



## Camp Kindergarten Jump-Starts Learning

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In the weeks before school started at Matheny-Withrow Elementary, a young girl traced the notches in the two dice she rolled, counting up the total number. She then took that number to count out miniature leaves to add to her paper tree – she preferred the yellow and red leaves because they were the fall leaves.

At the table next to her, a boy surveyed lowercase and uppercase letters in front of him, using an oversized blue marker to color in letters after naming each one. Nearby, several students worked to piece together a puzzle.

The 19 students in total were in their last week of Camp Kindergarten: Ready, Set, Go!, a three-week program held this summer to improve school readiness among incoming kindergarten students, many of whom hadn't attended pre-school before. It's a program funded in collaboration by the Community Foundation's giving circle Young Philanthropists and United Way, together helping bring a high-quality school-like program to students before their first day of kindergarten.



In 2017, a majority of incoming kindergartners at Matheny-Withrow did not have any pre-school experience. That places them behind their peers on the first day of kindergarten, not only learning the curriculum, but also in the social and emotional development of being in an all-day classroom. Matheny-Withrow wanted to change that.

Camp Kindergarten is a program that speaks directly to Sangamon Success, a report that grew out of a year-long planning process organized by the Sangamon County Continuum of Learning, a local partnership of the Community Foundation, The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Central Illinois, and University of Illinois Springfield.

Dozens of local educational and child development experts convened in committees to review research from across the country about what works and doesn't work in closing the achievement gap between less-advantaged and more advantaged children.

Twenty-five recommendations are outlined in the report to address the specific needs of children in Sangamon County, including accessing high-quality school-like experiences heading into kindergarten,

building strong relationships with parents, and developing more complete data on children's development heading into the first year of elementary school.

The need for a program like Camp Kindergarten was felt as a waitlist built up. Of the 15 days of camp, 95 percent of students attended at least 13 days. After pre- and post-assessment tests, 75 percent of the students showed growth in their developmental readiness. And for kindergarten teacher Bri Vogel, who has been teaching for 17 years, the biggest difference she saw were the improvements in social and emotional skills.

"When kids come into kindergarten, they're nervous and maybe not ready to go to school," she said. "The kids left the program loving school, wanting to come back to school ready to learn. I feel like they gained the social and emotional skills to manage when they feel upset – 15 days before they didn't have those skills.

"We would all meet on the carpet and they could share anything, develop their language skills and talk to their peers. By the end, they were saying I love school and talking in complete sentences. At the beginning it was, my favorite color is yellow."

We're committed to improving outcomes for the young people in our community, and thrilled to have great partners to continue striving to make that happen.

*For more information about the Continuum of Learning and to read the Sangamon Success report, visit [www.continuumoflearning.org](http://www.continuumoflearning.org). To learn more about Young Philanthropists, visit [www.CFLL.org](http://www.CFLL.org).*