



The World Health Organization defines “social determinants” as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.” As leaders in our community, if there is one gift we can give the children of Hillsborough County this Holiday Season that will positively affect their social determinants is a high-quality early learning experience.

We know that with only 46 percent of children entering kindergarten in Hillsborough County ready to learn, we must provide a more robust, high quality learning experience and “teach them early: Brain development begins weeks after conception and rapidly develops through age 3.

As community leaders we need to explore creative ways to support the early learning community that affords all children the same high-quality learning experiences, regardless of their socio-economic status.

In the span of one year, children living in poverty hear approximately 250,000 words compared to children raised in wealthier families, who are exposed to more than 4 million. The disparity in language acquisition can be exponentially affected by exposing children to high-quality learning. From birth to age 3 children develop their emotional intelligence and we know positive early learning experiences improve cognitive skills, decrease the risk of developmental delays, and result in children who can self-regulate, all of which are lifelong skills for success.

Please join the Children’s Board in starting the conversation and look for opportunities to touch the system in a positive way. Adopt an early learning program. Encourage new parents to read, talk, and sing to their children and to make every minute of play a teachable moment. Join us in the effort to make Hillsborough County the best in America to raise our children.

I hope you all have a wonderful and safe holiday season.

My best,
Kelley Parris
Executive Director
Children’s Board of Hillsborough County