

November / December 2022 Holiday Newsletter

Executive Director's Column

Much of the reported action to date at the Academy's morning and evening programs has centered on the GED program. A large number of the GED students has made visible gains on their path toward their high school diplomas: passing paper-pencil pretests, GED practice tests, and in many cases, the final GED tests in Language Arts, Social Studies and Science. Many of those with only the Math portion of the GED to conquer slowly but surely are making progress. This should be a year of many students gaining their diplomas.

In a GED program, the diploma is the end goal. For a majority of students at Family Literacy Academy, there is more. We have an increasing number of students who want to understand and use English better in their day-to-day lives, including the chance to improve their children's education. We have mothers who want their children to get the best start on the road to success in lifelong learning. Both our day and evening ESOL and preschool (and evening sessions for school-age children of our GED and ESOL students) meet the critical and comprehensive needs of improving literacy in the community. Most important to our focus on and success with ESOL and education of our adult students' children is the day-to-day planning and preparation and the downright hard work by the Academy's dedicated ESOL and preschool staff teams.

That is the point of this newsletter - our preschool and ESOL efforts.

And let's begin.....





Congratulations to our 119th GED

Michael Ocasio joined the Academy in September and just completed his GED, the first of the year and the 119th in our history.

Obviously, Michael is bright, attentive and hardworking. He is also a nice guy who will go far. He liked the class and sings the praise of Ms. Crum and the staff. He enjoyed the parenting classes, something that will benefit his two children, already on their way to success in school.

Michael has goals - completing his efforts to provide barber services and enrolling at Polk State to gain business skills and entrepreneurial abilities. There is no stopping him !

Meet Our ESOL Students & Program

Daytime ESOL

The daytime ESOL class is going well, with some sixteen and growing members enrolled. Students are working hard on their lessons and are dedicated to improving their English skills. We use a variety of resources to improve writing skills, vocabulary, reading and comprehension, pronunciation, and listening skills.

Our classes usually begin with a writing prompt with the students doing their best to answer the prompt in writing. Their writing is checked for grammar, spelling, and punctuation and the student reads their answer aloud. We have a daily reading activity designed for our ESOL students. These articles are on health, safety, finance, and family life where students are first introduced to the vocabulary.

We also learn about current events while reading "News for You," a newspaper published especially for students. Our students also enjoy learning new words, and how to spell them, with crossword puzzles. Using different types of learning activities helps keep students engaged. Many times, teaching a new word may look like a game of charades. Acting out words makes learning more fun !



Meet Our ESOL Students **& Program (cont.)**

While a few from last year have returned, most of our ESOL students this year are beginning English learners. Just for example, Evelia Mote and Esmeralda "Esme" Contteras are very dedicated and loyal students. Esme brings her four-year-old son, Alex, to learn in our preschool. Alex visited our class recently with his fellow classmates in search for the runaway gingerbread man.... a holiday activity enjoyed by not only pre-school classmates but throughout the entire building.

Julio Villanveva attends class regularly while his twins benefit from the preschool.

We celebrate the progress each student is making during every class. Muy bien!

Thanks to Donna Barringer, the Academy's daytime ESOL teacher.

Nighttime ESOL

The enrollment in the Tuesday evening ESOL class continues to grow, and at last count exceeded some fifteen. Many of them bring their children to attend our nighttime preschool classes or receive homework assistance for their older children. The background of our evening class varies, requiring flexibility on the part of our instructor, Ms. Sandra Annotti.

(Of course, the objective of ESOL classes is to improve the comprehension and use of a student's English, regardless of his or her native language.) Leonardo and Edison are from Brazil and speak Portuguese. They have an extensive vocabulary and have added greatly to class discussions with their eager participation and willingness to share their culture. Lupe Juarez, originally from Mexico, has made progress in comprehension, and is always willing to assist others. Daniel has improved his writing skills, and now readily responds in class. Mireya Maguey has improved in comprehension and writing. Lourdes Maguey has made significant improvement in comprehension and participation.

We greatly appreciate the services of our long time ESOL teacher, Sandra Annotti.

As our daytime and nighttime ESOL students make progress and gain confidence in their comprehension and use of English, they ultimately have to decide whether they want to continue their education by enrolling in our GED program, as has occurred in past years. (Lupe Juarez in this year's evening class has already improved her Math by attending our Monday night GED Math class for a while.) Some of our students already have advanced degrees from their native countries and come to our ESOL class to improve their English.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Daytime Preschool

Our families love their children and want to do what they can to help them grow up to be a success in school and beyond. However, they may not fully understand how quickly their child's brains grow and how important it is to provide a variety of stimuli to encourage healthy growth - through reading, repetition, and play. Early and consistent attention will result in a better chance to learn, grow, compete and succeed in school and throughout life. That is the reason for efforts such as the Academy's preschool program and life skills classes and our joining the Charter schools' READ20 initiative (which, from its beginning, the Academy has espoused as a vital component of family literacy). The Academy, through the Family Literacy Coalition, looks forward to providing community wide awareness of the importance of these needs evidenced in the video "No Small Matter." This is all about the second generation and our efforts to decrease the cycle of poverty and increase the level of literacy.

Giggles, smiles, playing and hugs all are part of our day along with so much more. These are some of the precious moments we experience each day in the childcare program offered by the Family Literacy Academy.

The childcare program is to provide a safe, fun, and educational environment to the children of the parents who are attending the academy, to work towards attaining their GED or improving their English in the ESOL program. The goal is to provide literacy rich curriculum.

Throughout the morning, the teachers greet each child and encourage them to play in the various centers. These centers include, housekeeping, blocks and trucks, puzzles, various manipulatives, art, books, and puppets, and recently added, the grocery store. The teachers find opportunities to work with the students on developmental skills that are appropriate for each age and take every opportunity to read to the children.



Daytime Preschool (cont.)

Along with developmental skills, the three-and four-year-old children work on age-appropriate academic skills in a small group setting. Other activities include snack time, outdoor play, and whole group reading time. When the parents pick up their children, they may check out classroom books, donated by United Way, to read with their child at home and we also send books home that are theirs to keep.

It would be so easy to tell you about the successes of each of the students we are privileged to teach. However, for this article, we will highlight two.

First, we would like to introduce you to Elizabeth. She has attended our program for 2 years. Due to medical issues, she has had some delays in her early development. The teachers worked with the recommendations given by her doctors and parents. This year, she is no longer dealing with some of the medical issues, so we are now collaborating with medical personnel to encourage success with her early developmental skills. Speech and make believe are two of those skills. She is making progress in both; but we are so pleased to see her growing interest for playing in the housekeeping center and taking care of the baby dolls. She loves to walk them in the stroller. We are excited to see how she will continue to progress this year.





Preschool (cont.)

Alex is another one of our students. Alex walks in each day with a smile on his face and wants to find his friends and start his day. He is one of our older students and he enjoys helping the younger ones. For part of the morning, he works in the three- and four-year-old program. He is so excited to come into class and find out what we will be doing that day. He is eager to listen to and talk about the stories we read, and he loves to work on our daily skills and projects. He is a joy to have in our program. Working with our students and their families is a privilege and we are so thankful that we can provide this gift of childcare so that the parents can work towards building a better future for their family.

Thanks to the contribution of **Robin Jolley**
Lead Teacher of the Family Literacy Academy Preschool

Our evening children's program provides much the same learning opportunity, with fully functioning teachers (headed by Ann Oriend, experienced in preschool work) for preschool students but adds the services of experienced elementary teacher Jeff Olson to provide homework assistance and appropriate-aged activities to the school age students of our night time GED students.





Parenting & Life Skills Classes

Parenting classes are scheduled throughout each month. These classes focus on different topics to help encourage a safe and positive experience in raising their children.

Examples of some of the classes are the importance of reading with their child, how to choose age-appropriate books, seatbelt safety and first aid. These discussions may lead to the use of guest speakers. This is also an opportunity for the parents to share their concerns and successes with raising their child and create meaningful relationships and provide support and encouragement with the other parents in the program.

So often, parents, especially single parents, feel that they are alone in dealing with issues such as self-esteem, stress and special needs and identifying helpful community resources.

Thanks for the contribution of Linda Brown, Family Literacy Academy Social Worker and Robin Jolley, lead preschool teacher.



Our Students Speak Out On The Academy

Michael Ocasio

Something that I have benefited from in my time here at the Literacy Academy is the Parenting Classes. In the classes I love that it is an opportunity for parents to speak about some of the trials that parents go through. I believe that every parent needs some time to talk with other parents to get help with anything that the parent(s) are going through, or just having time to be able to listen to other parents helps with the stress of dealing with their own kids.

Marissa Brown

Before joining the Family Literacy Academy, I was drowning in depression.... the endless feeling of everything being out of reach and unachievable. I have gained so much... academic help, resources for my family, structure for my toddler who is speech-delayed, and so much more. I have made reading to my child a priority which has not only helped his speech but our relationship. would not be where I am today if it weren't for this program. I can't wait to see where it leads me. If I have anything other than my family to be thankful for, it is the Family Literacy Program.

“Who you surround yourself with is who you will become.”

Our Students Speak Out On The Academy (cont.)

Shane Monge

Well, I have been in this program for a few years now. It has been a big blessing for my son and me. There is a feeling of love that embraces you. There is great support with other parents in Parenting Class. You don't feel like you are alone in the feelings and struggles of being a parent.

The childcare teachers have helped my son so much with his speech delay. It helped me to learn that he would speak when he is ready.

Mrs. Mary, Mrs. Carol, Mrs. Rivers, Mrs. Linda and Mrs. Gail all loved on him, but Mrs. Rivers really knows my son! She has been with him since he was 6 months old. He is now 3 years old! She always said, "My baby will talk when he's ready" and something like "Don't you worry' baby." And, sure enough, last holiday season, he spoke. I had heard him sing and say words here and there but when he finally spoke, he had a lot to say.

Tammie Durden

My time with the Family Literacy Academy has been a great experience! This far, it has brought my daughter and me closer together. We both attend class to gain our diploma, but it has both of us believing we can reach goals we only dreamed about...goals from completing our G.E.D.s to teaching us how to be better people.

Since starting the Family Literacy Academy, I have learned that communication is a huge factor in society and at home. The skills we are learning in this program will open many doors we thought were closed. This program has taught me that I can accomplish any goal I set out to obtain with just hard work and believing in myself.

I'm very grateful to the program. Without it I wouldn't have had a chance to get my G.E.D. nor learn how important communication is between my daughter and myself, and with other people



THE IMPORTANCE OF POLK STATE COLLEGE TO THE ACADEMY AND THE COMMUNITY

The prime reason for the Academy's existence is the improvement of the lives of its students. That means providing greater opportunities to those students. One of the greatest opportunities has come from our partnership with Polk State College early on in our existence, as was evidenced by the declaration of previous Polk State President Holden to an early class of the Academy: "You are not just here for your GED, You are here to go to college." From that point forward our partnership with Polk State has flourished, continuing through the leadership of current President Falconetti. Some 45 of the Academy's GED graduates have enrolled at Polk State.

Not only has Polk State helped to improve the lives of our students, but it has also had a major positive impact on the Lake Wales community.

"Polk State College is proud to partner with the Family Literacy Academy at Lake Wales to advance the educational attainment of Polk County residents. Together, we are transforming the lives of students and their families and promoting future prosperity through the positive economic impact of education on our community."

**Dr. Angela Garcia Falconetti,
President of Polk State College**

Please read the guest column from the Ledger article:

Polk State College adds \$215.5 million to county economy
Dr. Angela Garcia Falconetti
Guest Columnist

The transformative impact Polk State College has on the lives of students is witnessed on campus each day, and the value graduates add to the local workforce is evident across the community with approximately 70% remaining in Polk County. A recent study reaffirms the value of Polk State, finding that the College's credit programs add \$215.5 million in total income to the Polk County economy each year.

Polk State commissioned this study by Emsi Burning Glass using Fiscal Year 2020-2021 data for degree-seeking students to establish a baseline as it updates its strategic plan and prepares for significant growth in student enrollment, programs, and geographic footprint. Polk State's credit programs include 24 associate degrees and six baccalaureate degrees.



THE IMPORTANCE OF POLK STATE COLLEGE TO THE ACADEMY AND THE COMMUNITY (cont.)

Fifty-five percent of this impact - or \$118.5 million - is a direct result of the increased earnings students and alumni receive because of their Polk State education and training. For every \$1 a student invests in Polk State, they receive a cumulative value of \$5 in higher future earnings. This not only benefits them, but also their families, local businesses, and the overall economic development of the region. To put it into perspective, this is an economic boost similar to hosting the World Series - 20 times.

This comes as no surprise to Polk State, which is on the cusp of significant growth alongside greater Polk County. Polk remains one of the fastest growing areas in the nation with an estimated 45 people moving to the County daily, and quality higher education and workforce training remain critical to ensuring an exceptional quality of life for current residents and those to come. The economic impact report was released as Polk State prepares for its largest growth period in more than a decade.

Following a historical legislative session in which Polk State was allocated \$53.1 million, the College is expanding with \$13.8 million to begin the development of the Haines City-Davenport Campus in Northeast Polk County. The new campus located along U.S. 27 in Haines City, adjacent to Advent Health Heart of Florida and the Medeplex, will bring quality higher education and workforce training closer for many residents in Polk County's fastest-growing region. Phase one of the \$51 million development will include designing, planning, and site preparation for the multi-phased project. Within a 10-mile radius of the site, there are more than 80,000 residents whose highest educational attainment is a high school diploma - or some college - but no degree. The campus will serve students and families in Haines City and Davenport, as well as a broad area of Central Florida including Clermont, Poinciana and Champion's Gate. Of Polk State's seven locations in Winter Haven, Lakeland, Bartow and Lake Wales, the closest campus for residents of Northeast Polk is approximately 30 miles roundtrip, which means this Polk State location will make quality education more accessible to thousands.

The results of the recent economic impact study affirm the return on investment for ventures such as this expansion of the college. As Polk County's largest-serving public institution of higher education, Polk State is working diligently to ensure that it will meet the needs of the rapidly expanding community.

Dr. Angela Garcia Falconetti is President of Polk State College and Chair of the Florida College System Council of Presidents.

OUR STUDENTS ENGAGE IN ACADEMY HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

We are a FAMILY program and subscribe to the theory that “all work and no play” does not make for well-rounded adults, children and families. Thus, the final push for end of the semester instruction yields to participating in holiday events.

This includes our preschoolers’ pursuit of the gingerbread man throughout the Campbell Center following being read the story of the gingerbread man’s escape from being cooked, construction of gingerbread houses and our long-standing tradition of providing books, stuffed animals and pajamas to all of our children in the Academy (thanks to the generosity of the Lake Wales United Methodist congregation) to close out the semester. (Look for more pictures in our January newsletter.)

And that is it for first semester of the Academy’s academic year 2022-23, except for our thanks to you for your support and our best wishes for a safe and joyful holiday season and a productive new year! We resume classes for our second semester on January? Until then, the staff and students join the Board of Directors of the Family Literacy Academy in wishing you and yours.



Gingerbread house





Merry Christmas
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR



Your friends at **Family Literacy Academy**

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A GREAT NEW YEAR

**FROM THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
STAFF, & FAMILIES OF
THE FAMILY LITERACY ACADEMY
AT LAKE WALES**

**Special note to our special friend and supporter, Aunt Martha:
Merry Christmas and the best and healthiest of new years to you. The
program is doing well, and we greatly appreciate your interest in it. Sue
continues to be undaunted and so generous with her time in providing
guidance as we learn Math from her.**

You remain our inspiration !!

All the best to you.





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