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## **Students at Southdowns learn life-saving swim skills through new program**

**BATON ROUGE, LA.** – The East Baton Rouge Parish School System is proud to announce the conclusion of the inaugural Bear Necessities Water Safety Program at Southdowns Pre-K Center with a special showcase event. On Wednesday, Nov. 13, at 12 p.m., young participants will demonstrate the water safety skills they've gained at Crawfish Swim School, located at 8556 Siegen Lane.

This life-saving program, designed to teach water safety fundamentals to young children, was made possible through a strategic partnership with Crawfish Aquatics and the YMCA of Baton Rouge. Throughout the course, 120 of Southdowns' 161 students participated in weekly hands-on, skill-based lessons, learning vital techniques such as floating, basic swimming strokes, and emergency responses.

The Bear Necessities Water Safety Program addresses a critical need, as drowning rates disproportionately affect minority communities and children with disabilities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black and Hispanic children face significantly higher drowning rates than their white peers, with Black children ages 5-19 drowning in swimming pools at a rate 5.5 times higher than white children of the same age.

Children with disabilities are also at an elevated risk. This disparity highlights the importance of early water safety education, especially in underserved communities where access to swimming lessons and aquatic facilities may be limited.

“Drowning is preventable, and programs like Bear Necessities can help bridge the gap in water safety skills that all children face,” said Shalika Scott, principal at Southdowns Pre-K. The showcase event will celebrate the hard work and progress of these young swimmers, marking a milestone in building a safer future for our community.

