

READING READINESS AND SUCCESS



Pennsylvania
Partnerships for Children

Reading is the basis of all learning. Children who learn to read and to love reading while they're young win a key that opens the doors of knowledge for a lifetime.

Reading Readiness and Success in Pennsylvania

From birth to third grade, children learn to read. From third grade on, they read to learn. Or as a Harvard expert on early literacy said, “After third grade, teachers rely on reading for all the other teaching they do. By fifth grade, it’s very difficult to teach anything – whether it’s math, science, or history – to a child who can’t read.”¹

The importance of early literacy has become increasingly clear to policymakers and educators as they grapple with education reforms and school achievement initiatives. With state and federal funds, Pennsylvania runs four early literacy programs – Family Literacy, the Parent Child Home Program, Read to Succeed, and the Reading Excellence Program. Early literacy education is also a vital component of family support programs, including nurse home visiting, family centers, and Early Head Start.

Family Literacy

Family Literacy works from the premise that parents are a child’s first teachers and the most powerful influence on children’s academic success. The Pennsylvania Department of Education

administers two Family Literacy programs together: the federal Even Start, administered by 33 grantees and available to children from birth to age 7 and their parents, and the state’s Family Literacy Program, or Act 143, operated by 29 grantees and available to children of any age and parents who read below a fifth-grade level.

Available in all 67 counties, Family Literacy delivers four components through home visits and other support services: adult education, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent-child interaction. Through partnerships with 183 school districts and three charter schools, services are available from intermediate units, community action agencies, Head Start, family service providers, libraries and literacy councils. Every county’s public library system also offers summer reading programs with Act 143 funds.

Serving 3,559 families with 5,305 children, both Even Start and Act 143 share common goals:

- Break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy through an intergenerational effort.
- Improve educational opportunities for children and adults by integrating early childhood and adult education.



- Create a new range of services by building collaborations among community resources.
- Help low-income children and adults meet challenging education performance standards. Both programs follow Family Literacy Program Performance Standards, established in 2001, that set grade-level or reading readiness, school attendance, and grade promotion expectations for participating children.

The Pennsylvania Family Literacy Consortium, a collaborative comprising the state Departments of Education and Public Welfare, Temple University, Penn State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Head Start Association, and the state library system, refines Family Literacy across state agencies and providers. The consortium develops quality indicators and performance standards to support the Family Literacy work of local agencies or partners.

Funding for the \$17.8 million effort comes from \$8.5 million in federal Even Start funds and \$9.3 million in state Act 143 funds.

Parent Child Home Program

The Department of Public Welfare's Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) targets 2- and 3-year-old children whose educational prospects are diminished, particularly by parents' low educational levels, but who also face other challenges, such as teen parents, poverty, language barriers, and homes where single parents are raising several children.

Reaching families whose isolation or poverty might keep them from group or center-based literacy programs, PCHP sends home visitors to the family twice weekly for two years. Each week, the home visitor leaves a new book or educational toy with the family, demonstrating its use in encouraging verbal interaction and good parenting techniques. Families can access the program through the local Child Care Information System office, school, or county Children and Youth office. Families usually participate for 23 weeks a year – spanning the school year – for two years.

The \$3 million directed to PCHP from TANF funding in 2001-02 is slated for repeats in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 state budgets.

*Fact
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Family Literacy

- **Definition:** Services addressing the literacy needs of all family members and promoting parents' involvement in their children's education, offered by the state through two programs – the federally funded Even Start and the state-funded Act 143.
- **Eligibility:** For Even Start, children from birth to age 7 and their parents. For Act 143, children of any age and parents who cannot read at a fifth-grade level.
- **Participation:** 3,559 families, with 5,305 children and 3,822 adults, participated in the two programs in 2001-02.
- **Availability:** Offered through school districts, intermediate units, community action agencies, Head Start, family service providers, libraries, and literacy councils in all 67 counties.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.²
- **Funding:** \$17.8 million, comprising \$8.5 million in federal Even Start funds and \$9.3 million in state Act 143 funds, in 2001-02.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, 717-772-3737.

Read to Succeed

Read to Succeed, launched in 1999, is the Ridge Administration's primary effort to improve young students' reading skills. Through it, elementary schools where 60 percent of fifth graders score in the bottom half of reading tests or verifiably demonstrate reading failure receive grants to restructure their classroom reading programs and reach students who are not progressing toward reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards.

Participating school districts must also reach young children by collaborating with local Head Start, Family Literacy programs, or local libraries and other agencies that offer reading and literacy instruction. Parents and caregivers must also be part of the literacy effort.

Districts can use the funds for a variety of approaches, including:

- One-on-one or small-group reading and writing instruction.
- Hiring teachers and instructional support staff for extended-day and summer programs.
- Professional development and training.

Schools must apply for the competitive grants, matching \$1 for every \$2 in state funds. At the end of the state's four-year



Fact Box

Parent Child Home Program

- **Definition:** Services targeting families whose children risk educational disadvantages with home-based parenting and early literacy services.
- **Eligibility:** Families of children ages 2 and 3, with income through 235 percent of poverty (\$42,535 for a family of four).
- **Participation:** Participation figures are not available because the program started in January 2002.
- **Availability:** Available at 33 organizations or schools in 29 counties.
- **Oversight:** Office of Children, Youth and Families, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.
- **Funding:** \$3 million in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds in 2001-02, to be repeated in 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05.
- **More information:** Office of Children, Youth and Families, 717-783-5836.

investment, schools will be expected to maintain Read to Succeed efforts without state help – a possible challenge for districts already straining under tight budgets.

Reading Excellence Act

The 1999 federal Reading Excellence Act (REA) required state strategies to ensure that all children become skilled and motivated readers. Through Family Literacy project partnerships, and with a framework for weaving services through homes, schools, and communities, the REA strives to give all children research-based literacy and reading activities from kindergarten through third grade.

Over four years, from 1999-00 through the program's end in 2002-03, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will have received \$30 million in federal Reading Excellence funds. The new federal Reading First program is slated to overlap in 2002-03, when – contingent on a successful application to the U.S. Department of

Education – Pennsylvania should receive a first allocation of more than \$28 million. With a \$31 million allocation in 2003-04, Reading First will replace the Reading Excellence Act.

Family Supports

When families struggle to stay afloat, the educational needs of children may be lost in the press to handle more immediate concerns. Family supports can ease the pressures on parents, while helping them devote a part of each day or week to reading with their children.

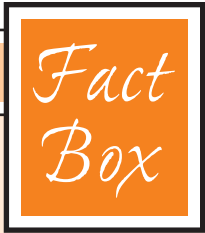
Literacy activities are core components of three state-funded family support efforts and a federal program:

- **Nurse home visiting:** Similar to the Parent Child Home Program (see page 34) but with a broader mission, Pennsylvania's nurse home visiting programs assign nurses or certified home visitors

Fact Box

Read to Succeed

- **Definition:** A four-year state program designed to ensure that all students learn to read and write by the end of third grade.
- **Eligibility:** Elementary schools, charter schools, Head Start programs and preschools which can show need through reading test results – 60 percent of students scoring in the bottom half of fifth-grade PSSA or other recognized achievement test – or through verifiable data showing that a specific group of students need extra reading help.
- **Participation:** 135,500 students since 1999-00.
- **Availability:** 698 schools, in 235 districts, participated in 2000-01, plus three charter schools, one Head Start program, and two early childhood learning centers.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** \$100 million in state funds, allocated from 1999-00 through 2002-03. The competitive grants require a \$1 match for every \$2 in state funds.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services, 717-787-8913.


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Reading Excellence Act

- **Definition:** Reading improvement grants for schools with high-risk students in kindergarten through third grade.
- **Eligibility:** Schools eligible for Title I, the federal supplemental education program for educationally disadvantaged children; state Empowerment Districts, where at least 50 percent of students score in the bottom-measured group of students in statewide PSSA scores in math and reading for the previous two years; or a state's two school districts with the highest percentage of students in poverty (Philadelphia and Chester-Upland school districts).
- **Participation:** About 6,000 children participated from 1999-2000 to 2000-01.
- **Availability:** 25 school districts with 210 eligible school buildings.
- **Oversight:** Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Federal Programs, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** \$30 million in federal funds, allocated from 1999-00 to 2001-02.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 717-787-2127.

to see at-risk pregnant women and parents of children from birth through age 2. The visitors share advice on health, child development, and good parenting, including the importance of reading. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, part of the Governor's Community Partnership for Safe Children, offers \$7.2 million in Nurse Home Visiting grants to 16 programs statewide, serving 3,125 families.

- **Family centers and Parents as Teachers:** Family centers provide integrated neighborhood services to help families become better educated, healthier, and self-sufficient. Literacy training is offered largely through Parents as Teachers, a voluntary family education program available to expectant parents and parents of children from birth through age 5. Each of the state's 48 family centers must serve at least 100 families with children through Parents as Teachers. PAT offers child development activities that encourage language development, intellectual growth, social development and motor skills, helping parents understand healthy child development and strengthening their abilities as the child's first and most important teachers. Overseen by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, with \$10 million in state and federal funds, family centers serve

9,900 children, about 6,500 of them under age 6. As a model for home visiting and parent education, PAT is also offered in Pennsylvania by nine Even Start, eight Head Start, and three Early Head Start programs, plus 23 schools, child care centers, and intermediate units. Together, family centers and the other PAT providers served more than 5,680 children in 2000.³

- **I Am Your Child:** In 2002-03, Pennsylvania projects distributing a set of six early childhood development videos, produced by the I Am Your Child Foundation, with a child's word book and parents' resource guide, to the parents of every newborn and toddler in the state. The materials, available in English and Spanish, stress the importance of reading to children and share other parenting tips. New parents can request the materials by calling 1-800-986-BABY, or can find them at 7,300 sites, including family centers, libraries, Early Intervention providers, Family Literacy programs, county assistance offices, and local health departments. Under the 2002-03 budget plan, the plan will be financed with \$4 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds.
- **Early Head Start:** Early Head Start provides child development and family support services for children under 3 years old and pregnant women. Services can include health

and nutrition services, child care for working parents, and home visits that help parents build their parenting skills and enhance the in-home learning environment. With \$19.3 million in federal funds, Early Head Start served only 2,428 of the 82,000 eligible infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania in 2002.

Why Reading Readiness and Success Matters

Literacy is the anchor of learning, the skill that grounds all school achievement and, for most people, lifetime success. And yet, one Pennsylvania fifth grader in four scored below proficient on state reading tests in 2001-02.

Early attention to reading skills is critical, because most reading problems among teens could have been avoided in the early years of childhood.⁴ However, the signs point to deeply seated literacy obstacles, especially among at-risk children:

- The ability to recognize letters is essential in learning to read, but in one study, 33 percent of children entering kindergarten – one new kindergartner in three – were not proficient in recognizing letters. More than half of the beginning kindergartners considered at risk of school failure because of low family income and low parent education could identify only two or three letters of the alphabet.⁵
- 10 percent of fourth graders whose parents didn't finish high school scored at advanced or proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading exam, compared to half of the fourth graders whose parents graduated from college.⁶

The benefits of early literacy investments, before reading problems become entrenched, are evident:

- **Broad impact:** Early attention can correct reading deficiencies in all but about 3 percent to 5 percent of children.⁷

- **Maintaining academic progress:** Some low-income and minority students lose three to four months' worth of literacy skills in the summer, compared to high-income children who generally gain by at least a month.⁸
- **Opening the door to learning:** Students who do not learn efficient reading skills are blocked from every other subject in their schooling.⁹

Pennsylvania's existing early literacy investments pay off in stronger reading skills for children and auxiliary benefits for parents:

- In Parents as Teachers, participating 3-year-olds are significantly more advanced in language, problem-solving abilities, and social development. As they grow, they score higher on kindergarten readiness tests and on reading, language, and math tests through fourth grade. Their parents are also more involved in their schooling and have lower rates of suspected or documented child abuse and neglect.¹⁰
- In the Parent Child Home Program, at-risk children show substantial improvement in school success and standardized achievement tests, and their high school graduation rates match those of middle-class students. Their parents often return to school, get a GED, or find employment.¹¹

State of the States/Best Practices

The National Research Council said that effective reading instruction for children must include:¹²

- Instruction in phonics, or the links between sounds and spelling.
- Frequent opportunities to read and write, and to discuss and analyze texts.
- Access to early literacy experiences, including family literacy.
- Professional development and education in literacy instruction for all levels of teachers and for parents.

- Help for students who don't progress or whose English proficiency is limited.
- Manageable class sizes, high-quality instructional materials, good school libraries, and a school-wide commitment to literacy success.

A few states have adopted innovative literacy approaches that draw students, teachers, schools, parents, and communities into the efforts:

Early literacy and motivation: Delaware was the first – and only – state to adopt the U.S. Department of Education's Reading Is Fundamental Initiative. Developed in 1997 and funded entirely by Delaware businesses, private foundations, and the Delaware Department of Education, the five-year effort follows two tracks for the state's eligible children:

- Early literacy for Delaware's children in Head Start, Even Start, Early Childhood Assistance child care programs, and Parents as Teachers. This component features RIF's National Book Program, which provides free, new books to every participating child and also includes parent and community involvement and motivational activities, a two-week reading challenge program, and training for early childhood center staff.
- Running Start, an intensive reading motivation program for every Delaware first grader that promotes parent and community involvement in children's reading.

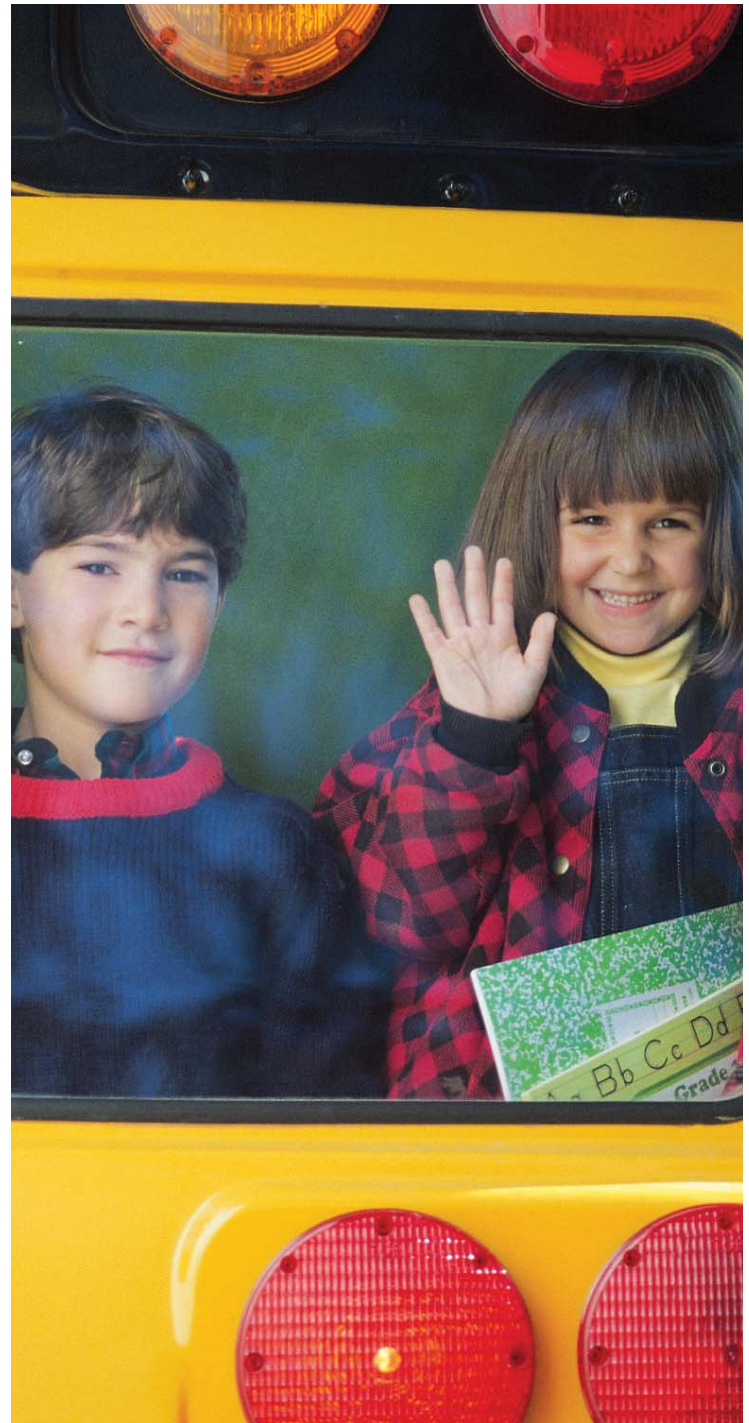
In home, at school, in the summer: The \$15 million Reading Plan for Michigan, or RPM, offers tools for young readers, their families, and their schools, including:

- R.E.A.D.Y. (Read, Educate, and Develop Youth) Tool Kits for parents and caregivers to help children build reading skills.
- The Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, an assessment tool kit to mark progress toward the goal of all students becoming independent readers by the end of third grade.
- The Preschool-Grade 3 Reading and Writing Portfolio, which gives teachers and parents a clear picture of a student's progress.
- The Model Summer School Program, which will provide best practices in all school districts.

Classroom grants: Ohio's Fourth Grade Guarantee offers classroom incentives to ensure that every fourth grader passes the state's reading proficiency test. The program

offers prevention, immediate and early intervention, and intense remediation for first through third graders reading below grade level.

Ohio also allocated \$19.7 million in 2002-03 for OhioReads. The program offers classroom grants, averaging nearly \$58,000, for schools that don't achieve a 75 percent reading



standard on state tests, and for community literacy projects, with average grants of nearly \$30,000.

Early literacy through schools: Indiana's 1997 Reading and Literacy Initiative for a Better Indiana originally allocated \$14 million for an Early Intervention Reading Grant program, school library printed materials, and adult education. The Early Intervention Reading Grants help local school districts adopt proven early intervention programs, including Even Start and full-day kindergarten (see "Kindergarten").

Situation Analysis

Early literacy has gained new respect in the policy world, winning funding from state and federal lawmakers who see it as a tool for progress toward the primary goal of lifting student achievement. With the exception of Family Literacy, born in 1986, the major federal and state initiatives – the Parent

Child Home Program, Read to Succeed, and the Reading Excellence Act – have all been introduced since 1999. Together, they represent a new \$139 million, four-year investment in reading readiness and success.

In 2001, a new state law codified the use of at least 25 percent of state literacy funds for Family Literacy – a level the state had been exceeding for a decade – and articulated the program's goals to make sustainable changes in family interaction, literacy levels, parents' self-sufficiency, and children's school success.

But in Pennsylvania, literacy funds aren't necessarily accumulating by the year. As new programs emerge, some old ones disappear. In 2002-03, school districts will see the last of their Read to Succeed funds. Unless the state renews Read to Succeed in 2003-04, schools must fill the gaps from their own limited resources. The Parent Child Home Program is funded only through 2003-04, and family centers have received only cost-of-living increases year after year. Family Literacy could continue receiving federal



funds, but Even Start may face a 20 percent cut – for a \$1.7 million hit – in 2003.

While the federal government cuts Even Start, new funding streams for early literacy are appearing:

- Reading First has emerged from the eliminated Reading Excellence Act, with funding increases to \$900 million in 2002 and a proposed \$1 billion in 2003. Pending approval by the U.S. Department of Education, Pennsylvania's share could be \$28 million in 2002-03 and \$31.23 million in 2003-04, up from \$10 million received annually through Reading Excellence. Funds will flow from the federal government to states, based on their number of low-income children, and then competitively to schools, with high-poverty, low reading-achievement districts getting priority. The money will fund professional development activities for kindergarten through third grade teachers.
- Early Reading First, part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, will award competitive grants to schools or community organizations to offer research-based literacy instruction for low-income, preschool-age children. However, with grants of \$250,000 to \$1 million awarded from a \$75 million funding pool in 2002, Early Reading First will reach – at most – 300 programs nationwide.

In the meantime, Pennsylvania has no overarching agenda that unifies the many disparate state and federal early literacy programs. Instead of coordinating existing funds and melding early literacy efforts with proven, existing approaches, such as preschool and full-day kindergarten, Pennsylvania's dollars flow through a variety of pipes to a variety of disconnected destinations.

The natural advocacy base for early literacy programs, such as Family Literacy providers, Head Start and preschool providers, is augmented by others who see ways to enhance reading readiness offerings – such as foundations, researchers, business leaders, and librarians – and those who see the impact of failing to grasp early literacy opportunities – namely, elementary and secondary school teachers whose students are hampered by poor reading skills.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Pennsylvania lacks an overarching literacy agenda — a failing when it comes to assuring that every child, and not just those who land in good early education programs, prepares to read well.

To plug the holes and effectively apply its early literacy resources, Pennsylvania should focus on reaching children where they spend their time — at home, in preschool and child care, in school, and in after-school activities — and strengthening existing efforts.

■ **Coordinate for accountability:** Pennsylvania's literacy programs are scattered across three state agencies. To reach as many at-risk children as possible, they should flow through schools, intermediate units, Head Start providers, and community organizations. As the need for accountability in federal and state spending increases, Pennsylvania should create a collaborative process that points agencies toward a unified goal of improving reading rates before children leave third grade. A good model to start: The Pennsylvania Family Literacy Consortium, which focuses the various players within the Family Literacy program on a common agenda.

■ **Evaluate and expand:** National studies have shown that literacy approaches such as Even Start, the Parent Child Home Program, Early Head Start, and nurse home visits — all in place in Pennsylvania — have positive impacts on early literacy. But their impact on Pennsylvania has not been studied, and each reaches only a fragment of eligible children. The state should evaluate its literacy programs here in Pennsylvania and, as they're shown effective, expand funding to reach every community with at-risk families.

■ **Review and renew Read to Succeed:** Read to Succeed is a major, \$100 million early literacy effort, but its impact has not been studied. Pennsylvania should evaluate Read to Succeed and, if it's proven effective, renew funding for schools.

■ **Secure all available federal funding:** The federal focus on early literacy offers an opportunity to retain and strengthen Pennsylvania's literacy programs. The state should secure all available federal funding and target the dollars toward at-risk children in existing early literacy programs and other educational efforts that teach the foundations of reading, such as preschool and full-day kindergarten.

ENDNOTES

Reading Readiness and Success

- ¹ Catherine Snow, Ph.D., Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- ² U.S. Even Start Family Literacy Program, Title I, Part B, Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-382), and Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Act, Act 143 of 1986.
- ³ National Parents as Teachers Report, December 31, 2000.
- ⁴ National Research Council, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Washington, DC, 1998.
- ⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, America's Kindergartners: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, 2000.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996.
- ⁷ Torgesen, Individual Differences in Responding to Early Interventions in Reading: The Lingering Problem of Treatment Resisters, *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 2000.
- ⁸ Entwisle, D. R., and Alexander, Katherine, Summer setback: Race, poverty, school composition, and mathematics achievement in the first two years of school. *American Sociological Review*, 1992.
- ⁹ The National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, Reading Research Tells Us About Children with Diverse Learning Needs, 1996.
- ¹⁰ National Parents as Teachers, www.patnc.org.
- ¹¹ Department of Public Welfare, Request for Proposals, Parent Child Home Program, November 2001.
- ¹² The National Research Council, Ready to Learn, 2001.



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Mission Statement

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is a strong, effective and trusted voice for improving the health, early education and well-being of the Commonwealth's children.

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