CCECC provides Kindergarten-Readiness support

Carrollton, KY — Sept. 17, 2015 — In older times, many children did not begin learning to read until they started school, and “starting school” meant going to first grade. Everyone did not attend kindergarten, and all-day kindergarten was a rarity indeed. Preschool was almost unheard of.

Contrast this with today’s emphasis on early learning, and it is clear that many things have changed.

Today's parents are bombarded with advice of all sorts — chief of which concerns early learning. Should children listen to classical music and take piano lessons? What role does physical activity play in a child’s development? Are apps for toddlers a good idea? How important is going to preschool? While today’s parents try to wade through the conflicting information that they hear on the evening news and read on the Internet, today’s grandparents look on in bewilderment, remembering simpler, less anxiety-inducing times.

Fortunately for Kentuckians, the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education has clarified the situation by creating a definition of “school readiness” that gives parents a framework for understanding the skills, socialization and knowledge that children need to hit the ground running in kindergarten. This definition is research-based and measurable, so parents, educators and policy makers can objectively see what will help children reach their potential.

Sometimes called “Kindergarten Readiness,” the five developmental areas that the taskforce highlighted are the following:

- Approaches to learning
- Health and physical well-being
- Language and communication development
- Social and emotional development
- Cognitive and general knowledge

These five areas can be grouped into three general categories: cognitive, physical and social/emotional.
In other words, children who begin kindergarten healthy and socially/emotionally resilient and who have spent years as active learners will be better prepared for success. Educators do not expect students to show up for kindergarten knowing everything already. However, students who struggle with preventable health issues, who lack basic social skills and who have not begun the process of learning letters and numbers will be far behind students who are making strides in those areas.

The task force created indicators for each of these categories so that parents and other caregivers can have specific Kindergarten-Readiness goals for their children. According to the Kentucky Department of Education’s website (education.ky.gov), a healthy child will generally eat a balanced diet; get adequate rest; receive regular medical care, dental care, and immunizations; be able to complete large-muscle actions, such as running and jumping; and use writing implements and other tools that require fine-muscle movement.

An emotionally/socially prepared child can follow simple rules and routines, express needs and wants, exhibit curiosity and motivation to learn, explore and try new things, play/share with others, be away from parents without being upset, work well alone and focus/listen.

A linguistically, mathematically and cognitively prepared child will be able to use short sentences, sing songs, recognize and say simple rhymes, attempt to write his or her name and address, attempt to count and interact with numbers, attempt to identify and name shapes and colors, listen to/make music, dance, differentiate between print and pictures, listen to stories being read, notice similarities and differences, ask questions, understand simple concepts of time and sort/classify objects.

Kindergarten Readiness is something almost all children can achieve with support from adults; unfortunately, not all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. According to the 2014 Early Childhood Profile, only 43% of Carroll County children were ready for kindergarten, which was 6% lower than the state’s rate. This means that the majority of Carroll County students begin their school careers struggling in one or more of the five developmental areas.

Preschools and Head Start programs are designed to move children toward kindergarten/school readiness, but not all children attend these programs. This means that many parents are the sole teacher that their child has before kindergarten. Whereas preschool and Head Start programs, such as those at the Carroll County Child Development Center, have support and oversight from the state and federal government, many parents do not.

Fortunately, there is help. The Carroll County Early Childhood Council was formed in order to assist parents whose children do not attend a preschool or Head Start program.

A collaborative group funded by a grant from the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood, the CCECC hosts the Dr. Seuss Birthday Bash, Panther Tots and KinderBoost, all events designed to give Carroll County children a head start on their learning and literacy and to help parents and caregivers learn how to move their children toward Kindergarten Readiness. CCECC membership is open to anyone who is interested in furthering the educational opportunities of young children in the county. The Carroll County Public Library, local childcare centers and other youth-serving local organizations are all represented on the council.

The CCECC is hosting ten community events this year that are geared toward families with children ages 0 – 5. A free meal will be served at each of the five Panther Tots events, and all Carroll County families with young children are invited to attend.

The first Panther Tots event was held Sept. 10 at Point Park.
Four more events are scheduled:

- **Oct. 21, “Little Artist, Big Artist”** — This event is an Eric Carle-themed art night, where children will interact with various artists from the community. To be held at Kathryn Winn Primary, the event starts at 5:30 p.m. with dinner served before at 5:00 p.m.

- **Dec. 2, “Elf on a Shelf”** — Join the CCECC elves for a Christmas-themed make-and-take event where parents and children will create crafts together. The event starts at 5:30 p.m. at Kathryn Winn Primary with dinner served before at 5:00 p.m.

- **Jan. 13, “Let it Go”** — The Carroll County Public Library will host a “Frozen” night. Children are encouraged to dress like characters from Disney’s movie “Frozen.” The event starts at 5:30 p.m. with dinner served before at 5:00 p.m.

- **Feb. 27, “Dr. Seuss Bash”** — Join the CCECC and other community partners for learning activities celebrating Dr. Seuss’s birthday. Children are encouraged to dress as their favorite Dr. Seuss character. The event starts at 10:00 a.m. at Kathryn Winn Primary.

KinderBoost is a similar initiative of the CCECC, but it is focused on 3 and 4-year-old children who are not currently enrolled in preschool. There will be five KinderBoost events this school year, the first of which will be held on Sept. 25. All of the events will be at the Carroll County Public Library from 10 – 11:30 a.m. on the following dates:

- Sept. 25
- Oct. 23
- Jan. 22
- Feb. 26
- March 25

In addition to members of the Early Childhood Council, two Preschool Pals will be at the KinderBoost events. The Preschool Pals are trained consultants who specialize in helping parents and childcare providers better prepare children for kindergarten. The Preschool Pals work regionally and are based at the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC) in Shelbyville, Ky. Since Carroll County is part of a Race to the Top grant in conjunction with OVEC, these services are available to all Carroll County childcare providers. The services include resources, training and consulting.

Kindergarten Readiness is something on which everyone can agree, and it is not something that has changed. There were children in the past who were and who were not Kindergarten-Ready. The only change is that Kindergarten Readiness is now quantified and measured. Clearly, having more Kindergarten–Ready children is in the best interest of everyone in Carroll County. The Carroll County Early Childhood Council and the Carroll County School District are here to help.

For more information on Kindergarten Readiness, the CCECC, Panther Tots or KinderBoost, contact CCECC Chair Gerda Wise at 502-732-7070 or CCCDC Director Pam McNeal at 502-732-7085

The Carroll County School District is a public school system that operates within the geographic boundaries of Carroll County, Ky. The district serves around 1,900 students K-12.

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