

Community

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THE POST-CRESCENT'S OPINION

'Brain to Five' initiative good for public

Area parents eager to understand what's behind their baby's coos, their toddler's meltdowns or their preschooler's grasp of language are in luck.

The Appleton Education Foundation is hosting four leading "brain investigators" from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Waisman Center who will speak about brain development in young children in a series of free lectures beginning next month.

Dr. Richie Davidson, whom Madison Magazine named "Person of the Year" for 2007, kicks off the series Feb. 6 with his lecture, "Shaping Your Child's Brain" at Appleton North High School. The series continues into April; all talks are held at

the high school.

This series, called "Brain to Five," is a collaboration between the Appleton Education Foundation, the Waisman Center and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

The partnership, announced last week, will make valuable research in areas such as autism, early emotional development and brain imaging available to the general public.

And it comes at a time when scientists and educators increasingly emphasize the critical importance of early brain development — both from the standpoint of regular learning and in treating neurological disorders. "The earlier, the better" is the mantra of many researchers.

The community education series also dovetails nicely with the birth-to-5 initiatives the Appleton Area School District adopted last year. Judy Baseman, assistant superintendent for school services, said the district created 10 initiatives after observing the readiness of children entering the school system.

The district just hired a birth-to-5 coordinator and offers free assessments for preschool children to determine their readiness for kindergarten. And it wants to offer "lap books" to new parents as they leave the hospital to encourage them to read to their babies.

It's never too early to start learning and it's good to see a partnership supporting this concept here.

'Brain to Five' series speakers

Feb. 6: Richie Davidson on "Shaping Your Child's Brain"

March 5: Susan Ellis Welsmer on "What Does that Gurgle Really Mean? Early Language and Your Toddler"

April 2: Jenny Saffran on "How Babies Learn"

April 23: Seth David Pollak on "Children's Emotions and the Developing Brain"

All presentations are free and will be in the Appleton North High School Auditorium. The Feb. 6 program is at 7:30 p.m. Times haven't been announced for the other dates.