



## State Update

### Pre-K Today Campaign Launched

A new effort to bring pre-kindergarten to thousands of more preschoolers in Pennsylvania went live last week with a new web site dedicated to the campaign and supporters lined up across the state. **Pre-K Today** is a non-partisan campaign launched by a broad-based coalition from around the Commonwealth committed to efforts to advance dedicated state financing for voluntary high quality pre-kindergarten programs designed to assure that Pennsylvania's children enter school ready to learn and prepared to succeed.

**Pre-K Today** supports the Governor's \$75 million proposal in the 2007-08 budget to create Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. If enacted, PA Pre-K Counts will provide approximately 11,000 3- and 4-year-olds with voluntary, high-quality pre-K delivered through a mixed service delivery system in which all providers comply with State Board of Education pre-K regulations and the state's early learning standards.

If your organization has not yet signed on to endorse the campaign, we urge

you to do so today at

<http://www.prektoday.org/signup.shtml>

### Pre-K Investments & DPW Budget Defended in Budget Hearings

The Department of Education's budget was the focus of budget hearings before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees in early March. In his prepared remarks for the hearings, Education Secretary Zahorchak said that the Governor's 2007-2008 budget provides \$527 million in new pre-K-12 education investments to support a comprehensive set of strategies to improve student achievement.

Regarding the Governor's \$75 million Pre K Counts proposal to provide voluntary, high-quality pre-K to about 11,000 3 and 4 year olds delivered through a mixed service delivery system, the Secretary noted, "Study after study has shown that quality pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs serve as the building block for future student achievement. Research from Rand and others tells us that every dollar invested yields \$6-17 in benefits to taxpayers."

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*Published by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a strong, effective, and trusted voice to improve the health, education, and well-being of the Commonwealth's children. Joan L. Benso, President and CEO.*

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A number of legislators on the House and Senate panels focused their questions on the structure of the Governor's proposal under the Accountability Block Grant and the need to prioritize state spending in a very tight budget year. But the good news is no one on the committees expressed disagreement with scholarly research that sustains the argument that investments in quality pre-K are wise and yield significant dividends. In fact, a number of members on the committees from both parties acknowledged the strong research base supporting pre-K.

The comments and questions of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee made it very clear that if pre-K is to be a part of the FY 2007-2008 budget, then we must help make it a priority in legislators' minds.

*Click here to send an e-mail to your legislator expressing your support for the proposed \$75 million investment in pre-K.*

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The House and Senate are reconvening at the conclusion of the budget hearing process. The drafting and introduction of a budget bill or bills is the next step in the state budget process. The state budget will be debated and negotiated for the next three months.

In addition, Department of Public Welfare Secretary Richman appeared before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to outline the agency's proposed FY 2007-2008 budget. The Secretary used the opportunity to refute the assertion that Pennsylvania has 1.9 million "welfare recipients." Secretary Richman explained that we

have about 1.9 million Pennsylvanians covered by Medical Assistance, 81 percent of whom are elderly, disabled, or children. According to the Secretary, about 235,000 individuals receive cash assistance. Secretary Richman also highlighted the progress the Commonwealth has made in increasing its work participation rate over 49 percent. Members of both panels asked a number of questions regarding the Governor's Cover All Pennsylvanians proposal. The Secretary noted that the proposal will help improve both access to care and quality of care for all citizens.

### State Revenue Update

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue reported that the Commonwealth collected \$1.6 billion in general fund revenue in February. This is \$17.2 million or 1.1 percent more than the official estimate. Fiscal year-to-date general fund collections total \$15.3 billion, which is \$112.1 million or 0.7 percent above the official estimate.

### Improving Teacher Requirements

Teacher education and certification requirements were the subject of a February 13 public hearing of the Senate Education Committee. The hearing was called to consider the State Board of Education's proposed revisions of its Chapter 49 regulations dealing with teacher education and certification.

PPC's President and CEO Joan Benso testified at the hearing explaining why the fundamental thrust of the proposed changes is right and deserves support. Others testifying at the hearing included representatives from the State Board of Education, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators, the Pennsylvania State Education Association, and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

Benso expressed strong support for the State Board's proposal that beginning in 2012, those with early childhood certificates be permitted to teach



children in pre-K through third grade; those with elementary/middle level certificates be permitted to teach children in fourth through eighth grades; and those with secondary certificates be permitted to teach those in ninth through twelfth grades. She remarked, “The State Board’s approach to this issue is a sensible one. It will result in more young children leaving third grade as good readers and

good students, ready for the rest of their school experience. It will result in more middle-level youngsters having the support they need to make the difficult transition through early adolescence without developing problems that lead so many today not to finish high school successfully.”

Benso is scheduled to testify on the regulations before the House Education Committee March 28.

## Federal Update

### Federal Budget Update

On February 15, President Bush signed into law a joint resolution that provides budget funding for the remainder of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2007. As previously reported, with the exception of defense and homeland security spending, the federal government has been operating under a series of continuing resolutions since the beginning of the fiscal year in October 2006.

Under the \$463 billion joint funding resolution, most federal programs would be funded at FFY 2006 levels, with an additional \$16 billion for certain programs, including Head Start (\$103.7 million increase), Pell Grants (\$615.4 million increase) and the new Title I School Improvement Fund (\$125 million for schools that failed to meet NCLB requirements).

Congress is now turning to the task of crafting the FFY 2008 budget. The first step in this process for Congress is to pass separate budget resolutions in the House and Senate. We understand that both chambers are expected to begin considering their respective resolutions in mid to late March. Several contentious issues must be addressed in developing and adopting the resolutions, including how much money to provide for defense and domestic discretionary spending, how to accommodate SCHIP reauthorization and the need for more funds, and whether to adhere (and how strictly)

to Pay as You Go or PAYGO for increases in entitlement spending.

While they are not very detailed in scope, the House and Budget resolutions are very important because they set the overall denominator for the federal budget. PPC will be closely monitoring non-defense domestic discretionary amounts. This subset of spending provides vital funding for a number of important health, education and child care programs. In discussions with our congressional delegation, we will be advocating for increasing investments in this category of spending that not only keeps up with inflation (as compared to the FFY 2007 budget), but actually increases investments.

### SCHIP Update

In late February, the National Governors Association sent a letter to U.S. House and Senate leaders urging them to begin work now to ensure timely and successful reauthorization of SCHIP. The bipartisan letter noted that maintaining flexibility for states to tailor the program to the health care needs and unique demographics of each state is paramount for the future success of the program. Finally, the governors stressed that Congress must provide sufficient funding to fully meet each state’s health care coverage objectives for SCHIP. The need for flexibility is especially important for states like Pennsylvania that have moved ahead and made



CHIP coverage available to all children. Governor Rendell was a strong voice advocating for meaningful reauthorization with his colleagues.

Congressional observers are closely watching the development of the House and Senate Budget Resolutions for signs of how Congress intends to deal with SCHIP reauthorization. In addition, we expect a number of bills to be introduced in March providing for SCHIP reauthorization. Several key committee chairs and other members of Congress are expressing their hope to not only fill the shortfalls, but to provide funds to cover more currently eligible children and to expand programs to cover more children who are not currently eligible.

*We will keep you posted on new developments regarding SCHIP reauthorization. In the meantime, click here to send a letter to your elected officials in Washington and urge them to work toward timely and meaningful SCHIP reauthorization.*

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**PA Receives Federal Approval for Cover All Kids Expansion**

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved Pennsylvania’s Cover All Kids CHIP expansion. Approval of the expansion maintains Pennsylvania’s leadership in providing access to affordable health insurance for all uninsured children and teens, through the age of 18. The Department of Insurance is now accepting applications for the expanded program.

State officials estimate that federal approval means that Pennsylvania can utilize federal funds to help purchase health insurance coverage to children

in families earning up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. Children in families above 300 percent FPIG pay the full cost of coverage – no public dollars are used to purchase the coverage. Currently, about 68 cents of every dollar used to provide CHIP coverage comes from the federal government.

Please see the following chart for a breakdown of income limits and estimated premiums.

Percent of Federal Poverty Income Guidelines	Maximum income level for a family of four	Average Monthly premium per child
200% or lower	\$41,300	\$0
201% - 250%	\$51,625	\$38
251% - 275%	\$56,788	\$53
276% - 300%	\$61,950	\$60
Over 300%	No maximum	\$150

More than 152,000 children currently are enrolled in CHIP. Families are encouraged to contact the Pennsylvania Department of Insurance for additional information at 1-800-986-KIDS (5437) or visit [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us) to apply online.

**Head Start Reauthorization Begins in the House**

The reauthorization of Head Start began recently in the House as the Education and Labor Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education heard from Head Start administrators across the country regarding service delivery, and researchers on early childhood brain development. Subcommittee Chair Dale Kildee (D-MI) noted that “There are no more critical programs for our nation’s children than these [Head Start and Early Head Start], because there are no years more critical to their development



than the early ones.” The House Education and Labor Committee could release its Head Start reauthorization bill as early as this week.

Reauthorization has stalled in recent congressional sessions due to controversial aspects involving the potential capping, or block granting, of funds, and other faith-based hiring provisions. Neither the House nor Senate is planning to include these provisions this year. Legislation has not been introduced in the House, but Committee Chair George Miller (D-CA) is aiming to introduce a reauthorization package this spring.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee earlier approved S. 556, the “Head Start for School Readiness Act”, to reauthorize Head Start for the next five years. It is now set to go the full Senate chamber for passage.

*Click here to urge your senators to support Head Start reauthorization for the next five years.*

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