

Looking At The ISSUES

Stark Education Partnership

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Research Supports Major Shift Needed in Early Education

"Children's development is complex, and much research points to the fact that depth of thinking and quality of interaction matter more than rote learning and knowledge."

With recent advances in neuroscience, we understand that a child's early experiences are essential for long-term learning and growth. In particular, during the first five years of life, interactions and environment shape a child's brain growth and development. Knowing this has created a **growing sense of urgency to better prepare all children for school**. After all, research tells us that children who start behind stay behind, and early gaps in understandings – especially those in literacy and math – tend to be sustained or widened over time.

At the same time, this urgency has often led to misdirected efforts. Across the U.S., formal elementary education has become narrowly focused on literacy and mathematics. Pressure to address achievement gaps in these areas has led many preschools and early elementary grades to increase prescribed, academic instruction and remove the child-directed exploration, hands-on learning, and imaginative play that are longitudinally correlated to higher order thinking.

Even in Stark County with a large percentage of highly rated preschools and successful parent engagement programs like SPARK, the kindergarten readiness data has essentially remained statistically the same over the last 5 years. Since 2017 approximately 60% of Stark public school students beginning kindergarten are ready. Once in kindergarten, with every passing year, remediation delays a child's progress, reduces opportunities for access to higher level learning experiences, and is more time intensive and expensive for the education system.

It's time for a change! The Center for Childhood Creativity at the Bay Area Discovery Museum performed an [extensive review of the research regarding successful practices that impact school readiness](#). They found that students will improve on all significant data points when **the notion of school readiness is expanded beyond early reading and math skills. Early learning must include a wide range of experiences** in order to develop executive function skills, curiosity, language, socioemotional well-being, motor skills and health.



Children develop higher-order thinking through practice. **Exploratory, hands-on science learning** – particularly with thoughtful adults asking developmental questions and modeling – **is critical to turning children's innate desire to understand the world around them into experiences that wire the brain for complex, conceptual thinking**. Rethinking the approach to teaching math will help us move from memorizing facts to helping children develop math concepts, so they are far more likely to demonstrate long term proficiency not only in mathematics but also in literacy over their academic lives.

Children with stronger social skills do better in school, in the workplace, and in life. Child-directed play and modeling of helping behaviors are key to the development of social skills and need be prioritized in early education. In transformed classrooms we will see children actively engaged in exploring the world around them and expressing their understanding through invention, communication and art forms.

The Stark Education Partnership (a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) collaborates with education, business, civic and community members across the entire spectrum – cradle to career – to create and respond to opportunities that will provide ALL students with education and career success.

