannon Nickinson**

STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

## OUR MISSION

To improve the quality of life by building a vibrant community.

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B E C A U S E  
EVERY MOMENT  
MATTERS

B E C A U S E  
EVERY CHILD  
COUNTS



**Within Our Reach**  
**Within Your Hands**

Studer Family Children's Hospital Capital Campaign



## WE'RE HALFWAY THERE.

*Please join us by giving in support of our kids* — BUBBA & ANGIE WATSON

Just like the kids we serve — who dream of growing up to be baseball players, firefighters and chefs — we have big plans! The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Sacred Heart is creating a new reality for children, families and friends in our area and we can't do it without you. Help us ensure that each child will have the critical help they need when it counts.

## OUR CHILDREN NEED YOUR HELP PLEASE LEND YOUR SUPPORT

Our plans for the hospital are ambitious, but our community is strong. We're neighbors and friends, colleagues and family. Right now this bold new future for our region is **Within Our Reach, Within Your Hands.**

*"When the world moves on so quickly, you begin to ask yourself how to make a long-term difference, one that will last for generations to come. For me it's supporting children and families who need our support."*

— BUBBA & ANGIE  
WATSON



# WHERE THE *Future Lies*

STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE AND EARLY LEARNING

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**T**he Pensacola metro area's economic future lies in our 5-year-olds. That's a message Studer Community Institute has been delivering since its first Metro Report in 2014.

In 2014, we built a Pensacola Metro Dashboard to help us track our community's progress. It was developed with the help of the University of West Florida and uses 16 measurements to track the economic, educational and social well-being of our community.

In analyzing it, we found links between our economy and our education system. Our colleagues at UWF noted that in general, our low wages compared to peer communities in the Southeast were tied to our educational attainment level.

Not enough of our citizens had the education level necessary to command jobs with higher-paying wages. And because our workforce wasn't as educated as other communities, we were hindered in our ability not only to attract new business and industry to the community, but also in our existing businesses' ability to grow and add more jobs to the community.

Then we started researching how other communities changed this dynamic — to see if we could take some of their lessons and apply them to Pensacola.

We started out looking at how increasing high school graduation rates could boost our community. We found it is an important lever to move — and we found that a predictor of how likely a child is to graduate on time can be traced back farther. First to eighth grade, then to third grade reading level, and then to kindergarten readiness.

The more we researched, the farther back in a child's educational life the trail led us. In fact, kindergarten readiness led us back again, to a child's first 1,000 days — the years between birth and age 3.



The success of the public school system, the strength of our workforce, the path that leads to a quality of life that includes lower crime rates, higher property values, and better wages all rely on, in words of UWF economist Rick Harper, “making sure our 5-year-olds show up for kindergarten literate, numerate and eager to learn.”

So that’s where we decided to do our work.

Harper is not the only economist who views kindergarten readiness as an economic development issue. James Heckman has won a Nobel Prize in Economics. The University of Chicago economist’s research shows that the return on investing in high-quality early education is greater than those previously set for preschool programs serving 3- to 4-year-olds.

The new findings in late 2016 show high-quality programs can return up to \$13 for every \$1 invested per child.

John List is chairman of the economics department at the University of Chicago. He has joined forces with Dr. Dana Suskind and her team at the Thirty Million Words Initiative to see how science can be used to figure out what works best to help children under 5 learn.

They are looking to close the “achievement gap” — the gap in school readiness and performance that separates low-income children from their better-off peers. Research shows the gap is linked to the number of words a child hears before his or her fourth birthday.

For kids from lower-income families who hear fewer words, it amounts to a gap of 30 million fewer words heard from birth to age 3 than kids from better-off families who grow up in a language-rich environment.

The gap impacts how children develop their vocabulary and the skills they will need to be readers later on.

The only way we can close that gap is to ensure that our children show up for school kindergarten ready. According to Harper, some of the reasons why that is important:

- Kids who grow up in and around the Pensacola MSA earn about 8.4 percent less than the same kid would if he/she were to grow up in an average place in the U.S.

“Where thousands live the way millions wish they could, where the warmth of our community [Pensacola] comes not only from God’s good sunshine, but from the hearts of the people who live here.”

— VINCE WHIBBS,  
FORMER MAYOR OF PENSACOLA

- For Escambia County, the results are even worse. Children who spend 20 years of their childhood in Escambia earn about 15 percent less at age 26 than the same child would if they grew up in an average place in the U.S. That’s \$3,870 a year less than in the “nationally average” place.
- Escambia is second worst among the 67 counties in Florida, with only Gadsden County registering lower, at -\$3,910.

That is why embracing the challenge to become America’s First Early Learning City is important, not only for the parents of young children, but for the business owners who employ those parents — and will one day employ their children.

The key pieces of an Early Learning City are health care, community, business, education, resources, media and the environment. Each segment has a hand in building a culture of lifelong learning that supports early brain development, parent engagement and school readiness.

When each does its part toward the common purpose of giving each child the best chance to be ready for kindergarten, the quality of life in the community improves for:

- An early childhood education system that has a common language of quality and supports the healthy development of young children and their families toward the goal of school readiness.
- A public school system that gets better prepared students and more engaged parents who understand why support at home is crucial to a child’s success. Those better prepared students should be more likely to graduate high school on time and be more likely to earn post-high school degrees that will help them get a better-paying job.

- Business owners who invest in their community and see employees who are parents more productive and engaged at work because they feel their workplaces value their role as parents.
- Employers who have a better educated, more skilled workforce from which to hire.
- Residents who see their city improve through the benefits of a better educated workforce — lower crime rates, higher wages, better schools, less of a public investment in the reactionary services, and a quality of life that makes companies and individuals want to invest in the community.

After population growth stagnated for at least a decade in the 2000s, U.S. Census Bureau data indicates Escambia County is seeing about a 4 percent increase in the last





Dr. Dana Suskind and Quint Studer

five years. But the number of young children in poverty is outpacing the number of children growing up in more financially stable homes.

There are 71 Census tracts in Escambia County. In the 15 tracts where poverty among families with children is 5 percent or less, there are 2,979 children ages 4 and under. In the 30 tracts where poverty among families with children is 10 percent or higher, there are 8,252 children ages 4 and under.

Building a community that weaves early learning into its social fabric will benefit all of our children — but it will benefit those 8,252 children most.

In short, an Early Learning City looks remarkably like the way former Mayor Vince Whibbs described Pensacola: “Where thousands live the way millions wish they could, where the warmth of our community comes not only from God’s good sunshine, but from the hearts of the people who live here. Welcome to Pensacola, America’s first place city and the place where America began.”

That’s why we devised The Early Learning City Roadmap, to be the start of a path that creates a community where all of our children get the best chance for a good start in life because their parents understand how important it is to talk and interact early and often with a baby.

We worked with local and state advocates and experts, as well as our partners at the University of Chicago, whose research has helped make them leaders in understanding early brain development.

With their help, we laid out this road-map, which shows how everyone in the community has a role to play in supporting the goal of having every child be ready for school on the first day.

#### **HEALTH CARE:**

In addition to focusing on the health and wellness of mother and baby, steps are under way to focus on the importance of the exposure to language from birth to age 3 — and stressing the power parents have to impact early brain development.

#### **RESOURCES:**

Resources are available in the community to help parents become good first teachers for their babies. Highlighting that work and helping parents access those resources are critical for the success of all of our children.

#### **EDUCATION:**

Many people believe that education begins with kindergarten. But research shows how important early learning experiences are long before the first day of school. There is much that can be done at home and in childcare settings to help young children get a good start. Data from the Florida Office of Early Learning for 2014 shows that only half of Escambia children who don’t attend voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) are kindergarten ready; 80 percent of those who complete VPK are ready.

An Early Learning City maximizes these resources by making sure every eligible child is enrolled in VPKs that follow quality guidelines, encouraging parent involvement and success in school.

#### **COMMUNITY:**

In Escambia County, childcare, Head Start and early learning centers are housed in private businesses, churches, community centers and on school campuses. But children and their parents are not only in those places. Workplaces, churches, businesses, parks and other spaces can have early brain development woven into their fabric, too.

An Early Learning City maximizes all of the resources in the community and points them toward a common purpose — helping all children have the best chance to be ready for school.

#### **THE ENVIRONMENT:**

Children learn from what they see around them. If their environment is colorful, filled with words and encourages them to explore using all of their senses, their brains will build strong connections and thrive.

If their environment is sterile, missing books, lacking an adult who talks to them every day, the connections in that child’s brain will wither.

Early Learning Cities see the link between the “built environment” — buildings, parks, playgrounds, signs, public spaces — and brain development and take steps to make every space a learning space.

#### **BUSINESS:**

Businesses have a role to play in early learning. By adding children’s books to their waiting areas and creating early learning-friendly spaces to support employees who are parents, businesses that are in “education” can become educational. They also can educate employees on how a baby’s brain develops in the first three years.

#### **MEDIA:**

The media — print, online, TV, radio — are important partners in spreading the message of the importance of early brain development, school readiness and in educating parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles and family friends, on the vital role they play.

In an Early Learning City, everyone can help build a brain, build a life and build a community.



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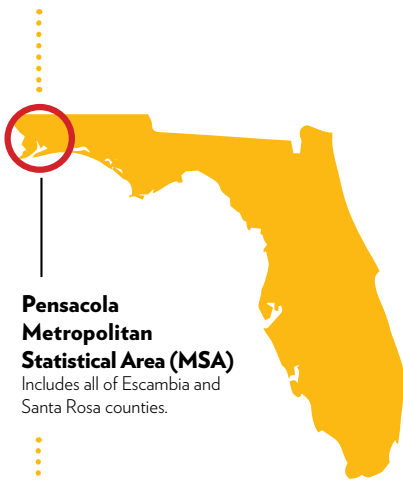


# PENSACOLA METRO Dashboard

OBJECTIVE BENCHMARKS ARE VITAL TO GAUGING PROGRESS AND IDENTIFYING AREAS THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT

The Studer Community Institute's new mission is to improve the quality of life by building a vibrant community. SCI's main focuses are a community dashboard to measure key quality of life indicators, early learning with a main focus on those first three years and the creation of jobs via workforce development. What you see here is the 2017 Dashboard for Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. The goal is to encourage all who impact these measurements to move these local outcomes to be the best in the state of Florida.

Visit [Studer.org](http://Studer.org) during the year as the dashboard is updated when new information becomes available.



**Pensacola Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)**  
Includes all of Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Preterm births			
	Escambia County 2013-15	<b>12.8%</b> of births <small>1,478 babies</small>	Florida <b>10%</b> of births <small>65,744 babies</small>
	Santa Rosa County 2013-15	<b>11.3%</b> of births <small>626 babies</small>	
<p>Escambia County ranks 62nd out of 67 counties in the preterm birth rate — and among 17 counties of similar population, Escambia ranked last. Santa Rosa County ranks 54th of 67 counties in terms of preterm births. Preterm birth rate tracks the percent of babies born before 37 weeks gestation. State health officials report the data as a three-year rolling rate.</p>			

Rent-burdened households			
	Escambia County 2015	<b>52.2%</b>	Florida <b>58.3%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>47.9%</b>	
<p>The rule of thumb for affordability is that housing should cost no more than 30% of your monthly income. This point tracks the percentage of people who spend more than that on rent.</p>			

Cost of child care			
	Escambia County	<b>49%</b> of a parent's monthly income	Florida <b>56%</b> of a parent's monthly income
	Santa Rosa County	<b>36%</b> of a parent's monthly income	
<p>This tracks average child care costs (for infant and preschoolers) as a percentage of median income for single-parent families.</p>			

Median workforce age			
	Escambia County 2015	<b>37.2</b>	Florida <b>41.4</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>39.5</b>	
<p>In 2015 in Escambia, the median workforce age was 37.2; in Santa Rosa it was 38. Florida was 41.4.</p>			


Single-parent households			
	Escambia County as of 2015	<b>38%</b> of families	Florida <b>36.7%</b> of families
	Santa Rosa County as of 2015	<b>25.3%</b> of families	
<p>Children living in single-parent families often face more economic and social hurdles than their peers from two-parent families.</p>			

Population			
	Escambia County from 2010 to 2015	<b>+2.8%</b>	Florida from 2010 to 2015 <b>+4.2%</b>
	Santa Rosa County from 2010 to 2015	<b>+6.0%</b>	
<p>Data shows that after steeply increasing every decade between 1970 and 2000, the population stagnated. In 2015, Escambia County's population was 306,327; in Santa Rosa it was 161,021.</p>			

Overweight and obesity rate			
	Escambia County 2013	<b>59.8%</b>	Florida <b>62.8%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2013	<b>60.9%</b>	
<p>Two out of three people in the Pensacola metro area are either overweight or obese, meaning they have a body mass index of 25 or higher. Obesity-related health problems diminish worker productivity and add cost to the health care system.</p>			


# BUILD A BRAIN BUILD A LIFE BUILD A COMMUNITY

## Kindergarten readiness

	Escambia County 2013-14	<b>66.2%</b>	Florida <b>71%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2013-14	<b>81.0%</b>	


This is the percentage of 5-year-olds found kindergarten-ready when evaluated in the first month of the school year. Children who are not ready for kindergarten may never catch up. This also puts extra stress on teachers and takes time away from other children. Problems with the state readiness screening process mean new rates haven't been issued for the last two years.

## Crime rate

	Escambia County 2015	<b>4,734.7</b> per 100,000 population	Florida <b>3,300</b> per 100,000 population
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>1,292.6</b> per 100,000 population	


This measures the number of crimes reported per 100,000 citizens, including both violent crimes and property crimes. One note: Among eight counties of roughly similar population, Escambia had the second highest violent crime rate per 100,000 — trailing only Leon County.

## Voter turnout

	Escambia County 2016	<b>73.9%</b> voters cast ballots	Florida <b>74.5%</b> voters cast ballots
	Santa Rosa County 2016	<b>68.1%</b> voters cast ballots	


How healthy is democracy in your community? Voter turnout is one way to measure that.

## Free & reduced-price lunch

	Escambia County 2015-16 school year	<b>60.6%</b>	Florida <b>60.2%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015-16 school year	<b>45.3%</b>	


This helps measure poverty in a community. Children living in households at or below 185% of the poverty level are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals at their schools.

## Middle class households

	Escambia County as of 2015	<b>64.5%</b>	Florida <b>63.4%</b>
	Santa Rosa County as of 2015	<b>67.4%</b>	


The percentage of households considered middle class in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties has remained relatively flat from 1990-2015, as has the state rate.

## VPK participation

	Escambia County 2015-16	<b>63.3%</b>	Florida <b>78%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015-16	<b>67.3%</b>	


Since 2005, all Florida 4-year-olds have been eligible to attend voluntary prekindergarten for free. In Escambia County, during 2015-2016, 1,319 children who were eligible for the state program were not enrolled in it. In Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, participation rates lag behind the state rate.

## College graduates

	Escambia County 2015	<b>24.5%</b>	Florida <b>27.3%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>26.6%</b>	


Research shows that communities with higher percentages of college-educated residents have higher wages overall. Pew Research Center study shows people with a college degree earned about \$17,500 more a year than those with just a high school diploma.

## High school graduation rate

	Escambia County 2015	<b>76.1%</b>	Florida <b>80.7%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>85.7%</b>	


This tracks the percentage of students who finished high school in four years.

## Real per capita income

	Escambia County 2014	<b>\$36,632</b>	Florida <b>\$42,737</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2014	<b>\$37,610</b>	

Real per capita income represents the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of our area, adjusted for inflation and divided by the population. It measures the average person's purchasing power and economic well-being.

## Labor force participation

	Escambia County 2015	<b>61.8%</b>	Florida <b>59.2%</b>
	Santa Rosa County 2015	<b>59.8%</b>	

The unemployment rate is often reported as a measure of joblessness, but it leaves out people who quit looking for work. Labor force participation shows how many people who are eligible to work are doing so.

## MISSION

To improve the quality of life by building a vibrant community.

## VISION

To make the Pensacola Metro community the greatest place to live in the world.

[STUDERI.ORG/DASHBOARD](http://STUDERI.ORG/DASHBOARD)

  /STUDERINSTITUTE





# BUILDING A *Reader*

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

Parent and community involvement is the Oakcrest Elementary School way, says Principal Linda Bonifay.

“Our motto has been for years, ‘Every student, every day, whatever it takes,’” she says. “We’ve created an environment where parents feel invited to our school.”

It didn’t happen overnight at Oakcrest, which was given a school grade of F in 2006. Former Principal Denny Wilson worked to change the culture at Oakcrest, which earned an A in 2011 after years of

gradual, steady improvement.

The staff at Oakcrest has worked hard over the years to build a culture that makes parents feel included and welcome at the school.

In some years, that included a staff position dedicated to acting as a liaison between the school and the community.

Often the foundation of strong parent involvement is laid in early childhood. Yet, for years, early learning has languished in purgatory, viewed as somehow less professional than traditional K-12 schooling

in the conversation about improving our education system.

That, experts say, has to change.

“That’s the whole point — 0-3 is the most impactful,” says Dana Suskind, a pediatric surgeon at the University of Chicago Medical School. “Eighty-five percent of your brain is grown at that time. It is the basis of everything that comes after.”

Suskind heads the Thirty Million Words Initiative, a group that leads research into how young children acquire language — and what strategies can help



VPK students say the Pledge of Allegiance at Trinity Learning Center day care in Pensacola.

# ABOUT *FSU'S* RESEARCH

The Florida Center for Reading Research's project is funded through the Institute of Education Sciences (the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education) through a five-year, \$100 million-plus grant that began in 2010. Six research teams are participating in the new Reading for Understanding Research Network. FSU's share of the pie is \$26 million to study why some children struggle to comprehend what they read.

More than 130 researchers representing linguistics, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, reading, speech and language pathology, assessment and evaluation are involved.

Christopher Lonigan, the center's associate director, said when the grant was awarded, that much of the research in the field in the last 30 years has focused on how children decode letters into words. This project will focus on how to help children turn being able to say those words into understanding what they mean, using strategies that teachers can implement in classrooms in fairly short order.

"That's the whole point — 0-3 is the most impactful ... Eighty-five percent of your brain is grown at that time. It is the basis of everything that comes after."

— **Dr. DANA SUSKIND,**  
PEDIATRIC SURGEON AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CHICAGO MEDICAL SCHOOL

their parents become better teachers. Her high profile earned her an invitation to a White House summit on early learning in 2014.

"Everyone talks about third-grade reading scores. Well what is third-grade reading based on?" Suskind says. "The acquisition of oral language skills at the beginning of preschool."

## STUDIES REVEAL RESULTS

Research done in Northwest Florida supports the notion that building a better reader begins before age 5.

Jeanine L. Clancy is a senior research associate at the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University. Since 2010, FSU researchers have been studying how young children learn to recognize letters, read words and comprehend what that they see on the page.

Some of that research includes children in

Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

The project started with three broad goals:

- Identify processes that lead to successful text comprehension in children.
- Identify what teaching techniques work best for students.
- Identify strategies that help teachers teach those early skills better.

Preliminary findings show that intervening early can boost a child's vocabulary and language development skills.

"When children are in school and reading, if they don't have any background knowledge on a topic, they don't have anything to connect their new learning to, it just hangs there," Clancy says. "If they've never been to a zoo or heard about a zoo, reading about animals in a zoo isn't as meaningful."

One of the centers that participated in the research was Trinity Learning Center in Pensacola.

Anna Kay Shirah has been the center's director for a decade. She also has six years of work experience with Title I early learning programs for the Escambia County School District.

She jumped at the chance to participate in the study.

"Anything we could do to promote literacy, I fully support," she says.

In kindergarten readiness scores, Trinity Learning Center typically scores in the high 80s and 90s. There were children at the center who Shirah believes could have benefited from the extra intervention the researchers offered.





Sandy Lyons reads to VPK students at Trinity Learning Center day care in Pensacola.

Students who did participate got extra help through weekly, one-on-one visits or in 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 help gauge what they remembered about the story and how they put that information in context.

### ‘PEOPLE JUST DON’T SEE IT’

The challenge of bringing parents to the table is one that educators know well.

Cracking the code to creating strong parent involvement is key to helping this community’s kindergartners show up ready to learn.

Malcolm Thomas, Escambia schools superintendent, 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. “Their language development, their vocabulary, that is the key.”

He recalled visiting a school and asking a first-grader what she was reading about

and she asked about the word “hedge.” She had never heard the word before.

Ashley Bodmar hardly goes through a workday without referencing the word-gap study that Suskind’s group draws its name from.

“Putting a child in front of TV is not the equivalent of interaction with a live human being,” Bodmar says. “Differences in vocabulary are evident as early as 18 months.”

Bodmar is executive director ECARE — Every Child a Reader in Escambia. The nonprofit was launched in 2006-2007 by the business community to help get kids ready for school.

ECARE works with childcare centers in the neighborhood that feed into Global Learning Academy, as well as hosts Reading Pals, tutors for preschoolers who need a boost in their language skills.

Brenda Dean, owner and director of Come Unto 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



“Putting a child in front of TV is not the equivalent of interaction with a live human being.”

— **ASHLEY BODMAR**,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ECARE

## ECARE

Every Child A

Reader in Escambia. *The nonprofit was launched in 2006-2007 by the business community to help get kids ready for school.*

how I would be able to give the kids what they need in order to improve their vocabulary and phonological awareness,” Dean said.

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

“A lot of times, 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. “Now for Christmas we give out books because we want to make a difference.”

Back at Oakcrest, creating a culture of family involvement remains a work in progress, Principal Bonifay says.

That means going to parents where they





are to help schedule appointments to get kids glasses or go to the doctor, hosting regular family nights at school that often include dinner, even having 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 Bonifay and her staff never stop trying to build those bridges, especially among the parents of their youngest students.

“Early literacy, that’s our building block,” Bonifay says. “We want our 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 life-long consequences.

“People just don’t see it,” Suskind says. “As long as it’s not a toxic environment, all 0- to 3- year-olds look the same. They smile, they react.

“It’s not like poor kids don’t learn to talk — they do. It’s developing the language for school and the brain connections for school that don’t develop as quickly.”

THE

# 30 MILLION

## WordGap

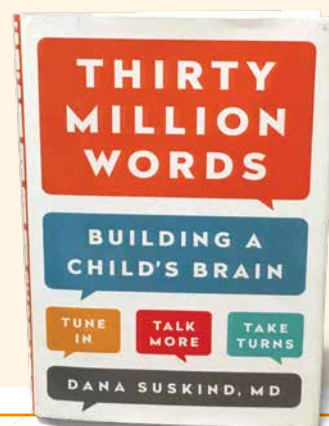
**Betty Hart and Todd Risley’s project followed 42 families in three income levels for three years to record the number of words spoken to children in those households.**

### 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 more words per hour, resulting in larger cumulative vocabularies.
- In professional families, children heard an average of 2,153 words per hour, while children in working-class families heard an average of 1,251 words per hour and children in welfare-recipient families heard an average of 616 words per hour. Over time, this means that in a year children in professional 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 heard an average of 3 million words. By age 4, a child from a welfare-recipient family

could have heard 32 million words fewer than a classmate from a professional family.

- By age 3, the observed cumulative vocabulary for children in the professional families was about 1,100 words. For children from working class families, the observed cumulative vocabulary was about 750 words and for children from welfare-recipient families it was just above 500 words.
- Children in professional families heard a higher ratio of encouragements to discouragements than their working-class and welfare-supported counterparts.



# Early learning is as simple as 1-2-3 ... with help from WSRE!

Talk, play, and read with your baby, and use WSRE's educational resources to support your child's learning.



## 1. Talk

Talking with your child, even during their first years, helps them build language and acquire the skills needed to be ready to learn. As your baby grows, provide a word-rich environment. Talk about the books you read, the places you go, and the PBS KIDS shows you watch together.

Guidelines from the Academy of Pediatrics point to **PBS KIDS** as a leading resource for educational programming and encourage parents to watch TV with their children and **talk** about it together, so make screen time family time and let it inspire other learning activities!

## 2. Play

Children learn best by engaging in activities that allow them to explore, imagine, and strengthen their natural abilities, so take **play** seriously! The **WSRE PBS KIDS Imagination Station** is equipped with books, toys, and touchscreen computers loaded with PBS KIDS educational games. Think of it as a play room specifically designed for you and your child to engage in fun, learning playtime together.

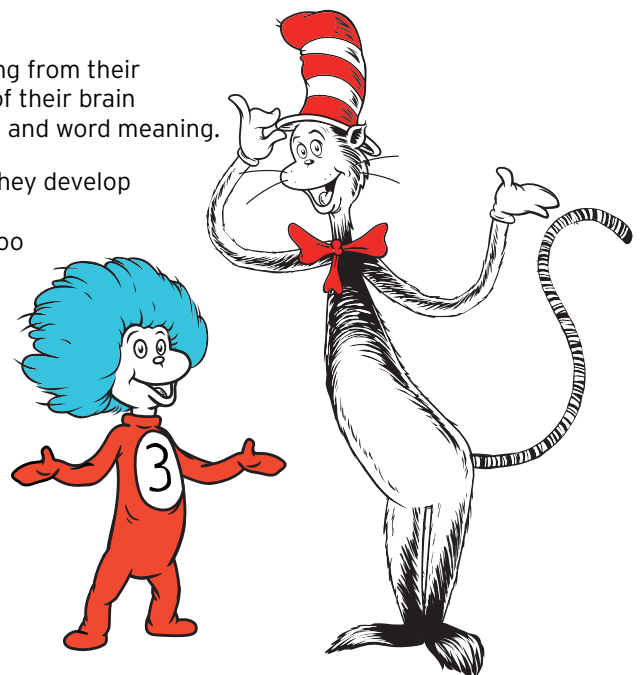
Kids like to play games connected to their favorite shows and characters, so come to the Imagination Station or visit [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org) for educational games and videos from shows like *Curious George*, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and, of course, *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*

## 3. Read

Young children are "pre-readers" who pick up clues about reading from their environment. Reading aloud to your child strengthens the part of their brain associated with visual imagery, the ability to understand stories, and word meaning.

When kids sit next to a caring adult and hear engaging stories, they develop positive associations with books, so encourage everyone in your family to **read** with your baby. As Dr. Seuss says, "You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child."

Turn over this sheet to learn more about early learning resources for your family.



A Service of Pensacola State College

[wsre.org](http://wsre.org) f t p i



Watch the new **WSRE PBS KIDS Channel 23.4** anytime and anywhere. It's free for everyone over-the-air, streaming live at [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org) and on the **PBS KIDS Video** app, and it's also carried by local cable providers as follows: Cox Channel 695, Mediacom Channel 84, Bright House Channel 200, and Riviera Utilities Channel 826.



The **WSRE PBS KIDS Imagination Station**, located at Blue Wahoos Stadium, is free and open 9 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It's also open during Blue Wahoos home games and at other times as publicized.

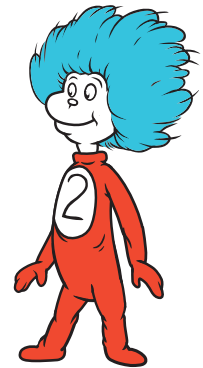
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Explore new ways to keep your child learning at [pbsparents.org](http://pbsparents.org)—a trusted resource that's filled with information on child development and early learning. Help your child learn and grow with PBS KIDS activities, monitor progress with the PBS Parents Child Development Tracker, and sign up for the PBS Parents Newsletter to receive free parenting tips, family-friendly recipes, cool crafts, and fun educational games every month.



Hundreds of free and fun early learning activities can also be found at [florida.pbslearningmedia.org](http://florida.pbslearningmedia.org)—enter "preschool" in the search field.



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SOURCE: MARKETING & RESEARCH RESOURCES, INC. (M&RR), JANUARY 2017



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To learn more, visit [wsre.org](http://wsre.org) or contact WSRE at [info@wsre.org](mailto:info@wsre.org) or 850-484-1200. [f](#) [t](#) [p](#) [i](#)

# THE Gap

## DR. DANA SUSKIND AND THE THIRTY MILLION WORD INITIATIVE

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**T**hirty million words.  
That's the difference between poor children and their better-off peers.

This is the science that underlies early learning programs from the South Side of Chicago to the Pensacola Metro area.

It comes from a 1995 study by child psychologists that found by age 4, poor children hear 30 million fewer words than children from better off families. This leads to poor children lagging academically, being weaker readers and falling behind in school.

Dana Suskind founded Thirty Million Words at the University of Chicago Medical School to drive awareness of the achievement gap and promote strategies to close it.

"The Hart and Risely study is what everybody talks about," Suskind says. "It's one sentence in a rich science that says how parents interact with children impacts the way brain processing develops.

"It's really about helping parents understand how important they are in terms of how they can grow their children's intelligence."

Suskind is a professor of surgery and pediatrics and director of the Pediatric Cochlear Implantation Program at U of C. She found that deaf kids who got cochlear implants — and whose families spoke more words to them — gained language skills faster than those who didn't.

In 2014, TMW was named partner in a \$19 million study funded by PNC through its Grow Up Great initiative. Suskind



"You have to explain the science to families in impactful ways so they understand that how smart you are is grown. And the most impactful thing to grow the brain is them."

— **Dr. DANA SUSKIND,**  
PEDIATRIC SURGEON AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
MEDICAL SCHOOLS



was invited to the White House to participate in a summit called by President Barack Obama to discuss the importance of early education.

The research she and her team do is conducted with Head Start families in Chicago. Its lessons apply to every community.

“The science is clear that the early childhood piece that has so often been overlooked is the foundation of 85 percent of all brain development,” Suskind says. “Ages 0-3 are even more important (than the VPK age).”

The number — 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 says. “We call ourselves 30 Million Words because that’s the thing that gets 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 3T’s” which encourages parents to “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’s website features testimonials

from parents who have gone through the program.

One mom, identified as Shurand, says the program has taught her the importance of stretching the sentences she says with her daughter with more information or of letting her daughter ask questions about books as they read them together.

“Before the TMW project, I did not know your child’s learning process starts now. From 0-3. I always thought it started at 5 when she starts school,” Shurand says. “Even though I wasn’t so good in school, it gave me a boost of confidence to teach her the things that I do know.”

Shurand’s experience echoes the videos of other moms who participate in the project, Suskind says.

“Lots of them say, ‘I didn’t know that I could make a difference.’” Suskind says. “You have to explain the science to families in impactful ways so they understand that how smart you are is grown. And the most impactful thing to grow the brain is them.”

Thirty Million Words uses individual and group interaction to help teach parents the power they have. It also uses a Language Environment Analysis (LENA) device, which records and measures the number of words a parent says to a child. The results are shared with parents during weekly meetings.

They partner across the city through the public health structure, through pediatricians offices, children’s museums, wherever they can.

The next step is to expand the approach to child care centers, bringing

providers into the loop as well.

The PNC grant will support a five-year study to follow between 200 and 250 children from age 15 months to kindergarten to monitor vocabulary development and school readiness.

“We believe you really need to be able to measure differences,” Suskind says. “Unless you can show that you are making it better, you’re just continuing a feel-good program to make you feel better. We want to be able to show what works, and if something doesn’t work, say so and move on to something that will.”

The heart of TMW remains the same.

“It’s really about wraparound support for the families,” Suskind said. “By age 4 children living in poverty are already six months behind. You are already playing catch up from the very beginning, even in a VPK that is funded four hours a day.”

Suskind mentions researcher Ian Fernald, whose findings show that children’s ability to process language is slower the less language they are exposed to.

“I think too often people don’t realize that intelligence is something you develop; it’s not something you’re born with. It is developed based on interactions from parents and caregivers.”

TV, she says, doesn’t help.

“We’re really social animals. It is socially contingent, from a live human being, there are studies that show it doesn’t have to be, it can on Skype, and that interaction is as powerful as if mom or grandma was there.”

Suskind and her team work tirelessly to drive home the fact that children are made smart by talking and interacting. That every sound or garbled word they utter is worth responding to.

She hopes that the turn in the national conversation about early learning from a perception of glorified babysitting to a real educational opportunity is a positive step in what will be a long road toward legitimizing early education.

“I think we need to stop studying what the problems are because we know what the problem is,” she says. “We need to help the parents.” 💡

# BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP

THE STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE AND UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO BRING EARLY LEARNING RESEARCH TO THE AREA

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**S**tuder Community Institute and the University of Chicago have partnered to bring an early learning research project to Pensacola.

The Thirty Million Words Initiative, founded by pediatric surgeon Dr. Dana Suskind, began working in Pensacola in 2017. The TMW Newborn Initiative will target new moms for lessons in early brain development to help them understand how language can build babies' brains.

Suskind and her staff develop and implement scientifically tested programs to help parents maximize language development from birth through age 3. The goal is to use language to build children's brains in an effort to ensure they show up for school ready to learn.

Data from the Institute's Pensacola Metro Dashboard — a set of 16 metrics that gauge the educational, economic and social well-being of the community — indicates that nearly one-third of Escambia County's kindergartners are not ready for school on the first day.

"It is perhaps the most significant problem we face that holds back our community," said Randy Hammer, former president and CEO of the Institute. "TMW addresses that and has the potential to improve the lives of thousands of children in our community. None of this would be happening if it weren't for a \$108,000 grant from the women of IMPACT100 and a \$50,000 gift from Quint and Rishy Studer."

TMW is based on a 1995 study by two Kansas researchers, Betty Hart and Todd Risley, who found some children hear 30 million more words by their fourth birthday than others. The children who heard 30 million more words were more likely to be ready to learn at the start of preschool, and by the third grade, they had bigger vocabularies, were stronger readers and scored higher on cognitive tests.

A key takeaway of the study, said Suskind, is that children who started school ahead tended to stay ahead, and children who started school behind tended to stay behind.

With about 3,000 children beginning kindergarten each school year in Escambia County, the data indicates that about 1,000 5-year-olds show up to school lagging behind their peers in language skills they'll need to learn to read and succeed in school.

"That's why early learning is so important," she said. "TMW is designed to confront not only the language gap, but also the achievement gap. We're so excited to have Pensacola as our first community outside of Chicago to pilot our program."


"Pensacola will be our first test case," said John List, who has been working with Suskind and

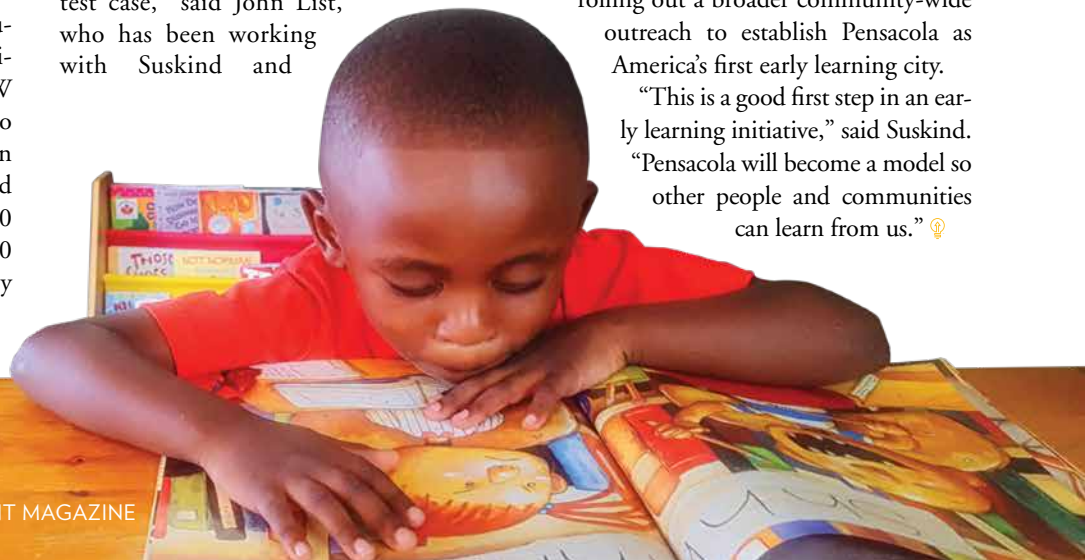
TMW and is chairman of the University of Chicago's economics department. "Once we learn what works in Pensacola, we will then take that to a nationwide experiment. We will choose communities in an experimental way and roll out in these communities what we did in Pensacola that worked and see if it can work nationwide. And I believe it will."

Suskind spoke to a group of about 400 people at Booker T. Washington High School on March 30, 2016, about her research and her book, "Thirty Million Words: Building a Child's Brain." The seeds of the partnership were sown during that visit.

Sacred Heart Hospital, Baptist Health Care and West Florida Hospital have all agreed to participate in the TMW-Newborn Initiative pilot program. TMW-Newborn delivers TMW's core message in a short video shown to new parents in hospitals as part of routine postpartum care.

TMW-Newborn was developed through rigorous testing and interviews with health care providers, hospital staffs and parents, especially those from underserved, low-income communities. It's the first piece in rolling out a broader community-wide outreach to establish Pensacola as America's first early learning city.

"This is a good first step in an early learning initiative," said Suskind. "Pensacola will become a model so other people and communities can learn from us." 



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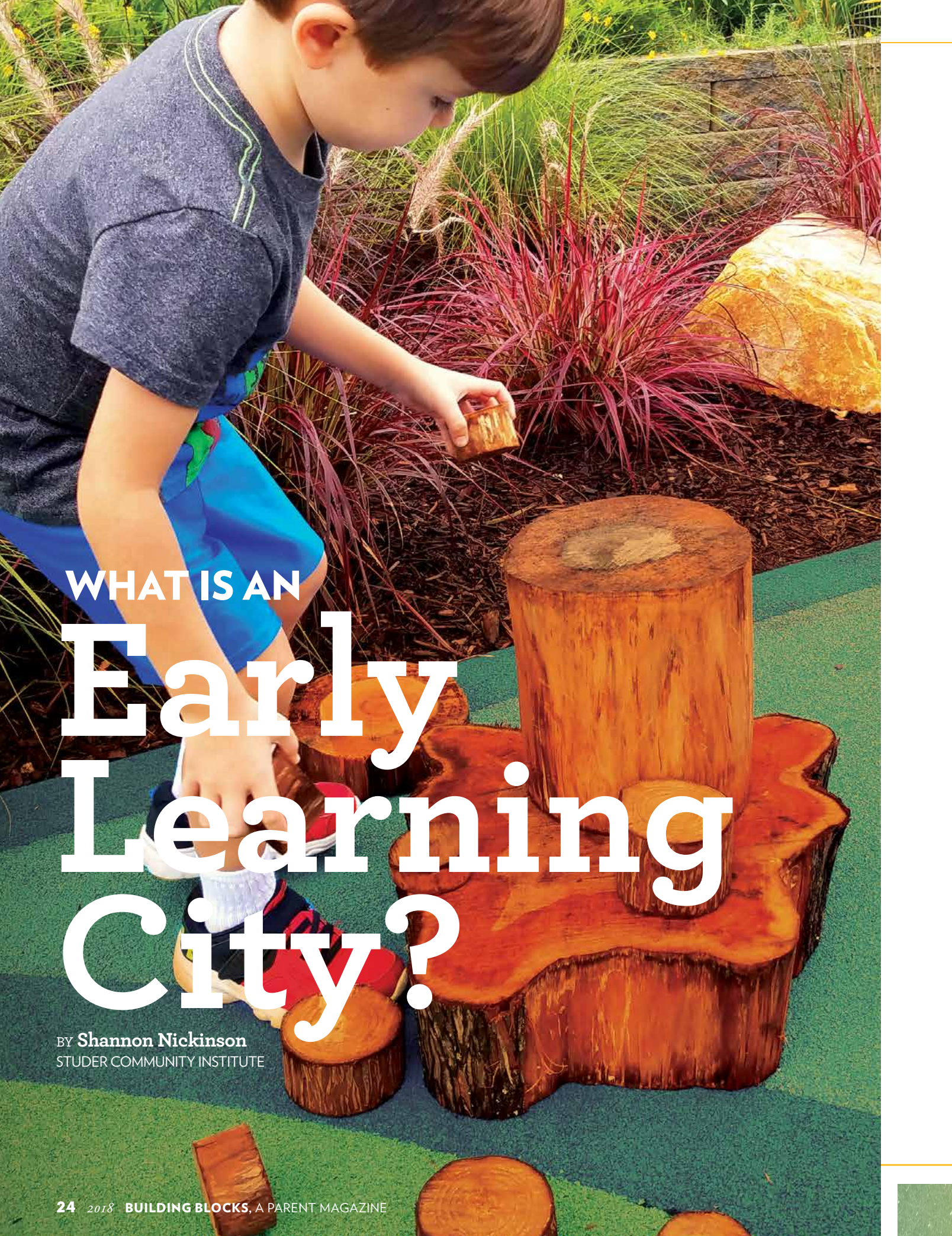
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WHAT IS AN

# Early Learning City?

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE





Nearly 85 percent of the human brain is developed between ages 0-3. But early education's share amounts to 4 percent of the state's education budget.

Imagine this.

Every new sidewalk has a hopscotch carved into it when it is poured.

Those "Science in the Street" stations the Pensacola MESS Hall installed for a limited time are out all the time, so that even a stop at a bench can be a lesson in circuits, motion and sound waves.

You keep track of every shape you can identify on display somewhere in the Palafox Market and turn in your tally near the double arch sculpture for a free serving of seasonal fruit from a market vendor.

Every workplace with parents offers time after hours or on the weekends to help with the registration and enrollment process for voluntary prekindergarten.

Upon your return from maternity leave, your employer gives you a gift basket with children's books, Legos and shape-sorting blocks.

Every early learning provider in the

county that is licensed or accredited by the state also carries meaningful ratings that parents could use to gauge the quality of care provided to children ages 0 to 3.

It would rank centers in staff-to-child ratio, hours spent on professional development, average hourly wage paid to workers, whether the center has achieved certification through a third-party, industry-specific national entity, and how many books, blocks and hands-on learning tools there are in each classroom.

Every childcare worker who works in an early learning center would earn a living wage, one that would allow them to afford childcare for their own children.

Every parent who goes through the checkout line at Publix or Winn-Dixie is handed a pamphlet with the A-B-Cs and 1-2-3s of how words build babies brains and the times and locations of free story hours at bookstores and public libraries.

Every produce section has signage encouraging youngsters to find as many colors as they can in the fruits and vegetables.

Every expectant mother leaves her first prenatal visit with an understanding of the importance of talking early and often to her baby.

Every pediatrician talks about infant brain development — and how words fuel it — at every well-baby visit.

Mixed into the rotation of cartoons

on waiting room televisions across the city is a video about the way a baby's brain develops — and how positive, loving words from parents are the vital food for those new neural pathways.

Every youth sports coach ends every practice with a reminder of the links between exercise, nutrition and brain development.

It's not reality in Pensacola. Not yet.

Nearly 85 percent of the human brain is developed between ages 0-3. But early education's share amounts to 4 percent of the state's education budget.

That is a long way to say that we cannot expect Tallahassee to help us make a dent in the number of children every year who show up without the skills they'll need to succeed in kindergarten and throughout their school careers.

Those nearly 1,000 children in Escambia County who come to kindergarten not prepared know they are missing something that their classmates have. Their teachers can tell you what it does to them, knowing that they can't read and write their whole name, hold a crayon or pencil correctly, count to 20.

Like they have nothing valuable to offer; that they shouldn't even try; that they don't fit in; that the race isn't fair; that the teacher doesn't like them.

Like someone moves the finish line just when they get close.

It falls to us — private business owners, doctors, nurses, parents, home visitation workers and concerned citizens of every social strata — to help close the gap for those children.

Because they are our children.

And given that, who better to provide them a community where the development of their brains is woven so deeply into the culture that our sidewalks, farmers markets, public buildings, grocery stores and doctor's offices all reflect that.

The discovery of the DeLuna settlement in 2016 made Pensacola rightly proud of its past and cemented its role in history.

Turning America's oldest settlement into its first immersive early learning city would be a beautiful testament to our future. 💡



# THE SCI Program

Early brain development is key to the foundation of a child's readiness for school, and ultimately for putting that child on a path for success in school and life.

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**T**he Studer Community Institute has five projects that aim to improve kindergarten readiness in the community by giving parents the understanding of the power of language and interaction in the first three years of life to build a child's brain.

That early brain development is key to the foundation of a child's readiness for school, and ultimately for putting that child on a path for success in school and life. That is crucial in our community, which state education data indicates has a kindergarten readiness rate of 66 percent (as of 2014, the most readily available data).

That means of the roughly 3,000 children who enter Escambia County School District as kindergartners, about 1,000 of those children don't have the fundamental language and academic skills they need to be ready for school.

Studer Community Institute's tools and content to build an Early Learning City are informed by a partnership we have established with the University of

Chicago's Thirty Million Words Initiative, a research project in the university's school of economics. SCI is the first entity that the Chicago team has established a community-level partnership with to translate their research and interventions to a broad range of a community.

## BRAIN BAGS

Brain Bags are early literacy gift bags given to new mothers before they leave the hospital. They include: a storybook, "P is for Pelican: The ABCs of Pensacola," which uses landmarks in our community to build letter awareness and encourage family reading; "Baby Steps," a baby book that can be personalized to help parents track early brain development milestones in the first three years of life; a toy; and a binder of community resource information and partners to help support parents. It includes library locations, screen time guidelines, Thirty Million Words Initiative teaching points, healthy lifestyle advice for first year of life and safe sleep information.



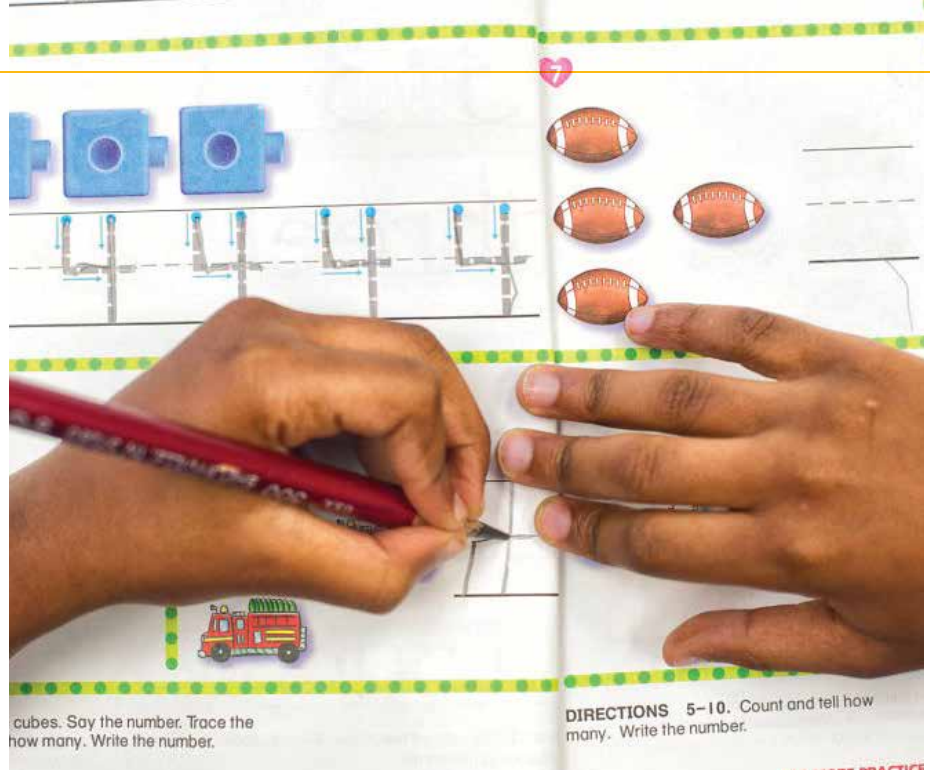
The project was launched with a grant from IMPACT 100 Pensacola Bay Area in late 2016. A total of 7,000 Brain Bags have been developed for the project's first year.

The Brain Bags are assembled by Arc Gateway's Pollack Industries. Arc offers life- and work-skills training for adults with developmental disabilities to help them contribute to the community. Assembling, storing and delivering the Brain Bags is now one of their contracted jobs. This year, at least 6,000 Brain Bags are being delivered to Baptist, Sacred Heart and West Florida hospitals and will be provided to new mothers.

An additional 1,000 Brain Bags are being distributed through partner agencies in the community who work one on one directly with parents of children ages birth to 3. These partners include: Early Steps (which connects parents of children under 3 with an identified developmental delay to services); Healthy Start Coalition (which uses Escambia County Health Department nurses to do home visits with pregnant women and new mothers who are at risk of adverse birth outcomes or adverse outcomes for the child in the first year of life); Children's Home Society (which offers family counseling and support services for clients referred through the foster care system and which operates counseling to pregnant and new teen mothers who are still in school); Families First Network and Early Childhood Court (a speciality court for parents with children under 4 who are trying to re-establish their parental rights).

Since April 2017, Baptist, Sacred Heart and West Florida hospitals have been handing out Brain Bags and using the teaching points with new mothers to help them understand the importance of parent talk in the early brain development of their child. Nurses spend 10-20 minutes per patient (averaged across three hospitals) teaching the bag and the Tune In, Take Turns, Talk More teaching points.

Moms who have received those lessons, gave the Brain Bag a 9.18 rating (out of 10) in terms of effectiveness at increasing their



**Children who have stronger literacy and numeracy skills are better prepared for the kind of work they will have to do once they start kindergarten.**

knowledge of how parent talk impacts early brain development.

Since January, 15 infant toddler developmental specialists at Pearl Nelson Center, eight service coordinators at Early Steps, eight Families First Network Early Childhood specialty court team members and 17 Healthy Start nurses at the Florida Department of Public Health in Escambia County have been trained on the Brain Bag teaching points. They will use them with the clients they reach through individual, one-on-one coaching with parents.

This means the Brain Bag curriculum will begin to reach some 500 more families with young children under age 4.

### UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PARTNERSHIP

Pensacola is the first community that will implement on a large scale the Newborn Intervention of the Thirty Million Words Initiative at the University of Chicago.

The TMW Initiative takes a public health approach to early learning using evidence-based interventions to engage parents, caregivers and practitioners into maximizing children's early language development in the first three years of life.

The Newborn Intervention is one of these

interventions, developed for the parents of newborns to be delivered during the universal newborn hearing screening every child undergoes before leaving the hospital. The video-based research pilot aims to measure what a new mom knows about her child's early brain development, and then through an iPad-based video, increase her knowledge of the power that language has to build an infant's brain.

The video has been tested with nearly 600 families in two Chicago-area hospitals. Pensacola is the first outside pilot of the project. Our mothers will be contributing to fine-tuning the messaging for research that is proving to be effective at increasing what parents know about brain development and the role it plays in school readiness.

Hospitals agree to share aggregated number of births, number of hearing screenings and the number of failed screenings. The University of Chicago agrees to share back the de-identified results of each hospital's mothers results on the survey.

The research project began in Pensacola on Aug. 30, 2017, at Sacred Heart Hospital.

### AREA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

SCI has formed a partnership with the Area Housing Commission to lead parent groups for residents in eight housing campuses with children under 4. In the housing complexes that Area Housing manages,



there are 270 families with children under 4 out of a total of 1,000 families. These children, when they age up to elementary school, primarily attend C.A. Weis, Global Learning Academy, Warrington and O.J. Semmes elementary schools. These neighborhood schools are traditionally among the lowest graded elementary schools in Escambia County School District, according to state standardized test scores (Florida Standards Assessment).

These weekly, one-hour sessions will guide parents through the importance of talking and interacting with their young children. The Moreno Court group began meeting in July 2017; Attucks Court began meeting in August; other housing campuses will come on board in 2018.

### LENA START PARTNERSHIP

SCI has formed a partnership with LENA Research Foundation in Boulder, Colo., and the Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County to bring research-based parent groups to a Florida community for the first time. The LENA Start program began with two pilot sites in September 2017. SCI staff led one of these groups, ELC staff led the other. We will expand to other sites in 2018.

LENA Start leads groups of between 10-20 parents through a 13-week curriculum designed to encourage them to talk and

interact more with their children under 3. It uses the LENA recording device to track the number of words parents say to their children. The weekly reports generated from that data give parents direct feedback on how much they talk and interact with their children. The hourlong weekly classes provide support and strategies to boost the number words and interactions parents share with their children doing everyday things.

LENA Start sites are Child Discovery Center at First Presbyterian Church, where at least 50 percent of the children enrolled come from families who qualify for School Readiness vouchers to pay for the cost of their childcare and Kids Klub Child Care on Davis Highway. January sites will add on parent groups at more community sites.

### MAKING PLAY SMART

They say that play is a child's work.

That doesn't mean playtime should be turned into an eight- or 10-hour shift. It means that play time is as important to a child as a workday is to an adult. But no one said we couldn't sneak a little learning into that playtime.

That's what the Making Play Smart project is meant to support. It includes pieces large and small. One example is the Early Learning Sensory Garden at the Bodacious

Brew drive-thru coffee shop. Research shows that being in nature boosts a child's brain development and ability to focus, to be creative and to solve problems. The Early Learning Garden, designed by Caldwell & Associates Architects, took elements of play and nature and worked to combine them into a learning space that is beautiful and fun.

Another project is a series of decals that can be added to public and play spaces. The decals are designed for children and parents to interact with together — and the designs are built around early language and numeracy skills children will need for kindergarten. For this, SCI has partnered with the City of Pensacola's Parks and Recreation department. Parks Department staff has identified a targeted list of parks they'd like the decals to be added to. Studer Community Institute is fundraising to support the design and placement of the decals. The first set was placed at Pensacola Blue Wahoos Stadium ahead of the Aug. 21, 2017, solar eclipse. The "look book" that SCI staff designed includes a series of decals that park sponsors can choose from. Next in line for placement are Bayview Park, Roger Scott Athletic Complex, Fricker Center, Moreno Court Housing complex and Aviation Discovery Park. 💡



Camp Fire, founded in 1910 as Camp Fire Girls, is a leader in bringing into practice the research that defines how and under what conditions youth **THRIVE** from birth. We are the first and only national youth development organization to implement this research in Northwest Florida. In partnership with and with funding from the Thrive Foundation for Youth and the New York Life Foundation, we have incorporated

our **THRIVE{OLOGY}** framework into every level of Camp Fire programs, beginning with our 2-year-olds. **THRIVE{OLOGY}** is built on neuroscience and human development research conducted by the late Dr. Peter Brown. Incorporating a growth mindset, conflict resolution, and inclusion to teach children the best way to discover who they are, we are “game-changing” youth development. And we are doing it with rigorous program measurement and evolution to ensure that our results are real, and lasting.



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### The Thrive{ology} framework:

- Identifying Sparks — activities that give motivation & purpose
- Adopting a growth mindset — the belief that skills can always be improved
- Learning to manage goals
- Reflecting on experiences & growth



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## Creating Lifelong Learners

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**-Dr. Maria Montessori**

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# BRAIN BAGS!

May it be a gift that keeps on giving

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE



The first IMPACT Brain Bags began going home with new moms at Pensacola area hospitals in late March. Designed by Studer Community Institute staff, the early literacy tools help parents begin to understand the power of parent talk in the early development of a child's brain.

The Brain Bags are a step in the Institute's journey to improve the quality of life in the Pensacola area through early education and workforce development.

The bags include teaching points — developed from materials from SCI's partners at the University of Chicago's Thirty Million Words Initiative — to give new parents advice about how to work more words into their interactions with their babies at home.

Building a language rich environment is critical for young children, especially in the first three years of life. Research shows that 85 percent of the human brain is developed in the first three years. It is the time when the wiring of the brain is laid.



**The clients at Arc Gateway's Pollack Industries work on the Brain Bags for Studer Community Institute. Arc assembles, stores and delivers the bags to hospitals and community partners who do home visits with parents with children under age 4.**

The strength of that basic wiring influences the “achievement gap” and impacts how a child will learn as he or she prepares for kindergarten and, studies suggest, has effects that linger throughout a child’s school life and adulthood.

The gap was outlined by University of Kansas researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risely and found that children from lower-income families hear on average 30 million fewer words by age 3 than their peers from better-off families.

The Brain Bags feature a copy of the children’s book “P is for Pelican: The ABCs of Pensacola,” a baby book to help parents track brain development in the first three years, a rattle and a binder highlighting community resources that can help support moms and dads build healthy brains for their young ones.

“The science of the Thirty Million Words tells us that starting at birth, reading and speaking to our children is the most powerful tool to help children develop brain function,” said Sacred Heart president and CEO Susan Davis. “Sacred Heart is committed to helping children get a healthy start to their lives, and the Brain Bag is the best way to help a child achieve their potential.”

In October 2016, Studer Community Institute was awarded an IMPACT 100 Pensacola Bay Area grant to launch the project.

Since then, the Brain Bags have become a key piece of SCI’s effort to build Pensacola into an “Early Learning City,” a place that enlists the whole community in creating a culture of lifelong learning, including in its public spaces.

It’s an important effort because only 66 percent of Escambia County’s kindergartners are ready for kindergarten on the first day of school, according to the most recently available data from the Florida Office of Early Learning.

An Early Learning City is a community that supports early brain development, parent engagement and school readiness for all of our children, especially those ages birth to 5.

An Early Learning City gives parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, child-care and health care professionals a common language to use about why talking and reading early and often to a child is vitally important to that child’s ultimate school readiness.

“We are grateful to SCI for the critical role they play in resourcing, leading and partnering in the effort to improve early education and school readiness,” said Mark Faulkner, president and CEO of Baptist Healthcare. “Without a doubt, we all share a common purpose of lifting the quality of life in our community. The availability of these Brain Bags to every new mom will be another important step in accomplishing that purpose.”

Davis, Faulkner and Carlton Ulmer, president and CEO of West Florida Healthcare, have been unanimous in their support for the project. They see and understand the critical link between school readiness and future academic and personal success — something that benefits the entire community.

Ulmer believes the Impact Brain Bags is an important tool that patients need and can use to be successful outside the hospital.

“Without a doubt, we all share a common purpose of lifting the quality of life in our community. The availability of these Brain Bags to every new mom will be another important step in accomplishing that purpose.”

— **MARK FAULKNER,**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
OF BAPTIST  
HEALTHCARE



“Joining the Studer Institute in the implementation of the Brain Bags for our new mothers and families speaks to our mission of being committed to the care and improvement of human life,” Ulmer said. “The teaching points that we are providing through the Brain Bag initiative are critical to the importance of language in early brain development and will have an impact on our patients and overall community for many years come.”

Two weeks after Mother’s Day, Kiera Smith-Crosby received one of the best gifts a woman can get: a newborn baby she named Joh’Nysia.

To her surprise, another gift was in store: an Impact 100 Brain Bag. Sacred Heart Hospital nurses presented the Brain Bag and explained how to use the materials in the early learning kit.

Smith-Crosby, 24, said she regularly reads the “P is for Pelican: The ABCs of Pensacola” to her children. She also uses the SCI “Baby Steps” book for tips and to track her baby’s developmental milestones.

“I didn’t know a lot of stuff about how much a child takes in as an infant,” she said. “Having the Brain Bag has helped me learn better ways to talk to my baby.”💡



# PARENT OUTREACH

BY **Reggie Dogan**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

Just as a child needs healthy food for physical growth, that same child also needs a healthy dose of language for brain development.

Words are food to a baby's brain. The more words a child hears in the first three years of life, the stronger the connections in the brain will be.

Since its inception last summer, the Studer Community Institute's Parent Outreach Program has focused on helping parents use the power they have through language to build their babies' brains.

The program offers tips, training and strategies in early learning and brain-development initiatives for parents of children under 4 years old who live in homes managed by the Pensacola Area Housing Commission.

The aim is to spread the program throughout the Area Housing campuses, reaching parents with helpful ways to engage their children and build babies' brains, and in the long run, build lives and a better community.

Through programs that assist parents in high-poverty areas in developing the tools and skills to help stimulate their babies' brains, SCI wants to help more children in

Pensacola reach developmental milestones and be ready for kindergarten and beyond.

Pensacola Area Housing Commission provides assistance to low-income residents through the management of Low Rent Public Housing.

Of about 1,000 residents who in live homes managed by the Area Housing Commission, more than 250 are children between 0 to 3 years old.

Area Housing Director Abe Singh said he welcomes the opportunity work with SCI in its parent outreach initiatives.

"The 1,000 families we serve mandate a good partnership between Studer Community Institute and Area Housing," Singh said. "This program offers the residents a wonderful opportunity to find better and productive ways to help their children learn and develop."

Moreno Court was the first campus under the Area Housing Commission's umbrella that SCI offered parenting sessions.

Another set of parents from Attucks Court meet at the Fricker Resource Center for similar classes to enhance brain development in babies and toddlers help prepare them for kindergarten.

The one hour, 12-week sessions use edu-

cational information and techniques from the University of Chicago Thirty Million Word Initiative and LENA Start, emphasizing the key component of the three T's: Tune In, Talk To and Take Turns.

SCI staff builds lessons and activities from early learning curricula, textbooks, websites and other sources that focus on using language to help parents help their children reach developmental milestones.

Through training sessions, role-playing and videos of real parent-child interaction, parents learn easy-to-follow strategies to enhance interaction and improve social and emotional development of the child.

The program also provides tools for parents to enhance their home language environment in order to improve their child's brain development, and invariably his or her ability to learn.

One session, for example, explained the impact of toxic stress on brain development and the various ways to prevent or minimize stressful situations that cause harm and adversity in children's lives.

Another session showed parents the various ways to use outside activities to incorporate language and encourage talk to increase brain development.





Of about 1,000 residents who live in homes managed by the Area Housing Commission, more than 250 are children between 0 to 3 years old.



**OPPOSITE:** Brittany Jones is one of the parents who attends an SCI parent outreach group. **ABOVE:** Jenny Cabrera is one of the moms who has found the SCI parent outreach program helpful.

Most parents know the importance of talking to their babies. Some have the desire and skill to interact and engage with their children in daily encounters and activities.

Research shows that parent involvement is the No. 1 predictor of early literacy success and future academic achievement.

This simple but crucial task is at the heart of the Parent Outreach Program. We are using and building on those important principles in our programs in Area Housing campuses with the parents to use at home with their children.

Tammy Barge, who participates in the Moreno Court program, says she enjoys learning new ways to interact with her children.

“I come because it gives me more positive skills, gaining knowledge about how to be a better parent for my children,” said Barge, 37, a mother with four children and



two under 4 years old. “The classes keep my attention and give very good information.”

Brittany Jones attends the Attucks Court program. She’s become an ambassador in helping spread the word and recruit more parents to attend.

“How do we thank the people who gave us this program?” asked Jones, 27, a mother of four, the youngest 4 months old. “You guys are a blessing.”

She continued: “You give us something to do with our kids. I gladly thank you for giving us advice on being better parents. It has brought me closer to my kids and Lord knows I need help with my 1-year-old. I appreciate this program. It’s been a great experience.”

It’s never too early to start talking and

reading to a baby as research shows that parents can have a positive impact on their child’s language and cognitive development in the first year.

Shauniece Windsor, 26, a mother of three, attends the Moreno Court program.

“The atmosphere is good and I learn a lot,” she said. “I do a lot of the activities I learn in class at home, and being around the people in the program is fun.”

Dayon Hestle, 28, a mother of five in Moreno Court, said the program has helped her learn how to communicate more with her children.

“When we’re eating, I let my baby know that he’s eating,” Hestle said. “When we’re in the car or outside, I’m always showing them different things and talking about the things we see, the different colors, shapes and sounds. I’ve learned so many different ways to talk to my baby.”

Pam Evans is a grandmother who helps in rearing her grandchildren. She’s been a regular participant in the Moreno Court program.

“I remember talking to my son who’s now in the military,” Evans said. “Now, I talk all the time and read to my grandchild. I read so much that he started sleeping with the book.”

There is little debate over the fact that all children deserve the chance to reach their fullest potential.

While traditional thought has said this begins on the first day of school, science tells us something different.

It says that if we want our children to be all they can be intellectually, productively and creatively, we must begin to recognize that the ultimate achievement begins on the first day of life and that parents must be recognized as that critical link.

Parents are their child’s first teacher. To have any success in building better babies, reaching parents and helping them become the best first teachers must be a cornerstone.

By building relationships with parents and families and creating partnerships with agencies and organizations, we want to continue giving parents training and tools to aid in building their babies’ brains, which ultimately builds a life and builds a community. 💡

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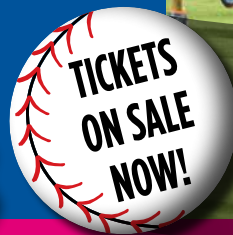
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APRIL	MAY <i>cont'd.</i>	JULY	AUGUST
Apr. 11 - 15 Chattanooga Lookouts	May 23 - 27 Tennessee Smokies	Jul. 1 - 3 Mississippi Braves	Aug. 2 - 6 Montgomery Biscuits
Apr. 21 - 25 Birmingham Barons	<b>JUNE</b>	Jul. 8 - 11 Mobile BayBears	Aug. 14 - 18 Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp
<b>MAY</b>	Jun. 3 - 7 Biloxi Shuckers	Jul. 18 - 22 Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp	Aug. 24 - 28 Mobile BayBears
May 2 - 6 Mississippi Braves	Jun. 13 - 17 Mobile BayBears	Jul. 28 - Aug. 1 Biloxi Shuckers	
May 17 - 21 Jackson Generals	Jun. 28 - 30 Mississippi Braves		



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All Games (except Sun.) - 6:35 PM • Sunday - 1:05 PM or 5:05 PM  
All pre-game activities start 30 minutes prior to game time. Gate dates and times are subject to change.



# LENA START

BY **Reggie Dogan**

STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

It takes a lot of small steps in the journey to make Pensacola America's First Early Learning City.

Studer Community Institute took one of those steps on Sept. 13, introducing LENA Start at First Presbyterian Church Child Discovery Center.

LENA stands for Language Environment Analysis. The LENA system measures the way parents and their young children converse.

Lena Start is focused on helping parents build stronger conversational habits that will have an impact on babies in the program's 13-week duration by providing parents with a powerful resource to keep talk top of mind.

Pensacola is the first site for LENA Start in Florida.

At the Child Discovery Center, 15 parents participated in the weekly sessions that include a curriculum of lessons, activities, videos and table exercises.

The Early Learning Coalition of Escambia combined a group of parents at Kid's Club on Davis Highway to begin its session this week.

Outcomes show that babies whose caregivers have participated in the program are building five months of language development in two months' time.

The most critical part of the program is the digital recorder, or "talk pedometer." It is tucked into a vest worn by babies and

toddlers (up to 30 months) to record a full day's worth of talking.

That data is used to generate a report that provides information on the number of words that the child is exposed to as well as the turn-taking interaction, the back and forth that occurred in the child's language environment throughout the day.

SCI LENA coordinators then will upload the recordings to LENA headquarters, which will generate reports that show how much the parents talked with their children and discuss strategies to help parents talk more throughout the program and as the child continues to develop and grow.

The recording device, along with the course materials, are part of the LENA Start™ program, an early language technology package overseen by the LENA Research Foundation that got its start on the East Coast and has recently come to Pensacola.

To ease parents' fears, it's important to note that nobody's actually listening to those conversations. LENA's software analyzes the pattern of those conversations and turns it into data.

While the recorder doesn't track what words parents and children are saying or hearing, it does capture a lot of valuable information, including the number of conversational turns or exchanges between child and adult, time spent listening to a television or other ambient noise versus communicating, and the frequency of the child's

A blue rectangular box with a white dashed border. At the top center is a white circle containing a downward-pointing arrow. Below the arrow, the text "LENA START" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font. Underneath, in a smaller white font, is the text: "LENA stands for Language Environment Analysis. The LENA system measures the way parents and their young children converse."

communication attempts.

Based on the findings of each report, parents and coaches are able to pinpoint times of the day where lots of talking is taking place and develop strategies to replicate more of these moments, whether it's taking advantage of downtime in the car during a morning commute or trading out some evening TV time for playtime.

Research shows that the more words children hear in the first three years of life builds the brain structure that will be needed later to support reading and thinking skills. Those early language skills can also lead to continued academic success later in life.

At SCI, we're taking small steps every day to make Pensacola's America's First Early Learning City.

LENA Start is a key part of becoming an Early Learning City by ensuring that parents are ably prepared to help their build their babies' brains, prepare their young children for kindergarten and help them reach important developmental milestones in their lives. 💡



# BARBERSHOP Books

BY **Reggie Dogan**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**T**he Barbershop Books program is among the positive steps taken to improve the quality of life in the community and increase school readiness.

Bringing the Barbershop Books program to Pensacola is among the steps taken to improve the quality of life and increase school readiness.

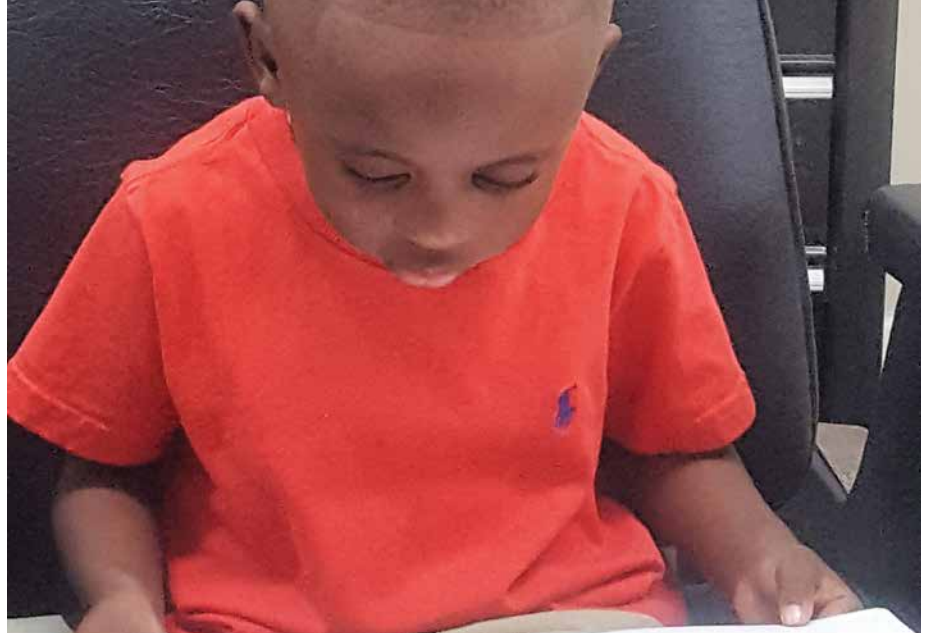
Barbershop Books is a community-based literacy program that creates child-friendly reading spaces in barbershops for boys ages 4 to 8 years old.

It leverages the cultural importance of barbershops in African American communities to help black boys identify as readers.

The focus on young black boys is significant because more than 80 percent of U.S. black male fourth-graders are not proficient in reading.

That's an important issue in Escambia County, where 2016 Florida Standards Assessment data shows fewer than 30 percent of African-American students in third grade scored at proficiency in language arts.

In an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy, poor reading skills among young black boys today will produce millions of black male high school dropouts who are unprepared to compete in the workforce of tomorrow, creating a litany of negative life



“... We have to stop talking about the contributing factors that lead to negative outcomes and start doing something. Even if we just help one young boy, it’s more than worthwhile.”

— Rev. **LONNIE WESLEY**,  
PASTOR OF GREATER LITTLE ROCK  
BAPTIST CHURCH

outcomes that cost billions of dollars in lost taxes, low wages, crime and incarceration.

In collaboration with the Studer Community Institute, The Rev. Lonnie Wesley, pastor of Greater Little Rock Baptist Church, brought the national book-reading project to Pensacola.

After hearing about the book program, Rev. Wesley solicited support from the Baptist Ministers Union of Pensacola and Vicinity to supply the Barbershop Books kit in four barbershops in the Pensacola area.

When he brought the idea to the local ministers, Wesley said that the Rev. Hosea Montgomery Jr., retired pastor of Bethlehem United Missionary Baptist Church, was one of the first to get behind the project.

“He stood up first, stood up tallest, but they all agree that we have to stop talking about the contributing factors that lead to negative outcomes and start doing something,” Wesley said. “Even if we just help one young boy, it’s more than worthwhile.”

Each bookshelf holds 15 books that are culturally relevant, age appropriate and gender responsive. Some fan favorites include “Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs,” “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” and “How Do Dinosaurs Go to School?”

The mission of Barbershop Books is to help young black boys and other boys of color to identify as readers by connecting books and reading to a male centered space by involving men, said Alvin Irby, CEO of Barbershop Books.

Irby, an author and former kindergarten and first-grade teacher, started the book program in Harlem, New York, in 2013, as a way to help young black boys identify as readers.

“At Barbershop Books, we believe that by pairing books and reading with barbershops, over time an association will be formed in community members and children — that when they see a barbershop, it will trigger them to think about books and reading,” Irby said.

The idea came to Irby when he saw one of his students walk into a barbershop without a book.

“My student just sat there with this bored look on his face for 15 or 20 minutes, and the whole time, I kept thinking, ‘He should be practicing his reading right now,’” he said. “So it was literally that perfect storm that brought about the idea: me being a teacher, me seeing my student, and me spending a lifetime going to the barbershop and understanding how important it is for the young boys who go there.”

Since its launch, Barbershop Books has partnered with more than 50 barbershops

across 20 cities in 12 different states to provide books for young black boys, a community that Irby explains is often underserved in school.

Barbering is an ancient profession with early records indicating the barber’s role as a community leader.

Like the church, black barbershops continue to thrive today as a meeting place for black men — and their boys — from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Over the years, black barbers have enjoyed a high degree of trust and respect and have served as role models for entrepreneurship and community participation.

Now, as an advocate and partner in addressing education disparities in the black community, the barbershop can become a place to help lead the charge.

Working together, the church and the barbershop are playing an important role in helping Pensacola become America’s First Early Learning City. 📖



### PARTICIPATING BARBERSHOPS IN PENSACOLA

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- **Meteye’s Cuts and Fashions**  
929 W. Michigan Ave.
- **The Original Kings of Barbering**  
3300 N. Pace Blvd., Suite 185

# THE THREE

# T'S

BY **Shannon Nickinson**  
STUDER COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

**Y**our baby's brain is a work in progress, and you are the person who can influence it the most.

Positive, loving interaction with a parent is the food that your baby's brain needs to be healthy, sharp and ready learn.

The science is indisputable. The essential years for developing the human brain are from birth through 3. Nearly 85 percent of the brain develops by age 3. The more words a baby hears in that time, the better prepared for school and life he or she will be.

Think of like this: A baby's brain is like a piggy bank. Every positive word a baby hears from a parent or caregiver is another coin in the bank. The payoff of all those words will come at the start of school with the skills to help him or her be ready to learn and succeed in school.

How can you help?

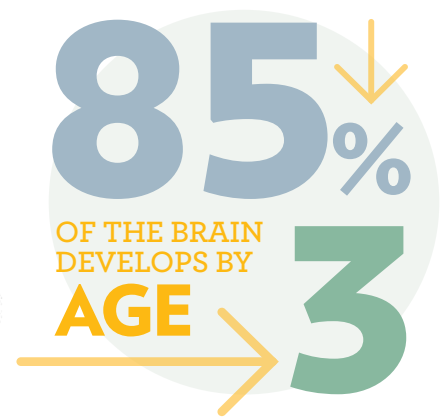
Here is some advice from Dr. Dana Suskind, the founder of the Thirty Million Words Initiative at the University of Chicago.

"While early childhood is really the story of parents," Suskind writes in her book, "parents are often afterthoughts in program development and reforms for closing the achievement gap. They may be mentioned in the discussion but, in the end, they are treated as an add-on rather than the key tool to make the necessary changes."

That's why Studer Community Institute believes it is important to share strategies like the Three Ts with parents.

"Parents are often afterthoughts in program development and reforms for closing the achievement gap. They may be mentioned in the discussion but, in the end, they are treated as an add-on rather than the key tool to make the necessary changes."

— **Dr. DANA SUSKIND,**  
PEDIATRIC SURGEON AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CHICAGO MEDICAL SCHOOL



## Tune In

- Follow your baby's interest and talk about it. Babies and toddlers will focus only on what they are interested in, even if that interest only lasts for five minutes.
- Build words into all play time. If they are stacking blocks, don't make them quit stacking blocks to listen to a story. Stack blocks with them and while you're there, talk about the blocks — what color they are, how many there are, which ones are shaped like rectangles or squares, etc.
- Ditch the smartphone or tablet. Instead spend face-to-face time with your baby talking, laughing and being together. Babies learn more from a loving adult than from a screen.
- Use your voice. Baby brains love the singsong rhythm that a higher pitched, slowed down voice makes. Repetition is key. You will get tired of reading the same story long before your child will get tired of hearing it. Keep reading it anyway.
- When your baby cries, respond with warmth and love. Studies show that babies whose cries are left unattended suffer "toxic" stress. If that continues over time, it damages the child's brain and makes it harder, research shows, for that child to learn, trust others and control his or her emotions.

## Talk More

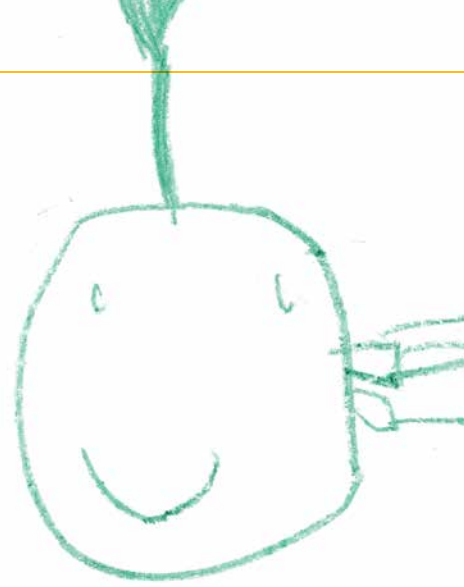
- Words matter. The number and the kind of words a child hears and how they are said are critical for your baby's brain to grow. Babies learn more from positive words than harsh, negative words. They also learn more from words that describe than from words that only give orders.
- Talk about what you do. Talk about what you are doing when your baby is there. When you change a diaper, when you wash the dishes, when you do anything, talk about it to your child. Babies are always listening.
- Talk about what your baby's doing. Connect one thing to many words. "You found my purse! What's in it? Keys. Hear how they jingle? Isn't that loud. No, we don't put keys in our mouth. They are dirty. We only put yummy things in our mouth like milk or bananas. Keys are for opening the door. See?"
- Stretch out what you say. Make the word fragments your baby starts to say into full sentences to help her learn more words. When your child says "Uppie, uppie," you should respond, "Do you want daddy to pick you up? I would love to pick you up and carry you on my shoulders!"
- The right kind of praise. Praise your child's effort — "You worked so hard on that puzzle and you finished it. Great job!" — rather than praise them — "You are so smart."
- The difference may seem small, but research shows that children who are praised for their effort are less likely to give up when faced with a challenge.

## Take Turns

- Talk all the time. Talk to your baby in conversation even before she has real words. When your baby makes a sound, it's her way of trying to talk to you. Answer back, even if you feel silly doing it. Every word you say is building her brain.
- Ask "how" or "why" questions. This is important as your child ages. Yes-no questions are only good for one-word answers. How and why questions force your child to fill in the blanks. It will build their higher thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Talk numbers. Talking about shapes, numbers and patterns is important too. Talk about the number of steps you take or blocks you stack, talk about a tower of four Legos compared to a tower of eight Legos. Use words like bigger, longer, smaller, shorter. Talk about patterns and shapes.
- Share books at reading time. Of course reading to a child is important. It's also important to teach parents what success looks like when reading to little ones. Moms in the Thirty Million Words Initiative at first often had complaints about reading with their children: "She wants to hold the book herself." "He won't sit still." "She doesn't let me finish the page before she tries to turn it herself." Parents had to learn that it was OK for their children to fidget while reading. What's important is keeping the child engaged — because engaged kids learn better.
- Ask about the story. It means asking open-ended questions about what happened in the story to let the child connect the dots.



# ASQ<sup>s</sup>



The **Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)** is used by health care professionals, childcare providers and developmental experts to track a child's growth. Based on the ASQ, by age 3 years, here are some milestones to look for.

## 6 Months

### COMMUNICATION

- If you are out of sight and call your baby, he or she looks in the direction of your voice.
- When your baby hears a loud sound, he or she turns to see where it came from.
- Your baby makes sounds such as “da,” “ga” and “ka.”
- When you copy a sound your baby makes, the baby tries to make the same sound back to you.
- Makes sounds to show if he or she is happy or sad.

### PROBLEM SOLVING

- Reaches for a toy in front of him or her with two hands.
- Picks up a toy and puts it in his or her mouth.
- Plays with a toy by banging it up and down on the floor or table.
- Turns to look for a toy he or she has dropped while lying on his or her back.
- Passes a toy back and forth from one hand to another.
- Reaches out to pat a mirror when in front of it, smiles or coos at the baby in the mirror.

## 12 Months

### COMMUNICATION

- Say two-syllable words such as “ba-ba” “da-da” “ga-ga.”
- Follow simple directions: “Come here,” “Give it to me” or “Put it back.”
- Plays at least one nursery game, such as “Bye-Bye,” “Peek-a-Boo,” or “Clap Your Hands.”
- Points to something he or she wants.
- Pick up objects, like a Cheerio, with thumb and forefinger.
- Says at least three words, such as “mama,” “dada,” or “baba.” At this age, a “word” is a sound that the baby says consistently to mean someone or something.

### PROBLEM SOLVING

- Helps turn the pages of a book.
- Finds a toy under a piece of paper or cloth after he or she sees you hide it there.
- Scribbles with a crayon or pencil.
- Offers you a toy if you ask for it.
- Copies you if you drop two toys into a container.
- Pushes his or her arm through the sleeve once you start it into the hole of the sleeve.
- Lifts his or her foot when it's time to put on a sock, shoe or pant leg.
- Offers you his or her toy when you hold your hand out and ask for the toy, even if he or she doesn't let go of it.





# 18 Months

## COMMUNICATION

- Says more than eight words in addition to “mama” and “dada.”
- Imitates a two-word sentence you say to her, like “Go home.” “Daddy play.”
- Points to the right picture when you say, “Show me the kitty” or “Where is the dog?”
- Points to draw your attention to what he or she is interested in.
- Says two or three words that combine two ideas: “Mommy come home.” “Daddy play ball” or “Dog gone.”
- Goes into another room to look for something when you ask, “Where is your truck?” or “Where is your coat?”
- Hugs a doll or stuffed animal while playing with it.
- Comes to you for help with opening a jar, box, etc.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- Scribbles back and forth when you give him or her a crayon or pencil.
- Copies a line you draw on a piece of paper.
- Stacks blocks or small toys on top of each other.
- Turns the pages of a book by himself.
- Copies you if you drop two toys into a container.
- Scribbles with a crayon or pencil.
- Copies things you do such as wipe up a spill, sweep, shave, comb hair.
- Make a mark with the tip of a crayon or pencil when trying to draw.
- Turn the pages of a book by himself.

# 24 Months

## COMMUNICATION

- Imitates a two-word sentence you say to her, like “Go home.” “Daddy play.”
- Points to the right picture when you say, “Show me the kitty” or “Where is the dog?”
- Look at you when you talk to him, laugh or smile when you play with him and turn to look when his name when called.
- Correctly use the words, “I,” “me,” “mine,” “you.”
- Says two or three words that combine two ideas: “Mommy come home.” “Daddy play ball” or “Dog gone.”
- Show interest in toys, people and things around. Move closer to other children.
- Use words or gestures to describe his feelings.
- Like to hear stories or songs.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- Follow at least three simple directions, such as, “Put the book on the table,” “Find your shoes,” “Hold my hand.”
- Look in the direction you point when you point at something. Try to show you something by pointing at it and looking back at you.
- Calm down within 15 minutes when upset.
- Scribbles back and forth when you give him or her a crayon or pencil.
- Copies a line you draw on a piece of paper.
- Play “make believe” like talking into a phone, feeding a doll, flying a toy plane.
- Put things away where they belong. For example, does your child know that toys go in the toy box, dishes go in the kitchen, etc.
- Use a chair or stool to get something that is out of reach or to “help” you in the kitchen.
- Copies things you do such as wipe up a spill, sweep, shave, comb hair.

# 36 Months

## COMMUNICATION

- Speaks in three or four word sentences.
- Follows directions that show she understands spatial relationships, such as: “Put the book on the table” or “Put the show under the chair” or “Move the zipper up.”
- Says their first and last name.
- Points correctly to at least seven body parts when you ask, either on their own body or on a doll.
- Talks well enough for strangers to understand most of the time.
- Is able to tell what is happening in the picture of a picture book if asked. For example, “What is the dog doing?” She should be able to answer, “barking” or “running,” for example.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- After you draw a straight vertical line on paper, makes a line that resembles yours. She should be able to do the same thing with a circle and with a horizontal line.
- Copies you when you build a bridge with blocks by making one like it.
- Holds a pencil or crayon between her finger and thumb.
- Watches an adult line up for toys, blocks, Legos, etc. and imitates that by lining four items in a row as well.
- Finds something to stand on (chair, stool) to get to something she cannot reach.
- Turns book pages one at a time.
- Put on a coat or jacket or shirt by herself.
- Does puzzles with three or four pieces.



# KINDERGARTEN *Readiness*

## YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S BEST TEACHER

Kindergarten may seem like a long way off, but it's never too early to start preparing your baby for school. From now until your child's first day of kindergarten, family members and caregivers are a child's best resource for building a strong foundation for school.

As your child nears age 5 and you both start thinking about the first day of kindergarten, this guide can be a checkup to help you see if he's ready to make the grade for school.

## CAN YOUR CHILD

### PRINT THEIR NAME



Handwriting practice lines for printing a name. The first line is a solid top line, the second is a dashed middle line, and the third is a solid bottom line. A vertical dotted line with a downward arrow is on the left side.

### COPY THESE LETTERS



Handwriting practice lines for copying letters. The first line is a solid top line, the second is a dashed middle line, and the third is a solid bottom line. A vertical dotted line with a downward arrow is on the left side.

V H T C A

### READ AND WRITE THESE NUMBERS

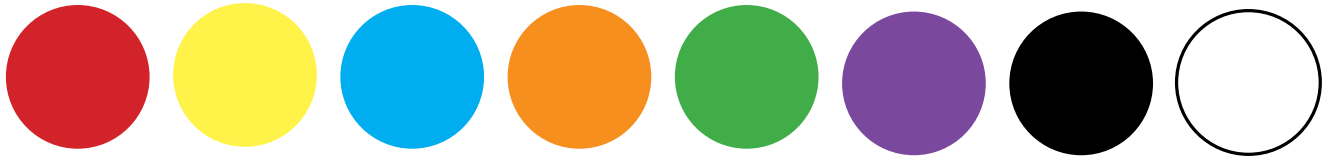


Handwriting practice lines for writing numbers. The first line is a solid top line, the second is a dashed middle line, and the third is a solid bottom line. A vertical dotted line with a downward arrow is on the left side.

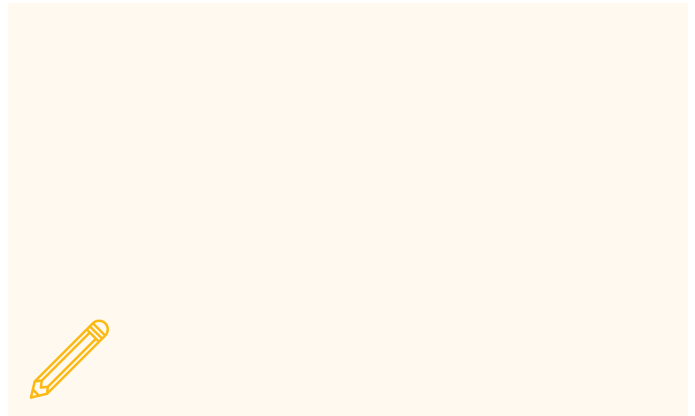
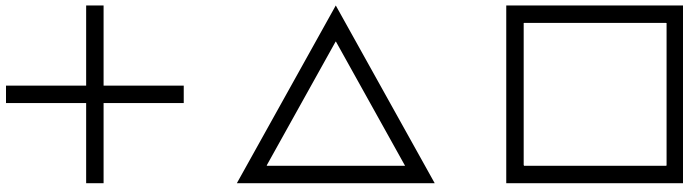
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

# CAN YOUR CHILD ...

**NAME THESE COLORS?**



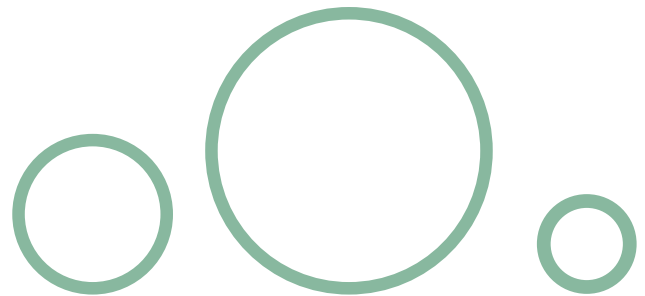
**DRAW THESE SHAPES?**



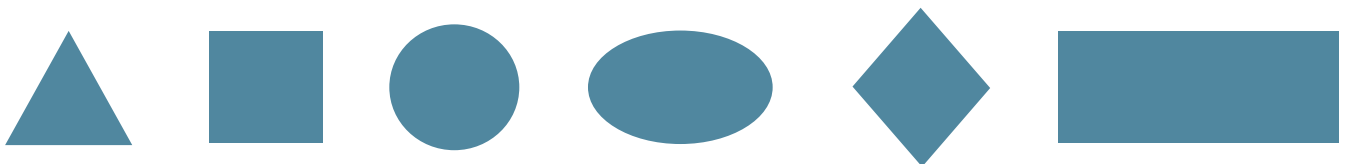
**COUNT THE LIGHT BULBS?**



**TELL YOU WHICH IS THE SMALLEST CIRCLE?**



**NAME THESE SHAPES?**



# CAN YOUR CHILD

## IDENTIFY OPPOSITES

big	little
hot	cold
front	back
left	right
happy	sad

## READ COMMON WORDS

the	my
of	is
to	are
you	do
she	does

## FOLLOW BASIC RULES

- Sharing and taking turns.
- Respecting people's property.
- Cleaning up after themselves.



- Listen for 10 minutes without interrupting.

- Dress himself or herself without help, except for snaps, buttons and zippers.
- Identify the front cover, back cover and title page of a book.

## FOLLOW THREE DIRECTIONS GIVEN AT THE SAME TIME

- Hang up your backpack.
- Put your lunch bag on the shelf.
- Sit on the rug for circle time.

## MARK THE ONES YOUR CHILD KNOWS

- First name
- Age
- Name the street or address of where they live
- City they live in
- Last name
- Boy or girl
- Telephone number

# BUILDING YOUR BABY'S BRAIN

THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR  
BABY'S BRAIN GROW IS EASY ...

TALK TALK TALK

Your words are food for your baby's brain. The more words a child hears in the first three years of life, the stronger the connections in the brain will be. Experts call it plasticity — it means that your baby's brain will learn more, more easily in these early years than at any other time in his or her life.

## Talk all the time

- Talk to your baby from the day he or she is born. Every word you say makes a connection in his or her brain. The more connections the brain builds, the more easily your baby will be able to learn later on.

## Keep your ears open

- When your baby coos or makes a first sound, it's a way of trying to answer you. Look your baby in the eye and answer back. That is a cue to the brain to talk more.

## Sing and talk together

- When you feed or change or bathe your baby, talk about what you're doing. Name the parts of the body. Count fingers and toes. Make up silly songs about what you're doing. Rhyming words and music help growing brains recognize patterns and sounds.

YOUR BABY'S BRAIN WILL  
TRIPLE IN SIZE  
BY AGE 3

### Remember

The more connections you help your baby's brain build by talking with your child will influence how ready and able to learn he or she will be.



# BRAIN

# BUILDERS



## TURN WAIT TIME INTO LEARNING TIME

Life with a child under 3 includes a lot of waiting. From the doctor's appointments to waiting for siblings, waiting with a little one sometimes seems like an eternity, and even the most well-behaved babies or toddlers become antsy.

Try treating the waiting area like an early learning hotspot.

- Talk about what you see. Look at the colors, patterns and shapes you see in the wall decorations or the flooring and talk about them. For an older child, play a quick game of "I Spy." For younger babies, do a "sight walk" of the room taking time to explain what you see to your baby.
- Talk about what the doctor or nurse may do when your visit starts. "We are waiting for the doctor to tell me just how much you have grown over the last three months. I can just imagine what the nurse will say when she sees how well you sit up!"
- Make a waiting room friend. If there are other children where you're waiting, see if your child will communicate with the other little ones in the room. An example would be, "It looks like he might be your age and he has a blue dinosaur on his shirt. You like dinosaurs, too!"



## INSTEAD OF SCREEN TIME TRY:



- **ART TIME:** Color with your child. Coloring helps kids use their imagination and builds their fine motor skills, which allows a child to hold a pencil correctly to write. As your child

draws or colors, ask about what they are drawing to get them thinking about the story behind the artwork.

- **PLAY TIME:**

Make sure you make time to build your child's mind and body by talking about nature and the world you see. Make time to walk, climb, run and swing. These things build gross motor skills — the big muscles that will help your child move — and spatial awareness — how objects relate to each other.



- **RHYME TIME:** Nursey rhymes, poems, songs and music that you listen to with your baby can help build the brain. It is one way to begin building the awareness of the sounds that words and letters make.



## USE ALL FIVE SENSES



It's important to utilize the five senses while engaging in quality talk. Experiences help our sensory system. Let's try to take experiences and use those as opportunities to talk to your baby. For babies, it is important to get them to make the connections with all the senses they are naturally using in their little "baby world."

Babies are curious and are always exploring the world around them. They often use touch, smell and taste to figure things out. Use those opportunities to get more words in with your baby.



For example, try allowing your growing six-month-old to have fun with "edible paint." Edible paint consists of two simple ingredients — whipped cream and food coloring. You and your child can talk about how the whipped cream feels.

"Is it cold?" Draw a green tree with the "edible paint." Interact and describe the "painting experience" with as many colorful words as possible.

When you are on a walk to a park or store, verbalize how all the five senses are being used on the stroll. Talk to your child about the early morning crisp air, ask them about the what they see, how the wind feels on their face? What sounds they hear — a dog barking or an airplane or noisy truck going by.



## USE SPACE WORDS

Space words refers to words that help us understand spatial awareness — where things are in relationship to each other. As adults, we often refer to the concept as our "sense of direction."

Words like up, down, under, over, top, bottom, in front, behind, high, low, near, far, left, right and middle are words that help develop our sense of spatial awareness.

It not only ties into language building, but also it ties in to building early math skills. Words such as first, last, big and small help children begin to understand how things rank in order and how shapes compare to each other. Those concepts are the things we use later on to learn algebra and geometry.

Helping your child count, recognize shapes, patterns and measure things builds his or her math skills.

How can you do it? While getting your child dressed, count the snaps or buttons on clothes. Talk about how the buttons go INTO the button holes. Now we pull your shirt DOWN to cover your belly. Talk about putting ONE shoe on his LEFT foot and ONE shoe on his RIGHT foot. That means you have TWO shoes!



## OUTSIDE PLAY

Physical activity — especially playing outside — increases blood flow to the brain. It's good for your child's body and brain.

Movement, both gross and fine motor activities, can increase muscle responses by strengthening synaptic connections. It allows children to practice their favorite things and to explore new ways to play.

Outside play gives children the opportunity to express their feelings and role play. Examples include playing kitchen, teacher, doctor, truck driver or firefighter.

Outside play can incorporate number and pattern relationships. There are so many things to count and sort — leaves, rocks, windows, birds and shapes to find.

How can you do it? Allow them to sit on a blanket outside. Use your five senses to talk about nature and all the things around you to your little one.

Blow bubbles. Talk about the sizes of the bubbles, how fast they move where they might float off to.

Remember to follow your child's lead. Children are more receptive if you get down on their level and enter their world of play. Make it fun. Outside play is good for you too!



## BRAIN

# BUILDERS

## CONNECT ONE THING TO MANY WORDS

One way to add more words to your child's word bank is to make word chains — a series of questions or statements connected to something your child is doing.

### Give it a try!

“The moon lives high in the sky and comes out at night.”



“Did you know that the moon is a circle, too?”



## START HERE:

“You have your ball.”



“That ball is red.”



“Red is mommy's favorite color.”



“The ball is shaped like a circle.”



“So is the shape of your doll's head!”

## THE RIGHT KIND OF PRAISE

### SAY THIS:

“You worked so hard on that puzzle and you finished it. Great job!”

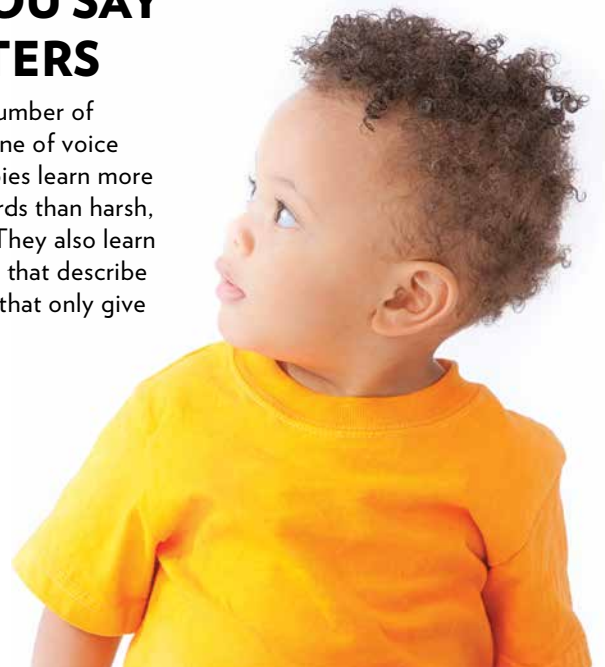
### RATHER THAN:

“You are so smart.”

**WHY:** The difference may seem small, but research shows that children who are praised for their effort rather than a personality trait are less likely to give up when faced with a challenge.

## HOW YOU SAY IT MATTERS

It's not just the number of words, but the tone of voice that matters. Babies learn more from positive words than harsh, negative words. They also learn more from words that describe than from words that only give orders.





# A Glimpse of our 16 Gestures by 16 Months

16by16™

Research shows the development of gestures predicts language skills 2 years later. Children should be using at least 2 new gestures each month from 9 to 16 months. By 16 months, children should have at least 16 gestures.

9 Months: Give, Shake head



10 Months: Reach, Raise arms



11 Months: Show, Wave



12 Months: Open hand, Point, Tap



13 Months: Clap, Blow a kiss



14 Months: Index finger point, Shhh gesture



15 Months: Head nod, Thumbs up, Hand up



16 Months: Other symbolic gestures



Visit [www.FirstWordsProject.com](http://www.FirstWordsProject.com) to print, download, and share the complete 16 Gestures by 16 Months and explore our Lookbook.

## Screen My Child

If your child is between 9 and 18 months, we invite you to participate in our research and have your child screened with the Smart ESAC.

Find out how at

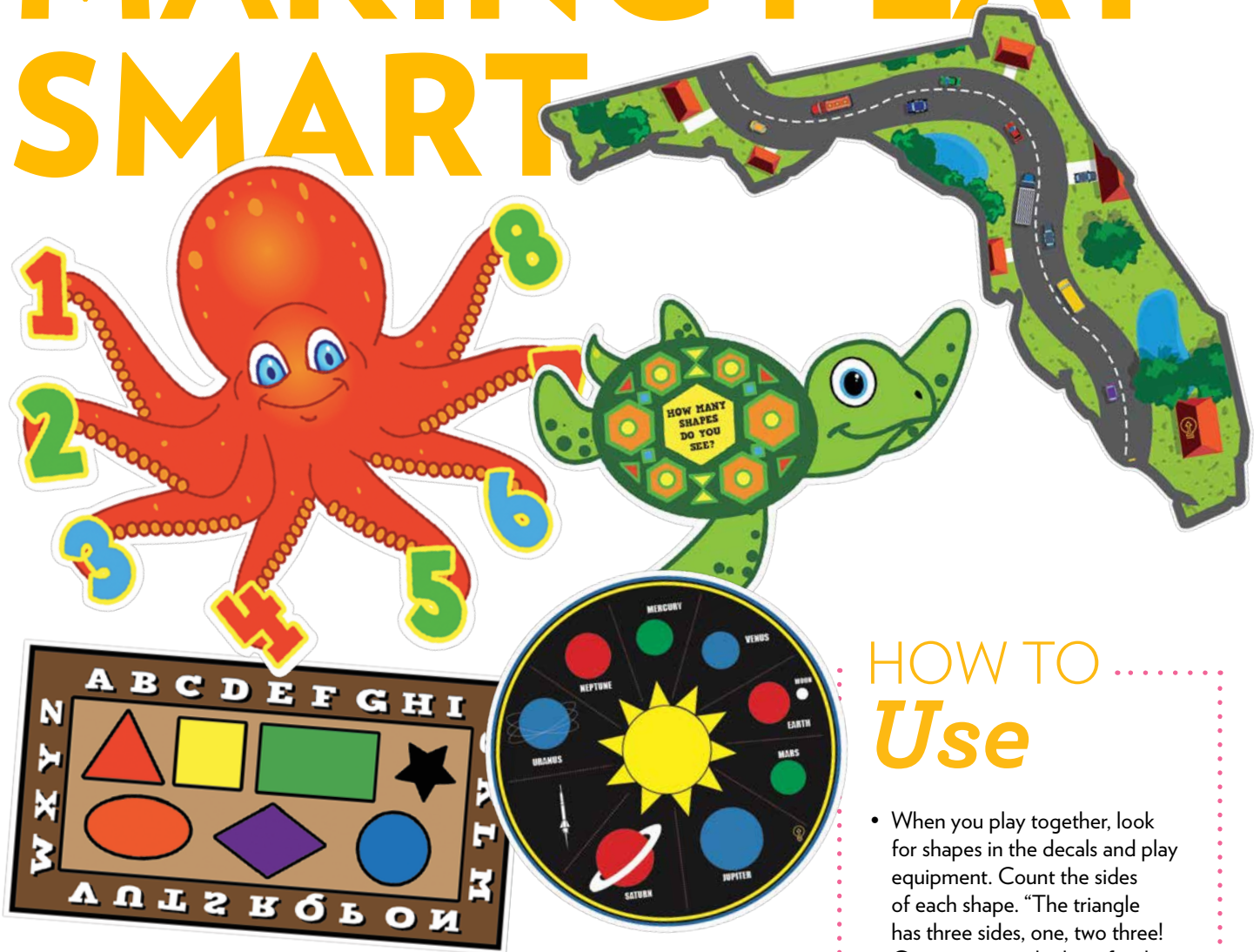
**FirstWordsProject.com**

While you are there

**CHECK OUT OUR GROWTH CHARTS**

Learn the Milestones that Matter Most.

# MAKING PLAY SMART



## HOW TO Use

- When you play together, look for shapes in the decals and play equipment. Count the sides of each shape. “The triangle has three sides, one, two three! Can you count the lines for the square?”
- When you hop, skip or jump, count the number of steps you take.
- Compare how big your steps are to how small your child’s steps are.
- Name the colors.
- When you say the alphabet, name an animal whose name starts with each letter.
- For information on how to sponsor a set of decals, email: [snickinson@studer.org](mailto:snickinson@studer.org)

The more words a child hears before the age of 4, the stronger the connections in his or her brain will be and the more likely that child is to be ready for school.

The Studer Community Institute’s work supports efforts to teach parents, families and caregivers about the important role that talk and interaction play in early brain development.

One way we do that is through the design and installation of decals that support early learning and kindergarten readiness skills in public spaces and play areas.

These decals reinforce concepts that will be important for children when they start school. Skills like counting, letter naming, shape and color identification are built into the design of these decals.

The decals also are meant to encourage families to play and interact together. That interaction and connection is critical to how strong a child’s brain becomes. 💡

For more information or to apply for one of these decals, email [info@studer.org](mailto:info@studer.org)

# BAPTIST

## EasySchedule

No hassle appointment scheduling is here. With Baptist Health Care's EasySchedule, you can directly book online appointments with **Baptist Medical Group primary and urgent care providers** from your desktop computer, smart phone or other electronic device.

It's simple.

1. Visit [eBaptistHealthCare.org](http://eBaptistHealthCare.org).
2. Choose a provider or location.
3. Select a time.
4. Confirm your appointment.

Once you've confirmed your appointment, you will have the option of receiving an email or text message to remind you of your visit.

Try out this new scheduling tool and give us feedback. Visit [eBaptistHealthCare.org](http://eBaptistHealthCare.org), or call **850.434.4080**, and EasySchedule your appointment today.



[eBAPTISTHEALTHCARE.ORG](http://eBAPTISTHEALTHCARE.ORG)



**BAPTIST**  
HEALTH CARE



Photo courtesy of J. McLaughlin

## SHOP

Altar'd State  
 Anthropologie  
 Brooks Brothers  
 Hemline (Spring 2018)  
 J. Jill  
 J. McLaughlin  
 Kinnucan's Specialty Outfitter  
 Lilly Pulitzer  
 L'Occitane en Provence  
 The Orvis Company  
 Ophelia Swimwear  
 Peter Millar (Spring 2018)  
 Pottery Barn  
 Tommy Bahama  
 Vineyard Vines



Photo courtesy of Emeril Lagasse

## DINE

Another Broken Egg Cafe  
 Cantina Laredo  
 The Craft Bar  
 Emeril's Coastal Italian  
 everkrisp  
 Fleming's Prime Steakhouse  
 Grimaldi's Coal Brick-Oven Pizzeria  
 PF Chang's China Bistro  
 Starbucks  
 Tommy Bahama Restaurant & Bar  
 The Wine Bar

## GRAND BOULEVARD

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