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New Report Examines College & Career Readiness of Pennsylvania Youth

PPC Releases *Preparing PA Youth for Success in a 21st Century Economy*

(HARRISBURG) – June 16, 2006 - Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today released a new report that examines whether the Commonwealth's youth are prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce. *Preparing PA Youth for Success in a 21st Century Economy*, the fourth report in the Ready By 21™ series, examines a variety of issues: Are our youth ready to compete in a global 21st century economy? Do they have the academic foundation they need to be ready for college, career and technical education or work? What are the public policies the Commonwealth needs to adopt to address these issues and ensure our students are prepared and successful?

To be successful in a 21st century economy, Pennsylvania needs a highly-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills to compete. But too many young people graduate from high school (or fail to graduate) lacking the academic foundation and competence required to be successful in postsecondary education or careers.

Young people who are preparing for more education and training or work require a similar foundation including high levels of aptitude in math and English. A key point in the report explains that all young people don't need to attend a traditional four-year college, but some form of postsecondary education is essential in order to gain the skills necessary to become competitive in the new economy. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 62% of jobs in 2005 were classified as "skilled" and required some postsecondary education as opposed to only 45% in 1991. Professional roles account for only 14% of jobs in 2005 versus 20% in 1990.

"This is a critical issue for the Commonwealth," said Joan L. Benso, President and CEO of PPC. "We need to act now to develop a public policy agenda and strategy to ensure our young people have the knowledge, skills and career guidance they need to become contributing adults and qualified workers, capable of earning family-sustaining wages one day. The fastest growing part of our job market is for skilled workers, including those who will be prepared in our technical education and associate degree programs."

Employers indicate that workers who earned 2-year college degrees are nearly equally well prepared (74%) as those who received 4-year college degrees (75%) for positions in today's workplace.

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Yet data offers a distressing picture of college and career readiness for Pennsylvania's youth. Approximately 22% of Pennsylvania public high school students fail to graduate in four years. Of those who graduate, only 41% are "college ready," according to the Manhattan Institute, a public policy think tank. Nearly 50% of 11th graders are not proficient in math and nearly 35% are not proficient in reading, making their prospects for successful postsecondary education or employment bleak.

While a large number of young people do graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education, many require remediation. In Pennsylvania, 75.5% of high school graduates plan on continuing their education. But of high school graduates nationwide entering four-year institutions, just over six in 10 earn a bachelor's degree within six years.

PPC's report states that young people need rigorous academic courses in high school to prepare them for postsecondary education and work, along with effective career education and guidance. Furthermore, in a May 2006 Issues PA/Pew poll, 85% of voters polled said being sure high school graduates have the skills they need to be college and career ready was the most important education issue.

Preparing PA Youth for Success in a 21st Century Economy outlines several action steps for Pennsylvania:

- More closely align pre-K-12 education with the postsecondary system to better prepare high school students for postsecondary success, including increasing academic rigor for all students and instituting a more appropriate uniform statewide accountability system.
- Institute effective career guidance and education programs that expose young people to the jobs of the future in real-world settings and guide students to the appropriate courses for college and career choices.
- Place a higher value on our career and technical education schools and assist them in providing a rigorous curriculum that promotes high academic achievement and advanced career and technical skills.
- Connect out-of-school youth with multiple pathways for educational opportunities that allow them to finish high school and gain postsecondary experience that builds on their skills and provides the flexibility required to meet the complexities of their life circumstances.

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children will continue to examine youth issues this year as part of its new PA Ready By 21TM initiative ensuring that young adults are ready for college, ready for work and ready for life. More information may be obtained by

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Access the report online at <http://www.papartnerships.org/resources.asp>

Funding for this report was made possible by the William Penn Foundation and The Annie E. Casey Foundation – KIDS COUNT project.

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