



Originally printed in the June 2010 REM "Local Voices"

United Way of Mid-Maine: Building on the Strength of our Children

The early years of a child's life, from birth to age five, are the years when crucial developmental stages take place. The support that we give children during these years can greatly affect how well they will do in kindergarten, grade school, middle/high school and throughout their lives.

United Way of Mid-Maine's School Readiness Project was created to help parents support their children birth to age five and to address gaps in understanding about early childhood development so more students can enter kindergarten ready to learn. United Way of Mid-Maine formed a partnership with Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP) and offered the pilot project this year at North Elementary School in Skowhegan. Parent education sessions were offered 3 times during the school year using the 1,2,3,4 Parents! model. Each session included 3 classes where parents learned new information on parenting and child behavior. The project will continue at North Elementary School and may expand to two additional schools participating during the upcoming school year.

School Readiness and early-childhood development are vitally important so that children grow up with an active sense of discovery and creativity. Both discovery and creativity, which begin to develop from day one, are important to learning throughout a person's life.

Birth to age five, before children enter kindergarten, is the most important time for a child to develop emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Beyond learning "good habits" at this age, a child's brain and body can develop great strength and flexibility that develop into important skills and behaviors when they reach school age. Parenting classes like 1,2,3,4, Parents! teach parents the skills to support their children's development so that their children are able to take advantage of more opportunities when they enter school and later in life. Parents, teachers, and the community benefits from children, and adults, who are eager to learn, engage, and seek out new opportunities for developing themselves in personal relationships, work, and education.

United Way of Mid-Maine's School Readiness Project is designed to give parents clear examples of how their children develop and learn during these first years of life. For more information please call Debra Frace at United Way of Mid-Maine 873-0686 or email debra@unitedwaymidme.org.