



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Initiative Launched to Support Working Families During Remote Learning

Families and Schools Together (FAST) Initiative Aims to Provide Safe, Academic Environments for Children During Work Day

RALEIGH, NC – August 5, 2020 – As the new school year begins with virtual learning for all Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) students, WCPSS has joined forces with several area nonprofits and local governments to help provide safe academic environments for students in grades K - 6 across Wake County. The new effort, **Families and Schools Together (FAST) Initiative**, is being led by the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), WakeEd Partnership, the YMCA of the Triangle, Marbles Kids Museum, Boys & Girls Clubs Serving Wake County and the City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department.

FAST's primary goal is to ensure that all families in Wake County have support for remote learning during the work day. These staffed small-group and socially distanced learning centers will also provide physical activity and extended learning opportunities. All sites will prioritize affordability with financial assistance available. Parents who wish to learn more about FAST and find a learning center for your child should visit <http://WakeFast.org>

"The Wake County Public School System is pleased and grateful to the lead organizations in the FAST Initiative who quickly came together in a way that directly helps children and families," said Cathy Moore, Superintendent, Wake County Public School System. "The potential academic benefits of this initiative are significant and the effort provides a clear example of how communities can work together to address pressing needs in a time of crisis."

“While we work toward bringing our students and teachers back together safely in classrooms, we know working parents need support while their children are not in school,” said Keith Poston, President of WakeEd Partnership. “This initiative was developed both to facilitate learning for students and to support our families and the local economy that rely on parents working. Remote learning is a community-wide challenge and it requires a broad community-based solution.”

“The YMCA has a deep commitment to youth development and a long, proven track record of partnering with families and school systems to meet unique needs,” said Lisa Humphreys, YMCA of the Triangle Chief Strategy Officer. “It is likely students will be out of a traditional, classroom learning setting for the part of the academic year. The YMCA is proud to be a key partner in developing supplemental learning programs that align with educational requirements and also support out-of-school time and the childcare needs of families.”

“Marbles Kids Museum is a leader in providing creative and innovative play-based learning for children and families,” said Sally Edwards, CEO of Marbles Kids Museum. “Marbles proudly works in partnership with other nonprofits and local schools and we are thrilled to join the FAST initiative to do our part to help meet the unique challenges of COVID-19 together as a community that cares deeply about kids.”

“The Boys & Girls Clubs has a 50-plus year history of serving the young people in our community who need us most,” said Ralph Capps, President and CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs Serving Wake County. “Unfortunately, there will probably be even more kids who are going to need support, encouragement, and guidance as the new school year opens. We have always seen our role as supporting our Club Members’ academic achievement and we are proud to be a part of this initiative. At some point we will move beyond COVID-19; until then our role is to provide the services most needed by Wake County’s children and teens.”

“Raleigh Parks is pleased to be a lead partner in the FAST initiative,” said Ken Hisler, Assistant Director – City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department. “We are proud to honor an 80-year-old tradition of partnering with the local school system. Each year we serve 52,000 youth and remain committed to supporting families and their childcare needs when they need us most. Through our Recreation and Education Centers (REC), we will provide an environment that allows students to learn, play, and thrive.”

In addition to these initial lead partners, many other community partners are supporting the FAST Initiative in a variety of ways based on their individual capabilities and resources. They include local churches, private childcare providers and many parks and recreation departments from across Wake County including the Town of Apex and Town of Holly Springs.

As partners in this initiative, all of the providers have agreed to provide:

- A quality learning environment (quiet room, socially-distanced student workspaces, internet access, trained supervision)

- Financial assistance or reduced rate programs for qualifying families
- Physical activity and recreation
- Extended learning activities (examples include: Social Emotional Learning, STEM, Art, Leadership Development, Character Development, etc.)
- Adherence to local, state and federal guidelines for safe childcare during COVID-19

As a lead partner in this initiative, WCPSS will provide school meals to children who receive federal Free and Reduced-Price lunches. In addition to its support for FAST, WCPSS will provide childcare for children of WCPSS staff in grades K-6.

About Wake County Public School System

Nearly four out of every five school children in Wake County attend the Wake County Public School System, providing a broad range of school choices on a daily basis.

About WakeEd Partnership

WakeEd Partnership is an independent, nonprofit organization composed of business and community leaders committed to improving public education. Since 1983, the Partnership has advocated for excellent educational opportunities for all students in the Wake County Public School System. For more information, please visit www.wakeed.org.

About YMCA of the Triangle

For more than 160 years, the YMCA of the Triangle has been the region's leading nonprofit strengthening the foundations of the communities we serve. At the Y, we're committed to nurturing the potential of children through Youth Development, improving the nation's health and well-being by promoting Healthy Living, and fostering a sense of Social Responsibility by providing opportunities to give back and support neighbors. The YMCA of the Triangle is a 501(c)3 nonprofit governed by a local board of volunteer directors. Today, across the region, the Y engages more than 230,000 children, adults and families. Learn more at YMCATriangle.org. For additional information about the YMCA's participation in the FAST Initiative, contact [Kim Keith](#), Vice President of Youth Development.

About Marbles Kids Museum

Located in downtown Raleigh, Marbles Kids Museum is a local nonprofit with a mission to spark imagination, discovery and learning through play. Creative, play-based experiences at Marbles contribute to intellectual growth, social and emotional well-being and physical development. Marbles believes strongly in our responsibility to make our unique museum experience available and accessible to every child.

About Boys & Girls Clubs Serving Wake County

For more than 50 years, Boys & Girls Clubs has enabled the young people most in need to achieve great futures as productive, caring, and responsible citizens. Today, the organization serves over 5,000 children and teens through seven Club locations in some of Wake County's most underserved neighborhoods. Our programs emphasize academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. In a 2019 survey, we found that 97% of our Club

Members expect to graduate from high school! Learn more about the positive impact Boys & Girls Clubs are having in our community by visiting www.wakebgc.org.

About City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department

Raleigh has never been without parks. Since 1792, the City of Raleigh has recognized that parks, open space, and greenways improve quality of life. Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources manages more than 200 parks including features like amusements, art centers, athletic facilities, community centers, lakes, nature preserves, off-leash dog parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, historic homes, and open spaces. Raleigh Parks remains committed to serving youth, teens and families through athletics, arts, nature, track-out, after-school/before-school, summer camp and specialized recreation programs. Our programs provide an opportunity to try something new, refine skills, and build friendships. Together we connect and enrich our community through exceptional experiences. Learn more about Raleigh Parks and follow us @RaleighParks

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