

School Readiness Symposium Focuses on Creating Mindful Learners

On Saturday, April 29, more than 240 early childhood educators attended “Creating Mindful Learners” – the topic of Fairfax Futures’ 13th Annual School Readiness Symposium. Speakers focused on the importance of using mindfulness practices that help children calm themselves and learn to regulate their emotions. The event was held at the Fairfax County Government Center and was made possible by a generous grant from the PNC Foundation.



Participants practice mindfulness strategies at the School Readiness Symposium.

Fairfax County Hunter Mill District Supervisor Cathy Hudgins, Fairfax County Public Schools Chief Academic Officer Francisco Durán, and Vice President of

PNC Financial Services Steve Day, welcomed the participants. Each speaker emphasized the significant role that early childhood educators play in helping young children develop school readiness and executive function skills.

Keynote speakers describe impact of mindfulness practice

Linda Ryden and Jillian Diesner, keynote speakers and teachers at Lafayette Elementary School in Washington, D.C., described the “Peace of Mind” curriculum they have implemented at their school. According to Ms. Ryden, mindfulness is less about clearing the mind, than about paying closer attention to what we are doing in the moment. For pre-K students, the peace curriculum focuses on breathing, social and emotional awareness, and mindful movements. Both presenters emphasized the importance of modeling mindfulness as a benefit to teachers as well as children.

Participants attended interactive breakout workshops:

Listen, Imagine and Move led by Marcia Daft incorporated music as a way to



Workshop participants build with smooth stones, which requires focus, patience and persistence.

engage young children, using rhythm and movement to help with listening and focus.

Mindfulness in Action presented by Bernice Mayfield, Debbie Weigand, and Laura Thieman introduced participants to a variety of mindfulness strategies which use movement to help children channel and manage their energy.

Taste of Mindful Eating by Dr. Lynn Rossy explored the BASICS approach to mindful eating, which refers to the importance of breathing, assessing hunger and savoring the food we eat, to lead to healthier food attitudes and healthier eating practices.

Exploring Mindfulness through Nature and Children’s Literature by Dr. Joan Isenberg provided literary resources and activities, as well as instructions for making and using aids like calming jars to build focus, concentration and attention.

Fairfax Futures Director Vera Blore was enthusiastic about the event. She noted that through these strategies, “Early childhood educators can help children develop the social emotional skills they will need to be successful in school and throughout their lives.”



Early childhood education partners and presenters prepare for the start of the symposium.



Conference hosts and presenters CEPS Director Jene Moore; President and CEO of Community Business Partnership Kathy Wheeler; Women’s Business Center Director Juli Monroe; WBC Business Counselor Jessica Smith; and National Association of Family Child Care CEO Bill Hudson.

Annual Conference Supports Educators’ Marketing Success

Women’s Business Center of Northern Virginia to co-host this event.

Speakers included Women’s Business Center Director Juli Monroe; Jill Kurtz, a marketing and public relations strategist and owner of Kurtz Digital Strategy; Lisa Shaughnessy, a consultant who creates and implements business processes; Janae Johnson, the Fairfax campus manager at George Mason University.

- Connect with parents in today’s fast paced technological climate.
- Understand the importance of staying in touch with families during the day.
- Market a business safely online.
- Understand and meet the expectations of parents.
- Use financial technology that benefits both the business and parents.

“Our speakers provided a lot of great information for our providers,” said CEPS Director Jene Moore. “Participants left with valuable information about using technology to streamline their business activities and communicate more effectively with parents.”

Nearly 200 family child care providers participated in OFC’s spring conference, Upgrade Your Business for Success on May 13. These educators learned new strategies to help their businesses thrive in a changing world. The Community Education and Provider Services program partnered with the Community Business Partnership’s

The keynote speaker was Bill Hudson, CEO of the National Association of Family Child Care, the only professional association dedicated specifically to promoting high-quality early childhood experiences in the unique environment of family child care programs.

The professional day was designed to help educators find ways to:

ECCC Families Make Memories

Annual Picnic Held at Burke Lake Park

The Employees’ Child Care Center held its annual picnic at Burke Lake Park on May 7. Families of children who attend ECCC and families of children who have “graduated” gathered for the opportunity to spend time with teachers and old friends in this relaxed outdoor setting.

Children had fun exploring the playground. They blew bubbles and took part in a variety of games with their friends. Some children enjoyed having their faces painted. The rustic setting provided an opportunity for families to explore nature while strolling along the park’s wooded trails and waterfront area.

“ECCC families look forward to attending this event each year to make memories with their children and connect with staff and friends in a fun setting,” said ECCC Director Ruth Stover. “It is a great way for the teachers and families to keep in touch through the years as the children get older.”



STEM Ready Cohort Receives STEM Kits



Graduates of the first Fairfax Futures STEM Ready Cohort were ecstatic to receive generous STEM Kits to use in their classrooms. The kits, provided through a grant by Dominion Energy, contain a variety of resources including magformers, building blocks, magnification science stations and other developmentally appropriate materials.

Over the course of nine weeks this spring, this cohort of 37 early childhood educators met for 10, 2-hour sessions. In each session,

they worked with staff from the Office for Children's Institute for Early Learning on integrating STEM concepts and processes into everyday early childhood education experiences. Using online tools provided by the Teaching Channel, educators uploaded videos between classes to demonstrate the ways they implemented the strategies with children in their programs. Mentors provided feedback using these same online tools.

In addition to this wonderful hands-on experience, members of the STEM Ready cohort received up to 24 hours of professional development credit. "This project was a true collaboration made possible by Fairfax Futures' close partnership with the Office for Children and thanks to the generous support we received from Dominion and The Boeing Company," said Fairfax Futures Director Vera Blore.



Children were guided to choose paint in a color that resembled their skin tone. Then they worked together to make a heart to illustrate that our differences bring beauty to the world.



NMAAHC staff reads a story to a class at Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start about accepting one another's differences.

Head Start Welcomes Presentation by NMAAHC

The National Museum of African American History and Culture has been open for only a year and they have already made an impact with the youngest members of the community. NMAAHC seeks to empower, enrich and educate young children on positive identity development, race, history and culture. Through their early childhood education initiatives, the NMAAHC has developed a program for the PreK-fourth grade audience that introduces American history through the African American lens.

One of the museum's teachers visited Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start to lead a program titled, "Tools for Change: Everyone Makes a Difference!" Students had the

experience of a story time session, exploration of historical objects, and a guided activity to create their own artwork. The students learned about civil rights activist, Martin Luther King Jr. and African American artist, Hale Woodruff, in age appropriate ways that prompted the children to think about the different tools, words or talents people use to make the world better.

After looking at the artwork of Hale Woodruff and reading the story "One" by Kathryn Otoshi the children were guided in a self-portrait activity. This activity was focused on how the children can make a difference and it promoted the children's positive perspective on who they are in the world.



SACC Holds First STEM Fair

“Our goal was to help children learn how creative and fun science can be,” explained Marshall Road SACC Head Teacher Lisa Desta, “and we really accomplished our goal.”

Fairfax County School Age Child Care recently hosted its first STEM Fair at the Providence Community Center, in partnership with the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services’ Technology Program. The idea for a multi-center science, technology, engineering and math fair was developed by the SACC Cluster 3B Science Workgroup members. In preparation for the fair, they provided training and support to other SACC staff and identified community partners interested in presenting at the event.

Guided by their SACC teachers, children from Cunningham Park, Flint Hill, Marshall Road, Mosby Woods, Oakton, Providence Community Center, Vienna, Waples Mill, Westbriar and Wolftrap SACC centers formulated hypotheses, conducted experiments, documented their observations, formed results based conclusions, and learned firsthand about the scientific method.

At the fair, children enjoyed presenting their findings to the audience and in some cases demonstrated their experiments! Cunningham Park Head Teacher Shawn Garrett explained, “The children worked on their science projects for weeks in advance and spent time preparing to present their projects to a live audience during the science fair.”

Children and their families were greeted by Supervisor Linda Smyth, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Providence District; and then ended the morning exploring science through a series of fun and educational activities offered by a variety of exhibitors including Apple, George Mason University’s STEM Program, Nike and Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center National Air and Space Museum.

“The STEM Fair was a great event for our community to see how talented our youth are and what great partnerships can bring to our communities,” said NCS Region 3 Service Area Manager Rob Grape. The Cluster3B Science Workgroup is looking forward to expanding the STEM Fair next school year and working with SACC teachers program wide to support meaningful STEM experiences for children.



Office for Children

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