

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: KATHY GELLER MYERS
717-236-5680; 717-903-3716 (cell)
kgmyers@papartnerships.org

**School Readiness Report Shows Early Education on Rise for
PA's Youngest Learners**

New Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children Publication Features Gains Made
and Improvements Needed in Preparing Kids for School

Poverty and low access to high-quality child care remain widespread

HARRISBURG, Aug. 24, 2006 - Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), a nonprofit, independent organization that advocates for the health, education and well-being of the Commonwealth's children, today released its second annual School Readiness Report which details 14 of the most significant indicators of a child's capacity to enter school ready to learn, ready to succeed. Most notable were improvements in a number of key early education indicators including number of children attending pre-kindergarten (from 10,271 in 2005 to 12,023 in 2006); number of kindergartners in full-day programs (from 51 percent in 2005 to 54 percent in 2006); and Head Start enrollment (from 65 percent in 2005 to 68 percent this year).

These early education indicators hold significant relevance this election season particularly since school readiness was a major issue during the gubernatorial election four years ago. PPC's School Readiness Report examines how well PA is doing preparing its youngest learners for school. What progress has been made and how much more work still needs to be done?

The indicators - used as benchmarks to show preparedness and progress in fundamental areas of child well-being - are grouped by categories of Ready Communities and Families; Ready Services - Health; Ready Services - Early Care and Education; and Ready Schools. Of 14 indicators, the majority (eight) showed improvement; three stayed the same and three lost slight ground from last year's School Readiness Report.

(MORE)

ADD-1

"This report shows increased investments in early care and education - through subsidized child care, Head Start and Accountability Block Grant funding - that establish the groundwork for the school readiness and success of every Pennsylvania child," said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania

Partnerships for Children. “It is paramount that we focus on preparing young people for school and assuring their success when they get there.”

In addition to the early education indicators, other wellness factors that achieved gains include the number of children enrolled through the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Medical Assistance (MA); the number of children enrolled in the state’s early intervention program; and the number of child care providers enrolled in Keystone STARS, the state’s child care quality improvement system. When the pilot program began in 2003, there were 868 child care providers enrolled in STARS; in May 2006 there were 4,203 providers participating in STARS. While this is a giant step forward, the reality is only 4.8 percent of child care slots in Pennsylvania are deemed high-quality as measured by accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), or a Star 4 designation through Keystone STARS.

“We are pleased with the gains made in the last few years,” Benso said. “Clearly this shows a commitment to improving the lives of children in the Commonwealth. But with 33 percent of children 0-4 living in low-income families and 16 percent of births to mothers with less than a high school education, there is much more work to be done to ensure that every child enters school with the tools needed to thrive.”

Funding for “School Readiness Indicators -2006” was made possible by: The Annenberg Foundation; The Annie E. Casey Foundation – KIDS COUNT; the Grable Foundation; the Howard Heinz Endowments; the William Penn Foundation; and the Raymond John Wean Foundation.

To view the School Readiness Indicators fact sheet or corresponding tables pertaining to your county, visit the special report section at <http://www.papartnerships.org/sr>

More information may be obtained contacting Kathy Geller Myers at PPC at 717-236-5680.

###