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Program brings education to neighborhood parks in the Elgin area --- 6/3/2022

By Rick West



Julian Hernandez, 3, listens during a bilingual story time as the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning's Learning On the Go program visited the River's Landing Apartments in Elgin last summer. *Rick West | Staff Photographer/2021*

A summer program to bring learning opportunities to underserved families with young children in the Elgin area is back for its sixth year.

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning's "Learning On the Go" is a two-month program that meets weekly in seven neighborhood parks -- five in Elgin and two in Hanover Park. The goal is to provide family engagement and early learning opportunities for kids, generally up to age 5.

"Learning On the Go offers a hands-on approach to make learning fun and engaging for the children and model for parents developmentally appropriate approaches to prepare children for school," said Amber Peters, EPEL executive director.

The program served 844 kids last year at various sites. The locations are picked based on community data of families who might not be accessing resources like child care, health care and the library.

Sites and program times and days are available on the [EPEL website](#). The program runs from June 6 to July 28.

During the weekly 45-minute classes, kids participate in a read-aloud and receive new books, lunch and materials to build early math and literacy skills. Learning On the Go utilizes YWCA Elgin bilingual family engagement specialists and **School District U-46** parent liaisons to operate the early learning sites.

Community partners like the Gail Borden and Poplar Creek Libraries provide weekly visits with their bookmobiles so families can apply for library cards and check out books.

Peters said the program tends to add more people each week as word spreads.

"Learning On the Go is an organic process," Peters said. "The EPEL family engagement team sets up near neighborhood parks, brings early learning materials, partners offer resources, and families start walking over to attend. It is so cool to watch!"

Peters said they hope to continue the program into the fall through a "playgroup model" to support families who don't have their children enrolled in early care programs.

"This is an opportunity to continue to build relationships and learn from families what they need most," Peters said.

EPEL is a nonprofit organization working to ensure that children have access to quality early care and education in Elgin and the surrounding neighborhoods. The group partners with other area stakeholders to provide resources, early childhood initiatives, information, and support for families and providers of children under 5 years old.