AAP: Pediatricians play key role in children's success in school
by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Pediatricians can help children thrive in school by promoting physical and social-emotional health and cognitive development, according to a new AAP policy.

The statement *The Pediatrician's Role in Optimizing School Readiness* emphasizes the importance of early experiences and relationships.

"Because pediatricians often are the only health and development professional regularly involved in a young child's life, they are perfectly positioned to work with families and the community to monitor and promote the critical elements of early experiences that foster school readiness," said Jeffrey Okamoto, M.D., FAAP, immediate-past chair of the AAP Council on School Health (COSH) and co-author of the policy statement.

The statement from COSH and the AAP Council on Early Childhood (COEC) is available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2293 and will be published in the September issue of *Pediatrics*. It adds to a 2008 technical report on school readiness that the AAP reaffirmed in 2013.

The policy includes the following recommendations for pediatricians:

- Optimize children's physical well-being using Bright Futures guidelines.
- Promote social-emotional well-being though partnerships with the family, addressing behavior concerns, mitigating risks for toxic stress and facilitating access to mental health services when needed.
- Discuss with families the need for optimal learning environments and plentiful reading materials to spur cognitive and language development.
- Promote the 5 Rs - reading, rhyming, routines, rewards and relationships.
- Identify children at risk of developmental difficulties and make timely referrals.
- Connect low-income children to early education programs.
- Advocate for services to support children's growth and development.

"Children's caregivers are their first teachers, and pediatricians can help families provide a safe, stable,
nurturing and stimulating learning environment," said co-author P. Gail Williams, M.D., FAAP, a member of COEC.

Resources

- School-related articles for parents
- AAP literacy toolkit
- Bright Futures
- Reach Out and Read
- Head Start early childhood program
- http://aapexperience.org/