

Report: Kids are ready for school

Results for York County children were in line with state averages.

By MICHELLE STARR
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Children in York County are about as prepared for school as others in the state, according to a report by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children released Tuesday.

The report, which gathered a variety of data from government agencies between 2000 and 2005, broke out factors contributing to a child's readiness for school.

"I'm looking at how well children are prepared to go to school and how well they do when they get there," said Joan Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. The organization strives to improve the health, education and well-being of Pennsylvania children.

The scores for York County were around the state average and didn't show any dramatic lead or lag.

Benso would prefer more child care facilities involved in a program called Keystone Stars, which tries to increase the number of accredited child care facilities.

After looking at York's results, she would prefer a greater number of high quality prekindergarten programs.

With the release of these findings, Benso said, she believed state lawmakers, community planners, parents and the public would want to talk about and support programs that help prepare students for class.

Investment in such programs has a strong rate of return, she said.

But she was pleased to see a low percentage of children without child care throughout the state and a number of York County school districts offering daylong kindergarten.

"We ran out of space, and we could not add any more full-day kindergarten," said Gretchen McFarland, assistant superintendent of Central York School District. "More parents requested full-day kindergarten than we were able to fulfill."

The district is renovating all three elementary buildings so it will be able to offer all-day kindergarten for everyone who wants it during the 2006-07 school year, McFarland said.

At Dallastown Area School District, Supt. Stewart Weinberg said school officials had addressed class size. The standard is 20 students per kindergarten and first-grade room, 22 students per second- and third-grade room and 23 students per fourth- and fifth- grade room.

But class size is not the only item of interest.

"I think there is nothing on this list of tables that we don't address or try to talk about in Dallastown," Weinberg said.

Parents who can do more with their children at home help, said Dennis Fry, director of teaching and learning at the York City School District.

"Their development and readiness for school really begins from birth on," he said. "Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of contact with the parents unless they have older siblings in the schools."

They arrive at varying degrees in York Central's district.

"All of these reports help us to understand the key factors that show up with our children, and they help us see what we need to do," she said. "We can't do anything about the causes, but we certainly can address their needs educationally when they come to us."

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