



Soaring into Kindergarten

A Blueprint for School Readiness Success

FOUNDATION TO FLIGHT: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & DISTRICT GROWTH

Manatee County at a Glance

-  * Located on Florida's Gulf Coast
-  * South of Tampa Bay
-  * North of Sarasota County
-  * County Seat: Bradenton

Why Location Matters

-  * One of Florida's fastest-growing communities.
-  * Rapid residential growth continues to drive school enrollment increases and facility needs.

District Snapshot

Key Facts

- Approximately 52,000-53,000 students enrolled districtwide.
- More than 80 schools serving students from Pre-K through Grade 12.
- SDMC is the largest employer with over 7,000 employees.
- One of Florida's fastest-growing school districts.

Why Early Learning Matters

Research Consistently Shows

Children participating in high-quality early learning programs are more likely to:

- * Enter kindergarten ready to learn

- * Demonstrate stronger literacy skills

- * Achieve academic success

- * Graduate from high school

School District Focus

- * School readiness
- * Early literacy
- * Kindergarten readiness
- * Expanded Pre-K access

Building a Strong Foundation

Investing in early learning:

- * Supports language development
- * Builds literacy skills
- * Improves school readiness
- * Reduces achievement gaps
- * Increases long-term academic success

Community Impact

Early learning investments benefit:

- * Children
- * Families
- * Schools
- * Employers
- * The Manatee County economy

The Challenge

Demand Exceeds Capacity

District leaders identified:

* Waiting lists for VPK and early learning programs

* Limited classroom space

* Need for additional resources

* Growing population creating additional demand

Critical Question

How do we ensure every child enters kindergarten ready to succeed?

Soar In 4: A Community-Wide Initiative

Schools cannot do this work alone. Soar in 4 is the result of a community-wide early learning initiative built on the belief that every child's success is a shared responsibility. The movement began with **19 community conversations** that invited neighbors to share their aspirations for their children, as well as the barriers they were experiencing. These conversations created a deeper understanding of what families and communities need and, most importantly, generated the momentum for a broader early learning movement.



Soar in 4

Mission

To foster a foundation for **"lifelong learning"** by activating families and aligning community resources to advance early literacy.

Vision

A community where every child is prepared for school and supported by **"confident, skilled families"**.

Strategic Vision

Our Commitment

We are building a system where:



Every child enters kindergarten ready to learn



Every learner graduates prepared for college, career, or workforce success



Every student becomes a proficient reader



Every family has access to high-quality educational opportunities

The Foundation of Success

Literacy Begins at Birth

Children learn literacy through:

Hearing stories

Listening to language

Singing songs

Daily conversations

Interactions with caring adults

Soar in 4: Activating Parents through School and Community Support



Interactive Learning Environments



The Soar Lab

Discover the joy of learning at our early learning museum, where families can engage in hands-on interactive experiences designed for early learners.

Community Literacy & Events

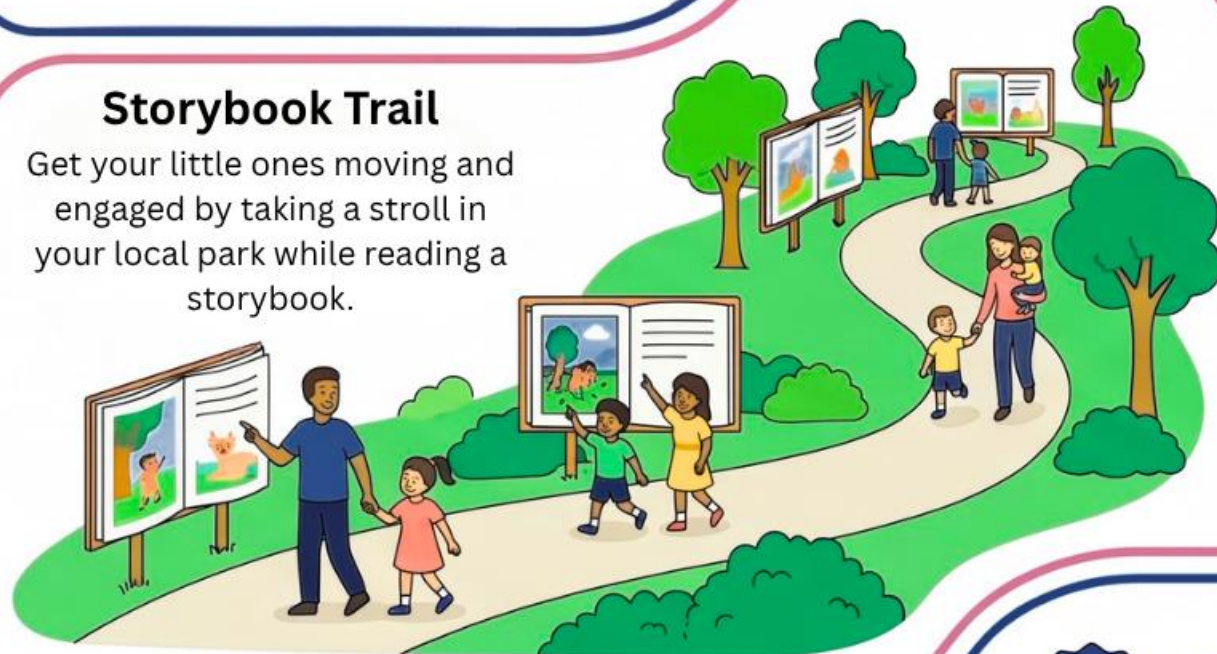
StoryTime

Join us at your local library for a read-aloud story, along with activities, games, and free giveaways!



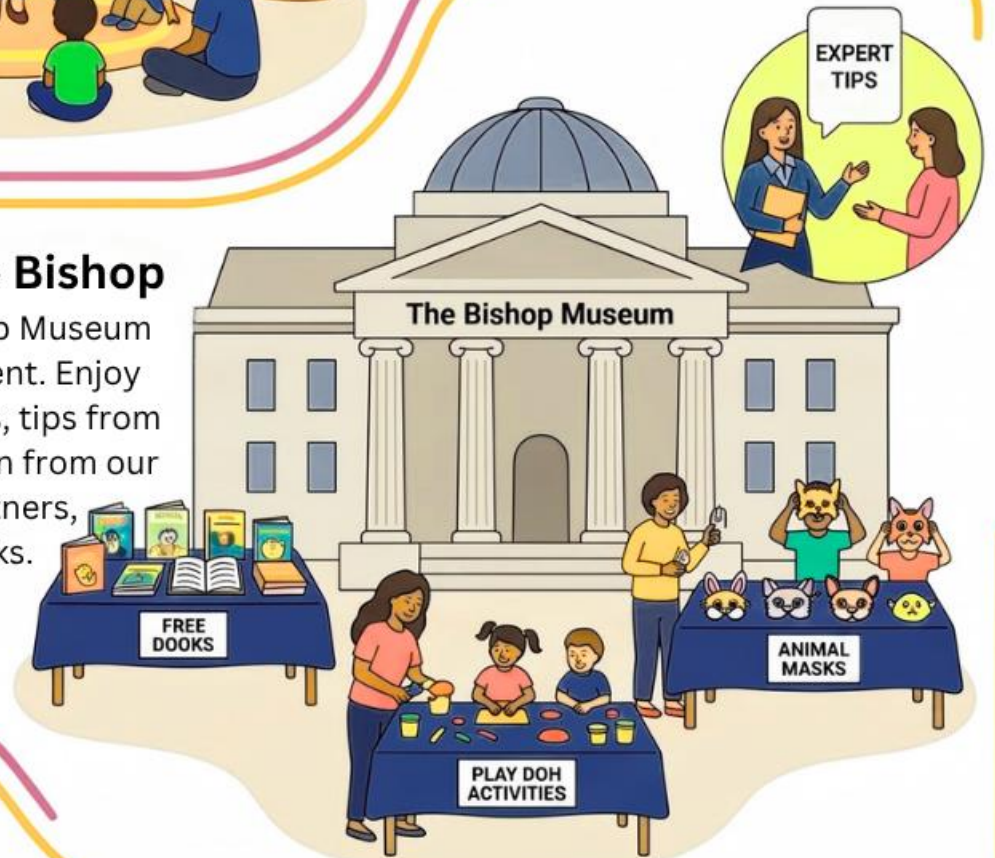
Storybook Trail

Get your little ones moving and engaged by taking a stroll in your local park while reading a storybook.



Soar in 4 at the Bishop

Visit us at the Bishop Museum for our monthly event. Enjoy free literacy supplies, tips from teachers, information from our community partners, and free books.



Aligned with FELDS

All programming follows Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards.

<https://soarin4.org/soar-lab>

Talk, Play, Learn

The Welly Wall invites children to explore the building blocks of language and math through sorting and categorizing. As they match and organize capital letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and words, children develop early literacy and numeracy skills.

Try Asking:

- “What do you notice about the shapes of capital and lowercase letters?”
- “How are numbers different from letters?”
- “Can you find a word that starts with this letter?”
- “What makes this a capital letter and that one lowercase?”

*Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standard:
iv. Language and Literacy Domain F. Emergent Reading
3. Shows Alphabetic and Print Knowledge a. recognizes that print conveys*



Quality Across Every Classroom

District-Wide Success

- ✱ **Every** SDMC VPK student experienced the Soar Lab.
- ✱ All district VPK classrooms achieved CLASS ratings of “**Meets Expectations**” or higher.

Result

Higher-quality teacher-child interactions and stronger learning experiences.

Measurable Outcome

Soar Lab Results

Children participating in Soar Lab field trips demonstrated:

+1.6 Months

Additional academic growth compared to peers.

Why It Matters

Meaningful growth today becomes stronger literacy outcomes tomorrow.

Return on Investment High-Impact Programming

- ✱ **14,649** children and caring adults served during open lab hours in six months.
- ✱ **1,601** Pre-K students participated through district field trips.
- ✱ **316** Parents and caregivers chaperoned a field trip.

Economic Impact

\$59

Returned For Every
\$1 Invested

The Impact

2025-2026 Highlights

- ❖ **91%** of VPK students **met or exceeded** state proficiency benchmarks on STAR Early Literacy
- ❖ Manatee was **13 percentage points above** the state average
- ❖ Manatee had a **12-point increase** year-over-year
- ❖ **100%** of VPK classrooms **met or exceeded** CLASS observation requirements.
- ❖ **All** Child Outcome Summary (COS) measures were completed.

Literacy Outcomes are Improving

Evidence of Growth

- ❖ **+12% Increase** in VPK early literacy results from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

Additional Progress

- ❖ Kindergarten readiness rates improved by **more than 3%** over five years.

PM3 ELA Results PK Early Literacy



	2025-2026 FAST PM3			Year-to-Year Comparison (Early Transitional Reader & Above)		
	Literacy Classification*			2025 PM3	2026 PM3	PM3 to PM3
	Early Emergent	Late Emergent	Early Transitional & Above	%	%	Change
PK - State	17%	42%	41%	38%	41%	+3% ↑
PK - Manatee	9%	37%	54%	42%	54%	+12% ↑

*Results rounded to 2 decimals

Projected 2025-26 VPK Provider Performance Metrics & Designations



	District-Run Sites
Excellent	28
Above Expectations	3
Meets Expectations	0
Below Expectations	0
Unsatisfactory	0

The Soar Success Model

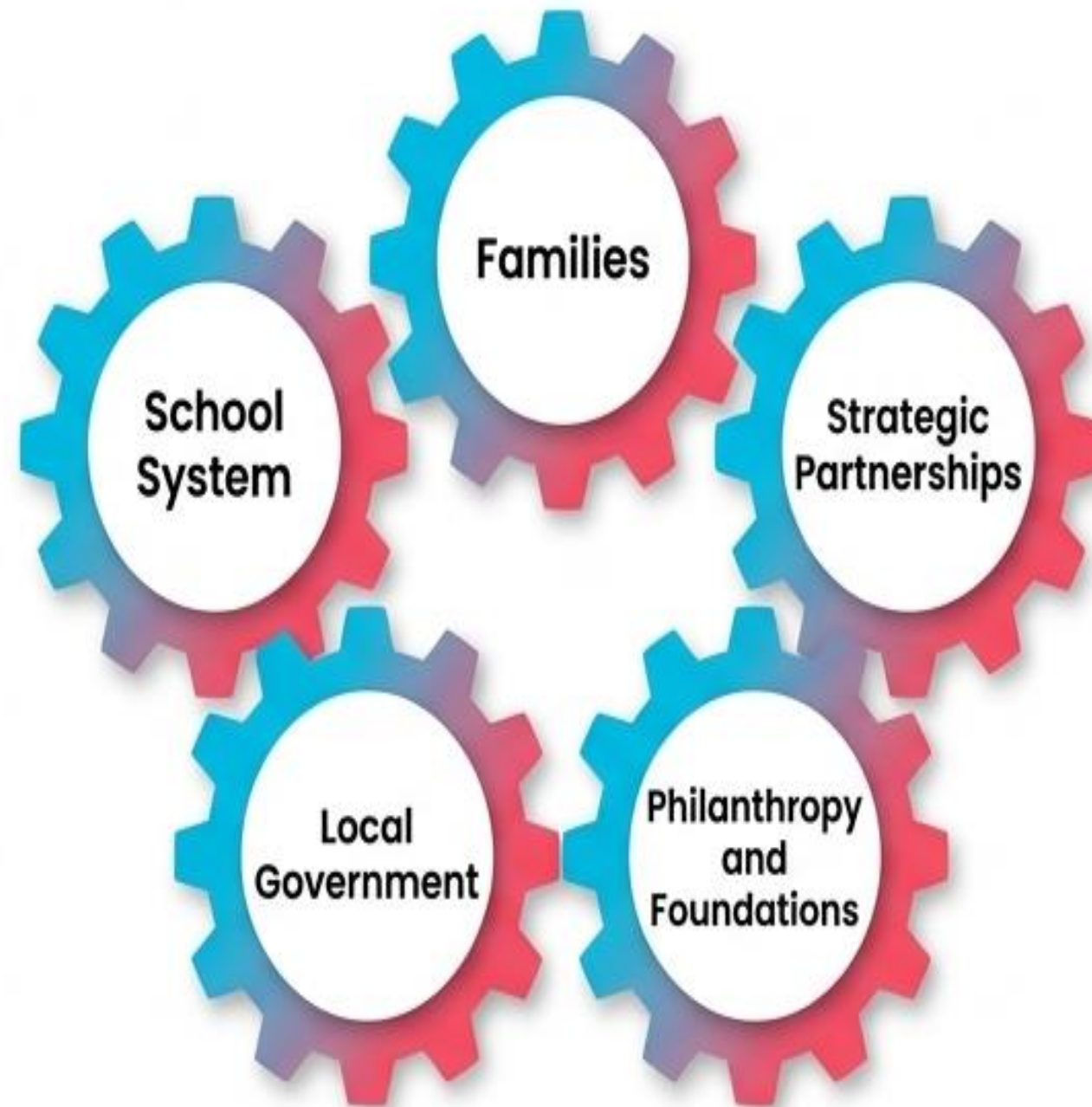
Family Impact

- * **100%** of participating caregivers reported learning a new skill to support their child's learning at home.

Why This Matters

When family confidence grows:

- Children's learning grows
- Literacy improves
- School readiness strengthens



When these five gears work together, children experience stronger school readiness and literacy outcomes

The Bottom Line

- * Improved literacy outcomes
- * Increased kindergarten readiness
- * Strong family engagement
- * Measurable academic growth
- * High return on investment
- * Community-wide impact

Replicating Success

Building a Scalable Early Literacy Movement

The Soar in 4 model is proof that lasting change happens when schools, families, community organizations, philanthropic partners, and local government works together toward a common vision: every child is entering kindergarten ready to learn and thrive. This successful, scalable framework is ready to take root in your community. Join us in expanding its impact and creating stronger readers, stronger schools, and stronger communities.

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