

SPARK CONTACT INFORMATION

RECRUITERS:

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Minerva Local:

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Alliance Local:

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www.sparkohio.org

Director's Corner
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and by providing families with free books, art supplies, and other educational resources and information proven to prepare children for kindergarten and for life.

This year, SPARK helped to transition over 140 children and families into the 2008 kindergarten class. It was truly a privilege to work closely with these families and share the goal of helping children to be better prepared for kindergarten. Now that another group of SPARK children has entered kindergarten, it's our hope that parents will continue to be a learning advocate for their child and consider ways to get involved at their school.

SPARK evaluation results show that parents have shown great progress in their ability to be learning advocates, and we're confident that through combined support and effort from the learning advocates, parent partners, schools, and community, every child will be given the opportunity to be successful in school and in life!

For additional information and resources to help you help your child, check out the website www.earlyexperiences.org.

Sincerely,

Shana Rozier

SPARK Program Coordinator



SPARK EVENT SCHEDULE

Parents of Belle Stone, Gibbs, and McGregor Preschoolers Enroll Now by Calling Linda Lairson at (330) 445-1109

SPARK representatives will be available for questions and enrollment at the following Canton events:

Date	Time	Event
October 24th	1:30-2:30 pm	Belle Stone Grandparents' Day (5th Grade)
November 4th	TBD	Election Day! Belle Stone, Gibbs, McGregor
November 6th	3:00-6:30 pm	McGregor Parent/Teacher Conferences
November 6th	4:00-7:30 pm	Belle Stone Parent/Teacher Conferences
November 11th	4:00-7:00 pm	Belle Stone Parent/Teacher Conferences
November 13th	3:00-6:30 pm	McGregor Parent/Teacher Conferences

November 14th	1:30 pm	McGregor Veteran's Day Program
November 21st	1:30-2:30 pm	Belle Stone Grandparents' Day
December 16th	6:00 pm	McGregor Christmas Program (2nd Grade)

*Note: SPARK will also attend Gibbs Elementary events. Times TBD.

Parents of M.I. DAY and WEST Preschoolers Enroll Now by Calling Beth Holderbaum at (330) 868-5988

SPARK representatives will be available for questions and enrollment at the following Minerva events:

Date	Time	Event
October 16th	5:00-8:00 pm	M.I. Day



www.earlyexperiences.org

Member of the Stark County Early Childhood Communications Collaborative



The Director's Corner

Dear Parents,

SPARK is now entering its sixth year of helping children and families in Stark County get ready for kindergarten, and we're so excited that it's now being offered in Summit and Trumbull County! We greatly appreciate the support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Sisters of Charity Foundation, Greater Alliance Foundations, United Way, and our community partners who have been instrumental in our ability to continue serving children and families throughout Ohio.

We know through research that the early years of a child's life (before they enter school) are very important — especially since it's a time of rapid brain development, and a time of greatest learning. We realize that every family is trying to balance meeting their child's physical and emotional needs, while also trying to be their child's very first, and perhaps most important, teacher and learning advocate. SPARK strives to help parents to meet some of these demands through our home and group sessions

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You Are Your Child's Best Learning Advocate!

Since a parent is a child's first and most important teacher, it is important that you take an active role in your child's learning. It has been proven that when parents are involved in their child's learning and their school, they do better and have better feelings about going to school.

Children do most of their real learning at home. Each room in your house can be a natural classroom environment for instruction to take place.

Showing your child that you value education provides a powerful example and contributes greatly to your child's future success. Here are a few things that you can do to be a learning advocate for your child:

Get Excited About Reading

Helping your child become a reader is the most important thing that you can do to help them succeed. Reading helps children in all school subjects and it is the key to life-long learning.

- Read to your child 20 minutes a day.
- Make sure your home has different reading materials (books, newspapers, magazines).
- Read yourself; you are modeling positive behavior that your child will want to copy.

Have Conversations With Your Child

Talking and listening to your child plays a major role in their success. Allowing your child to share their thoughts and ideas sends the message that their thoughts are important. In addition, children who have not learned to listen may have a problem following directions.

- As you walk or ride with your child, ask them what they see. Ask them to describe objects to you.



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Transition Committee Meetings in Minerva

Twice each year, a Transition Committee meeting is held in Minerva. The purpose of the meetings is to bring together members of the prekindergarten community, parents, and school personnel to work toward making the process of transition into kindergarten smooth and successful.

People invited include area preschool directors and preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, elementary principals, and parent representatives.

These meetings have provided the opportunity to build relationships, answer questions, and provide suggestions on topics related to supporting students and families as they begin kindergarten.

Some of the topics discussed might include curriculum alignment between preschool and kindergarten, KRA-L score data, the Transition Skills Summary form, questions about preschool, kindergarten, or SPARK programs, and suggestions for activities that might be helpful in children's transition process.

The Transition Skills Summary is a form completed by the preschool teacher and parent partners and is given to each child's kindergarten teacher. It describes the child's developmental levels so that kindergarten teachers retain the benefit of the preschool teacher's and parent partner's insights and use it to guide lesson planning and individualization of material.

Transition Committee meetings have proven to be a valuable part of Minerva's transition planning process! ✨



Dear Dr. Cece,

I read your column in the last newsletter. I knew that I wanted to learn how to be an effective learning advocate for my son. So I took your advice and I went to the group meeting at the school, even though I did not want to. It was hard to find time with all the other things that I needed and wanted to do. And to tell the truth, I just have never felt very comfortable in a school.

Well, what a surprise I had. I really enjoyed the group! I got to meet and talk with other parents. I got new ideas about how to help my son learn and the biggest surprise of all – I had fun (my son did too.)!

Groups really made me want to go to the Let's Talk sessions, which I did. It was really, really, good! And in August, I enjoyed my time at Get Ready for School. I now feel comfortable in my son's new school. (And so does my son.)

*Thank you SPARK for everything – the screenings, the learning plan, the group and home visits, the backpacks, school supplies, and much more. I feel like my son's school is more ready, I am more ready, and most importantly my son is **so** ready.*

I want to tell every SPARK parent "GO TO THE GROUP SESSIONS."

You will be glad you did!

**Signed,
SPARK Parent**

Dear SPARK Parent,

Thanks for such a nice letter. I am so glad that you enjoyed your opportunities to be at the school groups with other parents. And most importantly, thank you for sharing your good experiences with SPARK. Your words will encourage other SPARK parents to attend SPARK group meetings and lessons.

Year after year, our evaluation results suggest that SPARK is very effective in helping children and families, schools, and even the community be ready. Comments from both SPARK parents and our partners really let us know what is important about SPARK.

We are fortunate that we can continue to offer SPARK to the children of Stark County and to other children throughout Ohio. Thanks to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sisters of Charity Foundation, as well as, to all the participants in SPARK.

We hope to see all our SPARK parents at this fall's *SPARK Family Group Time*. You can find out details of dates and times in this newsletter or ask your Parent Partner.

**Signed,
Dr. Cece**

"When you put faith, hope, and love together you can raise kids in a negative world."

Zig Ziglar

If you would like to submit your questions to Dr. Cece, please contact your parent partner or mail to: SPARK Ohio/Dr. Cece Column, 400 Market Avenue North, Suite 300, Canton, OH 44702

Your Child's Learning Advocate CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- As you watch television together, talk about the program you are watching, talk about the main characters, and ask them what they think will happen next.
- When your child is speaking, stop what you are doing, pay attention, and ask questions to let them know you are listening.
- When playing a game, have your child repeat the directions.

Encourage Your Child to Be Responsible

Taking responsibility is an important part to school success.

- Establish rules. Children do well with consistency and routine. Rules allow you to establish a routine and remain consistent. Furthermore, rules help children realize that they are responsible for their actions.
- Give your child a few chores to do around the house. This will teach them responsibility and will help with future success in school and in life.

Encourage Your Child to Engage in Active Play

Children need to play an active role in their learning. They learn through their senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight). Active learning involves asking and answering questions, solving problems, and exploring interests.

- Allow your child to get messy (make mud pies, paint, do crafts, play sports, play an instrument).
- Give your child the opportunity to ask "why" questions. This is how they gather information.
- Get involved yourself. Play dress-up with your child, play in the sand, go for walks, and have conversations.

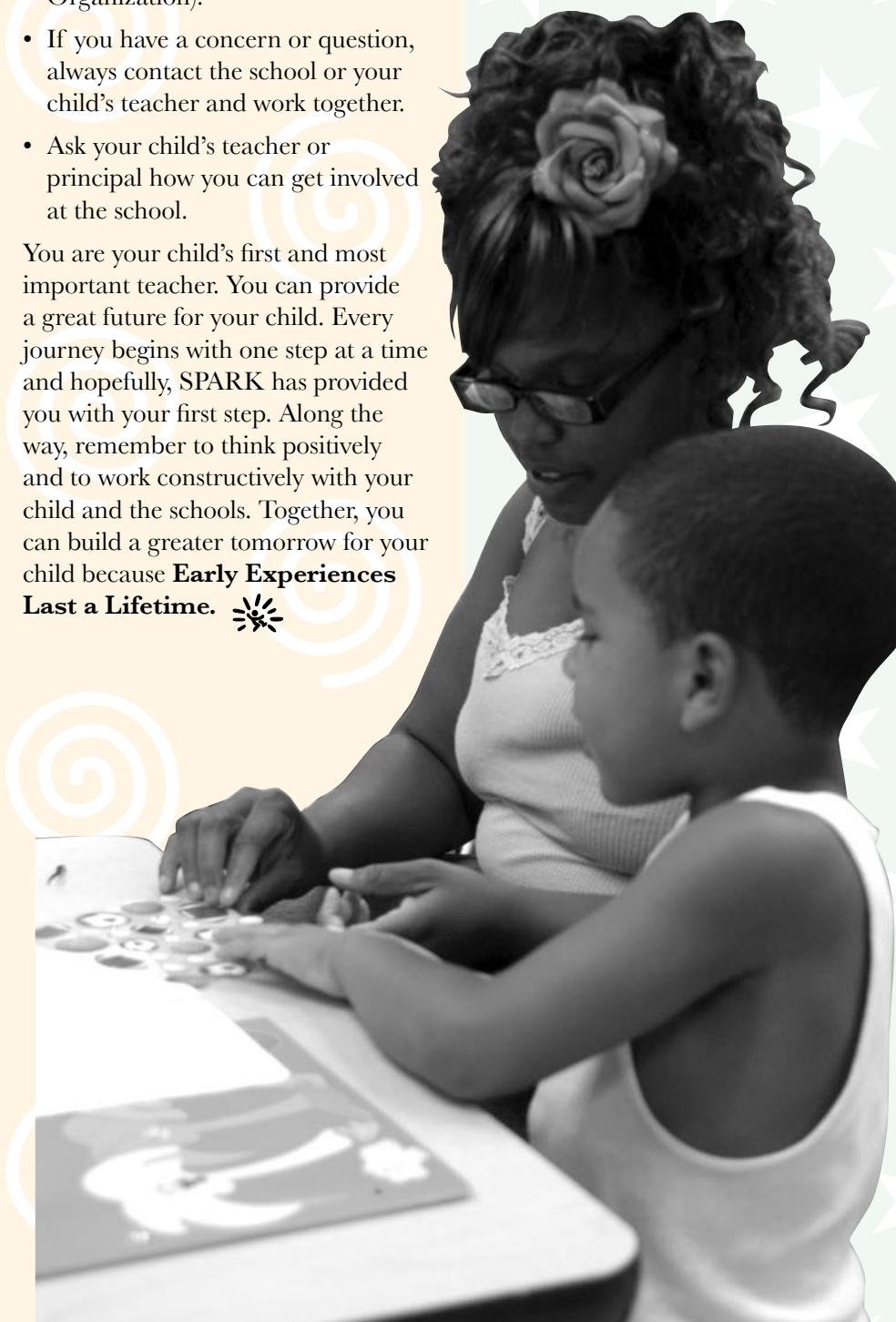
Get Involved in School Activities

Children who have parents involved in school activities show greater gains in achievement and motivation. Your

involvement is the bridge between your home and the school. You can advocate for your child first hand.

- Volunteer at the school (field trips, room parent, office help).
- Offer to speak to your child's class about your job, a special hobby, or a recent trip.
- Join the PTO (Parent Teacher Organization).
- If you have a concern or question, always contact the school or your child's teacher and work together.
- Ask your child's teacher or principal how you can get involved at the school.

You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can provide a great future for your child. Every journey begins with one step at a time and hopefully, SPARK has provided you with your first step. Along the way, remember to think positively and to work constructively with your child and the schools. Together, you can build a greater tomorrow for your child because **Early Experiences Last a Lifetime.** ✨



SPARK Family Group Time

- Children will receive a FREE book and learning materials
- Snack will be provided
- Group activities

4-year-old SPARK group sessions

Alliance:

October Dates:

- Rodman Library on Friday, October 10th at 1:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Monday, October 13th at 6:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Monday, October 20th at 6:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Friday, October 24th at 1:00 pm

December Dates

- Rodman Library on Friday, December 5th at 1:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Wednesday, December 10th at 6:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Friday, December 12th at 9:30 am
- Rodman Library on Monday, December 15th at 6:00 pm

Canton:

October Dates:

- McGregor Elementary on Thursday, October 2nd at 6:00 pm
- Gibbs Elementary on Wednesday, October 15th at 1:00 pm
- McGregor Elementary on Thursday, October 23rd at 1:00 pm
- Belle Stone Elementary on Wednesday, October 29th at 6:00 pm

December Dates

- McGregor Elementary on Wednesday, December 3rd at 1:00 pm
- Gibbs Elementary on Tuesday, December 9th at 1:00 pm
- McGregor Elementary on Wednesday, December 10th at 6:00 pm
- Belle Stone Elementary on Tuesday, December 16th at 6:00 pm

Minerva:

October Dates:

- Minerva Public Library on Wednesday, October 8th at 12:30 pm
- M.I.Day on Wednesday, October 22nd at 6:00 pm
- Minerva Public Library on Friday, October 24th at 9:30 am
- M.I.Day on Monday, October 27th at 6:00 pm

December Dates

- Minerva Public Library on Thursday, December 4th at 12:30 pm
- Minerva Public Library on Friday, December 5th at 9:30 am
- M.I.Day on Tuesday, December 9th at 6:00 pm
- M.I.Day on Wednesday, December 17th at 6:00 pm

3-year-old SPARK group sessions

Alliance:

- Rodman Library on Friday, November 7th at 9:30 am
- Rodman Library on Wednesday, November 12th at 6:00 pm
- Rodman Library on Friday, November 21st at 1:00 pm

Canton:

- Stark County Library on Thursday, November 6th at 1:00 pm
- Stark County Library on Friday, November 14th at 9:30 am
- Stark County Library on Wednesday, November 19th at 6:00 pm

Minerva:

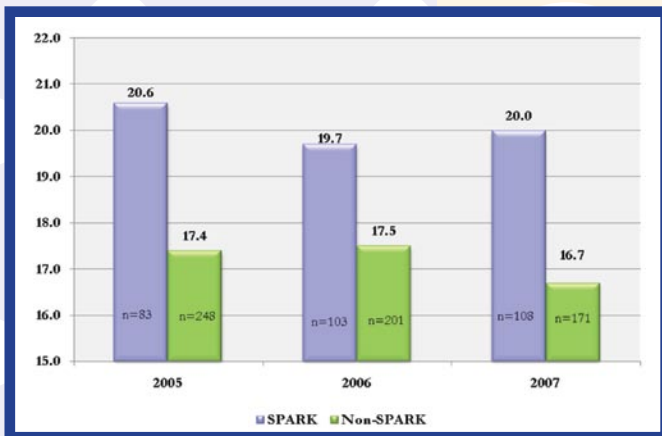
- Minerva Public Library on Monday, November 3rd at 12:30 pm
- Minerva Public Library on Wednesday, November 5th at 6:00 pm
- Minerva Public Library on Monday, November 10th at 6:00 pm
- Minerva Public Library on Tuesday, November 11th at 10:00 am



Is Your Child Ready to “KRA-L”?

When a child enters kindergarten, it may seem silly to ask if the child is ready to “KRA-L,” but in fact, that is the correct question. In 2005, the Ohio Department of Education developed a brief assessment tool, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Literacy (KRA-L), which is required for all children entering public kindergarten in the state of Ohio. The KRA-L is a 15-minute test given by the kindergarten teacher to measure skill areas necessary for becoming a successful reader.

Since the KRA-L began in 2005, three straight years of SPARK kindergarten children have taken the KRA-L and all three groups have shown very encouraging results. SPARK children were compared to non-SPARK children from the same neighborhoods and schools. The chart below shows that SPARK children have significantly scored higher than non-SPARK children for three years in row!

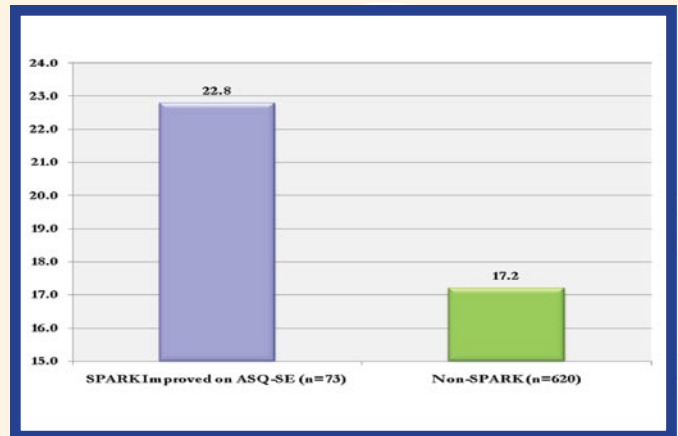


KRA-L Results for SPARK and Non-SPARK Children

Not only has SPARK helped increase children’s KRA-L scores, but SPARK has also helped them move to their next grade level on time more often than children not involved in SPARK. For example in Canton City, 97.4% of all SPARK children reached first grade on time, whereas only 92.3% of non-SPARK children did. In Minerva Local Schools, 94.4% of all SPARK children reached first grade on time while only 89.7% of the non-SPARK children were on schedule.

You also might have wondered why your parent partner asks you to complete so many forms while your child is in SPARK. You may recall completing something called the Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Social and Emotional (ASQ-SE) at entry into SPARK and periodically thereafter. If you have ever wondered “what does the ASQ-SE have to do with getting my child ready

for kindergarten?” here’s the reason: Experts now know that a child’s social and emotional readiness is just as critical to school success as knowing numbers, colors, and letters. Therefore, SPARK believes that identifying and helping a child’s social-emotional needs before the child enters kindergarten would give those children an edge in school over children whose social and emotional well-being may not be addressed until the child enters school. The table below compares the KRA-L scores of SPARK children in Canton and Minerva who were measured as improving their ASQ-SE scores during SPARK and who have entered kindergarten since 2005 to non-SPARK children who also entered kindergarten at the same time. The figure clearly shows that the SPARK children who improved on the ASQ-SE have outscored the non-SPARK comparison group on the KRA-L as the SPARK program had predicted.



KRA-L Scores for SPARK Children Who Had Improved ASQ-SE Scores during SPARK Compared to Non-SPARK Children at Kindergarten Entry

So, it is important to recognize that the SPARK program concentrates not only on academics, but also on many other aspects such as the social-emotional aspects of your child. SPARK is a comprehensive program that focuses on developing the “whole” child. The research shown here by Dr. Peter Leahy and Diane Banks at The University of Akron shows that SPARK’s many features seem to be having big “pay-offs” when a child reaches kindergarten and beyond. ✨