





This year Program Manager **Ashley Sholtz** and Early Literacy Specialist **Shanta Cooper** paired up to create a meaningful and fun day of celebration. The VPK class at **It Takes a Village Early Learning Center** in Winter Haven was treated to Ashley's special reading of *"Ten Little Fish"* by **Audrey Wood**. During the interactive reading children were able to come up to a felt board at the front of the class with 10 fish that they counted as the reading continued.

Another additional activity directed by Shanta included a fun fishing game where there was a pool set up inside the classroom with toy fish that had individual letters on each of them. Then each child was given a fishing pole to hook a fish and then identify the letter on the fish and write the letter on paper. A final activity added creative individual artistry. Each child was given a fish-shaped out of a round paper plate that they fingerpainted in various colors creating a beautiful display of rainbow colors and designs.

With the help of the school's wonderful teaching staff and our guiding staff, the event was a total success and a hit with the students! Ashley summed up the importance of celebrating literacy.

“Literacy should always be celebrated,” Ashley shared. “Our youngest minds are in the prime of learning and developing literacy skills, and what better way to promote these skills, than to make it a celebration! We want our young learners to be excited about reading, and It Takes A Village Early Learning Center LLC did just that. They created a fun, engaging, language and literacy-rich environment for the VPK children to explore and be creative in their own way, all while promoting literacy. I was delighted to be a part of their celebration of literacy, and I hope that all of our VPK teachers and directors remember to celebrate literacy, celebrate their children’s achievements, and their own.”

THERESA LOBBAN, OWNER OF MS. T’S KINDER GARDENERS RECEIVES MASTER’S DEGREE



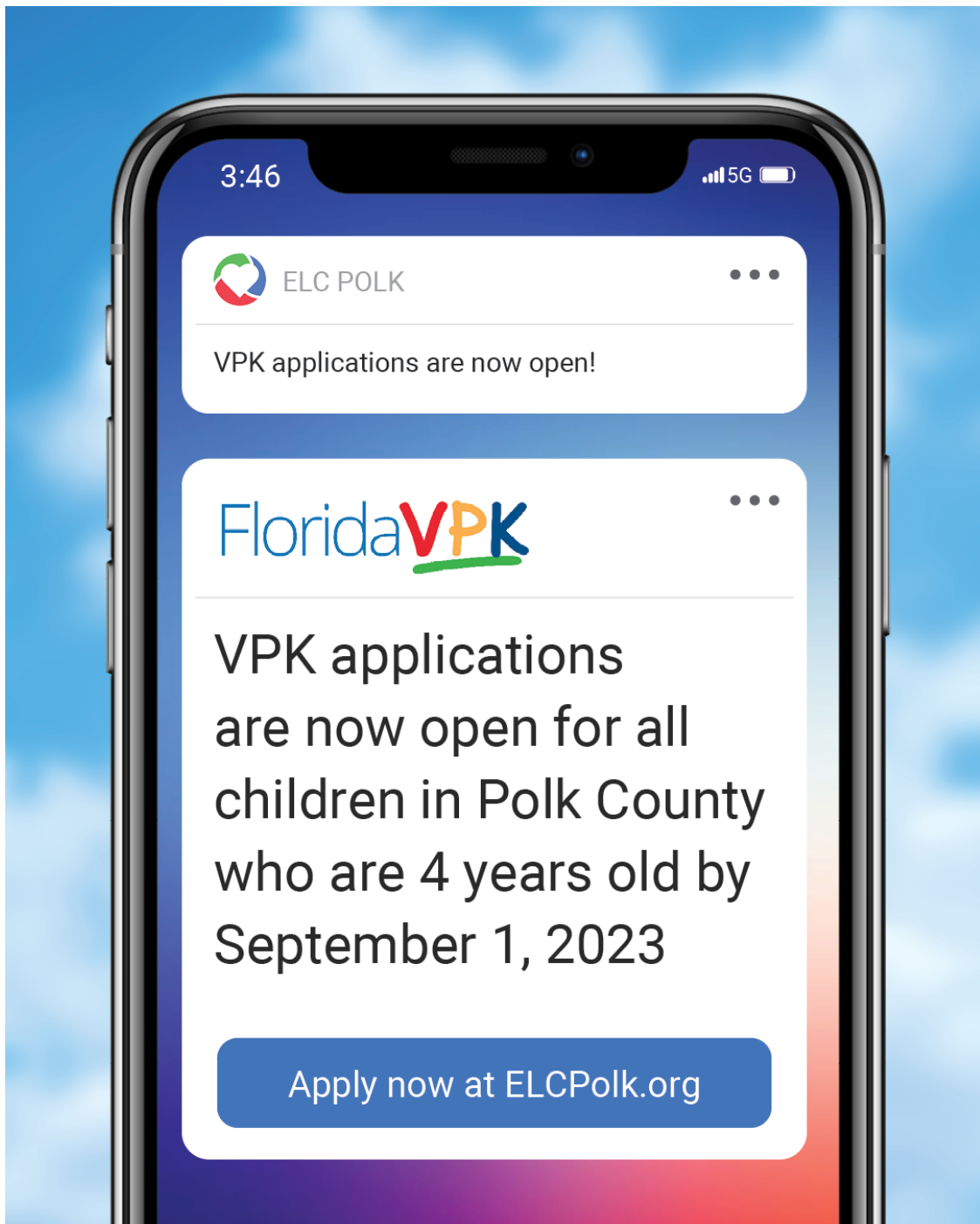


Theresa Lobban
Master of Education, Educational Leadership

Congratulations to **Theresa Lobban, owner of Ms. T's Kinder Gardeners**, who was recently awarded her Master of Education degree in educational leadership with a concentration in early education from the University of North Florida. We are so proud of her accomplishment as she achieved it while running a full-time business! She is thankful to the **T.E.A.C.H. Florida Scholarship Program** for the financial backing of both her bachelor's and master's degrees and encourages others to check out this excellent program (see link below). Theresa also believes that all her completed coursework could be applied at her center.

"It's never too late to go back to school to learn. Once you go to school and go back to your classroom, you find you can apply it all."

[More info about T.E.A.C.H. here](#)



EMPLOYEE **SPOTLIGHT**

Aaron Counts



Briefly describe your job role here at the ELC which is very technical and constantly changing.

My job entails managing all things IT (Information Technology). This includes everything from cell phones the staff uses to interconnecting all three offices in Lakeland, Lake Wales, and Winter Haven so that employees can communicate with each other. It's a job that involves constant problem-solving.

When a new change happens with our technology I always have to think about how all our employees will adapt to it. I think we all recognize that technology isn't going away and we've all got to embrace it.

How did you get interested in technology? Was it always your main interest and what do you enjoy doing when you're not problem-solving at work?

When I was younger, my first interest was sports and I used to play basketball but then spine issues from scoliosis kept me from continuing to play competitively. I started getting interested in technology when I was about 12 years old and my father recommended that I study it further. Now, I can't see myself doing anything else.

Away from work, it's PC gaming that helps me unwind. That's my stress reliever. It allows me to turn off my IT brain and relax!

Family time is also important to you, especially time spent with your four-year-old daughter who is autistic and non-verbal. Share with us some insights on being a parent of a special needs child and how technology continues to be a big part of your life at home.

Before my daughter was born I didn't know much about autism. Now I know that there are three levels that have been determined and with help and instruction there's hope for improvement in any of those levels. With regard to communication, there have been countless times that we have tried to understand what my daughter wants. Now we're looking into getting a tablet or bulletin board for her to communicate what she needs.

These resources that we are now able to get will give her the ability to do this. With images of food, for instance, she'll be able to pick out what she wants and show us. She likes noodles so we'll be able to have program options that will allow a food choice like that. We're also looking at a tablet that has full-sentence options that could open up even more communication.

With so many more autistic children today, parents have a lot more resources and can share information. Support groups are really important. Another key thing to remember is patience, patience, and patience and being able to take a moment to breathe in and to try to figure out what your child needs.



All ELC Polk Staff

Early Learning Coalition of Polk County

"I think what the Coalition stands for is **positive and it helps all of us parents**. Thank you for caring for the children and parents out there."

— *Anonymous*



Syndia Figueroa

Family Services Specialist

"I appreciated her effort to **provide all the information I needed.**"

– Marlenne E.



Gigi Santiago-Chavez

Family Services Specialist

"She was **very quick** and gave me **several polite reminders**. She was **very professional** and **always followed up with an email**. She was also **very kind** and got my case handled quickly and was **well-informed, nicely explaining what was needed.** "

– Cassidy T.



Latoya Leslie

Family Services Specialist

"Latoya **always goes above and beyond** to help me!"

– Shannon P.



Latrissa Spears

Family Services Specialist

"She helped through the process until the end. **I'm very satisfied.**"

– Katherine S.

**NEW DATE FOR THE LIP SYNC BATTLE FOR
THE LOVE OF KIDS SHOW**

GEICO
PHILANTHROPIC
FOUNDATION

P **PUBLIX SUPER MARKETS**
CHARITIES



LIP SYNC BATTLE

FOR THE LOVE OF KIDS SHOW

Who are we?

The Early Learning Coalition of Polk County offers childcare financial assistance to eligible families and Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) for all 4-year-olds throughout the county.

Who have we helped?

We currently provide high-quality early education to over 8,500 children in Polk County.

BENEFITING



EARLY LEARNING COALITION
OF POLK COUNTY

APRIL 15, 2023

6:00 PM – 8:30 PM | POLK THEATRE

121 FLORIDA AVE S, LAKELAND, FL 33801

✉ DebbieBurdett@elcpolk.org
☎ (863) 577-2468

✉ BelindaKramer@elcpolk.org
☎ (863) 220-1931



For more information, contact Debbie or Belinda and visit our website at [ELCPolk.org](https://www.elcpolk.org).

<https://www.elcpolk.org/newsroom/>

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