



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In Pine Grove, Amanda Stogner and her class pause briefly after a lively recess. They are on their way inside to enjoy a free, healthy lunch provided by First 5 and prepared by the Amador County School District.



Nathan Koldstad of Ione proudly displays his favorite pages in the classic children's book "Good Night Moon".



Brianna Medina is serious about her first paperback, which she is both the author and illustrator of, entitled "My Bridge Book".



AMADOR KINDERGARTENERS START SCHOOL THIS YEAR "READY TO LEARN"

"Learning to Love, Loving to Play, Playing to Learn, Ready to Learn" is the official slogan of the School Readiness Program at First 5 Amador. This summer 70 children throughout Amador County participated in the "Bridge", an annual transition to Kindergarten program. The Bridge program, which is free, is geared toward closing the achievement gap in school success. Studies show that children who start school demonstrating a lower skill level than their peers are apt to never catch up to those students who enter schools with the necessary tools for success. Five three-week sessions were held at four elementary schools: Ione, Plymouth, Pine Grove and Sutter Creek Primary.

The program, in its sixth year, is a collaboration between First 5 Amador and the Amador County Unified School District. All children who plan to enter Kindergarten in the fall may apply, but priority is given to students with little or no preschool experience. Bridge is aimed at allowing these students the opportunity to become accustomed to the rhythm, routine and academic expectations of Kindergarten prior to the start of the school year. By the second week of this year's program, teacher Kathy Mauzy in Ione commented, "I am so proud of these little guys and girls. It is absolutely amazing how far they have already come."

Mike, Linda and Evelyn Laney feel that the Bridge Program is exactly what they needed to help aid them with their recent relocation to Amador from Orange County. Due to the move, four-year-old Evelyn had to be pulled out of her preschool. Her father Mike describes the Bridge Program as being "a huge blessing and a tremendous value to young families here in Amador County". He added "the three weeks that Evelyn spent in the program helped to bridge the academic gap that resulted from her having to leave preschool and helped both Evelyn and my wife meet new friends."

Bridge is a "crash course" of sorts for the families involved. These young learners and their parents become familiar with the ins and outs of daily school attendance and are able to quickly learn the various school readiness skills in fun and interactive manners. There is an ongoing dialogue with parents regarding their student's progress. Teachers felt that their suggestions to parents about what can be done at home to help their child's development were taken to heart and immediately and successfully incorporated into the home routine. The curriculum is based on the "Bridge to Kindergarten" calendar that was compiled by Amador County teachers, administrators, parents and early education facilitators. Nine skill areas are outlined and deemed critical for children's readiness to enter school and their overall continued success throughout their formal education. These fundamental skills fall under the following categories: reading readiness,



Part of the daily routine for Room 1 at Sutter Creek Primary is to have a healthy snack followed by play and exercise in the Kindergarten playground.



Future Jackson Elementary students Chet Castoe, Erik Jones and Keilawnee Landergen practice writing their names.

health & safety, social readiness, music & art, numbers readiness, motor skills, writing readiness, colors & shapes and life skills readiness.

A typical day in one of the Bridge classrooms might entail participating in morning learning circle, a Zoophonics lesson, making ABC or “My Bridge Books” to take home, planting seeds, and an art project that incorporates cutting, tracing, drawing and/or painting. Each class also scheduled time to get outside each day, to conduct experiments in water tables, search through sand boxes, and develop large motor skills through various sports and physical activities. Each class also had supplemental guest teachers: music with Suzie Evans, story time with retired Probation Officer Richard Raihall and ceramics with First 5 Amador’s School Readiness Coordinator, Cheri Garamendi. Local artist James Aarons supplied the clay and use of his kiln for this project. Students completed sculptures which will be delivered to them at each of their elementary schools after the “official” start of their school year.

This year’s program came to a close with a celebratory dinner honoring the achievements of all of the young learners. Bridge families, teachers and organizations committed to serving Amador’s youth and families packed the conference room at the new Health & Human Services building for a spaghetti feed. Adding to the festivities were representatives from HRC Child Care Resources, A-TCAA’s Parent Education programs, Amador County Library, University of California Cooperative Extension Nutrition Education, Amador County Public Health Department and Tobacco Reduction of Amador County, all on hand to offer families information about local resources and services. Cheri Garamendi, First 5 Amador’s School Readiness Coordinator wants to remind families that right now is the best time to start preparing your child for Kindergarten. The mission of First 5 Amador is to promote, support and enhance the optimal development of Amador County’s children from zero to five years of age. First 5 offers many free programs to help ensure that all children and families have access to the services and tools that they need, from birth through the first five years of life. To find out more about all of the programs that First 5 Amador has to offer as well as upcoming events throughout the county, please check out their website at www.first5amador.com