



COUNTYWIDE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVES 2026

Expanding Opportunity Through Education

Grace Place for Children & Families, a recognized leader in family literacy in Collier County and nationally, has partnered with the Naples Children Foundation (NCF), the foundation behind the Naples Winter Wine Festival, to launch two grant-funded three-year countywide initiatives for early childhood education.

For more than two decades, Grace Place has proven a simple truth: education changes everything. Children enter kindergarten ready to learn; parents gain the literacy skills to advocate for their children, and entire families move from surviving to succeeding. These initiatives carry our proven model into two new communities.

Grant-Funded, Zero Impact to Existing Programs

Both initiatives are fully funded by dedicated, three-year NCF grants. Existing donor contributions are directed. Fundraising appeals, matching campaigns, and events will continue to support the Golden Gate campus.

The Need: A Countywide Shortage, Felt Most Acutely in Underserved Neighborhoods

The Florida Chamber Foundation reports Collier County is short 1,180 early-learning seats for children under six. Across the county, immigrant and low-income families face the same interconnected barriers Grace Place has spent 20+ years overcoming in Golden Gate: limited access to affordable, high-quality early learning; language and literacy challenges; transportation constraints; and a lack of integrated, two-generation family education models.

Why Grace Place: A Record That Earns This Investment

Grace Place has spent more than two decades solving this problem at its Golden Gate campus, generating outcomes that speak for themselves:

- 92% of preschoolers enter kindergarten school ready.
- 89% of K–5 students test at or above grade level in English.
- 88% of adult learners show measurable improvement in English proficiency.
- 100% of high school students in the college and career program graduate on time, college- or military-bound
- 1,300+ students gain life-changing literacy skills each year.

These results are why NCF selected us to lead this initiative.

Two Complementary Initiatives, One Coordinated Strategy

Both initiatives use existing partner facilities rather than new construction, directing grant dollars toward curriculum and teacher quality instead of buildings.



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	Bright Beginnings Sites	Naples Park Early Learning Center
Location	Boys & Girls Club of Collier County; East Naples United Methodist Church	Naples Park Elementary campus
Ages Served	Birth–3, alongside a parent	1–4
Capacity	120 children (3 classrooms, 2 sites)	92 children (7 classrooms)
Schedule	Half-day, 34-week school-year	Full-day, 48 weeks
Funding Model	NCF-grant-funded for 3 years	Tuition-supported NCF-grant funded for 3 years Tuition is expected to be \$1,600 a month
Core Approach	Two-generation model: children and parents learn side by side	Full-day school readiness for working families
Open Date	August 2026	January 2027

Initiative 1 — Grace Place Bright Beginnings

Bright Beginnings serves children and parents simultaneously, on the understanding that family outcomes are interconnected: when parents grow in literacy and workforce skills, children benefit, and vice versa.

As CEO Lara Fisher puts it, “At Grace Place, we equip every member of the family, from infants to adults, through English literacy. When families gain language skills, they gain opportunity, confidence, and a future filled with possibility.”

The Bright Beginnings model rests on four integrated components:

- Early Childhood Education: Creative Curriculum® blending teacher-guided and child-initiated learning.
- Adult Education: ESL, reading, writing, financial literacy, and digital literacy.
- Parent & Child Together Time: guided activities that build confidence and strengthen the parent–child bond.
- Parent Time: development knowledge and positive parenting strategies for the home

Expected impact: increased kindergarten readiness, improved parent literacy, and economic mobility, and reduced generational poverty through sustained two-generation support.

Initiative 2 — Naples Park Early Learning Center

More than half of Naples Park students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and the school's chronic absenteeism rate has nearly tripled in three years, from 11.9% in 2021–22 to 31.4% in 2023–24, pattern research links directly to families lacking stable childcare for younger siblings. Naples



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Park is one of the most densely populated residential areas in the county, historically home to the area's service, hospitality, and healthcare workforce, with limited quality early-learning options.

A full-day early learning center at Naples Park Elementary deepens Grace Place's existing partnership with Collier County Public Schools and creates a powerful pathway to kindergarten readiness for children who may fall behind. Building an early learning center inside that same building means we are not asking families to find a new place to trust; it's bringing opportunity directly into the place they already call home. And co-location also solves a practical problem for working parents with multiple children: a single drop-off.

Expected impact: critical new early-learning capacity in a community without a local provider, dependable full-day care for working families, and measurable gains in long-term academic outcomes.