



SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION
of Canton

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine

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Supporting Partnerships
to Assure Ready Kids

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COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2008

The Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

SPARK Ohio and the Sisters of Charity Foundation through its Quality Child Care Initiative are making a difference in the area of early learning experiences and not just inside Stark County but across the state of Ohio. Through the generosity of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, SPARK programs have set an example for other communities to follow. Most recently, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has seen fit to honor the SPARK Ohio project with a \$1.5 million Capstone Grant which supports replication of the organization's program model in communities throughout the state. We are grateful for the continued support of so many community partners who continue to share their time, talents, and resources with us. There are more details inside the newsletter on the grant and the replication project.

Replication Efforts – There are several new and potential SPARK locations at various stages of planning and implementation. Summit and Trumbull are some of the first counties to replicate the program. To accommodate the requests for SPARK and the Quality Child Care Initiative program information SPARK Ohio will hold our fourth informational seminar later this year at the Early Childhood Resource Center. If you are interested in learning more, please call! In future community newsletters, we will bring you news on the progress and success of each chapter.

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SPARK Ohio Received \$1.5 Million Kellogg Foundation Grant

SPARK Ohio recently received a \$1.5 million Capstone Grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The money will support replication of the organization's program model in communities across Ohio. The replication project will focus on assisting other communities implement the core components of the SPARK program.



During the next two years, the SPARK Ohio team along with representatives from the Sisters of Charity Foundation will support 6 to 10 replication sites and serve as the centralized hub for the new sites according to Joni Close, Senior Program Director, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton.

SPARK Ohio will continue to oversee the Canton City Schools program and the Minerva Local School District program as well as continue to work closely with the Alliance community and its program. The grant dollars are for administration of the sites, conducting training modules and a detailed evaluation of the replication process.

"I look at where we are today compared to where we were and I must admit we have come a long way," said Mrs. Close. "Our efforts in early childhood are spreading far beyond our community and influencing policy and practices across the state. We remain focused and continue to evaluate as we go."

SPARK Ohio tested the replication strategy it will implement in-house by expanding to include Alliance with significant funding to the Early Childhood Education Alliance from the Greater Alliance and Sisters of Charity Foundations,

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SPARK Summit – The Summit County SPARK program is deep into its implementation phase. Their team has been instrumental in helping SPARK Ohio test our roll out plan. Summit's oversight team includes representatives from many community partners and is ably led by the Summit Education Initiative – way to go!

SPARK Warren – Meetings between SPARK Warren and SPARK Ohio to discuss replication of the program are in full swing. The sharing of ideas on where to advertise and how to enroll children and their families, time-saving tips for creating parent partner supplies and other best practices top the discussion lists.

Early Experiences Last a Lifetime – The new billboard ads are doing the trick – catching peoples' attention. The bright colors and great photos make people smile. The new media

campaign just got underway this summer and includes public service announcements on local radio stations. I received an email from a speech and language pathologist who said, "I wanted to thank you for this wonderful public service announcement about how to talk to your baby! The information was accurate and presented in such a parent friendly way. That one announcement could easily change the lives of countless children and families! Thank you to your organization for valuing early childhood education – it truly makes all the difference! I hope that you plan to run that public service announcement over and over again so that as many families as possible may benefit from that information." My answer is *thank you* and yes, we plan on staying the course – thanks to our many partners. We will have more details in the fall newsletter.

Congratulations to Dr. Leahy and Shana – The success of SPARK Ohio is a result of many, many, people working together. Recognition for their

hard work comes from inside and, in some cases from outside professional organizations as in the case of Dr. Peter Leahy, SPARK Evaluator, who recently received a state award. Congratulations Peter! Also of note is Shana Worley's promotion to SPARK Program Coordinator. She has been with the Sisters of Charity Foundation for three years and has been involved with SPARK for the last year in a variety of ways. She helped finalize our policies and procedures manual and led an effort to create and implement a flexible and detailed monitoring system. While she was at it, she became one of us – committed to serving young children and their families. We are lucky to have her on the team.

Sincerely,

Joni T. Close
SPARK Program Director

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Dr. Peter Leahy Receives Award

Peter Leahy, Ph.D., Professor and Senior Research Associate, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, received the Evaluation Recognition Award at the Ohio Program Evaluators' Group (OPEG) Annual Meeting in May. The OPEG Board chose Dr. Leahy for his work in the field of evaluation including his evaluation work with SPARK Ohio. OPEG is a statewide organization with over 200 professional members representing a cross section of agencies, institutions and fields. The annual award recognizes individuals who promoted evaluation efforts at the local, regional and state levels. It looks for persons who have competed or engaged in an exceptional study or conducted or participated in a number of evaluation studies.

Dr. Leahy has served as the SPARK Ohio Evaluator from its inception.

Ready School Guide Finalized

Next Step, Choosing Pilot Schools & Launching Program

Things don't happen overnight. Just ask the professional, hardworking group of educators who have strategized, outlined, gathered and digested research and assembled a statewide committee to produce *Strong Beginnings, Smooth Transitions, Continuous Learning*, a Ready School Resource Guide for Elementary School Leadership. Ten elementary schools will receive the new guide this summer and those 10 schools will participate in a Governor's Summit in September.

The primary goal of the SPARK Ohio Ready for School – Ready Schools program is to assure children are ready for kindergarten and the schools are ready for them too. The transition of children from preschool to kindergarten can be one of the more stressful changes in the life of young learners and their families. The experiences of the child and family during this transition process can influence negatively or positively overall adjustment to school.

"When a child moves from a preschool setting to kindergarten, there can be dramatic differences between preschool and kindergarten teacher expectations," said Sandra Miller, Ph.D. and Director, Office of Early Learning and School Readiness, Ohio Dept. of Education. "There are differences in social and academic learning, the amount of one-on-one and small group time and the focus on the child. The more preschool and kindergarten programs work together to align curriculum, learning experiences and teaching strategies the better the results for children."

The ready school effort is a partnership between SPARK Ohio, the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA), the Ohio Department of Education's Office of Early Learning and School Readiness, the Partnership for Continued Learning and the Governor's Early Childhood Cabinet. The funding is through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in partnership with the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton.

There are seven components of a ready school: leadership, transitions, supportive environments, standards, instruction and assessments, home-school/community partnerships, adult learning communities and diversity, according to Dr. Miller.

"A child's readiness for kindergarten does not lie within the child but is a combination of factors. The guide is a resource document for all elementary school principals and for all preschool programs. It is important that education leaders understand transition into kindergarten is a process not a one-time event or service," said Dr. Miller.

"While the concept of a ready school has been part of the national conversation since the National Education Goals Panel 1998 report," said Dr. Miller, "the work to make this concept a reality within Ohio's schools would not have happened without SPARK Ohio."

This fall, the Ready Schools event will initiate a yearlong theme focusing on the important role of school leadership and seamless connections for educational continuity. With the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in partnership with the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton and its state partners, Ohio will be taking one giant step forward to assure that readiness is about the child and the school. ✨

SPARK Ohio Kellogg Grant CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

United Way of Greater Stark County and many others. Additional expansion plans inside Canton City Schools are under consideration. The first sites outside of Stark County are already underway in Summit and Trumbull Counties.

SPARK Summit will concentrate in Akron and initially serve 30 families with hopes of working with 90 children in its next phase. The SPARK Summit program is the result of grant monies through the Akron-based GAR Foundation to the University of Akron. The Summit Education Initiative, responsible for implementation in Summit County, has been instrumental in helping SPARK Ohio test its rollout strategy.

In March 2008, the Raymond John Wean Foundation awarded a \$25,000 planning grant to Community Solutions Association in Trumbull County to replicate the SPARK program in Warren City School District. Replication meetings are already occurring with agencies on the planning group, Warren City Schools and the SPARK team. Several other communities have contacted

SPARK Ohio to discuss replication of its core programs.

"Our ultimate hope is that the core elements of the SPARK Ohio program are implemented across the state and are funded through public and private partnerships," said Mrs. Close. "We hope the long-term effects of our efforts become universally accepted and eventually become part of our value system."



SPARK Ohio a Lifesaver for One Grandmother

Debora Beyer speaks quickly but there's a smile in her voice as she says, "I don't know how parents can do it. I was floundering." Mrs. Beyer is the guardian for her son's children, Gage and Alexis. She accepted the responsibility three years ago when Gage was a preschooler and Alexis was a toddler.

"I'm a grandmother. It's been 20 years since I earned my associate's degree," said Mrs. Beyer. "These children would have never been ready for school without SPARK. I truly didn't know where to begin or what was expected of children today."

Gage is a first grader at McGregor Elementary School in Canton City. Alexis will enter kindergarten in the fall, and according to their grandmother, both are much better prepared for school. All of them will miss the activities, crafts and fun times the *Let's Talk* program offered. Even more so, they will miss their SPARK parent partner visits from Holly Vanover.

"She has been a part of our life



since the children have been with me," said Mrs. Beyer. "SPARK couldn't have picked a better match for us. We love her dearly."

It started with a SPARK ad on the bulletin board at the neighborhood Fishers grocery store. Mrs. Beyer picked up the ad but never got around to calling. That's when her friend Terry took charge. Terry made

the initial call, got some beginning information and then told her "Call these people!"

"It was a life saver for me," said Mrs. Beyer. "They helped me get back into the loop. I was out of touch with what's happening in school and what was required learning for kids."

The activities and crafts aimed at helping her grandchildren learn during the early years are fond memories for Mrs. Beyer. They also enjoyed visiting the museums, libraries and other community places.

"SPARK smoothed the road for my grandchildren and is making the transition from home to school much easier for all of us," said Mrs. Beyer. "I think every parent should participate in the program. Everyone benefits!" ✨

SPARK Students Out-perform on KRA-L

Recent research shows children participating in the SPARK Ohio program continue to score higher on the state-mandated Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for Literacy (KRA-L) test. KRA-L measures elements of vocabulary and literacy development considered critical for reading success, and it identifies children who need additional help or further assessment.

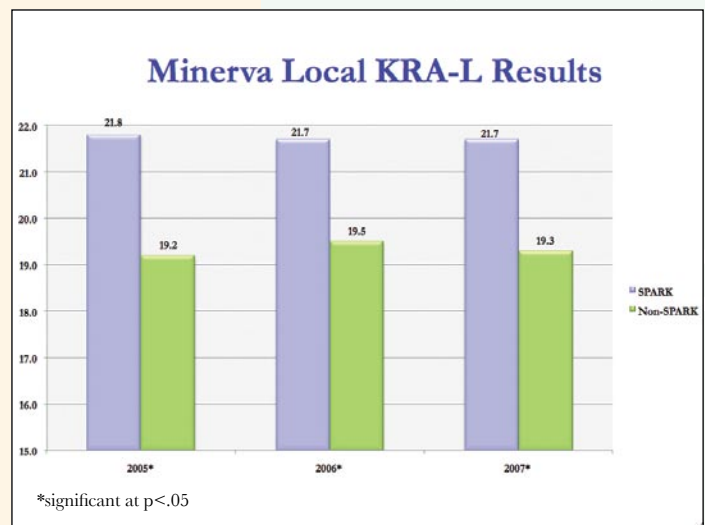
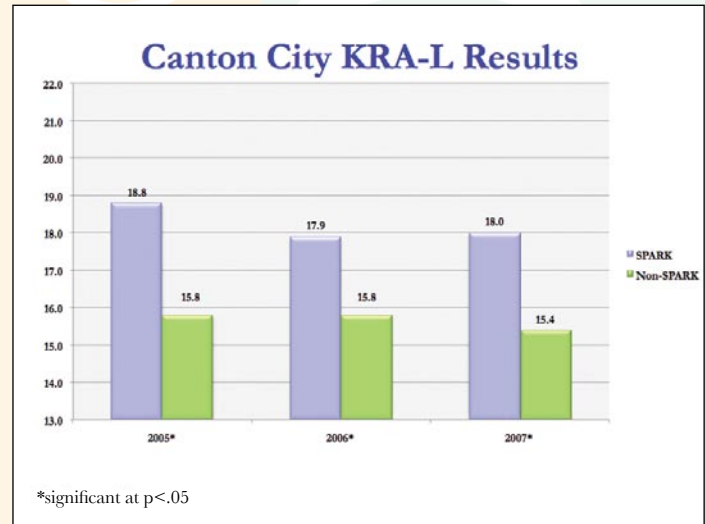
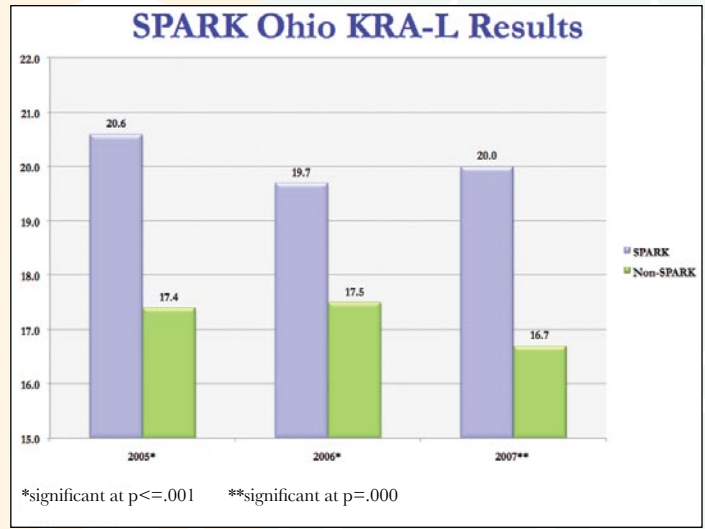


All Ohio public school kindergarten students, upon entering kindergarten, are required to take the test. The test includes letter identification, oral language processing, oral language comprehension and beginning sound identification.

“SPARK children are more prepared to begin kindergarten than children who do not participate in the SPARK programs,” said Peter Leahy, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio. “We expect this to give them a leg up on getting off to a better start in kindergarten and eventually to have a more successful school experience.”

Leahy and his university staff annually compile and summarize the KRA-L test results for SPARK Ohio. The team compares SPARK children and non-SPARK children inside the same Stark County neighborhoods and across the county. Differences of just a few points can indicate the need for additional help according to Leahy.

When looking at the neighborhoods inside Stark County, SPARK children have significantly outperformed their classmates on the KRA-L for the past three years. The Minerva Local School District and three Canton city schools have participated in SPARK programs since 2005. Their results show SPARK children consistently score higher than non-SPARK students.



Shana Worley Accepts Program Coordinator Position

Shana Worley recently accepted the position of Program Coordinator for SPARK Ohio. In her new role, she is responsible for all aspects of programming including fiscal, personnel and program implementation.

Shana will oversee the SPARK program operated in Canton City and Minerva Local School districts and work closely with the Early Childhood Education Alliance in Alliance, Ohio to coordinate their SPARK program.

"I'm looking forward to enrolling more families in the SPARK program. It is a wonderful kindergarten readiness program for all children and families regardless of their socioeconomic status," said Ms. Worley.


Shana has been with the Sisters of Charity Foundation for three years as a Program Officer and assisted in the development of a management information system that enables SPARK program staff to track and monitor services delivered to SPARK families.

She is a graduate of Timken Senior High School and holds a bachelor's degree from Kent State University and a master's in business administration from Ashland University. She is currently a member of the 21st Class of Leadership Stark County.



SPARK Ohio

Our name and logo has changed to match our expanded mission but the goals are the same – to help children get ready for kindergarten by building reading, language and social skills. Because of the generosity of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sisters of Charity Foundation, SPARK Ohio will serve as the hub for the replication of SPARK programs across the state as the logo represents. We are in

various stages of implementing the SPARK program in several counties and expanding inside the Canton School District. Requests for the program are made through the SPARK Ohio office. For more information on SPARK Ohio and/or how you can help, contact us at 330-454-5800. 

Early Experiences Last a Lifetime

The new billboards you are seeing around Stark County are just one part of a yearlong media campaign dedicated to creating broad recognition of the message and tagline Early Experiences Last a Lifetime. You will see the messages on brightly colored billboards at varying locations around the county and hear the messages on the radio. The website, www.earlyexperiences.org also carries the messages. Thank you to the Stark County Early Childhood Communications Collaborative, a group of interested community and early childhood leaders who have been working together for over a year to plan a public awareness campaign on the importance of early childhood. 