

BabySmart #5: Ms. Shanon Lusk, Oconee County School District's 4K Screening and 4K Goals

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Ms. Shanon Lusk was the guest for BabySmart #3. Ms. Lusk is the current Oconee County School District (OCSD) Director of Early Learning. She has more than 28 years of experience as an educator in Oconee County. As Director, she is responsible for the 4K screenings for kindergarten classes held in the public schools. In addition, Ms. Lusk is the Child Find Coordinator for the OCSD. Child Find is responsible for locating, identifying and providing services for all children between the ages of 3 and 21 with disabilities.

City Talk's Riley Johnson was the host. Ms. Caren von Hippel, BabyRead's founder and Director, and Ms. Kathy Whitmire interviewed Ms. Lusk.

4K Screening Overview. Ms. Lusk gave an overview of the spring 2020 4K screening schedule in advance of the September 2020 kindergarten school year. [Note: This outdated information has been edited out of the interview.] The 4K program is not available in all South Carolina counties but Oconee County is fortunate to have the program. Over 400 interviews are conducted every year. **There are approximately 380 spots available at 19 locations each year. About 80 percent of applicants get into the program; others are placed on a waiting list.** Screenings are held several times during the summer at the Bountyland Education campus. Dates are available on their web site. Parents and caregivers can also call for appointments at (864) 718-5133. [BabyRead's sign up table at the screenings is a major source of new families each year.]

Why Go to 4K? Ms. Lusk said children must turn 4 before September 1 and must meet SC early learning standards to qualify to participate (hence the screening); 5K (kindergarten) children must turn 5 before September 1; 5K children simply register. **Applicants must qualify for SC's early learning standards in six domains: (1) Play & Learning, (2) Emotional & Social Development, (3) Health & Physical Development, (4), Language & Communication, (5) Mathematical Thinking and (6) Cognitive Development. These are the essential skills to be successful in school.** 4K prepares children to be more ready for kindergarten.

Some of the many things children learn through 4K include: talking, following social rules, problem solving, conflict resolution skills, gaining independence, expressing and understanding emotions, using language to communicate, safety awareness, learning concepts of print, alphabet learning, pre-writing skills as well as number recognition, and number sense.

Ms. Lusk further stated children learn to read in kindergarten, 1st grade and 2nd grade but are expected to read on grade level by the end of the 3rd grade. She said we want to give them every opportunity to be successful. A lot of learning occurs between 3 and 5 years old; that's why we focus on these early learning skills. **Reading to babies, toddlers and pre-K children is one of the best ways to develop oral, written language and listening skills, and stimulate the imagination. It is critical in preparing our children for school.**

Do you Train Day Care Workers? Ms. Lusk said she does not train [commercial] day care centers but will visit a center if invited. **She is responsible for coordinating training for all of the Oconee County public school 4K teachers and assistants.** Ms. Whitmire stated some of the actual SC foundation for reading standards for infants is the ability to pat and chew on tactile books, look at pictures, and repetitively listen to books, stories and songs. **All three ladies agreed these standards are for parents**

and daycare workers as well as 4K teachers. Ms. Lusk said to let them chew – we want them to grasp books and develop early that love of reading.

Ms. Whitmire said there is a list of sixteen things that are important in the daily standards including “provide daily lap reading time”, listening to different sounds, watching the mouth move, etc. Ms. von Hippel reinforced the importance of providing daily lap time. Get them out of the highchair or crib and into your lap hopefully reading to foster that essential bonding. In addition to reading, it is so important to that emotional development too.

OCSD Pre-school Intervention Program. Ms. Lusk stated the OCSD Early Learning Department also has a pre-school intervention program for our 3- and 4-year-old students. **Students can qualify if they have delays and they meet eligibility requirements.** Her department conducts interviews based on parent, doctor and concerned community member referrals. These efforts apply to 3-year-olds because starting earlier is better. The contact number is the same for questions about the 3-year-old programs and 4K appointments: (864) 718-5133.

Ms. von Hippel concluded with contact information for Riley Johnson, BabyRead and Center 4 ADHD.