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STATE BUDGET

PPC on Health Insurance Exchange: Expand Kids' Access to Health Care

Pennsylvania children should have access to an expanded array of coverage and services through the state's upcoming health insurance exchange, PPC testified before a state Insurance Department hearing.

The department held hearings in August in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and the Philadelphia area to collect input on building the exchange required under the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso testified in Harrisburg that a strong exchange doesn't just enroll kids but also enhances their health. Benefits and access to care should be designed to ensure that children receive all necessary physical and behavioral health care services. As coverage numbers grow, provider networks should expand so children promptly get the primary, preventive, acute, or specialty care they need. "Having an insurance card doesn't guarantee access to health care services," Benso said.

Additionally, Benso's testimony called on the Insurance Department to ensure that:

- *Parents find the exchange easy to access, use, and understand. Access to information and supports should be available online, by mail, in person, by phone, and through multiple entry points such as government offices, hospitals and health care sites, and neighborhood locations. Trusted sites such as faith facilities and community-based organizations should be able to help families apply.*
- *Enrollment and renewal systems be streamlined and seamless, to assure maximum participation by all eligible children in Medicaid, CHIP, other subsidized coverage, or unsubsidized coverage. Applications should be simple, and end dates should be coordinated to avoid gaps in coverage when program eligibility changes.*

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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.



New Law Could Mean Medicaid Co-Pays for Some Families

The omnibus law authorizing the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) to make changes to eligibility for assistance programs, [ACT 22 OF 2011](#), requires DPW to charge co-pays for services provided to disabled children in families above 200 percent of federal poverty levels, but details are unavailable.

Currently, children with disabling physical or behavioral health conditions whose family incomes exceed 200 percent of poverty — or \$44,700 for a family of four — qualify for Medical Assistance under the “family of one” rule. That rule counts only the child’s income to determine eligibility, and families don’t pay monthly premiums or co-pays for medical services.

Act 22, enacted on June 30, directs DPW to charge co-payments for services for these children. However, details such as amounts, services covered, and when co-pays take effect are unclear. PPC will provide updates as they become available.

- Coverage be of high-quality, appropriately financed, and accountable to the public. Out-of-pocket expenses for premiums, deductibles, and co-pays should be reasonable and maintain Pennsylvania’s commitment to avoid cost sharing for children in families with income up to 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines.

A vibrant exchange also requires a “robust outreach component” that guides potential enrollees to places where consumer help is available, Benso said.

Find information about the exchange by [CLICKING HERE](#). For detailed principles on implementing PPACA [VISIT HERE](#).

OCDEL Budget Holds Line on Some Services but Forces Cuts in Others

Like many state programs, children’s programs under the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) saw cuts in the 2011-12 budget. OCDEL recently released some general information related to the impact of the budget cuts on its program areas:

- The same number of children and families served in Early Intervention, Keystone STARS, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Child Care Works.
- Partially funded T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, for 160 recipients with the fewest remaining credits toward earning a degree. Most recipients are expected to graduate this year.
- Co-pay increases for families receiving Child Care Works, and reductions to non-traditional rates for providers.
- Fewer children served than the 11,500 originally projected in the governor’s budget proposal by PA Pre-K Counts and 5,500 by Head Start Supplemental. OCDEL says it is “making every effort to limit the impact on direct services to children and families.” Exact enrollment figures are not yet publicly available.
- Partial funding restored for the Parent-Child Home Program to continue service in five high-risk or moderately high-risk counties where families have no alternative access to a Family Center or Nurse-Family Partnership program.



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Governor Issues Budget Development Guidance for FY 2012-13

Guidance to state agencies for the development of FY 2012-13 budget requests include significant potential changes for education and how funding is distributed. The program policy guidelines (PPGs) direct the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to propose a plan for the reporting of school attendance data in real time and aligning funding with actual enrollment.

Current school enrollment figures come from annual counts done on Oct. 1 and are nearly two years old by the time they're used to calculate state education spending. Changing to a Florida-style system that gathers data quarterly would "tighten the link between education funding and student needs," said Secretary of the Budget Charles Zogby in an interview.



In addition to a real-time student enrollment count, the PPGs call on PDE to revise the annual financial reports (AFRs) submitted by school districts to "reflect actual spending at the school level" and work with the Governor's Budget Office to develop a weighted student funding approach for education. The proposed changes to the AFRs reflect the concern that the resources provided to support students, especially those with educational challenges, are actually used in the buildings that house the students. It is important to note that the basic education funding formula adopted in 2008 also included a weighted student funding approach for basic education, but failed to include weights to reflect the higher costs associated with funding special and gifted education.

With regard to early childhood education, PDE and the DPW have been tasked with addressing the Commonwealth's early childhood programs, including: Pre-K Counts, Head Start Supplemental Assistance, Child Care Services and Child Care Assistance. The guidance points out that each program "has different eligibility requirements, standards of performance, and costs." The two departments will work together to "assess the issues and identify the most pressing needs, evaluate existing programs and rationalize the spectrum of early childhood programs."

In general, the PPGs call for state agencies to identify efficiencies, assume level funding for general government operations and discretionary programs, offset new or increasing funding and not request any additional state funding to replace lost or reduced federal funds.

2011 KIDS COUNT: PA Child Well-Being Improves, but Economic Outlooks are Bleak

Pennsylvania rose slightly on the child well-being scale, from its longstanding spot as 23rd among states to 20th, but the recession is taking its toll on children and families, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book.

About 10 percent of Pennsylvania children lived in households last year where at least one parent was unemployed. Nationally, nearly 8 million children lived with at least one unemployed parent in 2010 – double the number in 2007.

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The rate of teens not in school and not working grew from 6 percent to 8 percent from 2010 to 2011. More than 21 percent of Pennsylvania's teenagers – nearly 35,000 – failed to graduate with their class in 2010, and today, there are more than 100,000 high school dropouts ages 16 to 24 in Pennsylvania.

“For every step forward for kids, there's been a step backward,” said PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso. “We know Pennsylvania children and families continue to feel the effects of the recession.”

The 2011-12 Pennsylvania state budget cut nearly \$40 million from child care, which will have a grave impact on child care subsidy, and gave the Department of Public Welfare discretion to modify eligibility and increase child care co-pays.

“Pennsylvania lawmakers should prioritize funding that helps parents work and take care of their children, not take away this kind of support,” Benso said. “We have serious concerns that this new rule-making authority will have a negative impact on children if eligibility for child care is cut.”

Find the Data Book by [CLICKING HERE](#). For interactive Pennsylvania KIDS COUNT data, [VISIT HERE](#).



PPC Launches *Making the Grade*



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children launched a new project in August – *Making the Grade: Effective Teaching in Every Classroom*.

Making the Grade strives to create awareness about the importance of an effective teacher in every classroom and advance the public policy agenda required to assure that every child benefits from an effective teacher every school day.

Pennsylvania can improve teacher effectiveness by:

- *Designing a more effective evaluation system for teachers that includes student achievement coupled with observation.*
- *Using the new evaluation system to inform school district decisions such as teacher assignments, individualized professional development, compensation, tenure, retention and dismissal.*
- *Creating and utilizing incentives to ensure the most highly effective teachers serve the highest needs students.*
- *Expanding efforts in teacher induction and mentoring programs.*
- *Developing career pathways for teachers.*

A groundbreaking teacher effectiveness initiative is under way in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and U.S. Department of Education. The state Department of Education is leading a pilot project in the Allentown, Cornell, and Mohawk Area school districts and Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5, and up to 100 school districts and local education agencies are

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Pennsylvania's Children's Health Insurance Program

CHIP Enrollment

CHIP enrollment decreased to 194,130 in August. There were 15,716 children enrolled in CHIP who would have not been eligible before the Cover All Kids initiative.

Revenue Update

Pennsylvania collected \$1.8 billion in General Fund revenue in August, which was \$63.1 million, or 3.4 percent, less than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$3.5 billion, which is \$63.1 million, or 1.8 percent, below estimate.

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being sought to help refine the tools used in the pilot and develop a new teacher evaluation system.

Find details and PPC's inaugural report, "Teacher Effectiveness and Student Achievement," by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Pennsylvanians Carry High College Debt Loads

Pennsylvania's college graduates are entering the work world – if they find jobs – with average debt loads of \$27,000, according to a report from the Keystone Research Center and New York-based advocacy group Demos.

Pennsylvanians' average debt load is the nation's seventh highest, and the state also has the sixth-highest number of indebted college graduates, the report, "Under Attack: Pennsylvania's Middle Class and the Jobs Crisis," found.

The debt load compounds a long list of barriers to middle-class status for young adult Pennsylvanians – lack of jobs, declining wages, higher tuitions, and disappearing employer-provided health coverage and retirement plans.

The report cited child care as a major expense for young families. Full-time, center-based child care costs \$12,388 for infants and \$8,704 for 4-year-olds.

Find the report [HERE](#).

PA Gets So-So Grades for Academic Rigor

The rigor of Pennsylvania's academic standards for reading and math in 2009 were within national standards of "basic" performance but in the middle of the pack among all states, according to the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress from the National Center for the States.

The NAEP provides a consistent yardstick for measuring rigor among states' widely varying academic achievement tests. Pennsylvania was 15th most rigorous in fourth-grade reading, 32nd in fourth-grade math, 27th in eighth-grade reading, and 18th in eighth-grade math.

The report also found that 37 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above NAEP proficiency in reading and 46 percent in math. Among eighth-graders, 40 percent achieved proficiency or above in both reading and math.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is trying to heighten rigor, said department spokesperson Tim Eller. "We want to be ahead of the curve," said Eller.

Find the report [HERE](#).

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Federal Grant Supports Chester County Health Coverage Outreach

The Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County is among 39 agencies nationwide awarded a total of \$40 million by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to identify and enroll children eligible for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

The consortium received \$875,814 to target uninsured children of Delaware Valley immigrants. The goal is expanding a successful outreach and enrollment model in Chester County to Philadelphia, Delaware, and Montgomery counties through the 11-partner Maternity Care Coalition.

The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) of 2009 authorized the two-year grants. Nationwide, the total number of children eligible for coverage rose from 2008 to 2009, but uninsured children declined from 4.7 million to 4.3 million, in part due to outreach and enrollment efforts, according to a new study from the Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

FEDERAL UPDATE

Debt Ceiling Agreement Could Mean Cuts in Children's Programs

Immediate and future cuts to children's supports are possible from the deficit reduction deal brokered in Washington in early August.

The nick-of-time agreement between the White House and Congress allowed the president to pay bills by raising the nation's debt ceiling by up to \$900 billion. In exchange, Congress got caps – meant to cut the U.S. deficit by \$1.2 trillion – on annual discretionary spending through 2021.

Details on the spending cuts remain unclear, but children's programs represent 20 percent of non-defense discretionary spending. The provision could mean cuts in key children's investments.

The agreement also included a process to achieve further deficit reduction before the end of the 2011 calendar year. A Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction will recommend another \$1.5 trillion in cuts over 10 years, while the president has authorization to raise the debt ceiling by another \$1.5 trillion. If Congress doesn't cut the full \$1.5 trillion, triggers would force automatic cuts of \$1.2 trillion, starting in January 2013. The mandatory cuts would be divided evenly between defense and non-defense programs. Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, and foster care funding would be exempt at that point, but nothing prevents the Select Committee from recommending cuts in those areas.

Select Committee member U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA) said he supports tax-code reforms, including elimination of special-interest loopholes, but opposes tax hikes to raise revenue. He also said he'll seek changes in the entitlement programs he calls "long-term drivers" of the deficit.

"If we make some reforms in a sensible and thoughtful way that makes sure that... our current seniors are taken care of, that vulnerable people are fully protected, I think if we do this carefully, there should be common ground," he said.

Half of Young U.S. Kids Get Daily Reading, Census Bureau Reports

Half of 1- to 5-year-olds in the U.S. were read to seven or more times a week by a family member in 2009, the U.S. Census Bureau reports.

Families below poverty saw improvements – from 37 percent of 1- and 2-year-olds who were regularly read to in 1998 to 45 percent in 2009. Reading

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interactions were higher but stagnant among families above poverty, unchanging at 56 percent over the same period.

The Census Bureau also reported that:

- *57 percent of children talked or played with a parent three or more times in a typical day, up from 50 percent in 1998.*
- *Children eating dinner with a designated parent daily rose from 69 percent in 1998 to 72 percent in 2009.*
- *More children heard praise from parents three or more times a day – 57 percent, up from 48 percent in 1998.*

Guidelines Help Judges Better Serve Abused and Neglected Children

Children removed from their parents for abuse or neglect allegations experience better outcomes when judges follow a set of decision-making guidelines during the initial removal hearing, according to a study from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ).

In partnership with Casey Family Programs and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NCJFCJ member judges are working to reduce overrepresentation of children of color in the foster care system and their disparate outcomes. A national NCJFCJ initiative, Courts Catalyzing Change: Achieving Equity and Fairness in Foster Care (CCC), led to development of a benchcard containing the guidelines.

Forty-five percent more children returned home to parents or went to live with extended family members when judges used the benchcard during their hearings, according to a study tracking more than 500 children in Los Angeles, California, Omaha, Nebraska, and Portland, Oregon.

“Parents were more engaged, (and) child welfare workers were prepared with better and more complete information about the family’s conditions and circumstances,” said Portland Judge Nan Waller. “We were able to drill down to specific barriers that prevented the child from remaining at home and to meaningfully engage parents in fashioning solutions to keeping families together safely.”

Judges in the benchcard pilot sites were trained on its use, including key decision points at preliminary protective hearings. Researchers found that use of the benchcard, compared to a control group not using the benchcard, was associated with increases in the quality and quantity of discussion at the hearings.

Before benchcard implementation, 12.6 percent of children were returned home at the initial hearing, compared to 17.3 percent after benchcard implementation. Reunification rates also increased after implementation of the benchcard at later adjudication hearings.

The benchcard study has not yet examined the impact of the hearing guidelines on different racial and ethnic groups, but the NCJFCJ is expanding its research.



Obama Administration Releases Final Application for Race To The Top-Early Learning Challenge

The Obama Administration has released the final application for the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), which will provide \$500 million in state-level competitive grants to improve early learning and development programs.



The goal of RTT-ELC is to better prepare more high-needs children for kindergarten. The administration notes that, despite benefits in improved children's health, development, and cognitive abilities, the U.S. lacks a coordinated system for improving and evaluating early learning and development programs and sharing best practices across programs and states.

In their applications, states must demonstrate commitments to building coordinated systems, aligning resources and policies, and increasing access to high-quality early learning and development programs for children who need them most. RTT-ELC's five reform areas will focus on:

- *Building on states' existing strengths and coordinating programs across agencies to ensure consistency and sustainability beyond the grant.*
- *Defining high-quality, accountable programs by creating common-tiered quality rating and improvement systems.*
- *Developing common standards and assessments that measure child outcomes, address behavioral and health needs, and inform, engage and support families.*
- *Providing professional development, career advancement opportunities, appropriate compensation, and a common set of standards for workforce knowledge and competencies.*
- *Using data to inform early learning instruction and services and to assess whether children are entering kindergarten ready to succeed in elementary school.*

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the funding "will leverage best practices and pave the way to reinventing early education in the United States." Grants will range from about \$50 million to up to \$100 million. Applications are due Oct. 19, and the departments of Education and Health and Human Services will announce winners in December.

See the application and learn more at by [CLICKING HERE](#).

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