



Smart Start Update --- December 2014

www.SmartStartAlabama.org



Thank you for your partnership and support of our mission during the past year.

And, as we approach the holiday season and the end of the year, we hope you will consider a tax-deductible contribution to the Alabama Partnership for Children.

Best wishes to you and your family during this holiday season.
[Donate now!](#)

Partner Focus:

Play: A Foundation for Learning

April Kendrick, Ph.D., Director



**Zero
to Five
Matters**

~A newsletter focused on our most valuable investment~

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Don't Forget to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). 'A Tweet a Day for Learning and Play' provides early education tips and research, including information on our initiatives and partners. Check it out today!

December FOCUS

Check out this month's Smart Start FOCUS [packet](#) on Play Matters!

Mark Your Calendars:

[The Southern Early Childhood Associations \(SECA\) Annual Conference](#)

January 15-17, 2015
New Orleans, LA



Do you remember your childhood? I bet in your fondest memories you were playing. Do you still play? Why is that important? Play is the earliest foundation for learning. As young children, we learn best through play. We engage the world around us and become pirates, explorers, heroes. We utilize our imagination, stimulate our cognitive processes, explore language and sometimes invite our friends to join us in complex dramatic play. Play encourages and facilitates development in all the domains: cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical. It ranges from the simple to the complex.

What makes an action play? Play is voluntary, done for its own sake - that is, the means are more important than the end result. Play is joyful, it is imaginative, and it is active. In an excellent book on play by Stuart Brown (2009), he indicates that daily play is probably the most important factor in feeling fulfilled and satisfied in our lives. It is an important part of our happiness and in our ability to be creative and innovative human beings! Play is NOT just for children. As adults, it is important that we not lose our ability to play! It surprises me to discover how many parents do not know how to play with their child. Adults have lost touch with the freedom of play, and the social connection it can provide. It is also important for adults not to dominate or take over play but to allow the natural give and take between the participants. I have found in my own research that adults can inadvertently suppress play by directing it rather than engaging in it. Remember, it is the act and not the result that are important.

Here at CDR ([Child Development Resources](#)), we try to educate parents and teachers on the importance of play and provide resources to help facilitate development through the act of play. In our **Parent Lending Library** we have created activity packs that parents can check out according to the age of their child that has everything they would need to engage in play with their child. Sometimes having guidance and ideas to stimulate play helps break the ice with the parent as they learn about their child's development and how they can support it through play. Additionally, our **Baby TALK** program has opportunities for parents and children up to age 3 to come together in guided play sessions which also enhances the infant parent attachment bond. With our [Parenting Assistance Line](#) we often talk to parents who have questions or concerns about their child, and in response we provide resources to help support parents in the tough job of parenting. We have a [Facebook page for PAL](#) (please like us on FB) where we encourage parents to engage in play with their child and we provide some weekly ideas on our page. Remember, play is a great stress reliever (for adults and children) and in an effort to promote good emotional and mental health we will have a new division in our area - **Project LAUNCH**, which will help support teachers and professionals in our community in the mission of promoting good emotional and mental health for young children. Additionally, in our **Teacher Resource Library** we have many play activities, kits, music and books to support teachers in the classroom. If teachers in our service area of 12 counties can't come to us, we can go to them with our **Rolling Resource Van**. We also offer [trainings](#) that provide information to teachers on various subjects. In fact, be on the lookout for a conference in 2015 that we will be hosting on Developmentally Appropriate Practices and the importance of play based learning!

Remember:

- Play is vital for learning
- Play is how children learn best

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Congratulations to:

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® celebrates 25th Anniversary!!!
T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® was founded in 1990 by Child Care Services Association. Over the past 25 years, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program has been an effective strategy in helping address the need for a well-qualified fairly compensated and stable early childhood workforce. T.E.A.C.H. has projects in 24 states, plus the District of Columbia and has provided scholarships to more than 126,000 early childhood professionals.

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- Play is important for children AND adults
- Play is a stress reliever



Initiative Focus:

The Alabama Partnership for Children and PNC Partner to Strengthen Families in Alabama

PNC has once again joined in sponsoring the Strengthening Families initiative. This initiative is founded on the abundance of research that shows that investing in young children's healthy development and strong families provides high rates of return on investment. Strengthening Families is the foundation for building healthy and "ready" children that will strengthen Alabama's education system and economy. The APC will administer the Strengthening Families initiative in Jefferson, Lee, Montgomery and Morgan Counties and aims to enhance school readiness for children by strategically engaging parents, children and child care providers.

"We are pleased to partner again with PNC Bank, and with their investment we can continue to work in local communities to build strong families," said Gail Piggott, Executive Director of the APC. "During the critical brain development years, before children ever enter school, there is the greatest potential for positive impact. PNC Bank understands that an investment in early childhood is an investment in a better Alabama future, and we are pleased to partner with them across the state.

The 2014 Kids Count Data Book lists Alabama as 44th in the country in child well being. There have been increases in children living in poverty, children whose parents lack secure employment, children in single-parent families, children living in high-poverty areas, and births to teens. It is also estimated that as many as one-half of kindergartners enter school ill-prepared for success, and many of them are up to two years behind their peers. This sets a negative trajectory that impacts 3rd grade success, which is a predictor of high school

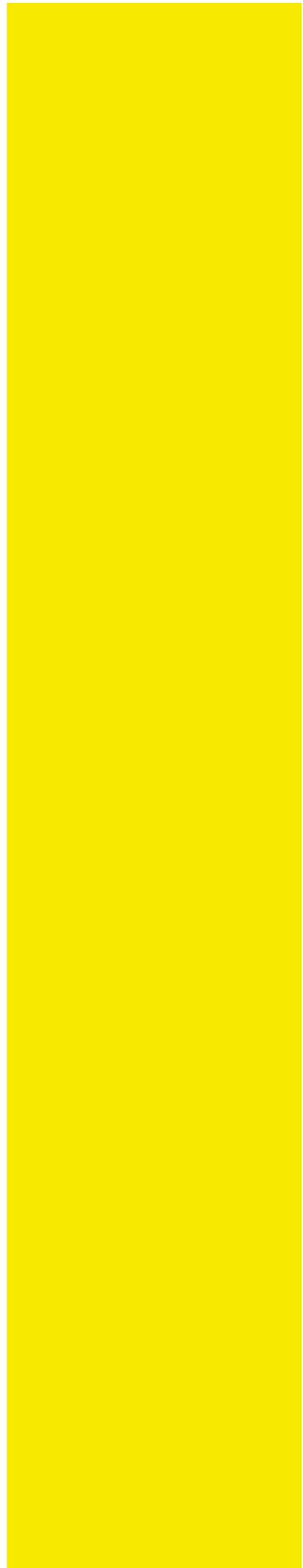
graduation rates. The Strengthening Families Initiative will address and enhance school readiness using a proven program of engaging parents, children and child care providers through Books, Balls, and Blocks events and Parent Cafés.

Books, Balls, and Blocks (BBB) are free events held for children and their families that provide opportunities for developmental assessment, parent and child education, and community resource education. Parent Cafés are a vehicle for parents to have their own conversations about keeping their families strong based on a set of Protective Factors that help prevent child abuse and neglect. PNC Grow Up Great materials will be shared with families at both the BBB and Parent Cafés. These materials will be part of an overall engagement and resource-sharing with parents, children and teachers. Both the BBB and Parent Café provide excellent venues for engaging parents using a variety of resources to lay the foundation for math and science.

Smart and Secure Children (SSC)

Graduation

Montgomery County and Lowndes County parents who participated in the Smart and Secure Children Parent Leadership Project this fall have graduated! Ceremonies were held at the Chisholm Baptist Church on Tuesday, November 18, and at the Mosses Town Hall on Wednesday, November 19. During the ceremony, some parents shared that they had grown a lot through the group: learning to listen to their children more; gaining more patience; and preparing healthier meals. One parent of a 2-year-old and a four-month-old also felt the time spent in class was self-nurturing and provided her with new social connections. Everyone was grateful for the opportunity. Funding for the two cohorts was provided by the Satcher Health Leadership Institute Division of Behavioral Health at the Morehouse School of Medicine and by the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation.



Our Mission: To work in partnership with other public and private entities to maintain an effective state and local system of resources and support that enables parents, families, and others who care for young children to ensure that they are healthy, protected, nurtured, and offered every opportunity to succeed in life.

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