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SUNCOAST The Campaign for GRADE-LEVEL READING

3rd Grade Reading Success Matters

Building Bright Beginnings for Kindergarten

It may seem early to begin thinking about next school year, but for any of our families with rising kindergarteners, now is the perfect time to set things in motion.

For many schools, Kindergarten Round-Up events take place somewhere between March and April. Whether you know which school your child is headed to or not, Kindergarten Round-Up events are a wonderful opportunity to get introduced to the school, its teachers, and the overall school culture, and most importantly, what to expect once your little one gets there. Visit the website, call your schools of interest, or look through the Suncoast Remake Learning Days event guide to save the date for Kindergarten Round-Up events.

At many Kindergarten Round-Up events, or sometimes at registration, you'll likely come across one of SCGLR's FREE Kindergarten Readiness Bags! The transition to kindergarten is a big step for young children, and being prepared can make a meaningful difference in their confidence and success during this important first year. Thanks to the continued support of teachers, principals, and generous community partners, and the generosity of The Patterson Foundation, with support from the Rotary Club of Sarasota Foundation, and United Way of Charlotte County, the Kindergarten Readiness Bags are ready for families!

Developed by the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Kindergarten Readiness Bags are designed to help children build early learning skills and feel confident as they take their first steps into kindergarten. These free bags are filled with fun, educational materials that families can use together at home.

You may be curious–what's actually in a Kindergarten Readiness Bag? We're so glad you asked! These bags are fully loaded with helpful, hands-on tools that support learning through play and exploration.

Here's what's inside:

- Two sets of flashcards
- Literacy charts
- Magnetic alphabet letters (uppercase and lowercase)
- Magnetic uppercase alphabet letters
- Drawing paper
- Jumbo crayons
- Kindergarten Readiness Checklists
- Information packets about Attendance Works and Vroom
- A copy of Josh the Baby Otter, a storybook about water safety

For some fun ideas about how to use these fabulous tools, check out this video! In this Connecting Communities podcast, Leah Verier-Dunn sat with Dr. Patti Folino, Principal of Tuttle Elementary in Sarasota County, for a wonderful and energized conversation about Kindergarten Readiness. Patti, now in her 30th year as an educator, shared her passion for children and the importance of preparing them to start kindergarten.

In our conversation, Patti mentions that expectations have increased for our young learners. She elaborates that one of the biggest challenges in starting kindergarten is for parents and caregivers to really understand the schedule of the day. Though still centered in fun and learning through play, there is a bit more rigor than there used to be. There are a lot of academic expectations and though these are things children will learn while in kindergarten, it is helpful for them to arrive with some awareness—ensuring it's not their first time being introduced to these academic and literacy concepts.

Acknowledging this increase in expectations can feel overwhelming, but through this conversation you'll see that simple actions help the ideas of readiness feel within reach. We talked about the resource Vroom, a wonderful app that helps families turn everyday moments into brain building moments. We discussed the importance of using local resources. Patti encourages families to check out organizations like Forty Carrots, the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, local libraries and more for early learning resources. Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of taking advantage of programs like VPK (Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten—subsidised pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds regardless of

income, to ensure your child has an opportunity to begin building the skills needed for kindergarten.

What are some simple things families can implement right away to support readiness? Patti mentions playing more games! Playing games naturally introduces so many of the areas to help strengthen as children enter into and continue on in school: problem solving, math and literacy skills, language, learning to lose, learning to try again, resilience, critical thinking, and so much more. How fun (and simple) is that?!

Did you notice? We haven't talked about screens or technology—it's intentional! Though technology is certainly a helpful and needed tool at times, in this case, interpersonal exchanges are much more powerful and effective at improving readiness. These exchanges happen naturally when adults and children play together and are the most crucial moments for brain and whole child development. The "serve and return", as Patti mentions in the podcast, paves the way for language skills to develop—she encourages us all to ask children questions and let them talk!

On that note, SCGLR invites you to get talkin'!

Let's Keep Connecting

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