



## Early Care and Education 2010 Elections

A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids

# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

### Why It Matters

A growing body of research on brain development has helped us understand how children's early experiences from birth through age five can significantly influence later cognitive, behavioral, educational, and economic outcomes. Results from national studies on the impact of high-quality early education such as the Perry Preschool Program have shown that investments in high-quality early education can result in a return on investment as high as \$16 for every \$1 spent. <sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania-based research supports these findings.

- A three-year independent study of 10,000 Pennsylvania students at risk for poor academic performance has found that significant numbers of children, ranging in age groups and categories, showed marked improvement in early learning abilities as a direct result of enrollment in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. Nearly 7,000 high-risk children enrolled in Pre K Counts: Public-Private Partnerships programs exceeded expected competencies in basic areas at transition to kindergarten, and the skills of 5-year-olds from the program exceeded those of age peers on a nationally standardized measure of early learning in spoken language, reading, math, classroom behavior and daily living skills. <sup>2</sup>
- A Pennsylvania study found school districts investing in pre-K could recoup as much as 78 percent of their spending in pre-K in education savings. Providing targeted preschool programs could reduce special education expenditures in the state by at least 8 percent annually (\$68 million). <sup>3</sup>

Research also has shown that low-income mothers whose children had participated in high-quality child care experienced more stable employment and higher earnings. <sup>4</sup> Workforce performance of parents is enhanced and productivity improved when young children are in stable, high-quality early education settings.

Economists and business leaders have taken a hard look at the research and are increasingly convinced that high-quality early education is a sound investment -- creating a more productive workforce, stimulating the economy, and yielding significant financial returns. James Heckman, University of Chicago Economist and Nobel Laureate noted, *"Investments in high-quality early education programs have the highest rate of return of any social investment."*

### What Works

Research has shown that high-quality early education provides dramatic and long-lasting benefits. Mediocre or poor quality early education can hamper the learning, language, literacy, and social skills children need for success in school. Some of the research-based

key components of quality include program and learning standards, degreed teachers, small group sizes, low staff to child ratios, and on-site monitoring.

*High-quality early education:*

- Prepares kids for school. Children who enter kindergarten from high-quality programs have better reading, language, and social skills than their peers.<sup>5</sup>
- Increases school success and helps build a skilled workforce. Children from high-quality programs get better test scores in later grades and are likelier to graduate from high school – itself a critical indicator of the adult’s life chances.<sup>6</sup>
- Reduces the likelihood that children will get in trouble as teens. Young children who receive enriching early childhood education experiences such as nurse home visitation, quality child care and quality preschool are less likely to become delinquent as teens.<sup>7</sup>
- Prepares children for success in adulthood. Children from high-quality early childhood education programs are likelier to mature into responsible citizens – likelier to be married, with higher educational attainment and better-paying jobs.<sup>8</sup>

The facts and the research clearly indicate that it makes far more sense to “frontload” the system to assure success, rather than “backload” it to compensate for failure.

### **Where Are We Now**

Each year, thousands of children enter Pennsylvania’s kindergarten classrooms. Some are ready to learn, but many others are not. School districts will spend millions of dollars on remediation and special education costs for those “not ready” for school over the course of their academic careers. Today, more than 75 percent of Pennsylvania’s jobs require workers with education beyond high school.<sup>9</sup> What happens or does not happen in early childhood can influence a lifetime of learning and earning for every child.

### **Child Care Access and Quality**

There are nearly 10,000 regulated child care providers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania serving an estimated 130,000 children each month -- infants through school-age. Child care is provided in Department of Public Welfare (DPW) certified child care centers that typically provide care for more than ten children, certified group child care homes that can serve no more than 12 children, and registered family child care homes that care for six or fewer children.

- Access: The child care subsidy system, Child Care Works, provides support for low- income families. Parents share the cost of child care with the state and must be working, in training, or in school to be eligible for assistance. In a recent statewide poll of registered voters, 79 percent of respondents indicated that it was a good use of public dollars to continue to fund this program so that more working families can remain in the workforce. On November 18, 2009 there were 11,700 children on the waiting list and some had been there

nearly a year. The program is operated on a first-come, first-served basis. While there are no set-asides or priority policies, a percentage of funding can be used at the local level to serve teen parents. Unfortunately, in some areas these dollars are quickly exhausted.

- Provider payments: Federal guidance for the Child Care and Development Fund recommends that states set payment rates for child care providers at the 75th percentile of current market rates to help assure families can access care. Pennsylvania's child care provider rates, as compared to the 2008 Child Care Market Rate Survey, average between 29 percent of the market rate for school-age, full-time, center-based care to 51 percent for full-time, infant, center-based care.<sup>10</sup>
- Safety and Accountability in Child Care: On a national scale, Pennsylvania has some of the strongest child care center regulations in the country. Pennsylvania is also home to the nationally recognized Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS)/ Healthy Child Care Pennsylvania, a program of the Pennsylvania PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. ECELS provides technical assistance, training, and helps set health and safety standards for child care throughout the country. However, Pennsylvania ranked 45 out of 52 in a 2008 report issued by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) on the health, safety, and well-being of children in home-based child care programs. Both the scope of the regulations and the lack of oversight for compliance earned Pennsylvania that dubious distinction. Pennsylvania conducts random monitoring visits to just 15 percent of regulated family child care providers each year. Providers receive no pre-service visit and could operate for years before a DPW certification representative visits the program.
- Quality: Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania's nationally recognized child care quality improvement and rating system was launched under the Ridge-Schweiker administration. Keystone STARS is a voluntary program grounded in a set of performance standards that reflect research-based practices to improve outcomes for children; a recognition/rating system awarding a number of STARS (1-4) as programs achieve the quality standards; and a system of financial and technical support. While more than 56 percent of Pennsylvania regulated child care providers participate in Keystone STARS, fewer than 18 percent have earned the highest STAR rankings of STAR 3 or STAR 4.

### **Infants and Toddlers**

There are 438,728 children birth to age three living in Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup> Experiences in the earliest years of life play a critical role in a child's ability to grow up healthy and ready to learn. When early experiences fail to support infants/toddlers, their ability to learn, grow, and succeed is compromised. All infants/toddlers need access to high-quality, affordable early care and education, health and mental health, and family support services. Programs and services that address these areas are critical; however, they are only as strong as the infrastructure that supports them.

Pennsylvania has begun the work to identify and frame a system of coordination and support for infants/toddlers and their families, however it has had to plug these efforts into existing strategies and programs. These programs include research-based approaches designed to increase school readiness and reduce child abuse such as Nurse/Family Partnerships, Child Home Visiting Program, and Early Head Start. However, there is still a significant gap between the number of vulnerable infants/toddlers and the services to address their needs and promote healthy development. By providing high-quality care and supports for infants/toddlers, we enable parents to work and enable young children to get a strong start that will help them thrive.

### **Pre-K in Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania's support of pre-K education has developed into a mixed delivery and funding system that provides flexibility for both the state and local school districts to target services where they are needed most. State funding for pre-K includes:

- Education Accountability Block Grant enables school districts to invest in the educational programs that are proven to help children's academic achievement. Establishing, maintaining or expanding a quality pre-kindergarten program aligned with the state's current academic standards is an allowable usage of grant funds.
- Basic Education Funding Formula contained in Act 61 of 2008 includes accountability measures that require districts that receive increases greater than the Act 1 inflation index to invest the funds greater than the index in student achievement strategies. Pre-K is one of the allowable student achievement strategies

*Public schools enrolled over 7,300 pre-K students in the 2008-2009 school year using state, federal, and local revenue.*

- Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) expands Head Start services to Pennsylvania's most needy three and four year olds. In FY 2008-2009 approximately 5,700 received expanded services as a result of the HSSAP. The federal Head Start Program was established in the 1960's and provides not only high-quality, pre-K experiences for low income, high risk children, but also provides comprehensive services and supports for their families. Monthly, over 35,000 children participate in Pennsylvania's Head Start programs.
- Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, established in 2007, is delivered through a mixed delivery system of school districts, Head Start programs, licensed child care participating in Keystone STARS at STAR 3 or 4, and private academic nursery schools, and provides and supports the provision of high quality pre-K education to Pennsylvania's three and four year olds at risk of academic failure. Pre-K Counts served nearly 12,000 students in the 2008-2009 school year.

There are more than 299,500 children aged three- and four- years old in Pennsylvania. However, just 20 percent of these youngsters have access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-K. In addition, while more than 57 percent live in families with incomes below 300 percent of the federal poverty level, just 30 percent of children from these families have

access to public pre-K programs. In June of 2009, Pre-K Counts grantees compiled waiting lists of 7,800 children for the 2009-2010 school year.

Results from Pennsylvania's investment in pre-K confirm national findings on the impact of high-quality pre-K on student outcomes. In just two years, Pre-K Counts is making a difference:

- At the end of the 2008/2009 school year, nearly every child (99 percent) showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and social skills after attending the PA Pre-K Counts program. Nearly 75 percent of children who attended Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts finished the school year with age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy and social skills.<sup>12</sup>
- Many children who entered PA Pre-K Counts in 2007-2008 with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) requiring Early Intervention services no longer required services when they entered kindergarten in 2008-2009.<sup>13</sup> Of those children who participated in PA Pre-K Counts in 2007-2008, a smaller percentage required Early Intervention services in kindergarten than among the total kindergarten population.<sup>14</sup>

### **Early Intervention**

Pennsylvania has made significant inroads in creating opportunities for the Commonwealth's youngest children to develop and learn to their fullest potential. Early Intervention Services assist children with developmental delays or disabilities before they enter school by working with their parents, caregivers, and communities to build on the child's strengths and maximize their experiences and opportunities. All eligible children from birth to five with developmental delays receive services and supports that maximize their development so they are successful in any early education setting. Programs are provided for infants/toddlers with disabilities and/or developmental delays, as well as to young children three and older. Between fiscal year 2005/2006 and 2007/2008 the number of children receiving Early Intervention Services in the Commonwealth grew from 66,160<sup>15</sup> to 73,600.<sup>16</sup> In 2007/2008, 58 percent of all children in Early Intervention received their services in typical early childhood settings – child care, Head Start, preschool.<sup>17</sup> Pennsylvania's population of children in need of early intervention services is projected to continue to grow.<sup>18</sup>

### **Early Childhood Workforce**

High-quality early education programs require educated and experienced teachers. A 2005 report by the Economic Policy Institute noted that Pennsylvania had a lower share of center-based early childhood educators with a four-year college degree than in the early 1980s.<sup>19</sup> It also found that since the mid-1980's, the wages and benefits of Pennsylvania center-based early childhood educators have remained stagnant relative to those of other workers.<sup>20</sup> In 2006, researchers from Penn State and the University of Pittsburgh found that teachers with college degrees provide higher quality early education. Both child care centers and family child care homes had significantly higher scores when the teacher had at least an Associate's Degree.<sup>21</sup> In a 2008 survey of Pennsylvania child care providers, 84 percent of respondents indicated that they had problems recruiting qualified staff in the last two years. Staff turnover plagued the providers surveyed with 30 percent of respondents

reporting that employees had either left to either take positions in school districts or positions outside the early education field.<sup>22</sup>

New teacher educational requirements for early care and education programs in Pennsylvania take effect from 2010-2013, including recent changes in the Pennsylvania State Board of Education teaching certification regulations. Pennsylvania's current strategies for addressing the early education workforce include embedding a wage and retention component in its quality improvement and rating system, Keystone STARS; offering vouchers for higher education, and sponsoring the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program. However, we must ensure that career development supports continue to be in place, that higher education has the capacity to assume larger student enrollment in this field, and that teacher compensation is increased to avoid abandonment of the field once they have become more credentialed.

### **The Time is Now**

Pennsylvania has gained a national reputation for its work in building a high-quality early education system that invests in the needs of its youngest citizens today in preparation for their roles in the future. Pennsylvania's efforts have become models for states across the country including Delaware, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, but we still have more work to do.

- Pennsylvania should increase access to high-quality child care so that by 2020:
  - No low-income, working family eligible for child care subsidies waits longer than three months for service.
  - "Special populations" of low-income families including, but not limited to, teen parents, children in foster care, summer school-age child care, and sibling care are served without delay.
  - Regulated child care provider rates meet or exceed the 75th percentile based on Market Rate Survey conducted annually to assure that providers are able to maintain and upgrade quality standards and increase compensation to teachers. Financing incentives should be developed to assure high quality services are available to infants and toddlers.
  - All Family Child Care Providers are certified for compliance with Department of Public Welfare regulations and inspected at least annually.
  - Keystone Stars has adequate resources to assure that 75 percent of Pennsylvania's regulated child care providers participate in the program; with 60 percent of participating programs achieving a STAR 2 or higher rating, and more than 30 percent ranking at or above a STAR 3.
- Pennsylvania should provide research based supports to strengthen families and help parents be the first and most important teachers of their children and provide standards driven professional development to other caregivers in order to help them meet the comprehensive needs of at-risk infants and toddlers.

- Pennsylvania should increase its commitment to high-quality pre-K so that by 2020, half of Pennsylvania's 3 and 4 year olds below 300 percent of poverty will have access to high-quality publicly funded pre-K programs.
- Pennsylvania should continue to guarantee that all children, with developmental delays or disabilities, birth through five, are identified and have the supports they need to maximize their development and reach their fullest potential both in life and in learning.
- Pennsylvania should stabilize the early childhood workforce with the goal of reducing staff turnover from 43 percent<sup>23</sup> to 20 percent by expanding scholarship programs, such as the T.E.A.CH. Early Childhood Scholarship, for its early education workforce, as well as provide supports that enable early childhood education providers to hire and retain staff with higher qualifications.

A new governor's leadership will be essential in identifying strategic investments that will most benefit the Commonwealth and its citizens. Early education is a proven strategy to help ensure Pennsylvania's ongoing economic health and competitiveness. It will require commitment, concentrated effort, and a willingness to allocate the necessary resources to make sure children enter school active, curious, eager and ready to learn. Our children will be the direct beneficiaries of this investment, but many others – families, employers, and all of Pennsylvania's citizens – will benefit as well.

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