



Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids

The SPARK Plug

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Can you believe another school year has started already? It seems like these things sneak up on us; before we know it, that snuggly little infant is a preschooler and then a kindergartener, ready to go off to school for exciting learning adventures.

If you have preschool-age children, one of the best ways you can prepare for those adventures is by joining SPARK. SPARK brings school readiness tools, activities, and resources right to your home. SPARK can also link your family to helpful community resources that can make getting ready for school that much easier. These are just some of the reasons why it's important to join SPARK today, if you're not already participating.

If you *are* already a part of SPARK, tell your friends, neighbors, and Facebook friends about all the wonderful benefits SPARK provides, so that they can also get the help and support of a parent partner, a learning plan that's individualized to their child's specific needs, free books and learning supplies, and an understanding of what their children will need to know to be ready for kindergarten. Your friends and neighbors will thank you!

Sincerely,

Shana

Shana Rozier
SPARK Program Director

A Double SPARK for Learning

When committed parents come together with a SPARK parent partner, anything is possible.

In SPARK, parents make all the difference. Take the Buzzelli family, for example. SPARK Parent Partner Amy Mangus knows that when she leaves the Buzzelli home, parents Stacie and Mike will be hard at work, preparing for their next SPARK home visit. Amy visits monthly to work with Stacie and Mike and their twin daughters Elizabeth and Nancimarie, who are 4½. Their youngest daughter, Gracielynn, is 24 months old; she often sits in on SPARK lessons as well.

When Elizabeth and Nancimarie started SPARK more than a year ago, their speech was delayed. Mike and Stacie were frustrated, because they couldn't understand the girls when



The Buzzelli Family with SPARK Parent Partner Amy Mangus.

they spoke. Through the SPARK responsive services process, the family was referred to a community agency for further testing. At first, the twins received speech therapy through SPARK, and then they transitioned to receiving speech services through the Alliance Early Learning School.

Mike and Stacie trust Amy to show them new ways to help the girls get ready for school. They appreciate Amy's training and experience, and know that when they wonder how to address a challenge, "Miss Amy" knows what could be done differently and suggests strategies that really work. One tip that Amy passed along has been working very well. She



**"It's amazing in one year
what has happened here."**

SPARK Parent Partner Amy Mangus



The alphabet is posted on the living room wall, along with the colorful freight train the twins made in SPARK. Elsewhere in the home, the twins' SPARK learning plan is posted.

showed Mike and Stacie that not everything has to be a formal, scheduled lesson. Now, the family often casually points out the shapes, letters, and colors they see while doing routine tasks like cooking, cleaning, and driving.

Amy trusts Mike and Stacie, too. She feels that trust is an important part of success in SPARK. Amy knows that if she's made any recommendations, Mike and Stacie are "on it." She says, "I know when I walk out the door, they will do everything possible" to help the girls master the skills laid out in their SPARK learning plans. It's obvious that SPARK has become part of everyday life in the Buzzelli home: the learning plans are posted on the wall, as are the alphabet and the *Freight Train* project the twins made while learning their colors.

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Stacie says that the girls are doing much better now. Mike and Stacie—and everyone else—can understand them when they speak. According to Amy, "It's amazing in one year what has happened here." They're learning numbers, colors, and shapes, and can count to ten. Nancimarie knows that the letter "N" is the first letter in her name.

Improving the girls' skills and abilities has been a real team effort. Amy says that the twins would not have made nearly as much progress if it hadn't been for all the hard work Mike and Stacie did. Both Amy and the Buzzellis also credit the combination of services they've received through SPARK, the school, and the community for the dramatic improvements the girls have made. Amy notices "a difference in Mom" as well. As the girls have responded and built their confidence, Stacie's confidence as her children's learning advocate has increased.



Nancimarie, Elizabeth, and Gracielynn Buzzelli learn colors, shapes, and counting by sorting lids from milk, laundry detergent, and snack food packages.

"As soon as I can sign up (our youngest daughter for SPARK), I'll be the first one in line."

SPARK mom Stacie Buzzelli

SPARK has even helped Gracielynn, although she's too young to be a SPARK child. Because Amy had helped Mike and Stacie recognize the signs of speech delay in their older daughters, they were able to get much earlier help for their

youngest daughter Gracielynn, who is now in the Help Me Grow program and is beginning to receive community-based speech therapy. When Miss Amy read *Freight Train* to the twins, Gracielynn was mesmerized and didn't move a muscle. Stacie was astonished, because "she *never* sits like that." Stacie says that Gracielynn will definitely be a SPARK child when she's old enough. She says, "as soon as I can sign up, I'll be the first one in line."



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SPARK Stark County





Recipe for Success

From the kitchen of SPARK and
Alliance Kindergarten teacher Sandi Zemrock



Ingredients

A dash of self-reliance. Teach your child how to do things on her own (tie her shoes, zip her jacket, etc.). By helping herself, your child will become confident and proud of her accomplishments.

A tablespoon of knowledge. Teach your child her full name, address, phone number, and birthday. Work together on learning to write her first name in uppercase and lowercase letters.

A cup of cooperation and fun. Provide opportunities for your child to play with others, and encourage her to share and take turns.

A pinch of fine motor skills. Allow your child to draw and color, use glue, and use child-sized safety scissors.

Directions

Combine the ingredients with everyday moments.

Your child can develop counting skills by helping you measure ingredients for dinner.

She can learn to sort by color, size, and shape while helping with the laundry.

She can count how many blue cars are in the store parking lot.

Talk about the words in the book when you read to your child, or the words you see on signs when you're out and about: what letter does the word "stop" begin with? What sound does the letter "S" make?

Learning Moments Are All Around Us



What letters?



Which is bigger?



How many?



What shape?



What colors?



What is different?

New Kindergarteners Get Ready for School

At this year's *Get Ready for School* programs in Alliance, Canton, and Minerva, 405 incoming kindergarteners explored their new schools, met their teachers and classmates, and celebrated the transition into kindergarten.

Parents loved the program. Here's what they had to say:

- "It helped my child leave home and showed her it was OK."
- "My daughter was nervous about school. Now she knows it is all right."
- "It helped calm my child's nerves about starting school and made him excited for school to start."





Way to Go, Massillon!

There was record attendance at Massillon's first group session held in June: 87% of eligible families attended! Although Massillon is the newest SPARK site in Stark County, it's already obvious that Massillon SPARK families are really committed to making sure their children are ready for school—and having fun along the way!

Congratulations, Massillon—your SPARK for learning is really showing!



SPARK has gone digital! Our new Facebook page is a great place to stay in touch, check on group session schedules, or ask a quick question.

We want to hear from you! Tell us about your SPARK experience. Don't forget to let your friends know how great SPARK is, by "liking" **SPARK Ohio Stark County** on Facebook.



Find us on Facebook!

www.facebook.com/SPARKStarkCounty



Online Help for Stark County Parents!

Parenting can be tough--there are so many different things to learn! *Early Experiences* is your community's early childhood website. It's there to help Stark County parents through the challenges of parenting a young child.

At www.earlyexperiences.org you can:

- Learn how to find a high-quality child care provider,
- Read about Ohio's new booster seat law,
- Learn how to help a child who bites,
- Learn about your child's development,
- Discover activities you can do with your child at home when it's too cold to go outside,
- Find ways to deal with the stress of parenting,
- Learn how to help your child deal with separation anxiety, and
- Find out about community resources, such as job training, food assistance, and health services.

SPARK Word Search Puzzle

Help your child search for the listed words. If you give your finished word search puzzle to your parent partner at your next SPARK visit, you'll receive an extra book!

K	N	R	G	S	P	U	O	R	G	Q
R	U	S	E	J	A	W	T	X	M	M
A	D	E	G	A	C	B	O	O	K	S
L	Q	I	R	V	D	U	R	L	W	S
O	Q	T	R	E	E	Y	Q	N	E	U
O	L	I	B	R	A	R	Y	I	Q	P
H	U	V	S	X	Y	D	L	N	K	P
C	P	I	I	A	F	P	I	R	Y	O
S	X	T	U	U	P	H	A	N	C	R
W	Y	C	N	U	Y	P	Z	V	G	T
U	R	A	S	E	S	C	G	P	A	I

These words are hidden in the puzzle above.

Can you find them all?

BOOKS	READY
GROUPS	SCHOOL
LIBRARY	SPARK
READING	SUPPORT

Can you find any other words in the puzzle?



Why Should You Visit the Early Childhood Resource Center?

If you haven't visited the Early Childhood Resource Center, you're missing out! Each week, The Center offers hands-on educational experiences for you and your child. Programs focus on storytelling, drumming, fitness, the environment, safety, and many other topics.

The Center has its own children's branch of the Stark County District Library. You can check out children's books, storytelling kits, videos, and CDs.

Once a week, the Center holds a "Parent Cafe." Early childhood expert Diana Boggia chats with parents about how to deal with issues that all parents face—and child care is provided at no cost!

You and your child can play outdoor learning games on the *Born Learning* trail, or explore educational themes in the interactive Inspiration Station.

The Center is a "one-stop shop" for families: check out library books, attend an Inspiration Station program, and run your sillies out, all in one place!

The Early Childhood Resource Center is located at 1718 Cleveland Avenue NW in Canton. For information on program schedules or membership, call (330) 491-3272 or visit www.ecresourcecenter.org.





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SPARK Contact Information

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To enroll in SPARK, contact:

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Email: joeray333@sbcglobal.net

Canton City Schools

Linda Lairson, Recruiter
Phone: 330-445-1109
Email: llairson@csstark.org

Massillon City Schools

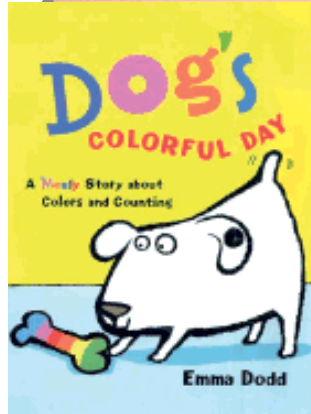
Erica Thom, Director
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Email: info@massillonahead.com

Minerva Local Schools

Ronele Syme, Recruiter
Phone: 330-868-4011 ext. 3513
Email: rsyme@csstark.org

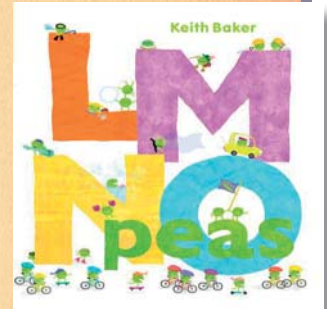
Books About Colors, Letters, Rhyming, and Shapes

Check out these great books from your local library



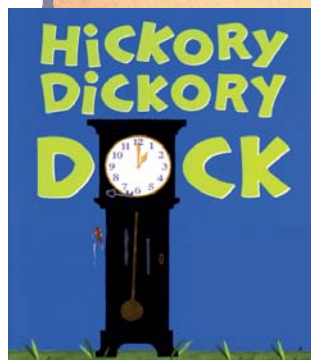
Dog's Colorful Day by Emma Dodd

A clumsy dog gets messy, collecting spots of red jam, blue paint, gray mud, purple ink, and more.



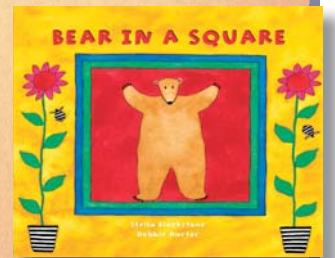
LMNO Peas by Keith Baker

Busy little peas talk about their jobs, from astronaut to zoologist.



Hickory Dickory Dock by Keith Baker

In an expansion of the familiar nursery rhyme, animals react in rhyme as the clock strikes one through twelve.



Bear in a Square by Stella Blackstone

Bear looks for shapes all around: rectangles in a school, circles in a pool, stars in the sky.

Do you love SPARK? Help spread the word!

Tell your neighbors about SPARK! Just like you, they'll get:

- ✓ Monthly visits from a caring parent partner to help get you and your child ready for kindergarten
- ✓ Free books and supplies
- ✓ Opportunities to meet other neighborhood families
- ✓ Access to community resources, if needed



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