



Pre-K Today Update

Campaign is Growing: Nearly 530 organizations have endorsed the Pre-K Today Campaign. 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 addition, there is now an opportunity for individuals to endorse Pre-K Today. You can join the more than 750 early learning champions who have done so already. Whether you're a teacher, parent, business leader or just 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_individuals.shtml

Research Report: In April, Pre-K Today released a report that summarizes the benefits of pre-K, the current state of pre-K in Pennsylvania in terms of funding and quality, and the investments that other states are making in high-quality pre-K. The report is a great resource tool for sharing with fellow pre-K supporters and policymakers. The

report is available at:

http://www.prektoday.org/tools_report.shtml

Alerts to Legislators: Pre-K Today is sending weekly email alerts to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The alerts highlight key research on the importance of high-quality pre-K and contain statements from pre-K partners as well as key pre-K supporters in the education, research and business worlds.

Legislative Briefing: On April 17, Pre-K Today and PNC Financial Services hosted a legislative briefing featuring Dr. Steven Barnett. Dr. Barnett is Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. Dr. Barnett is a national expert on the economics of early care and education. His research includes studies on the costs and benefits of early care and education, and the long term effects of preschool programs on children's learning and development. Dr. Barnett shared convincing information at the briefing on the many benefits of high-quality pre-K. He also highlighted how Pennsylvania's proposal for pre-K, if enacted, would move Pennsylvania among the top tier of states in terms of quality.

continued on page two

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.

Inside This Issue	
State Budget Update	3
Federal Update	5
Federal Budget Update	6



Pre-K Update continued from page one

Media Coverage: Newspapers across the Commonwealth are covering local events calling for support of pre-K and editorializing on the merits of investing state dollars in pre-K.

- “Studies have shown that at-risk children who did not attend quality pre-K were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers when they grow up than the children who attended.” – Op-Ed, Delaware County Daily News
- “The state Legislature should show its recognition of the importance of pre-K with full funding of the governor’s request.” – Editorial, Allentown Morning Call
- “The public money invested in pre-kindergarten classes, for example, produces a return for society long after most of the lawmakers who appropriate it are out of office.” – Editorial, Scranton Times-Tribune
- “Although the Legislature has several major funding issues on its plate, this one is a no-brainer. Despite proven benefits, Pennsylvania is not competitive with other states in giving its children a pre-K foundation.” – Editorial, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For an up-to-date list of newsclips and editorials, please click on:

http://www.prektoday.org/info_newsclips.shtml

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

Pre-K Defended Before Senate Appropriations Committee

The Senate Appropriations Committee held a public hearing on Governor Rendell’s proposed education investments on May 1. PPC’s President and CEO Joan Benso presented testimony at the hearing supporting the Governor’s proposed investment in pre-K. She noted that she is proud of the fact that PPC’s policy recommendations are grounded in sound research and analysis. She went on to say, “Based on our review of the literature, it is

very clear that research overwhelmingly supports high-quality pre-K as an education strategy.”

In her testimony, Benso noted the many benefits that accrue to students, schools, communities and the Commonwealth as a whole as a result of investing in high-quality pre-K. She told the committee that it is quite simple, our children need pre-K and our Commonwealth will benefit from providing it.

According to Benso, Pre-K Today supporters have made well over 200 contacts with members of the General Assembly and hosted a number of local events across Pennsylvania. The contacts reveal that legislators clearly understand the research and the many benefits of investing in high-quality pre-K. She took great care in addressing a number of questions and concerns regarding the proposed investment. In short order, Benso noted:

- The proposal does not exclude faith-based providers and that PPC thinks that faith-based providers should be allowed to compete for funding, as long as the standards and requirements remain strong and are applied equally to all providers;
- Public aid can be granted to sectarian schools;
- Pre-K funds would be available statewide;
- PPC supports the Education Improvement Tax Credit, but it is not a replacement for a high-quality pre-K financing strategy;
- The benefits of high-quality pre-K do not fade out when comparing students who received high-quality pre-K with control groups who did not;
- Public schools support pre-K and understand its value; and
- Targeted funding of pre-K investments is necessary because the Education Accountability Grant program has not taken a strong enough foothold as a pre-K strategy.

Benso concluded by remarking, “The General



Assembly has a unique opportunity this spring to make a real difference for thousands of Pennsylvania's youngest learners. And that difference – high-quality, voluntary pre-K will pay handsome dividends as an education strategy for the children who benefit directly and as an investment strategy for the schools, communities, and the Commonwealth itself that will reap the long-term rewards of a wise investment.”

House Accountability Block Grant/Pre-K Legislation Introduced

Rep. Chris King (D -Bucks) introduced HB 1057, establishing targeted pre-K and full-day kindergarten funding in the Accountability Block Grant (ABG). Of interest, the bill targets funds under the Block Grant to deliver high-quality pre-K programs across the Commonwealth in diverse settings, in order to ensure school readiness and improve future academic performance. The measure is identical to SB 723 (Musto, D-Luzerne).

The following co-sponsored the legislation:

Conklin (D-Centre), Biancucci (D-Beaver), Barrar (R-Delaware), Belfanti (D-Northumberland), Costa (D-Allegheny), Curry (D-Montgomery), DePasquale (D-York), Daley (D-Washington), Caltagirone (D-Berks), Fabrizio (D-Erie), Frankel (D-Allegheny), Freeman (D-Northampton), George (D-Clearfield), Gerber (D-Montgomery), James (D-Philadelphia), Kortz (D-Allegheny), Kula (D-Fayette), Leach (D-Montgomery), McCall (D-Carbon), Santoni (D-Berks), Brennan (D-Lehigh), Staback (D-Lackawanna), R. Taylor (D-Montgomery), Gibbons (D-Lawrence), Manderino (D-Philadelphia), Mann (D-Lehigh), Mundy (D-Luzerne), Myers (D-Philadelphia), Saylor (R-York), Scavello (R-Monroe), Shapiro (D-Montgomery), Shimkus (D-Lackawanna), Siproth (D-Monroe), McIlvaine Smith (D-Chester), Solobay (D-Washington), Sturla (D-Lancaster), Surra (D-Elk), Thomas (D-Philadelphia), Walko (D-Allegheny), Wansacz (D-Lackawanna), Youngblood (D-Philadelphia), Yudichak (D-Luzerne), Hennessey (R-Chester).

State Budget Update

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue reported that the Commonwealth collected \$3.4 billion in general fund revenue in April. This is \$42.7 million, or 1.2 percent, less than the official estimate. Fiscal year-to-date general fund collections total \$22.8 billion, which is \$207.8 million or 0.9 percent above the official estimate.

School Nutrition and Wellness Initiative Discussed

Governor Rendell's school nutrition and child wellness initiative was the subject of a public hearing of the House Education Committee on May 2. The proposal, introduced as HB 908 by Representative Tony Payton, Jr. (D-Philadelphia), would require schools that have 20 percent or more students

eligible for free or reduced price to offer school breakfast. Schools that adopt the PA Department of Education's Guidelines for Nutritional Standards for Competitive Foods 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.

The Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center testified in support of the legislation. According to the Center, about 750 schools do not participate in the school breakfast program. About one-third of the 57,600 students attending these schools are from low-income families. House Bill 908 would allow an estimated 22,000 additional children per day to



receive breakfast.

Multiple research studies have shown that children have the best chance for academic success if they start the day with a nutritious breakfast. 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. House Bill 908 will help improve the nutritional quality of food at school and expand availability of breakfast to those children who need it most.

Cover All Kids Implementation Update

The Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee held a public hearing on April 17 regarding the implementation of the Cover All Kids CHIP expansion. Deputy Insurance Commissioner George Hoover informed the committee on the steps that the Department took to expand the program. According to Hoover, the Department's goal is to enroll 15,000 additional children into CHIP by June 30. As of mid-April, the Department received applications for over 20,000 children. The Department projects that by FY 2010-2011 this will grow to nearly 70,000 additional children.

Based on these initial enrollment numbers, the Department is finding that a majority of the applicants' family incomes fall into previous program income eligibility levels. According to Hoover, this is significant because, "We have overcome the barrier of confusion about income eligibility in the program by eliminating these income limits." He added, "As a result, not only are we enrolling children from families that were previously unable to afford or gain access to comprehensive health insurance for their children, but we are enrolling children from families who thought that they were not eligible and didn't bother applying." Thanks to Cover All Kids, all of these families can now take comfort in knowing that their children's health care needs are covered.

The Return of TABOR

Senators Bob Regola (R-Westmoreland) and Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon) introduced legislation (SB 707) and a proposed amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution (SB 7) that would cap state spending. The proposals would limit state spending according to a formula that accounts for inflation and population growth. In the House, Rep. Todd Rock (R-Franklin) announced that he plans to introduce a proposed spending cap amendment to the Constitution in the near future as HB 1100.

Imposing artificial curbs on state spending will negatively impact the Commonwealth's ability to provide services, both existing and new, to our children. PPC will work to make sure that spending caps are not enacted so the Commonwealth can continue to dedicate adequate and appropriate funding to programs that provide critical services to children and their families.

PA House and Senate Schedules

The General Assembly is scheduled to be in session in Harrisburg in May on the following days: 7, 8, 21, 22, and 23 (House only).



Photo courtesy of Blair Byatt

More than 500 advocates visited the Capitol and lined the steps in the Rotunda May 8 for Early Childhood Action Day. Advocates came from across the state to urge legislators to support Gov. Rendell's early childhood budget including funding for pre-K, Keystone Stars and Child Care Works.



Federal Update

House Passes Head Start Reauthorization

The U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1429 by a vote of 365-48, which reauthorizes the Head Start program for five years.

Specifically, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007 would:

- Improve Head Start’s workforce quality by increasing funding for teacher and staff salaries and professional development.
- Strengthen school readiness by re-evaluating and updating current standards and assessments based on the best science.
- Improve coordination between Head Start and state and local child care and education programs.
- Expand access to up to 10,000 more children.
- Increase funding for Early Head Start, which serves children under three years old.
- Increase accountability through a new system to assess program quality and improve the triennial review process.
- Maintain strong parental participation through shared governance between parent policy councils and governing boards, to empower Head Start parents and allow programs to be responsive to local 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.

Created in 1965 to promote the early development of three- and four-year-old children by supporting the cognitive, physical, educational, and

social development of a child, Head Start has served over 24 million children since its inception.

SCHIP Update

Senators Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced comprehensive bipartisan SCHIP reauthorization legislation, S.1224 in the United States Senate. The legislation is so comprehensive that it is being referred to as the “gold standard” for reauthorization legislation. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) has signed on as a co-sponsor of the legislation.

In short, the legislation: extends SCHIP for five additional years; provides significant new resources for SCHIP; improves the funding stream to make funds more predictable; gives states new tools and resources to enroll already eligible children, like “express lane” eligibility; addresses citizenship documentation barriers; allows states to cover pregnant women; allows states to cover legal immigrant children and pregnant women in CHIP or Medicaid; strengthens the benefit package; and establishes a new child health quality and access initiative.

The Senate Finance Committee is expected to take up SCHIP reauthorization late this month or in early June. The Committee is expected to release and vote on a chairman’s mark (or chairman’s version) of SCHIP reauthorization legislation. It is important that reauthorization legislation fully utilizes the \$50 billion above current funding allocated by the House and Senate in their respective budget resolutions. It is also important that the legislation makes a number of programmatic improvements to SCHIP and continues to provide states the finances, tools and administrative flexibility to expand and improve health care for children for the next five fiscal years. S.1224 provides a tremendous benchmark to gauge the committee’s work.



In Pennsylvania, a number of newspapers are publishing positive editorials and op-eds calling on Congress to provide timely and meaningful SCHIP reauthorization. Recently, op-eds were published in Scranton, York, Pittsburgh, and Johnstown. More are expected to be published throughout the month of May.

Afterschool for All Challenge

Nearly 90 percent of children's and youth's time is spent outside of school. In America today, 14.3 million young people take care of themselves after the school day ends and research shows that the peak hours for juvenile crime and victimization are from 3 to 8 p.m. That's also the time that teens are likeliest to engage in risky behavior. It's critically important that our young people have access to quality, affordable afterschool programs.

To help make this happen, The Afterschool Alliance sponsored its sixth annual "Afterschool for

All Challenge" on April 23 and 24 in Washington, DC. The Challenge brought together more than 300 parents, children, educators, program providers and advocates from across the country to share their experiences and to encourage members of Congress to increase funding for afterschool programs.

The Challenge included a series of in-depth workshops exploring issues affecting the afterschool field – such as No Child Left Behind reauthorization, the challenges of providing afterschool programs in rural communities, engaging the media, and advocating for afterschool resources, to name a few.

Challenge participants fanned out across Capitol Hill to participate in meetings with members of Congress and staff. In these meetings, they discussed the benefits of afterschool programs and urged Congress to fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the chief federal funding stream for afterschool.

Federal Budget Update

House and Senate negotiators have made enough progress toward a joint budget resolution that it's possible the chambers will reach a final agreement in time for appropriations bills to start moving on the House floor the week of May 14.

The House will appoint conferees during the week of May 7 on the fiscal 2008 budget resolution. The Senate is expected to soon follow, clearing the way for a formal conference meeting to resolve differences between the House and Senate budget resolutions.

Of interest, the Senate resolution increases non-defense domestic discretionary spending by \$8 billion compared to FFY 2007 (adjusted for inflation). The House version increases spending in this category by \$14 billion. Both versions provide up to \$50 billion above baseline funding for a five-year SCHIP reauthorization.