

Literacy: The Foundation for a Stronger Future

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Every child deserves the opportunity to succeed in school and in life. One of the most important building blocks for that success is literacy.

Literacy is much more than learning to read words on a page. It begins at birth and develops through everyday experiences, listening to stories, singing songs, talking with caring adults, and exploring the world through play. Research tells us that more than 90 percent of brain development occurs before age five, making the early years critical for building the language and literacy skills children need to thrive.

At Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC), literacy is at the heart of our mission to launch every child as a healthy, lifelong learner by the end of third grade. While we do not operate a standalone literacy program, literacy is intentionally woven into everything we do.

We believe that families are a child's first and most important teachers. That is why literacy is integrated throughout our parenting programs, playgroups, family support services, and kindergarten transition activities. Through programs such as Triple P, Kaleidoscope Play & Learn, Family Navigation, and Family First, we help parents build language-rich home environments where children can grow, learn, and develop a love of reading.

Our commitment to literacy extends into early learning settings and schools as well. Through Ready Schools initiatives, NC Pre-K, quality improvement efforts, and partnerships with local school districts, we work to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. We also support educators through professional development and coaching that promotes literacy-rich classrooms and high-quality learning environments.

One of our most impactful literacy efforts is Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Each month, more than 3,600 children in Nash and Edgecombe counties receive a free, age-appropriate book mailed directly to their homes. For many families, these books help create daily reading routines and build home libraries that might not otherwise exist.

We are also working to create a culture of literacy throughout our community. Through our Readers Are Leaders campaign, community events, social media, newsletters, and partnerships, we share a simple but powerful message: reading matters. Last year alone, our literacy messages reached thousands of families across the Twin Counties.

In the coming year, DEPC will continue strengthening literacy through several key priorities. We will increase access to books at community events, encourage literacy activities in healthcare settings, faith communities, and partner organizations, and promote simple practices that families can use every day. Our message is straightforward: Read. Talk. Sing. Play. Learn.

One of the most effective literacy strategies costs nothing at all. Reading with a child for just a few minutes each day can build vocabulary, strengthen relationships, and foster a lifelong love of learning. At DEPC, we encourage “active reading”—asking questions, building vocabulary, and connecting stories to a child’s own experiences. These simple interactions help children develop the language and comprehension skills they need for future success.

Literacy is everyone’s responsibility. Parents, grandparents, educators, healthcare providers, faith leaders, businesses, and community organizations all play a role in helping children become confident readers and learners.

When we invest in literacy, we invest in our future workforce, stronger schools, healthier communities, and greater opportunities for every child. Together, we can ensure that every child in Nash and Edgecombe counties enters school ready to read, ready to learn, and ready to thrive.

Because when children learn to read, they gain the power to learn for a lifetime. Please connect with us. If you have an idea or suggestions on more ways we can partner and strengthen this effort, please let us know. I hope you have a great summer!