

# Our Schools

By Art Stow

## Lessons from the Oak Grove

Red Hill Elementary School recently launched a celebration of “Week of the Young Child” — an annual national event celebrating the importance of early childhood education — on an outstanding spring day. In our oak grove, an idyllic field just outside our building, more than 70 preschoolers were highly engaged in a range of activities. The students represented pre-K classes from six Albemarle County public schools: Red Hill, Agnor-Hurt, Cale, Scottsville, Stony Point and Woodbrook.

We had a full menu of activities for our young participants, from musical sing-alongs, to outdoor team activities, to a picnic lunch, to science experiences — even a station on how to prepare and eat a nutritious snack, courtesy of the Whole Foods folks. It was a picture-perfect experience for students, parents, volunteers, teachers and one lucky principal.

Besides young children having a wonderful time, something more serious was unfolding.

A recent Harvard study is the latest research to confirm how important pre-K programs are to the future of our country. It confirmed that such programs lead directly to improvements in language, literacy, math, emotional development and

social skills. The body of research shows that pre-K education is a faithful indicator of continued academic success in future years.

What really builds the foundation for lifelong success for these young boys and girls is not what they read from a book but what they read from one another. When I visit a pre-K classroom, I see children from different backgrounds energetically engaged in collaboration, excited by discovery, determined to understand and follow rules and developing a strong sense of social confidence.

On the subject of confidence, I have to confess that the highlight of my day is when I’m visited by one of our young pre-K students who has made it a habit to walk into my office unannounced to read to me.

Now, that’s worth celebrating.



*Art Stow is the principal of Red Hill Elementary School and a true believer in early childhood education.*

