

# LENA Start Marathon County: Launches new initiative to close the 'talk gap'

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Wausau, WI, 2/22/18 — The LENA Research Foundation and LENA Start Marathon County are pleased to announce an initiative to improve kindergarten readiness by encouraging parents to talk more with their children. [LENA Start™](#) features parent classes that employ LENA “talk pedometer” technology to measure how much parents are talking with their children, and how much children are responding. The program will launch at the Marathon County Public Library on February 26 and March 1.

LENA Start classes help parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers (0-32 months) close the “talk gap.” Research indicates that academic achievement gaps result because some children experience millions fewer words and conversations than their peers during the critical early years when babies’ brains are growing to 80 percent of their adult size.

LENA Start provides a series of efficient, engaging parent sessions where caregivers learn to use data about their home language environment from the LENA System™, along with simple strategies to increase interactive talk with their children.

“It is so exciting to bring LENA Start to Marathon County. The program empowers parents to make meaningful differences in the lives of their young children, and it is measurable in real time,” said Dr. Corina Norrbom, family medicine physician and program director for LENA Start Marathon County.

“LENA Start can benefit the entire community. Early talk has the potential to help close school achievement and future workforce skills gaps before they start,” Norrbom said.

The LENA Research Foundation had its roots in central Wisconsin. It was developed and funded by Judi and the late Terry Paul, who founded Renaissance Learning in Port Edwards.

The LENA Start Marathon County initiative is one of many LENA Start sites launching around the country this year, but the first to launch in Wisconsin. Since its introduction in 2015, LENA Start has been implemented by school districts, hospitals, library systems and social service organizations. Results from initial implementations show a 78 percent graduation rate, with improvements in four key areas:

- 75 percent of adult caregivers are speaking more to their babies
- 63 percent of families are having more conversations with their babies
- Families reported reading 57 percent more with their babies than before
- Children’s language scores are growing twice as fast as comparison groups

“The LENA Start model is laser-focused on simple, practical ways to help parents improve talk with their babies,” said Dr. Stephen Hannon, president of the LENA Research Foundation. “Focus is extremely important – now more than ever. More than half the children coming into America’s schools today are low income, and the data show that they disproportionately start school under-prepared. Early language is the starting point in turning that around.”

LENA Start classes begin February 26 from 10:30-11:30 a.m. or March 1 from 6-7 p.m. at the Marathon County Public Library, 300 North 1st Street, Wausau. The 13 weekly sessions are free. In addition, childcare, snacks or meals, and a children’s book are provided free at each session.