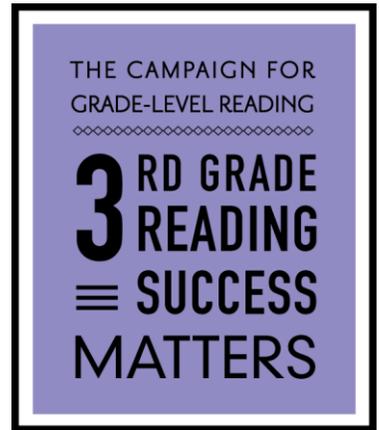


# BRIGHT SPOTS

Ready for School, Prepared to Learn



## AppleTree Institute, Washington, DC

Among U.S. cities, Washington, DC has faced some of the highest hurdles surrounding childhood poverty, effective early childhood programs and overall efforts to improve public education.

AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation (AppleTree) was founded in 1996 to increase the number of schools that close the achievement gap. From its roots as an advocate for education reform and an incubator for charter schools, AppleTree has developed its early childhood education model with an eye toward research.

Today, its Every Child Ready program offers a successful model for early childhood programs that can get children ready to learn in school. In fact, AppleTree was recently awarded an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant of \$5 million from the U.S. Department of Education to support further development and evaluation of Every Child Ready. AppleTree was the only organization serving children in the Washington, DC area selected from a pool of 1,700 applicants nationwide to receive one of the 49 grants awarded.

### Building on success

“When our founder Jack McCarthy began AppleTree, many people didn’t understand what a high-quality pre-school was and what could be done with it,” says Mary Anne Lesiak, director of programs. “To develop our pilot for Every Child Ready, we asked ourselves ‘Where are the biggest returns for kids? What’s really lacking in the field?’ We saw a real opportunity in the content and delivery area — in building a system of high-quality, research-based curricula with ongoing assessments to help instructors keep improving.”

Every Child Ready is an online set of tools and resources that provide quality and meaningful content for classroom teachers (*what to teach*), professional development including video exemplars and an observation protocol (*how to teach*) and a leadership guide (*how to tell it's being done*). Teachers focus on

#### WHO THEY ARE

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##### AppleTree Institute for Education

###### Innovation:

- Serves 700 children in 35 pre-school classrooms through its DC Partnership for Early Literacy program.
- Educates 320 children ages 3–4 at four DC sites through AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School.

#### CONTACT

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building children's language and background knowledge; discrete skills like sorting, letter sounds and writing; and school-ready behaviors — all important to children's later success in elementary school. Every Child Ready also ensures that children have plenty of time to explore their creativity.

## Motivating parents and children

AppleTree stands apart from many programs in its approach to continuous improvement. While AppleTree trains teachers to understand and use child assessment data, it doesn't stop there. ATI also shares results with parents, to help them see how important pre-K really is and to demonstrate how much their children are learning.

"You can see people change. You can see their pride," says Lesiak. "In many cases, parents didn't have great experiences in school as students. When they see that their child is learning and succeeding, and is on a trajectory to do things academically that they hadn't expected, it's really powerful."

Based on external evaluations of the pilot, children in Every Child Ready make significant gains in critical school-readiness skills: AppleTree alumni scored well above the averages for Washington, DC public school (DCPS) students on recognizing letters in kindergarten and on oral reading in second grade. Children with two years of AppleTree scored above national averages in those indicators. Plus, children who had two years of AppleTree showed approximately twice the gains of children with only one year.

"When we received these data, they took my breath away," says Lesiak. "While the data are very preliminary, they suggest that gains made in pre-school can be more durable than those found in earlier research on other programs."

## Changing lives

With the i3 grant and additional funding, AppleTree will implement the Every Child Ready model in different surroundings, conduct ongoing research across diverse pre-school sites, and refine the model with its partner schools. A tracking and evaluation component will allow AppleTree to compare outcomes between Every Child Ready participants and a control group. AppleTree will also develop new tools and online portals, model program costs for scalability, and expand ECR regionally and nationally.

"We're very excited about the i3 grant, because it will allow us to produce the tools, curriculum and materials that we'll validate with the study component," says Lesiak. "We want to demonstrate that investing in this type of early childhood education isn't just about improving reading and math skills. It's about changing children, families and communities. It's about changing lives for the better."

## WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

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In external evaluations, AppleTree alumni:

- Scored 70% above the average in oral reading among students entering 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in DC Public Schools (DCPS).
- Scored 25% higher in letter recognition than DCPS students entering kindergarten.
- Increased vocabulary growth scores by up to 16 standard score points after 2 years of ECR.

## HIGHLIGHTS

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The Every Child Ready program:

- Provides a full-day learning experience.
- Maintains child-to-teacher ratios of 7-to-1 or lower.
- Requires bachelor's degrees for lead teachers.
- Links curricula to specific objectives.
- Reviews data with parents as well as teachers.