

AN INDEPENDENT SUPPLEMENT BY MEDIAPLANET TO USA TODAY

Learning through play
Taking a hands
on approach

Building literacy
Developing cognitive
thinking skills

21st century classroom
Advancements
in technology

**MEDIA
PLANET**

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EARLY EDUCATION

PHOTO: DAVID BURNETT, SAVE THE CHILDREN

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TIPS

CREATING BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS

Save The Children ambassadors Jennifer Garner and Mark Shriver help revive education in struggling communities



**All the places
your child will grow**

NECPA Accredited Schools

The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation • www.necpa.net



CHALLENGES

Technology is not meant to replace the teacher or the classroom. The mission is to provide every child with the **finest education possible.**



The power of education

Kids are more receptive to learning at an early age. By the time a child enters first grade, his educational path is already set, having been shaped by experiences as a baby, a toddler and a pre-schooler.

Build vocabulary

I've been an educator for most of my life and I believe if we can build a child's vocabulary in the early years, he has a greater opportunity for educational success.

As a father of six children, I know the family has a tremendous impact on education. The one thing parents can do to help their kids is talk to them. There's nothing more important than vocabulary. Parents should talk to their children all day long.

Every child is growing his or her own brain and it's strictly a function of stimulus. The newest brain research shows if you're not stimu-

lating the circuits, you're not going to grow.

Language doesn't have to be profound but it should be positive to stimulate the child.

Encourage reading

It's very important to be reading and working on building vocabulary. Ask the child questions like, "What do you think?" Interactive reading allows the child to become active and respond.

Up until fourth grade a child is learning to read; after that he's reading to learn so do your part to keep your child motivated to read. If he's shying away from it, he may be overwhelmed by the words and need help.

Embracing technology

I have always wanted to help educate children all over the world, not just in the classrooms where I taught. Even if you don't have access to great teachers, it's possible to

"We want the children to reach their fullest potential."



Dustin Heuston
Chairman, Founder,
and CEO of Waterford Institute

get online and build a portal to the world. That's why I believe technology can improve the way children learn.

Software programs covering subjects such as reading, math and science, can help kids advance at their own pace.

Technology is not meant to replace the teacher or the classroom. The mission is to provide every child with the finest education possible. It's very exciting to say both equity and excellence are possible.

Don't be passive about technology and say, "I wonder what will happen with my children?" You should study technology for 30 minutes a day and find out what it can do for you and your family.

The message now is about hope. Remember, start a child young and build a mind properly. It's never too late.

DUSTIN HEUSTON

As told to Kristen Castillo

Finding accredited programs

■ Enrolling your child in a great school is starting earlier than ever. Many parents want highly regarded, accredited programs for children as young as babies.

What is accreditation?

"Accreditation is a process by which programs demonstrate they meet specific standards and criteria," says Linda Hassan Anderson of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) which accredits programs for children from birth until kindergarten. The goal of early accreditation

programs is overall program quality.

"Quality in early education is something we're striving for," says Andrea Seidman of National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), which serves schools with children age six weeks to eight years.

Accreditation Standards

Each accrediting body has their own standards for schools to meet.

NAEYC's standards include curriculum, student progress, health, and family involvement. NECPA's standards are similar and include health and safety, administration, and parent and

community relationships.

Planned on-site visits, as well as unannounced verification visits establish and maintain the accreditations, which typically are valid for a few years. NECPA's is good for three years and NAEYC's for five years. Both accreditation programs require schools to submit yearly reports.

What to look for

Before enrolling a child in a school, parents need to research the school.

"I would say to parents' credit, they are becoming very, very savvy consumers," says Hassan Anderson.

Parents should ask about the school's accreditation, meet staff

and teachers, and learn about the educator's professional qualifications.

A large part of accreditation programs are centered on parent involvement.

NECPA for example looks at parent-involved activities such as parent-teacher nights, frequent parent surveys, and newsletters and websites to keep families in the know, as well as holiday events to promote family involvement.

"We want the children to reach their fullest potential," says Kristen Grimm, also of NECPA.

KRISTEN CASTILLO

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WE RECOMMEND



The American Library Association and its divisions believe the ability to read is a fundamental skill for children growing up today

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"Studies show that early reading is critical for child development and academic and career success later in life."

Jennifer Garner gets involved

Working with Save the Children and bridging the gaps in communities.

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NEWS

QUESTION
& ANSWER

Wendy Collie
President,
KinderCare
Learning Centers

What differentiates early childhood education programs from day care?

What sets high-quality early education programs apart is the focus on a rich learning environment that supports the healthy development of the whole child cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically and ensures children have the skills necessary to enter school ready to learn.

- Look for a low teacher-to-student ratio allowing teachers to focus on individual learning.
- Look for developmentally appropriate curriculum and a language-rich environment
- Check to see that the program is accredited—accredited programs demonstrate their commitment to go beyond a state's minimum licensing requirements and meet rigorous national standards.
- Spend time with teachers and the center director—make sure they are qualified, engaged, and can help your child develop the skills he/she will need in school and beyond.

Question: How can parents help children learn through everyday play experiences?

Answer: Parents can show children a variety of activities and involve them in experiences like mealtime.

Turning play into education

Children might want to spend hours on one activity or toy, but child development experts say moderation matters since kids need to learn how to pay attention, finish a project, and make good decisions.

"It's really up to the parent to introduce diverse content and set limits when promoting the idea of self regulation in a child," says child development expert Dr. Karen Hill Scott who is also a mother of four children.

Children's development is often categorized as SPICE, an acronym meaning social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional skills. Educational play can help kids work on these skills.

Turning play into learning

Involve kids in meal preparation such as choosing placemats and setting the table. While doing laun-



PHOTO: AMERICA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

dry, kids learn colors, how to fold, and how to match items like socks.

Use creative projects like drawing, painting and crafts to help kids express their imagination. They can explore music by writing and singing silly songs and drumming on tables, too.

While outside, kids can pick flowers, name plants, and watch bugs and birds. No matter the activity, they'll feel helpful and also develop self-esteem.

"They'll feel like 'I mastered this,

I'm smart. I know what I'm doing. I know how to do this,'" says Hill Scott. "And outside of being loved by mom and dad, that mastery is really a big payoff for little kids."

Using media effectively

From cell phones to TV to gaming devices, media is everywhere.

David Kleeman, president of American Center for Children and Media says 85 percent of parents allow children to have some screen time. He says a good use of

media is encouraging kids to take photos with a camera phone.

Even video games can be good. "A lot of the games designed, you can't play sitting down and leaning back," says Kleeman. "You have to be up and moving, so physically they are wonderfully engaging."

Technology can supplement real world learning, but can't replace it. "They're very different experiences," says Kleeman. "If parents acknowledge that, then they can start to choose what their child needs, wants, and likes."

Children need to learn how and when to use media, as well as the importance of turning it off. That's why it's a good idea to treat media as one source of content in a child's day. Balance media with other activities such as reading, coloring, and playing with blocks.

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We believe that as children learn to think for themselves, they must be free to express what they are thinking.



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