

# Partnerships

## Message from the President

### Putting Kids at the Core, Election '10

A governor administers. A governor guides. A governor strives for common ground and, as the state's CEO, often takes the fall when things go wrong.

I remember a news conference, years ago, when Gov. Tom Ridge announced an expansion of CHIP. Two things were remarkable about that event. First, he was a Republican governor proudly taking the torch from his Democratic predecessor, Gov. Robert P. Casey, Sr., and spending precious political capital on the health of children.

Second, the event was held at a Harrisburg-area children's health center. Hardly anything new, of course. After all, politicians kissing babies constituted the original photo op. But someone handed Ridge a baby and as the governor of Pennsylvania answered reporters' questions, he held the baby in his arms and gently rocked back and forth.

Clearly, he loved holding that infant. And he loved being governor. Pennsylvania's governor can affect so many lives. He can't cradle each baby individually, but he can protect them in a collective hug with the policies he offers and priorities he sets for his administration.

A governor knows the needs of citizens take precedence, and a true leader listens to the voters. That's where you come in. This issue of

*Partnerships* is devoted to the issues that matter for kids. Some are longstanding but require vigilance to keep at the forefront, like early childhood education. Others are emerging as critical elements in the well-being of young Pennsylvanians and the state's prosperity, such as re-engaging dropouts. And some, like the needs and well-being of foster children, must be discussed in the light of day because they've been in the shadows too long.

Our lives are busy and free time is often scarce, but I do hope you'll take a few minutes to read this issue of *Partnerships* to learn about key policy matters that affect the health, stability, and education of children in Pennsylvania. And, please remember to vote November 2!

Thank you,  
Joan L. Benso  
President and CEO



## FirstSteps PA: High-Powered Coalition Keeps Early Childhood on the Front Burner

### The Problem: Maintaining Momentum

Pennsylvania has moved from a bottom state to a leader in early childhood education (ECE). Just 10 years ago, Pennsylvania was one of nine states without a public investment in pre-kindergarten. Today, Ohio, New York, West Virginia, and other states emulate Pennsylvania's funding and program models that have improved the quality of early education and given tens of thousands of children – many of them at risk of school failure – access to high-quality child care and pre-K.

Does that mean it's time to put ECE on autopilot?

No, says a new coalition of statewide organizations devoted to raising the visibility of early learning issues this fall and partnering with the next governor's administration to keep building a high-quality early learning system.

The First Steps PA campaign, found at [www.firststepspa.org](http://www.firststepspa.org), is the largest voter education and registration effort of its kind ever launched in Pennsylvania. The coalition includes more than 1,200 members representing approximately 22,000 professional staff who provide service each day to more than 200,000 children across the state. More than 300,000 parents are relying on them each day to assure their children are well cared for and have the opportunity to learn, grow and develop.

The benefits of high-quality early education are well-documented. Children from high-quality care and education are ready to learn and do better in school. As teens, they're likelier to avoid trouble and earn high school diplomas. As adults, they're likelier to be married, attain higher education levels, and hold better-paying jobs.

But we have a long way to go to assure all children in our state have access to these programs that can truly shape their lives: Consider this:

- Only 30 percent of Pennsylvania's income-eligible 3- and 4-year-olds have access to publicly-funded pre-K;
- Nearly 24 percent of children birth to five are enrolled in regulated child care. However, only 16 percent attend Keystone STARS-rated child care programs that have earned a Star 3 or 4 – the highest rankings;
- In fall 2009, the child care waiting list of 16,000 children was cleared, but that was due to one-time federal stimulus funds. Now, the list is back to 6,500. Research shows that low-income mothers whose children are in high-quality care have more employment stability and higher earnings. That's a plus for employers.

Other signs that early education in Pennsylvania hasn't yet reached its full, positive-outcome-yielding potential: low payment rates for child care providers, little oversight of a program meant to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children in home-based child care, stagnating

wages and benefits for early childhood educators, and high turnover among facilities that lose staff to better-paying jobs in school districts or other fields.



First Steps Pennsylvania  
Focus on Early Learning

### The Solution: Focus on Early Learning

First Steps PA believes that 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.

see **FirstSteps** on back page

## Operation Restart Motivates Dropouts to Try Again



### The Problem: Dropouts Drain Resources

Every machine has an on/off switch, but humans aren't so simple. When they turn themselves off – by dropping out of high school, for instance – it seems impossible to turn them back on again.

That's why Operation Restart ([www.operationrestart.org](http://www.operationrestart.org)) is driving dropout re-engagement onto the election-year agenda. Pennsylvania suffers from the lost power of dropouts when coordinated strategies could harness their energy and turn it into good things for employers, families, communities and state revenues.

Pennsylvania is home to nearly 110,000 people, ages 16 through 24, who dropped out of high school before earning diplomas. And last year, more than 34,000 additional young people did not graduate with their classes. That's 190 students every school day.

Research shows that, compared to high school graduates with some postsecondary education or associate's degree, dropouts:

- Earn nearly 40 percent less, \$21,358 compared to \$34,100 a year;
- Are more than twice as likely to be unemployed, 10 percent versus 4.4 percent;
- Are nearly four times more likely to live in poverty, 30.1 percent versus 8.4 percent.

Each dropout consumes \$683 more every year in taxpayer-funded assistance programs than he or she contributes in taxes. Compare that to the person with a high school diploma and some postsecondary education or associate's degree who contributes \$9,485 more in taxes each year than services consumed.

Dropouts cost our economy nearly \$74 million a year when they could contribute more than \$1 billion. That's a significant loss at any time, but especially when falling state revenues lead to program cuts and layoffs.

Employers lose out, too, because more than 70 percent of today's jobs in Pennsylvania require education beyond a high school diploma. Employers could abandon Pennsylvania if workers don't have the skills or credentials needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.

### The Solution: Operation Restart

Operation Restart is a statewide advocacy campaign to develop and advance a public policy agenda to ensure all young people to age 25 who lack a secondary credential have access to high-quality educational options that lead to a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials preparing them for a career with a self/family sustaining wage.

Operation Restart Campaign partners developed the following public policy agenda to re-engage high school dropouts in their education:

#### State-Level Agenda

- Under the auspices of the Governor's Policy Secretary, convene a cross-departmental workgroup that includes relevant secretaries and/or senior staff to analyze cross-system data and develop a dropout re-engagement strategy to assure high school dropouts have opportunities to re-engage in quality programs that lead to high school and postsecondary credentials.
- Ensure dropout and re-engagement data (such as graduation rate, dropout rate, student achievement data, on track to on-time graduation rates for 9th graders, number of dropouts who have re-engaged) is measured and reported by school districts and all other providers of dropout re-engagement initiatives.

#### Local Partnerships

- Develop and/or sustain local youth workforce collaboratives supported with state and federal funds to conduct community-wide assessments to analyze the dropout population – including their level of educational attainment and the social service needs of this population – and create

cross-sector comprehensive plans to improve the educational attainment of dropouts.

#### Education Models

- Provide dedicated funding for the creation of small, recovery-focused high schools for over-age and under-credited dropouts, including the use of charter and alternative schools.
- Create incentives for school districts to re-engage high school dropouts by providing "bonus aid" over and above the Average Daily Membership (ADM) subsidy for each dropout that is re-engaged.
- Create incentives for Career and Technical Centers to develop and offer re-engagement programs that blend academics, occupational skills and access to part-time employment. These incentives may also be "bonus aid" over and above the Vocational Average Daily Membership (VADM) subsidy.
- Support Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) programs to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of high school dropouts by providing additional opportunities through the Distance Learning Project and GED programs to incorporate transitions to postsecondary education.
- Create incentives for dropout re-engagement programs that develop and implement evidence-based, targeted strategies to increase the education attainment levels and address the needs of specific populations such as youth aging out of foster care, pregnant/parenting teens, English-language learners and juvenile offenders, who drop out of high school at disproportionately high rates.
- Amend Pennsylvania's dual enrollment legislation to increase opportunities for high school dropouts to participate by increasing the set-aside for this population and by expanding effective dropout re-engagement models that can participate.
- Assure re-engagement programs are rigorous and require young people to demonstrate proficiency in the core academic standards using common assessments such as Pennsylvania Keystone exams, National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exams, and approved Ability To Benefit (ATB) exams such as ASSET, Career Programs Assessment (CPAT), COMPASS and Accuplacer so they can benefit from student financial aid programs. Students without a U.S. high school credential are eligible for financial aid programs if they take and pass an approved ATB exam.
- Assure re-engagement programs provide competency-based awarding of secondary and postsecondary credit. Utilize the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Prior Learning Assessment initiative to assess knowledge and skills acquired outside of the classroom for the purpose of granting postsecondary credits.
- Assure that any public policies to make college more affordable for Pennsylvania's young people, including all state and federally funded programs, include funding for high school dropouts to enhance their educational attainment.

#### Support Services

- Establish local/regional re-engagement centers – perhaps utilizing the Commonwealth's CareerLinks – to provide assessment, counseling and referral services to high school dropouts.
- Authorize tax credits for employers who provide part-time employment to former dropouts who have re-enrolled in educational programming.
- Designate local or regional governmental offices, such as County Assistance Offices or CareerLinks, to coordinate support services for dropouts who re-engage in educational programming.

Pennsylvania's next governor can and should make dropout re-engagement a state priority for high school dropouts to re-engage and earn a high school diploma or GED and postsecondary and/or industry credentials that prepare them for productive employment in a 21<sup>st</sup> century occupation.

## One Piece of the Puzzle: Affordability

### The Problem: Rising Tuition

College degrees and postsecondary education are a must in today's knowledge-driven job world. And yet, Pennsylvania is the sixth-most expensive state to attend college, and our college graduates are saddled with debt loads averaging \$25,000 – the seventh-highest average in the nation. Between 1984 and 2006, while family income increased 147 percent, the cost of college rose a whopping 439 percent.

Young people who attend college have higher earnings and pay more taxes, are likelier to be employed, and are less likely to live in poverty.

About 390,000 18 to 24 year olds in Pennsylvania live in households at 200 percent of poverty or less – families of four earning less than \$44,100 a year. For all income groups, sending a child to a community

college takes 29 percent of average household income. State System and state-related schools take 41 percent. And sending a child to a Pennsylvania private college drains 87 percent of household income.

It's critically important that all students, including the economically and educationally disadvantaged, have the opportunity to go to college and are encouraged to attend.

### The Solution: Index Tuition

Pennsylvania should make college more affordable by indexing the share of tuition that a student or family would pay at community colleges, PASSHE

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universities or state-related and private institutions (if the PASSHE tuition level and transfer credits will be accepted) based on income. The plan should provide tuition assistance to students from low- and middle-income families (earning up to \$100,000 a year). However, it's important that young people and their families also contribute. Therefore, the plan should require everyone to pay something, based on their income, and the minimum payment should be \$1,000 per year. Requiring all students to pay something toward their education will help to ensure that they do not take the opportunity for granted and will work hard and persist to earn their degree.

So for example, if a student is attending a PASSHE university (or a participating state-related or private institution), and the student is from a family earning less than

\$32,000, he or she should be required to pay \$1,000 a year to attend; if the family earns \$45,000 a year he or she should pay \$2,250; and if the student is from a family earning \$75,000 a year, he or she should pay \$9,250 a year.

As for a student attending one of the Commonwealth's community colleges, if the family earns \$45,000 a year, the tuition payment should be \$1,000; and if the student is from a family earning \$75,000 a year, he or she should pay \$3,000 a year.

Ideally, the tuition relief would be available to all schools willing to take the state set reimbursement or subsidy so that every college student in Pennsylvania could benefit.

No young person should be denied the opportunity to attend college because of financial barriers.

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## Promoting Permanent Families for Children in Foster Care

### The Problem: Children Languishing in Foster Care

More than 31,000 children were in Pennsylvania's foster care system in 2008 – more than enough children to populate a city the size of Johnstown – and yet, state laws and regulations aren't aligned with their best interests. Though many good, dedicated people work on behalf of those children, the system in which they toil doesn't incentivize the safety, permanency, and well-being of kids.

Every child deserves a forever family and a loving, nurturing home, but a child funneled into Pennsylvania's system spends a median 16 months in foster care. More than one-third of those in the system between one and two years experience three or more placements. Half of youth 13 and older in foster care live in group homes and institutions.

In Pennsylvania, an African-American child is more than six times likely to be in foster care than a white youth; and a Latino youth is more than three times likely to be in foster care than a white youth.

Furthermore, only 22 percent of children in foster care are placed with their relatives. Nearly half of children in Pennsylvania's foster care system are 13 and older, but only 19 percent of adoptions out of foster care involve teens.

The federal government requires that Pennsylvania's foster care system promote children's safety, permanency, and well-being. But state and federal funding for operations – administered by counties and largely provided by private agencies – doesn't incentivize those outcomes.

### The Solution: Advance Critical Child Welfare Reforms

It is time that Pennsylvania does more to safely reduce the number of children in Pennsylvania's foster care system by assuring a legal and permanent family for every child:

- *Pennsylvania should structure foster-care financing to spend taxpayer dollars more effectively. Counties could get more money for adopting evidence-based practices that reduce child abuse and neglect and help more children transition into permanent families. A recent poll found that 82 percent of registered voters believe that such incentives are good public policy. More funds should also be devoted to in-home and community-based services to reduce reliance on foster care, and savings from this shift could be reinvested in improving the system and preventing the child abuse and neglect that put children on the path to foster care.*
- *Require county children and youth agencies to engage in family finding efforts – the diligent search and recruitment of relatives and extended kin including both maternal and paternal family members in order to keep children safely in their family networks.*
- *Assure that all families involved in the child welfare system have the opportunity to engage in family conferencing - a process that helps families identify resources, identify challenges, and develop action plans to address the underlying reasons the family has become known to the child welfare system or reason the child/children are not safe.*
- *Create a legal means to establish formal and enforceable post-adoption contact agreements between birth and adoptive families in cases deemed appropriate by the courts.*
- *Allow the courts to reverse the termination of parental rights for a child who remains in foster care without another permanent family for three or more years when deemed appropriate and when will aid in successful reunification with the birth family.*
- *Assure that children in foster care and their birth parents receive appropriate legal representation.*
- *Require a minimum of three-month permanency review hearings by the courts for all children in foster care.*
- *Establish a foster care bill of rights for children.*
- *Increase the use of reunification, adoption and legal guardianship as permanency goals for children in foster care and create criteria which limit and decrease reliance on the permanency goals of emancipation and long-term foster care (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement).*
- *Require county children and youth agencies to collect and annually report information on the race and ethnicity of children and families at the point of referral, investigation and acceptance for child welfare services.*

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## K-12 Education: Progress Made but More Work to Do

### The Problem: Inadequate State Funding and Support for Teachers

One of the most important factors influencing the future success of any child – and ultimately our nation's economy - is the quality of education received. Children who have the advantage of rigorous schooling and develop knowledge, skills, creativity and determination will carry this Commonwealth and our nation forward as a leader in a global economy. We must prioritize their preparation for a complex world and a knowledge-based economy.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has achieved significant headway in student achievement. In fact, the Center for Education Policy (CEP) reports that between 2002 and 2008, Pennsylvania was the only state in the nation to make comprehensive academic gains. Examining reading and math performance, CEP found in its report that Pennsylvania was the only state to:

- *Reduce the percentage of students performing at the lowest achievement ranking;*
- *Increase the percentage of students who are at least on grade level; and*
- *Increase the percentage of students who are at the highest achievement level.*

State assessment scores also bear out the positive work students and schools are putting into meeting the academic requirements set forth by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Seventy-eight percent of Pennsylvania's public schools met adequate yearly progress in 2009. This is a 6 percent increase since 2008. Additionally, 73 percent of all students performed at or above grade level on the PSSA, compared to just over 51 percent in 2002.

The success of Pennsylvania's students and schools coincides with Pennsylvania's investments in public education over the last eight years that focus on providing resources for strategies proven to increase student achievement. But even with all our success, Pennsylvania still has new mountains to climb to provide sufficient funding to school districts and ensure all students meet academic achievement targets.

While basic education funding has realized significant victories over the past few years, that doesn't mean the economic recession hasn't presented new obstacles. The good news is that Pennsylvania now has a school funding formula based on the principles of adequacy, equity and accountability and a statutory goal to review and meet state funding targets by 2014. The bad news is that current state funding levels stand below what was appropriated in FY 2008-09. Federal funds have filled the gap, but they expire at the end of this fiscal year.

In order to grow and sustain Pennsylvania students' achievement in coming years, we cannot abandon the strategies or investments which have led to our students' success. And at the same time, we must also look to ensure that the people charged with cultivating students' academic growth and tapping their potential have adequate supports throughout their careers, but also early teaching experience.

### The Solution: Maintain Commitment

#### School Funding

Pennsylvania must continue to maintain our commitment to the basic education funding formula and invest necessary resources to close the state share of the adequacy gap as well as provide adequate funding for students with special needs. The basic education formula neglects to take into account children who require special education services. Resources aren't everything, but experience and our recent success shows us they make a difference.

#### College & Career Readiness

Recent support by state policymakers and the State Board of Education has paved the way to implement a system of academic supports and common-sense accountability to ensure all students achieve. But to ensure that educators receive those supports and accountability is improved, elected officials must now support the continued development of voluntary model curricula, diagnostics to identify struggling students no later than sixth grade, mandatory supplemental instruction for students who don't meet academic standards, and aligned end-of-course assessments in 10 academic areas through annual appropriations.

#### Teacher Effectiveness

One important element of the equation to drive educational attainment and college and career readiness is teacher effectiveness. Teachers are the ones most responsible for helping students achieve and yet a targeted strategy to attract talent to the

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classroom (as well as retain, promote and reward teachers) by encouraging professional growth has been lacking.

This year, a new movement is encouraging all stakeholders, including teachers and policymakers, to discuss adopting and implementing proven teacher-effectiveness strategies. In Pittsburgh Public Schools, a \$40 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is challenging all teachers and administrators to make teaching the best it can be.

Statewide, a range of elements could address the many facets of a nuanced issue. A more effective evaluation system, based on multiple measures, could recognize excellence. Professional development could be individualized, for example, helping new teachers in the difficult early years of their careers and helping high school teachers master core subjects. Incentives would encourage the most effective teachers to serve the lowest performing students (instead of assigning the most effective teachers to the highest performing kids) for fairer distribution of effective teachers.

## Afterschool Programs Promote Healthy Development, Save Money

### The Problem: Kids Unsupervised

When we think of children, we often think of them in the classroom, and yet 90 percent of their time is spent out of school. Nationwide, the number of children left alone after the school day has risen to 15.1 million since 2004. In Pennsylvania, 26 percent of children spend an average of seven hours a week caring for themselves. These unsupervised children are at risk of academic and behavioral problems and substance abuse.

But with supervised afterschool activities, children are less likely to drop out of school, get arrested, smoke cigarettes, or use drugs. Every \$1 spent on afterschool activities can save \$2.50 on crime prevention alone, and up to \$12.90 on child care, school spending, and welfare.

### The Solution: Linkages

Pennsylvania has many high-quality afterschool programs, but only 9 percent of children are enrolled. A recent legislative study recommended establishing a Statewide Afterschool Coordinating Council to develop quality guidelines and performance measurements, create quality improvement incentives, promote collaboration and public-private resource sharing, develop models for staff recruitment and retention, and connect youth in high-need communities to quality programs.

Afterschool programs provide opportunities for extended learning, career exploration, and social and emotional growth. A 2009 report from the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee recommended the Commonwealth establish a Statewide Afterschool Coordinating Council to better align state government efforts.

## Growth in Children's Health, but Gaps Persist

### The Problem: Coverage Still Lacking

Pennsylvania's lawmakers long ago set aside partisan differences and united around health care coverage for children. Kids with health insurance are much likelier to be immunized, get regular check-ups, and see a doctor promptly for common ailments such as ear infections and asthma. Because children with health insurance are more likely to avoid preventable childhood illnesses, they generally have better school attendance and better school performance than the uninsured.

The Commonwealth is among a select few states that make health coverage available to all children who do not have access to or cannot afford it through a combination of CHIP and Medicaid. Together, CHIP and Medicaid insure about 1.3 million children; this is 46 percent of all children in Pennsylvania.

While kids here have access to coverage, often that coverage isn't comprehensive enough to fulfill a variety of needs, such as medically necessary orthodontia for children with chronic conditions including cleft palates or other jaw or facial abnormalities.

### The Solution: Comprehensive Coverage

The Commonwealth must ensure that all children who do not have access to or cannot afford private health coverage - including special populations such as pregnant and parenting teens and foster youth aging out of the system - continue to have access to health insurance through Medicaid and CHIP. Medicaid coverage is an entitlement, but CHIP coverage depends on the amount of annually appropriated funds. Pennsylvania is a leader among states when it comes to children's public health care coverage. But we can continue to enhance the Commonwealth's standing in the nation and improve children's health by making health coverage comprehensive enough to suit a variety of active children's needs.

### FirstSteps *continued from page 1*

- Pennsylvania should stabilize the early childhood workforce with the goal of reducing staff turnover from 43 percent to 20 percent by expanding scholarship programs, such as the T.E.A.C.H. 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.

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### Partnerships

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