

## Parents, teachers excited about brain development



Post-Crescent photo by Dan Powers

MARGARITA NEVAREZ (left) and her daughter, Sophia, 2, engage in reading books to help develop language skills and broaden vocabulary Wednesday as her husband, Francisco Nevarez, does the same with their other daughter, Valeria, 1, as part of the Even Start Family Literacy program at McKinley Elementary School in Appleton.

### Series looks at environmental influences on children

By Kathy Walsh Nufer  
Post-Crescent staff writer

APPLETON — The environment moms and dads create for young children influences learning more than they might know.

So Appleton Education Foundation is teaming up again with Waisman Center of the University of Wisconsin-Madison to share the latest research on why parents and other adults should pay close attention.

The foundation announced the lineup for the second installment of its highly popular 2008 speaker series on early brain development Thursday.

Starting Feb. 18, four professionals will share their expertise on pivotal

#### Brain to Five lineup

Presentations, all free and open the public, and early childhood experts are:

■ 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18, Appleton East High School: Marsha Mailick Seltzer on "An Unanticipated Life: Parenting a Child with Autism."

■ 7 p.m. March 11, Appleton North High School: Mary Schneider on "Prenatal Environments Shape Brain Development."

■ 7 p.m. April 22, Appleton North High School: Julie Poehlmann on "Risk and Resilience in Infancy and

environmental factors in early childhood, including prenatal influences on brain development and maternal depression.

The first speaker, Waisman director and researcher Marsha Mailick Seltzer, will discuss the impact raising a child with autism has on a family.

"We're building off

Early Childhood: Preterm Birth and Maternal Depression."

■ 7 p.m. May 6, Appleton North High School: Nan Brien on "Healthy Surroundings: Applying Research to Real Life."

**Child care available:** Apple Tree Connections, 5020 N. Providence Ave., Appleton, will offer free child care on all four dates of the speaker series. For more information, contact Jennifer Desarmo at 920-560-5437.

**On the Web:** www.appletoneducationfoundation.org

what we learned last year about the basic science of brain development," said Julie Krause, AEF executive director.

"Unlike many biological factors, parents, educators and caregivers actually have some measure of control over a child's environment. The research is showing that prenatal and

## BRAIN TO FIVE: Advice helps motor skills grow

From A-2

adult basic education, early childhood classes, parenting classes and parent-child interactive literacy activities.

Staff members give parents daily guidance and hands-on experience doing everything from reading to, and painting and singing with their infants, toddlers and preschoolers, to trying techniques that increase motor skills and vocabulary, all with an eye to enriching their environment.

Even Start teachers took what they learned during last year's AEF speaker series, and modified it for parents, many of whom are just learning English, in a "how-to, user-friendly way," adult education teacher Kris Clouthier said.

"There is so much new, valuable information from this for all of us," she said of the opportunity to hear about cutting-edge research.

"Some parents know to read to their child but don't always know why, or what it really means to a child's success in school."

Parent Erendira Sapien said she now understands why playing with daughter Dayanna, 3, is critical.

"Every day her teacher Miss Laura (Schumacher) tells us how we need to share with her, so we play and read to her at home because it opens her brain. She's growing, taking good steps and telling me words in Spanglish now."

Basilisa Mungia, a mother of five including 2-year-old Bryan, said reading to children is not as common in her culture as here. Home visits by staff "taught me how to read to him and how it's really very important to start early with children because they grow and develop every day."

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