



NEWS RELEASE

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Nationwide Children's Hospital Prioritizes Kindergarten Readiness as Part of Pediatric "Vital Signs"

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Five and six-year-olds across the country are currently being evaluated for kindergarten readiness, a measurement of a child's ability to engage with standard kindergarten curriculum. Nationwide Children's Hospital is helping kids get ready for kindergarten locally with the hopes of researching outcomes and helping other systems adopt education as an important part of health care delivery.

"Covid-19 made clear just how strong the connection between health and education is, and how we have to be focused on addressing inequities and level the playing field to help impact families and children," said Mary Kay Irwin, EdD, senior director of Nationwide Children's Hospital's Care Connection School-Based Health and Mobile Clinics.

The hospital was able to improve kindergarten readiness scores for children who participated in their kindergarten readiness program by 95%. The hospital's experts say that just like taking a patient's "vital signs," looking at the health of kids in a community need to go beyond basic health metrics, and should take into account education and wellbeing through things like their kindergarten readiness program, which they call SPARK – Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids.

Even without a specific program, pediatricians are often an important community resource because they are connected to various programs that foster learning and developmental skills and can provide guidance on hands-on activities families can do together. Children who develop early learning skills– learning their ABC's counting to 10, knowing what to do with a book when it is handed to them – when they begin kindergarten, they are much more likely to experience success later on, whether that is graduating from high school or earning a secondary education.

"How well a child is prepared for kindergarten is critical in helping to shape the success of their educational journey and parents and caregivers should ask their pediatrician how to ensure their child is ready to attend kindergarten," said [Sara Bode, MD](#), primary care pediatrician and the medical director of Nationwide Children's Hospital's Care Connection School-Based Health and Mobile Clinics. "If children are not experiencing the early activities that promote kindergarten readiness from birth to five years of age, it is incredibly difficult for that child to be ready and successful when they start kindergarten and can lead to other inequities in their future."

Dr. Bode and Dr. Irwin note the importance of partnering with early childhood educators, school leadership and other community members who are passionate about preparing children for academic success.

“Always think about how to do this work collaboratively,” Dr. Bode said, “Evaluate each others strengths and work to move the needle forward to improve both health and education. It doesn’t have to be one or the other.”

Kindergarten Readiness is one of eight [Pediatric Vital Signs](#) metrics identified by Nationwide Children’s Hospital to measure the wellbeing of a child. The other seven metrics are Infant Mortality, High School Graduation, Obesity, Teenage Pregnancy, Suicide, All-Cause Child Mortality and a hybrid measure called Preventive Services Delivery.

*[Click here](#) to learn how the SPARK program helped one central Ohio mother prepare her children for kindergarten.