

Middletown program teaches children before they even become students



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MIDDLETOWN, CT (WFSB) -- It's back to the classroom for many across the state.

In Middletown, there's a new program that is teaching children even before they officially become students.

"We made it a priority here in Middletown to ensure that every single 4-year-old is kindergarten ready," said Superintendent of Schools Michael Conner.

In a time when only 47 percent of students are kindergarten ready, it's a lofty goal in Middletown.

But how can a district connect and start to mold children who technically, aren't even students? The answer is through the Bridge to Brilliance app.

The app, which is loaded onto an iPad, was created by Wesleyan graduate Ilene Rosenthal.

Before it came to Middletown, Conner said it was tested in a third world country where English is as foreign to them as Swahili is to us.

It was given to adults, and for six to eight weeks weeks they taught themselves.

"Those adults, that participated in the experiment, were reading simple text. So I thought if it could work on adults in a third world country, who had limited

exposure to rich vocabulary, limited exposure to English, what it could do here for 3 or 4 year old cohorts,” Conner said.

Through games and songs, little ones, like 5-year-old Katie Carey, can get familiar with math, vocabulary, reading and writing.

“Letters, sounds, books, colors, patterns. It changes every day,” said her mom Joyce Carey.

The app is free and exclusive to Middletown families.

Parents need to take the initiative to download it and have their children use it. The recommended daily use is 15 minutes a day, but because the format plays out like a game, children want to do more.

“She loves to be on the iPad and for her to be able to learn, it’s a great idea. She gets her screen time and she’s learning at the same time,” Carey said.

The app opens a new avenue of learning. Here, consistency and repetition are a strong theme, ensuring children really master the lesson.

“We can also have them record themselves and they can listen back,” said preschool coordinator Dawn Abrahamson.

As Katie goes through the activities, the data is shared with Middletown school administrators, so they’ll have a profile of her strengths and weaknesses, on her first day of kindergarten.

“Her skills are definitely getting stronger by using the app. She’s recognizing the letters more by seeing them and tracing them,” Carey said.

In just eight months, Conner says Middletown’s children have mastered a combined 10.8 million words and is excited to see the results when school opens today.

“If we’re able to curtail this, just not at the local level but at the state level, you will see education fundamentally shift,” Conner said.

Officials say 90 percent of Middletown families are using the app and they’re not saying how much it costs, but do say it’s cost effective so more towns could potentially embrace the app.

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