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“YEARS OF THE YOUNG CHILD IN PASCO AND HERNANDO COUNTIES” HITS THE GROUND RUNNING

The Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc., successfully launched its latest initiative, “2017 and Beyond: Years of the Young Child in Pasco and Hernando Counties,” (YOTYC) to highlight the incredible importance of Early Learning within our communities.



Odessa, Florida- On Saturday, January 21, 2017, community leaders from both Pasco and Hernando Counties entered into the “Cyber Zone,” a computer lab located in a bright colored building designated for Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Age children at Discovery Point of Suncoast Crossing (Pasco County).

Typically, the second of five classrooms seats around 60 young children; on this particular day however, persons representing Boards of Education, County Commissions and the public at large, settled in on the children’s chairs eager to absorb the mounting evidence associated with the lifelong benefits of Early Learning.

"They're crying out; 'Can you hear me?' If we don't answer their cry now, we will hear from them later," noted Ernest Hooper, *Tampa Bay Times* Columnist, in reference to the importance of responding to our children’s needs, now rather than later.

[A December 2016 report](#) by Noble Prize Winning Economist Dr. James Heckman estimates the annual rate of return on investment in quality Early Learning programs at 13%. Greater outcomes in education, health, social and emotional development, and economic productivity as well as reduced crime rates emphasize the obvious reality that by investing in our youngest citizens, we are investing in the overall progress of our communities.

Saturday's event launched what will be years of constant reminders on the importance of Early Learning. The Coalition plans to inundate the Pasco and Hernando communities with a series of social media campaigns, advertisements and YOTYC merchandise. Parents/guardians and Early Learning Educators will be offered numerous special events and training opportunities to support the vital relationship between parents and caregivers that is necessary to raise successful children.

Dr. Steven N. Kanakis, Chairman of the Early Learning Coalition's Board of Directors noted that, "I am very proud that our organization, representing Pasco and Hernando's young children, took the unique step of declaring 'Years of the Young Child.' It is a great step forward - for our children, our parents and our communities."

The Coalition looks forward to moving away from terms often used in place of Early Learning such as childcare, day care, babysitting, etc. Quality Early Learning programs are not only important because of the positive effects on a child's brain development, but also because these programs allow parents to continue working and/or furthering their education which in turn strengthens our communities.

For more information about the Coalition and the YOTYC initiative, visit www.phelc.org.

For updates on YOTYC, like the [ELC of Pasco and Hernando Counties on Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter @PHELC](#).

About the Coalition

The Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc. is one of 30 Early Learning Coalitions in Florida. Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program is for all children who are four-years old on or before September 1st. School Readiness provides subsidized child care for low-to-moderate income working families. The nonprofit serves over 13,000 children between infancy and twelve-years old, working with more than 400 providers in the counties.

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