



State Update

Pre-K Today

Last month, we introduced you to Pre-K Today, the 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. If your organization has not yet signed onto the campaign, please do so today at: <http://www.prektoday.org/signup.shtml>.

All coalition members will be posted on our website to demonstrate the scope of our support to policymakers and the media. In just a few short weeks the number of organizations endorsing the Pre-K Today has grown to 485, while more than 320 individuals have endorsed the campaign in the last several days.

In addition, there is now an opportunity for individuals to endorse Pre-K Today. Whether you're a teacher, parent, business leader or a concerned Pennsylvanian, you can lend your personal voice to the campaign. Please reach out to your family members,

friends, neighbors, parents, co-workers and others to sign on to the campaign at: http://www.prektoday.org/signup_individual.shtml.

Pre-K Today was heard in the halls of the Capitol when more than 400 supporting organizations signed onto a letter to the General Assembly, urging legislators to support the Governor's \$75 million proposal in the 2007-08 budget to create Pre-K Counts. Pre-K Today is now sending email alerts to the members of the General Assembly and key staff on a weekly basis, highlighting both the value of high-quality pre-K and the broad-based support that this important budget proposal enjoys.

On March 21, PPC's President and CEO Joan Benso presented testimony before the Senate Education Committee regarding the Governor's proposed \$75 million investment in pre-K. She noted, "Pennsylvania has abandoned its distinction of being one of only nine states not providing state support for pre-K. But in order to keep pace we need to do more. If we fail to, our children are seriously disadvantaged and ultimately the Commonwealth loses as we fail to adequately

continued on page two



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Inside This Issue	
Federal Budget Update	3



State Update continued from page one

prepare children to enter school ready to learn – the very children that will be our workforce of tomorrow.” Benso concluded her remarks before the committee by saying, “Let’s not wait another day to move forward on investments that have been unequivocally proven to secure better academic outcomes for young children and provide economic and social benefits to the community at large.”

Pre-K Today members are meeting with their legislators in Harrisburg and in the district offices, urging them to support the \$75 million investment. In addition, several are hosting local events in which business and community leaders, teachers, administrators, local child care providers, Head Start providers and others will speak with one voice in support of state investments in pre-K.

More information on Pre-K Today can be found by clicking www.prektoday.org.

Early Childhood Action Day May 8 in Harrisburg

We need YOUR help on May 8 in Harrisburg!! Please come to the Capitol May 8 and help celebrate Early Childhood Action Day, or Lobby Day. This is the day HUNDREDS of parents, teachers, school administrators, business leaders, child care providers and concerned citizens will flock to Harrisburg to make their voices known about the importance of pre-kindergarten in Pennsylvania.

For more information, please click on the Lobby Day flyers here:

<http://www.prektoday.org/pdfs/lobbyday.pdf>

Accountability Block Grant/Pre-K Legislation Introduced

Last week Sen. Raphael J. Musto (D - Luzerne) introduced SB 723, legislation establishing pre-K and full-day kindergarten in the Accountability Block Grant (ABG). The bill calls for the Education Department to establish an accountability block grant program for any approved provider of pre-K

services to provide pre-K and ensure school readiness and improve future academic performance.

Sen. Musto has 11 co-sponsors: Fontana (D-Allegheny), Stout (D-Washington), O’Pake (D-Berks), Washington (D-Philadelphia), Logan (D-Allegheny), Mellow (D-Lackawanna), Kasunic (D-Fayette), C. Williams (D-Montgomery), Costa (D-Allegheny), Kitchen (D-Philadelphia), Stack (D-Philadelphia) and Lavelle (D-Beaver). The bill was referred to the Senate Education Committee April 2.

State Revenue Update

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue reported that the Commonwealth collected \$4 billion in general fund revenue in March. This is \$138.4 million or 3.6 percent more than the official estimate. Fiscal year-to-date general fund collections total \$19.3 billion, which is \$250.5 million or 1.3 percent above the official estimate.

Improving Children’s Access to Dental Care

The Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee held a public hearing on March 28 to gather testimony on SB 455. The measure would improve access to dental hygiene in public and private settings by recognizing and providing for the scope of practice of independent dental hygiene practitioners.

PPC’s President and CEO Joan Benso testified at the hearing, noting that tooth decay is the number one chronic disease of childhood. She explained that oral diseases and conditions can negatively affect children’s growth, function and ability to learn. One challenge to finding needed dental care is the lack or high cost of dental insurance. More than 133,000 children lack medical insurance in Pennsylvania. National statistics show that there are 2.6 children with no dental insurance coverage for every child lacking health insurance.

Benso added that both CHIP and Medicaid cover dental services for children. Together, these



programs cover one in three children in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, even if a child has coverage through CHIP or Medicaid, access to dental care is hindered due to an overall shortage of dentists as well as a shortage of dentists that accept public coverage. Benso concluded by noting that SB 455 will effectively reduce barriers that keep children from receiving the routine preventive dental care they need by opening up more options for dental care for children.

Making the Case for Improving Teacher Requirements

Dr. Robert E. Feir, PPC's Director of Education Initiatives, testified before the House Education Committee on March 28 in support of the State Board of Education's Chapter 49 regulations dealing with teacher education and certification.

Dr. Feir expressed strong support for the proposed requirement 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. He remarked, "The State Board's proposed changes are based upon years of increasingly convincing research about the developmental learning needs of children and should, therefore, promote higher levels of achievement by children."

School Breakfast Proposal Introduced

Multiple research studies have shown that children have the best chance for academic success if they start the day with a nutritious breakfast.

On March 23, the Senate passed its version of the FFY 2008 Budget Resolution. Of interest, the measure increases non-defense domestic discretionary spending by \$6 billion (adjusted for inflation) as compared to the FFY 2007 budget, and

Educators have found that providing a school-based breakfast is a cost effective way to enhance the learning environment. Despite clear evidence that eating breakfast contributes to higher achievement, Pennsylvania ranks 42nd among the 50 states for the percentage of low-income children who receive school breakfast.

School breakfast is also a key ingredient in promoting good health and reducing obesity. It lessens the temptation to snack on less healthy food or to overeat at other meals. And for children from low-income families, school-based meals serve the additional purpose of providing food that parents may not be able to provide.

Representative Tony Payton, Jr. (D-Philadelphia) introduced House Bill 908 to expand the availability of school breakfast in the Commonwealth. The legislation is a part of the Governor's Prescription for PA proposal. Sen. Vincent Hughes is expected to introduce companion legislation in the Senate.

Under the measure, schools in which low-income students comprise 20 percent or more of enrollment would be required to offer school breakfast. Schools that adopt the PA Department of Education's Guidelines for Nutritional Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools would receive an increase in state payments to partially reimburse costs of meals provided through the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch programs. A state investment of \$6.5 million could leverage an estimated \$23.6 million in new federal funds to pay for the program.

PA House and Senate Schedules

The House and Senate are scheduled to be in session in Harrisburg on April 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 30.

it is \$16 billion more than the President proposed for non-defense discretionary funding. It also proposes a change in rules restricting advance appropriations, which would effectively make an additional \$2 billion in funding available for non-



defense programs in FFY 2008. The measure also establishes a reserve fund of up to \$50 billion for Congress to use for SCHIP reauthorization.

Prior to passage, the Senate defeated an amendment that called for reducing federal SCHIP matching funds for programs that provide coverage to children above 200% FPIG. PPC worked closely with the offices of Senators Specter and Casey to supply them information on the potential impact to Pennsylvania's CHIP program. Of great interest, both Senators Specter and Casey voted against the amendment. The Senators also voted against a second troublesome amendment that would have, among other things, deleted language in the resolution that provided both the purpose and the amount of funds for SCHIP reauthorization.

The House adopted its budget resolution for FFY 2008 on March 29. The spending plan increases non-defense domestic discretionary spending by \$12 billion (adjusted for inflation) as compared to the FFY 2007 budget, and it is \$22 billion more than the President proposed for non-defense discretionary funding. Like the Senate Budget Resolution, it proposes a change in rules restricting advance appropriations, which would effectively make an additional \$2 billion in funding available for non-defense programs in FFY 2008. Again, like the Senate version, the resolution establishes a reserve fund of up to \$50 billion for Congress to use for SCHIP reauthorization.

A conference committee will reconcile the House and Senate budget resolutions. Congressional leaders hope to have a final resolution ready for consideration in mid April. PPC supports House version's increased spending on non-defense domestic discretionary funding as well as its language regarding SCHIP reauthorization. While both versions reserve \$50 billion for SCHIP reauthorization, the House version provides the most flexibility for funding the reauthorization.

The final budget resolution sets the overall

spending denominator for FFY 2008. After the denominator is set, the House and Senate Appropriations Committee will start crating and considering the dozen or so spending bills that make up the entire federal budget.

SCHIP Reauthorization Gaining Momentum

PPC led a Pennsylvania congressional staff briefing by the PA SCHIP coalition on March 13. The briefing attracted staff from 10 of 21 congressional offices (Senator Casey, Representatives, Gerlach, Schwartz, English, Platts, Dent, Fattah, Brady, P. Murphy, and Shuster). Presenters at the briefing included the American Academy of Pediatrics-PA Chapter, all four Blue Cross/ Blue Shield companies, the Hospital and Healthsystem Association, PPC and Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. The briefing delivered a solid message of support for timely and meaningful SCHIP reauthorization from a deep and broad coalition of insurers, hospitals, pediatricians, and child and health advocacy organizations.

On March 13, Senator Bob Casey was among several U.S. House and Senate speakers at a bipartisan rally supporting reauthorizing and properly funding SCHIP. Senator Casey noted that protecting and growing the SCHIP program is his number one priority. He noted that the President's budget proposal "underfunds the program and would cause 1.4 million children and pregnant women to lose coverage. Further, it attempts to prevent states like my home state of Pennsylvania from expanding SCHIP. We have a chance this year to protect and grow the program to give another generation of children access to health care. We must encourage progress to expand SCHIP, not stifle the efforts of states like Pennsylvania." Senator Casey made subsequent statements of strong support for SCHIP reauthorization on the Senate floor.

A number of measures providing for SCHIP reauthorization have been introduced in the U.S.



House and Senate. SCHIP received considerable attention during the debate on the House and Senate budget resolutions. It is clear that congressional leaders have made reauthorization one of the top priorities for the 110th Congress. Action on reauthorization legislation is expected this spring.

The members of the Pennsylvania House and Senate expressed their support for SCHIP by adopting separate resolutions, HR 104 and SR 40. The resolutions note that the success of CHIP in Pennsylvania hinges on an effective partnership with the federal government. The resolutions urge Congress to provide timely and meaningful SCHIP reauthorization.

Report Shows Decline in Federal Spending on Children

The Urban Institute just issued a report that answers the questions: How much does the federal government spend on children? How have children's priorities fared against other national priorities in the federal budget? Are children becoming more of an afterthought in future budget planning?

The report, "Kids Share 2007: How Children Fare in the Federal Budget" reveals the following important facts:

- *Federal spending on children, adjusted for inflation, grew from \$53 billion in 1960 to \$333 billion in 2006. However, as a share of the economy, spending on children rose from just 1.9 to 2.6 percent of GDP.*
- *The share of federal domestic spending focused on children has fallen 23 percent from 20.1 percent in 1960 to 15.4 percent in 2006.*
- *Over the next ten years, the share of the domestic budget focused on children is scheduled to decline further, as children are projected to receive less than 6 percent of new domestic spending between 2006 and 2017.*

Unfortunately, the report reveals that based on the analysis of historical and future trends in the federal budget, children appear to be a diminishing national priority. Information regarding the report can be found at www.firstfocus.net.

PPC and its friends and partners fight every day in Harrisburg and Washington D.C. to reverse this trend and make children a priority on the public agenda.

Head Start Moving Toward Reauthorization

On March 14, the House Committee on Education and Labor unanimously approved H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007, which reauthorizes the Head Start program for five years. The next step will be for the full House and full Senate to each vote on their Head Start bills and then work out the differences between the two bills. The House and Senate bills are similar in many respects, but diverge on a number of provisions.

The House bill aims to improve the quality of Head Start programs. In addition, it gives programs increased flexibility to serve infants and toddlers and provide full-day programs when doing so would better meet community needs. The bill also maintains the long-standing approach of having the federal government provide Head Start grants directly to local agencies. However, the bill authorizes relatively small increases for Head Start over this fiscal year—\$7.35 billion for FY 2008, and such sums as may be necessary for FY 2009 through 2011. Head Start is funded at \$6.892 billion for FY 2007.