

Amador's youngest students ready to start school

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By News release

When school starts on Aug. 19, 99 of Amador County's incoming kindergarten students will have a jump-start on the school year. Nearly 100 students completed the three-week Bridge to Kindergarten Program, a project of First 5 Amador. Students, parents and teachers took time out of their summer to help these children better prepare themselves for the ever-exciting first day of school. The program began in 2003 with 16 enrollees and has grown into a program that served roughly 40 percent of this year's kindergartners at all six county elementary schools.

First 5 Amador's School Readiness initiative funds the Bridge and many other programs that are aimed at increasing children's overall well-being during the first five years of life. Cheri Garamendi, School Readiness Coordinator for First 5 Amador states "it has become increasingly evident that early learning, a strong, healthy foundation and school readiness are of great importance to our nation's children in the long run. By addressing children's developmental needs before their first year of formal elementary education, their chances of success grow exponentially. They are more apt to do well throughout school and consequently, later in life." The Bridge Program is geared towards building children's knowledge and skills in the following domains: reading, numbers, writing, colors, shapes, music, art, health, safety, motor skills, life skills and social readiness.

Overall, 94 percent of parents rated the program outstanding or above average! When parents were asked what their favorite part of the Bridge Program was, responses included:

- "The excitement our daughter had about going every day. It is obvious they made it fun and yet her skills improved as well. It has been such a positive step towards preparation for kindergarten."
- "Hearing about what he did each day, seeing the excitement and enthusiasm he had for learning, and the chance for him to share with us."
- "Being able to get an idea of how the school routine will not only effect our daughter, but the rest of the family as well. Also, finding out what areas we should be working on at home."
- "My son came home with great artwork that he was very proud of. I was glad to hear that he worked in stations and was introduced to the structure of a typical kindergarten day. I also hope that his new familiarity with the school will help alleviate some anxiety come August."
- "We loved the variety. The teachers were delightful and very helpful. He learned letters, how to write his name and he loved story time."
- "My child learned so much in just a short time."

The program culminated with a celebratory dinner that was very well attended by students, parents, siblings, and teachers. The annual dinner acknowledges students' achievements and helps build a sense of community before school even starts. Representatives from a number of partner agencies were on-hand to answer parents' questions about what else they could do to prepare their children for school. Parents learned about quality out-of-school child care opportunities from The Resource Connection, recreation opportunities offered by the Amador County Recreation Agency, the Summer Reading Program at the Library, and nutrition and healthy eating information was relayed via samples of delicious Independence Day Parfaits from the University of California Cooperative Extension. Additionally parenting support, education and advice was offered by the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency, information on immunizations and preventing sickness was made available by Amador County Public Health and the benefits of smoking cessation were highlighted by Tobacco Reduction of Amador County. Garamendi added, "having these partners in the room is critical to the mission of First 5. Informing and empowering parents regarding all of the resources that our rural county has to offer is a key element in promoting the well-being of these young children."

Priority enrollment is given to students with little or no preschool experience, although applications are accepted for all incoming kindergarten students. This year, no one was turned away. First 5 Amador wants parents to remember that they are their child's first and most important teacher.

For more information regarding the Bridge Program and other services offered for children 0 to 5 and their families, visit www.first5amador.com or call 257-1092.



Some of Lone Elementary's incoming kindergarten students gather for a brief shot after spending time outdoors, getting exercise and working on socialization and motor skills.

Photo by: [Courtesy to the Ledger Dispatch](#)

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