

Nemours Children's Health Celebrates 20th Anniversary of Reading BrightStart! program with the Jacksonville Jaguars during Read Across America Week

Events with Episcopal Children's Services and Lutheran Services of Florida highlight importance of early literacy skills

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (March 4, 2025) – In celebration of [Read Across America Week](#), Nemours Children's Health, in partnership with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Episcopal Children's Services (ECS4Kids), held a special Literacy Locker Room event to promote the importance of early literacy skills and celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Nemours Children's [Reading BrightStart!](#) program.

The Reading BrightStart! program provides research-based tools and resources to parents and teachers to promote strong early reading skills in young children, particularly those at risk for reading difficulties, to build reading skills among children from birth to age five.

"Nemours Children's Health created Reading BrightStart! 20 years ago because we recognize that literacy is a strong predictor of lifelong health. Literacy is a cornerstone of a child's overall well-being, empowering them not only with knowledge but also fostering critical thinking, emotional growth, and a lifelong passion for learning," said Allison Gertel-Rosenberg, Vice President, Chief Policy and Prevention Officer, Nemours Children's Health. "The health of our communities flourishes when every child has the opportunity to read, learn, and thrive."

Jacksonville Jaguars mascot, Jaxson de Ville, and the ROAR cheerleaders joined the celebration which featured a reading of *Jaxson's Big Jump* by ECS4Kids President and CEO, Dr. Natalya Roby.

ECS4Kids helps children enter school ready to learn through the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), Head Start, School Readiness and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCRR). The programs help to strengthen key areas including motor development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, language and communication skills, and problem-solving skills in young children. ECS4Kids empowers communities to rise above generational poverty with comprehensive early childhood education and holistic family support.

In addition, Nemours Children's partnered with Lutheran Services of Florida Duval Head Start (LSF) to promote an early love for reading, with literacy "birthday parties" in classrooms at the Don Brewer Head Start Center. Each classroom celebration featured Head Start Program Director, Maria McNair, who shared the importance of early literacy and Gertel-Rosenberg who read *Birthday Monsters* and encouraged healthy habits.

LSF Duval Head Start provides comprehensive, high-quality early childhood education and support services to nearly 1,000 children ages 0-5, including those with disabilities, promoting health, growth and learning while helping families achieve self-sufficiency.

In an effort to spread awareness about the importance of literacy, Nemours Children's will give away 2,500 Reading BrightStart! swag bags to children across Jacksonville during Read Across America Week. Each bag contains the program's Book of the Year, *Birthday Monsters*, by Sandra Boynton, as well as information about the [family literacy website](#).

Founded in 2005, Nemours Children's Reading BrightStart! has supported nearly 290,000 children. Currently, the curriculum is used in 38 states, including 61 of 67 counties in Florida, and more than 70 preschool classrooms in the Jacksonville area. More than 5,000 early childhood educators are trained to use Reading BrightStart! curricula.

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About Nemours Children's Health

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, which includes two freestanding children's hospitals and a network of more than 70 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also addressing children's needs well beyond medicine. In producing the highly acclaimed, award-winning pediatric medicine

podcast Well Beyond Medicine, Nemours underscores that commitment by featuring the people, programs and partnerships addressing whole child health. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, Nemours [KidsHealth.org](https://kidshealth.org).

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves. For more information, visit [Nemours.org](https://nemours.org).

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