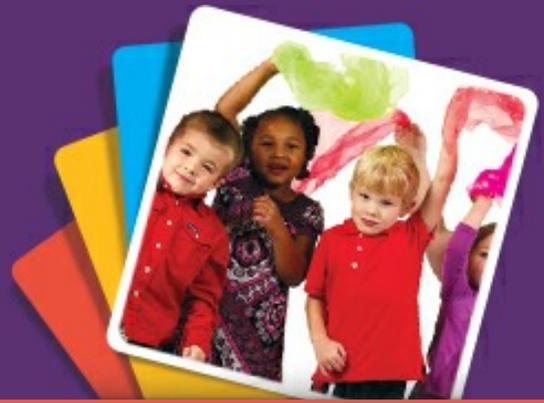




WYOMING
KidsFirst



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Technology As An Opportunity For Early Childhood

Let's face it: young children today are growing up in a world that is very different than the world we grew up in. While we may have spent most of our earliest days outside enjoying fresh air, today's youngest learners are much more likely to spend the bulk of their time engaged (or, all too often passively preoccupied) with some sort of technology. Today, technology infiltrates almost every aspect of our society—including early childhood. While the debate surrounding screen time certainly has deeper roots than the invention of the iPad, it is the advent of the innumerable personal gadgets and screens that has really ignited this issue.

As a result of the increasing prevalence of screen technology, many experts first suggested very strict guidelines—often prescribing abstinence—regarding appropriate use for young children. This response has become increasingly unrealistic. As was pointed out in a recent article in *Forbes*, “Screen abstinence would pretty much be like sentencing a newborn to house arrest” because of the omnipresent screen in our modern world. Whether for or against screen technology, it is undeniably integrated into our human experience in a way that suggests it is here to stay.

In response to this new reality, more and more experts, educators, and parents are reconsidering the guidelines and best practices for young children's screen time. Overall, the suggestion is that screen time can be used as a support to children's learning and development with proper limits, high quality content, and parental engagement and positive role modeling. Check out the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP)

revised guidelines on children and screen time here.

An important takeaway for the new guidelines is that not all apps, games, or media interactions are created equal when it comes to learning. Parents are encouraged to be intentional with their children's media access—to do their research to ensure what's being used offers activity choices that are appropriate, enhance children's daily learning experiences, are easy to use and engaging, connect with and support learning goals, and provide appropriate feedback. This advice aims to shift screen time away from a mere distraction to an engaging and educational opportunity for young children.

Caregivers who want to ensure their children are using high quality media resources are encouraged to check out the Children's Technology Review, a NAEYC-recommended online journal and database designed to help parents, teachers and librarians find objectively reviewed, high quality media products. The database has just 12,000 reviews to date. Learn more about the Children's Technology Review or search the review database here.

A great resource for sure to be high quality apps are those created by the Fred Rogers Center, an institution guided by Mr. Rogers' legacy and devotion to young children and families. The center is “dedicated to helping children and adults thrive in the digital age, and ensuring that technology use complements children's social interactions, play, and other activities with the caring friends and family in their lives.” Check out some of their featured apps here.

The Community Baby Shower Model

An exciting new program model is spreading across Wyoming: community baby showers! This program is designed to bring newly parenting families or pregnant women and their supporters together for a fun celebration of their important roles as parents and families. The events provide opportunities for families to connect with other families in the community, as well as for families to connect to the available community resources for prenatal care and raising young children. And, of course, it wouldn't be a baby shower without participants being showered with gifts!

The community baby shower model can be seen across the country. The program came to Wyoming at the behest of the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH). WDH adapted Oklahoma's program model and hosted Wyoming's first community baby shower in 2014, with Uinta County serving as the pilot project site. This year, Uinta County hosted its second shower in May, while Sweetwater County, Albany County, and Cody hosted their first showers in September. Natrona County has started planning for its first shower, which it hopes to host in 2016.

The Uinta County baby shower efforts have been spearheaded by the Uinta County Public Health and WDH. Each of the two events featured over 20 interactive info booths—offering everything from car seat demos to prenatal yoga to service registrations. Almost 200 people attended each shower. Uinta County Public Health and the many agencies that have supported this effort are committed to hosting an annual baby shower in their community.

Both Albany and Sweetwater Counties' baby showers were led by the Wyoming Citizen Review Panel, the local Public Health Nursing Departments, and the WDH in collaboration with a myriad of community partners, such as WIC, Cent\$ible Nutrition, and MOPS—to name a few. Like Uinta County's event, these showers also had booths at which participants received information, registered for services, participated in activities, or entered giveaway raffles. Over 130 people attended Sweetwater County's baby shower, and more than



A pregnant woman attending Cody's Community Baby Shower receives a children's book—one of many giveaways at this event.

200 people came to Albany County's shower. All participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, making each of these inaugural events a huge success!

The baby shower in Cody was part of the local hospital's "Community Health Series," and was coordinated by hospital staff. The event featured talks from various medical staff, including a pediatric physician, an OB/GYN physician, and women's health staff, as well as a Q&A session with nutrition staff. The event also offered several informational and service-oriented booths, including a massage station! Like all of the other showers, this event featured many great door prizes and giveaways donated by local organizations and event partners. Over 30 mothers attended this shower, and the planning team hopes to grow the event in coming years.

Each of these community baby showers is a result of strong community collaboration and support at the local level and generous resource and information sharing between communities. Any community member interested in launching this program is encouraged to contact Danielle Marks, WDH's Women and Infant Health Program Manager, at danielle.marks@wyo.gov or 307-777-7944 for information or existing program resources.

From the Director



Dear Partners,

Nearing the end of his speech to Congress on September 24, Pope Francis said:

“In particular, I would like to call attention to those family members who are the most vulnerable, the young. For many of them, a future filled with countless possibilities beckons, yet so many others seem disoriented and aimless, trapped in a hopeless maze of violence, abuse and despair. Their problems are our problems. We cannot avoid them. We need to face them together, to talk about them and to seek effective solutions rather than getting bogged down in discussions.”

We will not all share the same political or religious views. Without digging into either, let us contemplate what we have in common... Our state is one of prudent stewardship. Our heritage and strong rural values dictate – unsurprisingly – a standard for giving to others. We have such advantages: public education, not much crime, people who want to work. The vast preponderance of us care about other people’s children. Why, then, do we settle for less than realizing bright futures and limitless possibilities for all children?

All children. Not “my” children or “these” children. All children. Our success depends on a diverse set of families and communities working together; success depends not on all of us doing the same thing, but on empowering each to contribute to the blend of health, education, nurturing and love that grows our children in the same ways – cognitively, physically, socially, emotionally and, yes, spiritually.

I know that some of our children are disoriented, aimless or trapped in a hopeless maze. I accept their problems as my problems. I will not avoid them! Instead, I seek the solutions that Pope Francis spoke of. I imagine a Wyoming where every child is happy, healthy, nurtured, encouraged, and loved. My imagination, then, takes me to a place where all children are cared



“Working to ensure each Wyoming child is her or his own possibilitarian for the future.”

for as if they were members of my own family. (How dare I settle for less than exactly what I want for my own daughter, Lydia!) Imagine the possibilities when each child knows there are and takes hold of the opportunities around every corner. Just imagine – it can be done! This is my exaltation: I am leaving behind the

quagmire of our wandering discussions to execute the intentional, meaningful, effective solutions that ensure each Wyoming child is her or his own possibilitarian for the future.

I will be vigilant. I insist on progress. Wyoming’s very future depends on it.

Becca Steinhoff, Executive Director



Spotlight on Sheridan

Sheridan Is Taking it to the Next Level Outcomes

The Sheridan County School District #2 (SCSD #2) is leading a collaborative effort—“Next Level”—that asks a diverse set of community stakeholders to commit to work together to ensure high school graduation for all local youth. Next Level came from the school district’s realization that if the high school worked really hard, they could hope to reach about an 85% graduation rate. At that rate, around 30 students in each graduating class at SCSD#2 would not earn a high school diploma...and that just wasn’t acceptable to SCSD #2. And so, Next Level was born.

SCSD #2 acknowledged that do better for their students they would need the whole community to be invested in ensuring and then celebrating high school graduation. With community leaders from a variety of entities as partners, the school district did some research and created a framework for success that has become the Next Level initiative. This initiative now has almost 20 partners and continues to grow. Additionally, the program has received funding from major foundations, including the John. P. Ellbogen Foundation, the Homer A. & Mildred S. Scott Foundation, the Kibbee Foundation for Children, and the B.F. & Rose H. Perkins Foundation.

The collaboration has identified four focus areas in which partners will work to impact their long-term goal to ensure high school graduation for all Sheridan youth: early childhood, student attendance, community engagement, and multiple pathways to graduation. Each focus area comes with its own goal and set of collaborators to identify priorities, actions and impacts. The goal of the early childhood component is to “improve kindergarten readiness and provide training and support for parents of young children.” Taking a

cue from research that says children who start school behind are more likely to stay behind, SCSD#2 will work with others to ensure that children start school prepared for success in their first year and beyond.

Wyoming Kids First is a member of the Next Level Early Childhood Team, and facilitated a community early childhood meeting on October 14 to kick-off the conversation to work with families, early care and education professionals, and the broader community to ensure that all children enter SCSD#2 with the attitudes, skills and behaviors they need to be successful students before they become high school graduates. From this meeting, participants identified the community’s strengths and challenges and then prioritized commitments to improving the system. Wyoming Kids First is excited to be a part of this initiative, which truly connects the dots between a child’s strong start and school and lifelong success.



Participants at Next Level’s early childhood meeting, facilitated by Wyoming Kids First’s Becca Steinhoff, identified the components, characteristics, commitments, and challenges for the community’s early childhood system.



Featured Research

Prenatal Care – Fundamental to a Healthy Start, a Healthy Life

The extensive research documenting how prenatal health is fundamental to long-term health and well-being is undeniable. We know that the foundation for K-12 and life-long success is built during the first five years of life, and that the available infrastructure, so to speak, is determined prenatally. It would seem, then, that we would focus the bulk of our efforts to ensure prenatal health and a successful first five years. Of course, that is simply not the case.

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the U.S. is far from leading in early childhood health indicators: the U.S. infant mortality rate was ranked 32nd among the 34 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2010., and the U.S. preterm birth rate (defined as birth at less than 37 weeks of gestation) ranks 130th out of 184 countries. These statistics should be troublesome for everyone. There is now a wealth of evidence on how early-life conditions affect future well-being, measured by health, educational attainment, adult earnings, and other indicators throughout life. For example, babies born at low birthweights enter the world with an increased likelihood of having a school-age learning disability, being enrolled in special education classes, having a lower IQ, dropping out of high school, and experiencing lifelong physical, cognitive and behavioral disabilities. This research provides stark evidence that we must do better.

How we can do better is pretty simple, actually: we must increase the use and quality of prenatal care—the medical care during pregnancy that tracks and supports the health and well-being of both the

mother and baby. Babies of mothers who do not get prenatal care are three times more likely to have a low birth weight and five times more likely to die than those born to mothers who do get care. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that women have, on

average, 11 prenatal care visits during pregnancy—both early and regular care is essential.

It is likely that pregnant families have received what is oftentimes conflicting or confusing advice from others: Eat this. Don't eat that. Do this. Don't do that. There is also a wealth of information available on how to best support a healthy pregnancy, and it can be overwhelming. For many, it's tough to keep it all straight.

Check out this two-page “Pregnancy Do’s and

Don’ts” from the U.S. Office on Women’s Health. And, because there’s an app for everything nowadays, we’d be remiss not to mention “My 9 Months,” an app that provides free information about healthy pregnancies. Parenting families are encouraged to utilize prenatal visits as opportunities to ask specific questions or express any concerns they may have about their pregnancy.

Finally, do not let cost be a barrier to prenatal care. Women in every state can get help to pay for medical care during their pregnancies. Every state in the United States has a program that offers free or reduced-cost medical care, information, advice, and other services important for a healthy pregnancy. To find out about the program in Wyoming, call 1-800-311-BABY or contact your local Public Health Department.



This display board from Uinta County's Community Baby Shower sends a critical message about the importance of prenatal health: "what happens in the womb does not stay in the womb."

Connect with WY Quality Counts!

–From WY Quality Counts

Like children, WY Quality Counts seems to never rest. WYQC is tirelessly working to increase the quality of childcare in Wyoming. One way WYQC invests in our children's future is by providing funding and resources to college students and working professionals.

WYQC's website is a treasure trove of information for students and professionals searching for scholarships, grants, and training programs to help develop their career. The website also conveniently provides links to online applications, downloadable necessary forms, an application due date

calculator and frequently asked questions. This convenient collection of resources makes the process of applying for assistance easier than ever.

Professionals should also take advantage of the website's ever-growing resource of expert- and kid-approved activities, and download or order WYQC products to use in their classrooms, like activity books, field guides, and growth charts.



To learn more about WYQC and its goals or to join in on the fun, visit our website at wyqualitycounts.org or find us on Facebook at facebook.com/WYQualityCounts.

WY Quality Counts is brought to you by the Department of Workforce Services and exists to provide training, grants and awareness to increase the quality of child care in Wyoming. WY Quality Counts is pleased to contribute to the quarterly WY Kids First Newsletter; however, the views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of WY Quality Counts, the Department of Workforce Services, or any of the employees thereof.



Wyoming Business Forum: "School Readiness...ROI for Tomorrow?"

Nov 16-18 in Cheyenne

This year's Business Forum features a session on school readiness and how investing in early childhood today will result in the greatest return on our investment tomorrow. On Tuesday, November 17 at 3:20 p.m., Skip Oppenheimer, a businessman and early childhood advocate, will speak on the importance of investing in early childhood. This discussion on "School

Readiness ... ROI for Tomorrow" will be co-moderated by respected businessmen and will feature a panel of business representatives, a legislator, and Jan Lawrence from Basic Beginnings in Laramie!