

## HOW IGNITE HAS STRENGTHENED HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS AT THE ALACHUA COUNTY HEAD START SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM



### The Organization and Program

#### *Alachua County Head Start Summer Bridge Program*

ECS4Kids (Episcopal Children's Services) is an organization whose mission is to empower communities to rise above generational poverty with comprehensive early childhood education and holistic family support. The organization offers Head Start programming, School Readiness services, and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK). In the summer of 2024, ECS4Kids ran the Alachua County Head Start Summer Bridge Program for the second summer in a row. Funded by the Children's Trust of Alachua County, the program operated for 35 days, from June to July, across five locations in Alachua County and served 110 preschool-aged children. The program was selected for funding from the Children's Trust as part of its mission to improve educational access for all Alachua County children.



### The Organization and Program

#### *Preventing the Summer Slide*

The primary goal of ECS4Kids' Head Start Summer Bridge Program is to prevent the summer slide—when children lose knowledge and skills gained during the school year. As Melanie Clough, assistant vice president of early childhood education at ECS4Kids, explains, "We want kids ready for kindergarten, and to do that, we cannot have the summer slide." While the program successfully kept learning going during the summer of 2023, ECS4Kids aimed to build on that success in 2024 by strengthening connections between school and home. A key focus was creating more opportunities for learning at home and helping families support school-readiness goals. Achieving these connections, however, required the right tools and strategies.

### The Plan

#### *Implementing Ignite by Hatch™ at Home*

"Learning should be joyful, and Ignite supports that joy."

- Melanie Clough, Assistant Vice President of Early Childhood Education, ECS4Kids



To build the connection between home and school, ECS4Kids wanted a tool that would make summer learning enjoyable and be both accessible and actionable for caregivers. Its solution was to provide Ignite by Hatch™, a Hatch Early Learning product, for families to use at home during the 2024 Head Start Summer Bridge Program. Ignite is a play-based digital learning platform designed to support growth across seven key developmental domains, including Mathematics, Literacy, and Social-Emotional Development. The platform's focus on playful learning helps engage children while also giving caregivers and educators actionable insights into each child's progress through an accessible data dashboard. "Learning should be joyful, and Ignite supports that joy," explains Clough, emphasizing Ignite's value in connecting school and home.

Of course, implementing a digital tool at home requires thoughtful planning. To ensure that all families could use Ignite at home, ECS4Kids provided tablets preloaded with Ignite to all participating families. For those without Internet access, portable MiFi routers were distributed. Additionally, family advocates, who were trained on Ignite, met with caregivers at daily dismissal time to explain how to use the platform and encourage regular use at home. This comprehensive approach ensured that families had the tools and support needed to make learning a seamless part of their daily routines over the summer months.



## The Impact

### *Ignite Connected Home and School to Prevent Summer Learning Loss*

One of ECS4Kids’ primary goals for the 2024 Head Start Summer Bridge Program was to prevent summer learning loss by fostering stronger connections between home and school. Ignite became a cornerstone of this effort, enabling children to continue learning at home while equipping families with tools to support their child’s growth. Strengthening the home-to-school connection was key to achieving the program’s broader goal of preventing summer slide.

Teachers saw firsthand how Ignite strengthened the home-to-school connection. They noted that children entered the classroom in the fall more prepared, confident, and equipped with consistent learning habits built over the summer months. Families, too, valued Ignite’s accessibility and its ability to provide actionable insights into their child’s progress, empowering them to actively engage in school-readiness goals. Reflecting on Ignite’s role, Clough shares, “We always worry about children having access to learning with fidelity, but we know that with Ignite, children are receiving a high-quality learning experience that is truly individualized—even at home.”

This strengthened home-to-school connection that Ignite supported contributed to the overall success of the Summer Bridge Program. Data from The Children’s Trust of Alachua County showed that 85% of participating children improved literacy scores, 75% improved math scores, and 73% improved social-emotional scores over the course of the summer.

These outcomes highlight the program’s success in mitigating summer learning loss and emphasize the importance of building strong partnerships between home and school. By leveraging Ignite, the 2024 Head Start Summer Bridge Program empowered families to actively support their child’s learning, setting children up for success as they entered the school year. Together, these results demonstrate the program’s immediate effectiveness and offer a model for how technology and collaboration can drive learning in and outside of school.



“We always worry about children having access to learning with fidelity, but we know that with Ignite, children are receiving a high-quality learning experience that is truly individualized—even at home.”  
- Melanie Clough, Assistant Vice President of Early Childhood Education, ECS4Kids