

LOOK for the STARS



Super Kids + Super Care = Star-Bright Futures

As you know from Coalition announcements over the past year, our community has made a commitment to support a local comprehensive quality rating improvement system (QRIS), based on a 5 Star recognition system, to be administered by the Early Learning Coalition. Many directors and family child care providers have attended informational meetings to learn more about the Look for the Stars initiative and the additional supports that will be available. The program is now well under way.

The Coalition contracted with the Devereux Florida team to conduct the ERS assessments and complete the checklists for the other items within the point based system. This process began mid February and is scheduled to be completed by the end of April. **Once all the assessments are done providers will receive a report with valuable information identifying areas of strength and areas that may need to be improved.** The focus of the QRIS this first year is to establish initial ratings and identify how best to meet specific needs to ensure that all providers are able to offer the quality programs which are the foundation for a child's success in school and in life.

By their commitment to the Look for the Stars QRIS our community has recognized the importance of quality early childhood experiences in supporting positive outcomes for children. This is a wonderful opportunity for child care providers to make their own commitment to quality, to take an objective look at their programs to see what needs to be improved, and to receive support from the Coalition to make those changes. We are looking forward to working together with all of you on our common goal - the best possible care and early learning experiences for our young children.



Outdoor Environments Workshops Saturday, May 17th

Save the date for wonderful training opportunity on a hot topic! Betsy Thigpen, a nationally recognized authority on outdoor environments, came from North Carolina to present at the Coalition's provider conference in January. Teachers and directors requested more information so we have invited her back for a longer workshop that will allow her to cover this issue in depth.



With the current emphasis on academic skill development, early childhood educators are realizing that outdoor play has often been overlooked. Betsy Thigpen will give another perspective, with a focus on the benefits of going outside and experiencing the natural world. The workshop will offer suggestions on creating rich outdoor environments, ideas for activities, the benefits of outdoor play for children with challenging behaviors, the importance of outdoor play on physical development, and ways to incorporate the outdoor environment as an essential element in the daily curriculum. Flyer with details is enclosed. This is a training you won't want to miss!



Just for Family Child Care Providers

The 16th Annual Family Child Care Conference will be held the end of June in Clearwater Beach. Once again the Coalition is offering scholarships for up to **\$300** to family child care providers who would like to attend this event. This is a great opportunity to catch up on developments in the field, get new ideas, have fun and share experiences with other family child care providers.

Applications must be returned to the Coalition postmarked by May 1st. Priority will be given to first-time attendees. We hope to sponsor many family child care providers to the conference!





VPK NEWS

Summer VPK and the 2008/2009 School Year VPK programs will be here before you know it. The Coalition's Child Care Connection started issuing Certificates of Eligibility on March 18 and so far more than 500 parents have

applied. Check the VPK provider list given to parents on the VPK page of the Coalition's website and let us know if your information is not correct. Any new VPK provider must contact the Coalition to be approved and put on the list. **All new VPK providers and any provider who would like a refresher should attend a VPK Orientation:**

Tuesday, April 15 ~ or ~ Thursday April 17

6:00 pm to 7:00 pm

**1750 17th St, Unit K-1, Sarasota
Human Services Center**

(where the Coalition office is located)

RSVP to 954-4830 ext. 4 or email

jsmirnov@earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org

Reminder: All VPK Providers need to submit a new VPK Form 10 and a VPK Form 11 for each VPK Class along with the VPK Statewide Agreement and VPK Calendar. **All teachers must be approved by the Coalition, have appropriate and current education credentials and must have their level 2 background screening, including FBI fingerprint clearance, current within 5 years before they start.** VPK Directors must also hold current director credentials. Go to the Coalition website's VPK page for the VPK 10 and 11, the VPK Agreement, and VPK calendar and a VPK checklist or call 954-4830 ext. 4.

Teachers or directors who need **VPK Standards** training contact **Dianne Rose** at 954-4830 ext. 3.

Phonological Awareness Training Coming in June!

Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and distinguish parts of speech and words. Knowing that many teachers would like additional training in this important area, Lisa Allen, the new VPK Regional Facilitator, will offer workshops on this topic in June. Stay tuned!



English Language Learners in the VPK Classroom online!

Access this free course at www.flvpkonline.org/ELL/ and see enclosed flyer for more information.

Kindergarten Transition

A transition is a major life change. For young children, moving from preschool to kindergarten is one of the most significant transitions they will experience. Teachers need to work together with parents and children to ensure that this big step is a positive one. To give kindergarten teachers useful information from both preschool teachers and parents please make copies and complete the enclosed **Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition Checklist** for each child and return the completed checklists to the Coalition, which will distribute them to the appropriate kindergarten teachers. This is

also a great opportunity to share information and reassure parents.

For more resources and ideas on kindergarten transition, go to the **Florida Center for Parent Involvement** website,

www.fmhi.usf.edu/cfs/dares/fcpi.



Insurance Forum Thursday, April 17

Access to affordable insurance remains an on-going issue for many in the early childhood community. While this is a challenging problem with no easy solutions the Coalition has continued its efforts to find affordable options. Janet Kahn, Coalition Executive Director, is Chair of a county-wide committee working on insurance issues. See the enclosed flyer for information on a *Get Sarasota County Insured* educational forum to be held in North Port on Thursday, April 17 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.

Trainings → Trainings → Trainings →

The Florida Center is presenting an all day workshop on **Sensory Integration**, April 19th in Venice, with a nationally known speaker. Reports from those who attended this training last year were extremely positive, "the presenter is wonderful and the workshop very interactive." Remember that the **Coalition's Continuing Education Scholarship** reimburses up to \$150 for attending trainings and conferences.

Resource Room Bulletin

N~ The Resource Room will soon have its own page on the Coalition's website, where documents and schedules will be posted. Lesson planning with **Dianne Rose** continues, so be sure to take advantage of that opportunity! Call 556-1600 x 118 for more information.

Visit our website! Minutes of meetings and scholarship applications are posted. A calendar of meetings is also available, as well as the community training calendar. Look us up and give us your feedback! If any director or teacher would like to receive a copy of this newsletter via email, contact the Coalition at the general email address below.

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