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STATE BUDGET

Educators Statewide Join PDE Test to Revise Teacher Evaluations

Beginning in January, 77 Pennsylvania school districts and about two dozen other public education entities will help the Pennsylvania Department of Education pilot a new teacher and principal evaluation program.

The new system would count multiple measures of student achievement toward half of an educator's evaluation. The rest would rely on traditional practices, such as classroom observations.

"Students, parents and taxpayers deserve an educational system in which educators and school leaders are held accountable for the work being done in the classroom," said Education Secretary Ron Tomalis.

The Department of Education convened educators, businesspeople, and researchers in 2009 and began testing a revised educator assessment system in four pilot sites – three school districts and an intermediate unit – using an \$800,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Based on the findings of the first pilot, the follow-up engages more than 100 volunteer local education entities. Participants are receiving training this fall on administering the new assessments. In January, they will use the new evaluation method and provide feedback to the Department of Education, but the evaluation won't be used to determine an educator's official 2011-12 assessment.

Pennsylvania's existing evaluations of teachers and principals are based solely on observation and don't factor in student achievement. Educators are cited as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" – a system PDE says has "led to the misrepresentation of the effectiveness of educators in Pennsylvania." In 2009-10, 99.4 percent of all Pennsylvania teachers and 99.2 percent of all principals received satisfactory ratings.

The statewide pilot will give PDE field-tested feedback to incorporate into the rollout of a revised evaluation system in 2012-13.

Teacher evaluations like those being crafted by PDE can be an important part of boosting teacher effectiveness. PPC's new, statewide public awareness

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 & CEO.



Child Poverty Rises in PA

Pennsylvania’s child poverty rate worsened from 15.9 percent in 2007 to 18.8 percent in 2010 — better than the nationwide rate, but still an alarming indicator of the effects of economic downturn.

Nationwide, 21.2 percent of children lived in poverty in 2010, according to figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau in September. One child in 10 now lives in deep poverty, defined as below 50 percent of the federal poverty line — an increase of 16 million children since 2007.

Children represent 24.4 percent of the total U.S. population, but 35.5 percent of all people living in poverty and 36 percent of all those living in deep poverty.

One bright spot in the census figures: The uninsured rate for U.S. children remained level while it worsened for adults. In 2010, 16.4 million children nationwide lived in poverty and 7.3 million had no health insurance.

campaign — [MAKING THE GRADE](#) — is promoting a statewide dialogue about the importance of teacher effectiveness in raising student achievement.

Two Legislators: Use Gas Tax for Accountability Block Grant

Pennsylvania’s Accountability Block Grant, a key funding source for full-day kindergarten, would get a share of natural gas drilling taxes under a bill two state House Republicans plan to introduce.

Thomas Murt (R-Montgomery) and Gene DiGirolamo (R-Bucks) say their plan differs from the narrow “impact fee” proposals favored by the governor and other lawmakers. Their bill would distribute 29 percent of revenue to local governments, 27 percent for environmental programs, and 44 percent for statewide priorities, including ABG and human services programs and supports.

Read Murt’s and DiGirolamo’s memo on the measure at [by CLICKING HERE](#).

Co-Pays Rise for Child Care Works

Acting on a new law requiring \$16 million in co-pay increases for Child Care Works, the state Department of Public Welfare announced hikes that took effect Oct. 3.

With the increases, families will pay from 8 percent to 11 percent of income for subsidized child care. Co-pays for the lowest-income families, earning less than \$18,530, are affected the most, with increases ranging from 67 to 100 percent. For a family of three earning 150 percent of the poverty level, or \$27,795 a year, the co-pay rises from \$40 per week to \$46.

In large part, DPW adhered to recommendations of the Early Childhood Advocacy Coalition (of which Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is a part), including keeping per-family co-pays and not changing to per-child, and waiving co-pays for TANF families without earned income.

PPC Report: Work-Based Learning Creates Career Pathways

Jobs of the new economy have changed dramatically, but few young people or their families understand the education and skills needed to obtain them, concludes a new Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children report, “[PROMISING PATHWAYS TO CAREERS: WORK-BASED LEARNING FOR PENNSYLVANIA YOUNG PEOPLE](#).”

Today, 75 percent of Pennsylvania jobs require education beyond high school, and that number is expected to rise. Young people need a strong academic foundation for 21st Century jobs, with a continuum of work-based learning opportunities to learn about and prepare for potential. “Promising Pathways” examines the importance



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of effective career awareness and work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing, for middle and high school students and out-of-school youth.

The report also highlights proven and promising models that businesses, educators, and afterschool programs statewide are using to link young people with employers in quality work-based learning opportunities.

PPC has posted the report on its website along with a “[PROMISING PATHWAYS TO CAREERS TOOLKIT](#)” to help employers create quality work-based learning experiences. The toolkit includes information on identifying and contacting local work-based learning partners, elements of successful programs, how-to guides and checklists on conducting high-quality job shadows or internships, and a variety of templates. It also includes sections for local work-based learning partners and afterschool providers.

PA Among Highest-Cost States for Infant Child Care

Pennsylvania was one of the 10 least-affordable states for full-time, center-based infant care in 2010, with the cost of care taking nearly half of a single mother’s annual salary, according to “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2011 Update,” from the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies.

NACCRRA’s survey of child care resource and referral state networks also found that:

- *Child care costs are high. The average annual cost of full-time care in a Pennsylvania center in 2010 was \$11,300 for an infant and \$7,000 for a 4-year-old.*
- *Costs are high compared to household expenses. In Pennsylvania, the average annual child care center cost for an infant (\$11,300) exceeds annualized rent payments (\$8,592).*



Find the entire report by [CLICKING HERE](#).

PPC: Charter School Reform Should Increase Achievement and Assure Accountability

As policymakers consider charter school reform, PPC is recommending five guiding principles to increase student achievement and improve accountability for the public’s investment in charter and cyber charter schools. Policymakers should focus on:

- *Governance.*
- *Performance standards within charter agreements and improved fiscal and ethical accountability requirements.*
- *Expansion of high-quality charter school opportunities.*
- *Fair state policy regarding enrollment.*
- *Protection for taxpayers’ investments.*

Read details by [CLICKING HERE](#).

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Streamline CCIS Administration but Don't Cut Services for Kids, PPC Asks

The state Department of Public Welfare can improve operations and efficiencies, but services for children and their families shouldn't be curtailed in the process, PPC said in commenting on the restructuring of Pennsylvania's Child Care Information Services.

For many years, Child Care Information Services grantees "have carried out the critical role of determining income eligibility of families receiving subsidized child care services, validating rates and making payment to providers chosen by eligible families," PPC said in comments submitted to the Office of Child Development and Early Learning.

As DPW streamlines the system, care should be taken to protect and preserve the core elements of child safety, provider reliability, early learning opportunities, and public accountability, PPC recommended.

Technological advancements, including expansive broadband access, have already saved money by allowing DPW to consolidate services. As DPW seeks other efficiencies, PPC suggests the department:

- *Assure that administrative caps for grantees – the CCIS programs – not be paid for through cuts in resources for families.*
- *Use a third-party source for earned income information to reduce the need for face-to-face meetings, improve program administration, and reduce waste, fraud and abuse. If the department wants to retain face-to-face eligibility verification, the responsibility could be given to providers, who see families regularly. Subsidized child care is one of the few remaining programs requiring face-to-face eligibility verification.*
- *Place more services and information online.*
- *Assure child safety, family access to suitable care, and waiting list integrity by not outsourcing child safety, provider reliability, early learning opportunities, and public accountability components.*
- *Share information with parents and providers throughout the transition process to minimize confusion and questions.*

PDE Announces Act 1 index

The Act 1 base index for 2012-13 is 1.7 percent, up from 1.4 percent in 2011-12, Education Secretary Ron Tomalis announced on Sept. 24. The Act 1 index sets the maximum tax increases that school districts can impose without first getting approval from the courts, PDE or voters in local referenda.

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CHIP Enrollment

The CHIP enrollment increased slightly in September to 194,378. There were 16,063 children covered by CHIP who would not have been eligible prior to the Cover All Kids expansion.

Revenue Update

Pennsylvania collected \$2.3 billion in General Fund revenue in September, which was \$151.8 million — or 6.1 percent — less than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$5.8 billion, which is \$215 million — or 3.5 percent — below estimate.



FEDERAL UPDATE

Congress Funds U.S. Budget, but More Fights Lie Ahead

Congress and the White House averted a government shutdown – again – when they reached agreement on disaster relief funding in a continuing resolution that funds the government through Tuesday, October 4th. The House is expected to take up another continuing resolution that will fund the government through November 18th as part of the agreement. But more fights loom on current and future federal spending.

The Appropriations Committees in both the House and Senate are getting to work on budget bills for FY 2012 even though the fiscal year has already started. The House Appropriations Committee released a proposal to fund the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Education. The bill would eliminate the Race to the Top program, provide some increases to Title I grants to school districts, special education funding and Head Start, while maintaining the funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program and 21st Century Learning Centers at the FY 2011 level. The House Republican budget proposal would prohibit the Obama Administration from spending any money on the health care reform law until all legal challenges are resolved.

More details on the House’s proposal are [AVAILABLE HERE](#).

The Senate Appropriations Committee, on the other hand, approved its bill to fund the same departments but with different priorities. For instance, the Senate bill includes almost \$700 million for Race to the Top. It maintains funding for Title I, special education and CCDBG, but includes a smaller increase for Head Start than the House proposal. Access more detailed information on the Senate bill by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Meanwhile, a 12-member Select Deficit Reduction Committee, including U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA), must produce a plan by Nov. 23 to slash \$1.2 trillion from the budget over the next 10 years. The lack of a plan would trigger automatic, across-the-board cuts. Members are sparring over whether to raise taxes or reform the tax code, and many analysts say any proposal that doesn’t raise revenue would have to severely cut Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security.

Reauthorized Child Welfare Law Could Open Door to PA Waiver

Congress approved the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, reauthorizing the child and family service programs under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act and renewing the Title IV-E state child welfare waiver authority for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

President Obama signed the bill on September 30th.

PPC urged Pennsylvania’s congressional delegation to support the legislation and avert expiration of Title IV-B programs, including the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program, to help prevent child abuse and neglect.

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PA Education Secretary Might Not Seek NCLB Waiver

President Obama says states can opt out of No Child Left Behind’s requirement that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014, but Pennsylvania Education Secretary Ron Tomalis said he might not seek a waiver.

Under the White House plan, states could substitute NCLB requirements with their own standards for preparing students for college and careers and evaluation standards for teachers and principals. Students still would have to take yearly reading and math tests, but administration officials said the emphasis will shift to measuring growth over time.

Some in Congress accuse the president of injecting politics into education just in time for the 2012 election, but Obama said he is acting because Congress has failed to correct NCLB’s flaws.

Tomalis said he hesitates to seek a waiver because of the possibility that Obama could lose re-election and a new U.S. education secretary in 2013 might revoke the waivers.

“Prevention efforts are essential to keep kids safely with their families and avoid the need for more costly out-of-home placement,” PPC wrote to members of Congress. “It is important to note that Title IV-B programs are the only federal programs focused on not only preventing child abuse and neglect, but also providing services to families once a finding of abuse or neglect is substantiated.”

Under the new law, states can apply for Title IV-E waivers, “so funds traditionally spent on foster care can be used to strengthen efforts to serve more children in their homes,” PPC stated. Pennsylvania is well positioned to win a waiver because recent policies and programs – including the bill of rights for children in foster care, and efforts to reduce the use of congregate care – are improving the foster-care system. Even without a waiver, Pennsylvania has reduced the number of children in foster care by 20 percent, but a disproportionate share of children and youth still remain in congregate settings.

Report: Block Granting Medicaid Could Hurt Kids

Letting states spend Medicaid funds through less-restrictive block grants could reduce services for children and increase out-of-pocket costs for parents, First Focus reported in “Block Grants are Bad for Kids.”

Medicaid is a safety net for America’s children, but some negotiators in Washington’s deficit-reduction committee are proposing a block grant that could cause states to reduce enrollment, limit benefits, cut provider payments, and shift more costs onto children and families, the report said.

“The evidence is clear that a Medicaid block grant will only exacerbate the impact of the ongoing recession, increasing our nation’s uninsurance rates and deepening state budget crises,” said First Focus President Bruce Lesley.

[CLICK HERE](#) to download the full report.

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