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Build a community for young children

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Special to The Herald-Sun

Health care, good nutrition, strong parenting and quality early education impact on a child's readiness for success in school and in life. A "Ready Community" provides the resources, services and supports to ensure that young children are nurtured, challenged and engaged in high-quality learning opportunities starting at birth.

How has Durham's Partnership worked to ensure Durham is a Ready Community that supports young children?

Over the past 15 years, Durham's Partnership for Children has developed a comprehensive continuum of early childhood programs and initiatives to support young children and their caregivers. Durham's Partnership for Children keeps its vision always at the forefront of its planning and program development to meet the state's specific performance benchmarks in the areas of early childhood education, child health and family support.

Knowing that the more exposure to high-quality learning opportunities that children have in the early years, the more prepared they are for success in school, the Partnership has worked with its partners to increase the percentage of children in high-quality 4 and 5 star child care placements from 27 percent to 57 percent. Recognizing that strong families can effectively support children in their development, the Partnership has also worked to bring evidence-based parent programming such as the Incredible Years to Durham, and understanding that improved access to health care and healthy eating helps children be ready to learn, the Partnership collaborates with multiple players in the County to overcome system issues and improve outcomes for children.

We are proud of our progress, yet acutely aware that our community has faced growing economic challenges. Many of our young children birth to age 5 live in vulnerable circumstances

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that put them at risk for later challenges. In Durham County, more than 45 percent of young children, birth to age 5, live in low-income families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and nearly 23 percent live below the poverty line (\$20,000 for a family of four).

A child's preparation for school success is shaped and influenced by so many factors. To be a "Ready Community," we must invest in the system that provides resources, services and supports to ALL families with young children. We must invest in programs that help parents to become "Ready Families" to provide stable and supportive environments for their children,

and, of course, we need to be partners in creating "Ready Schools" that involve parents at all levels and transition children into school.

As we look to the future, Durham's Partnership stands ready to continue to focus on our mission to be innovative and collaborative in order to have successful approaches to meet the needs of young children birth to age 5 and their families in Durham County. If you have an idea to help our efforts to be "Ready" on all counts, please join us in our efforts.

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