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# National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

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**Meeting Street Academy-Spartanburg**  
Spartanburg, North Carolina

## **Video Transcript: Success Through Early Learning and Family Engagement**

**Kyndran Hilton, Principal:** So here at Spartanburg, we really do encourage our families to bring their students in as early as three years old, and I know that, that is not traditional. Most schools start at five, but what we have seen is that when we are allowed to build that partnership very early on with parents and bring students in, it just sets students up for success.

**Monica Miller, Parent:** It may seem like a lot, but I think the way they do the curriculum it- it's not set up in a way to where your child is going to be overwhelmed. They take plenty of movement breaks. And of course at that age, they take a nap. And you'd be surprised at three years old, I mean, their minds are just amazing. They're just like little sponges, they're soaking up everything and they can handle a full day schedule. They really can.

**Kyndran Hilton:** In our three- and four-year-old classrooms, every single classroom does have two teachers in the room, and they learn through play as they should.

**Amanda Kuklinski, Teacher:** So, we do have certain meeting times, where we'll all meet as a class, we do our morning meeting, our closing circle, we'll do read-alouds as a whole group, but most of the real, you know, deep learning happens when they're playing in centers. And then I'll work with small groups of children at a time to really individualize what they're learning.

**Kyndran Hilton:** We have a lot of students here in South Carolina and Spartanburg in particular that start kindergarten and they are not kindergarten ready. And so, what we do is we get them in, we provide whatever services that they need, whether it's speech therapy, play therapy, to work on their, their fine motor skills, and to build those, fill those gaps academically so that when they get to kindergarten, they are truly ready to start learning and flourishing.

**Kierra Caldwell, Speech Language Pathologist:** So, from the very beginning in three-K starting early, we develop those trusting family relationships. And when the families and the teachers trust you, they're more likely to implement your home exercise activities at home and in the classroom setting to have that repeated exposure for those kids to advance faster and have a deeper understanding of the content.

**Siobhan Reagan, Assistant Principal:** Family engagement is our top priority here. And some things that we do to really accomplish that is one, we do home visits. So, our three- and four-K teachers, they go out and they do home visits for every single family.

**Bernard Brewton, Parent:** We got to know the staff and they got to know us. We got to see on a firsthand basis of where our son would be doing his school day, practically his second home. And also, the expectations that, they put upon themselves, the accountability factor that we felt good about.

**Geordy Johnson, School Co-Founder:** You know, we've also tried to focus on helping to educate and lift up the whole family. And a lot of that is programming for parents through volunteers and also through classes on nutrition, financial planning, and getting access to good health care for the family.

**Geneen Brewton, Parent:** We get all these different trainings. We actually take those trainings home. And then when we come back the next month, we let them know, did they work?

**Monica Miller:** I just like how they encourage us to do things as a family. The last session was about encouraging us to have conversations, like, during dinner. And we actually got these little conversation cards. We could pick a card and so every day you ask your child, well, how was your day? And then you talk about whatever's on the card.

**Kaila Griffin, Teacher:** So, the, the big idea, the mission for Meeting Street schools, is that a child's zip code should not determine their future. So, we can help kids, even if they're at a disadvantage, to, you know, raise their own bar, and become just as successful as someone who had all the advantage.

**Kyndran Hilton:** For a school that is looking to build a really strong early, pre-K program. I would say two things are essential. Number one is connecting to families, our parents are our students first teachers, and that relationship will last from the day they walk into the building until they leave us. The second piece is choosing the perfect curriculum. We want something that is age appropriate that allows students to really get in and explore, and that meets their needs as three- and four-year-olds.

**Jeff Stevens, Superintendent, Spartanburg School District 7:** When you get a group of people, who are willing to push the envelope and, and find different ways to educate children, I think we can only help the children in our community. And we use Meeting Street quite often as an example to our district, about how they are doing things differently and how we can learn from that as a district as well.

**Monica Miller:** It touches me so much on Fridays in particular, when I pick her up from school and I'll hear a teacher or a staff member say, "Bye, Amaya. I love you." And that just gives me the warm fuzzies. to know that when I drop her off, she's in a loving environment where she can thrive. And that makes all the difference.