

# School Readiness in Pennsylvania

## School Readiness Indicators - 2006

School readiness is an issue that gained prominence during the 2002 gubernatorial election when both candidates expressed support for pre-kindergarten and other school readiness strategies. As we head into this election season, it is valuable to reflect on how far we have come, but it is even more important to ask, “What specific steps will every candidate for Governor, U.S. Senate, Congress and the PA General Assembly take to guarantee that all Pennsylvania children enter school ready to learn?”

The landscape continues to change with new or existing commitments to children’s health insurance, parenting education and family support strategies started during past administrations. But, the big news in this report card are the landmark investments Pennsylvania has made in early care and education – child care, Head Start, the Accountability Block Grant and significant increases in basic and special education funding – that are serving as a critical foundation to improve the school readiness and success of every Pennsylvania child. And the recently passed 2006/07 budget included a \$50 million increase for ABG over the current fiscal year bringing the total appropriation to \$250 million as well as additional increases in child care, Head Start, home visiting and children’s health programs. We are hopeful next year’s School Readiness Report will include even more positive changes.

### Where are we now?

Already there is growth in the number of children in pre-K and full-day kindergarten, plus the number of child care providers enrolled in Keystone STARS, the state’s child care quality improvement system.

In recent years, PA has grown from having only 29 percent of its kindergarteners in full-day programs to almost 55 percent this year, due to the creation and increased funding of the Block Grant. Despite this progress, Pennsylvania still trails the nation; about two-thirds of all American kindergarteners are in full-day programs.

When Keystone STARS began as a pilot program in 2002/03, 868 child care providers were accepted into the initial group. In May 2006, there were 4,203 providers participating in the STARS program. In 2002/03, 106 of these providers received the highest star 4 rating. This number had swelled to 354 in May. While the number of high-quality spaces for young children in child care settings is still quite low as compared to demand, the pipeline to increase quality has exploded. Keystone STARS is a very important initiative in establishing and rewarding programs that meet the highest standards in quality care of the Commonwealth’s children.

### What’s next for Pennsylvania?

The recently passed 2006/07 budget included funding to resource the “Cover All Kids” proposal designed to make health insurance available to every uninsured child in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, budget negotiators did not agree to the implementing legislation to facilitate the expansion of CHIP; this legislation will have to wait until the fall session when hopefully it will pass quickly. The “Cover All Kids” proposal sent a strong message that some policymakers understand that health coverage is an important component of school readiness. Hopefully, action this fall will demonstrate a commitment by all policymakers. Children who have coverage are more likely to be immunized, receive regular check-ups and get prompt treatment for common childhood ailments such as asthma. Children who are uninsured have poorer health and miss more school than their insured peers, reducing their academic achievement.

Pennsylvania clearly has made strides in the past few years that show we are heading in the right direction, but it will require more time and more investments in these strategies to promote and support school readiness that will have a lasting impact on all of our youngest learners.



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Indicators	Significance	2005	2006	Change Type
<b>Ready Communities and Families</b>				
<b>Children Living in Low-Income Families</b> Children ages 0-4 who live in households earning less than 200% of the federal income poverty guidelines or \$40,000 for a family of four.	Children living in poverty are more likely to have poor nutrition, chronic health problems, be less prepared for and have more difficulty in school.	1 in 3	1 in 3	Stayed the Same
<b>Births to Mothers with Less than a High School Degree</b> Percent of all births where education is known.	Children living with mothers with low education level are less likely to receive cognitive stimulation and high-quality child care and more likely to have diminished reading skills.	16.2%	16.4%	Lost Ground
<b>Child Abuse and Neglect</b> Substantiated cases of abuse and neglect for children 0 thru 4.	Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are more likely to perform poorly in school, have lower IQ scores, and have difficulty with language ability. They are likelier to have social, emotional and physical health problems.	900	870	Made Improvement
<b>English Not the Primary Language Spoken in the Home</b> Percent of children ages 0-4 living in families where English is not the primary language spoken at home and English is not spoken "very well."	Children living in homes where English is not the primary language spoken are more likely to enter school with lower math, reading, and general knowledge assessments.	3.2%	3.2%	Stayed the Same
<b>Ready Services - Health</b>				
<b>Children Lacking Health Insurance</b> Percent of children 0-4 who are uninsured.	Children who are uninsured are less likely to access primary health care services that can prevent or address chronic or acute health conditions. Lack of health care or delays in treatment can negatively impact cognitive, emotional, behavioral and physical development. Uninsured children are more likely to miss school and have diminished academic achievement.	3.9%	3.9%	Stayed the Same
<b>Children Funded by Public Health Insurance</b> Percent of children ages 0-4 who are covered through Medical Assistance or the Children's Health Insurance Program.		42.4%	43.7%	Made Improvement
<b>Children Born at Low Birth Weight</b> Percent of babies born weighing under 2,500 grams.	Babies born at low birth weight are likelier to die in the first year of life, have disabilities and health problems that can include developmental delays, visual and hearing impairments and chronic respiratory ailments. They may have trouble with social skills and show higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, physical disabilities and hyperactivity and aggression.	8.1%	8.7%	Lost Ground
<b>Ready Services - Early Care and Education</b>				
<b>Early Intervention</b> Number of children birth to the age they begin school enrolled in the state's early intervention program.	Early intervention is designed to assist children with developmental delays or disabilities before they enter school by working with their parents, caregivers and communities to build on the child's strengths and maximize their experiences and opportunities. Early intervention services help improve children's school readiness.	60,059	63,020	Made Improvement
<b>Head Start Enrollment</b> Percent of eligible children ages 3 and 4 enrolled in Head Start.	Head Start, a comprehensive preschool program for children living in poverty, has demonstrated positive impact on school readiness and school success.	68.1%	69.6%	Made Improvement
<b>Public School Pre-K Enrollment</b> Number of children attending pre-K in Pennsylvania's public schools.	High-quality pre-K helps improve the school readiness of young children by enhancing their social, emotional and cognitive development. Children who attend high-quality pre-K enter school more prepared and achieve greater success, including fewer grade retentions, less remediation and higher standardized test scores.	10,271	12,023	Made Improvement
<b>High-Quality Child Care</b> Availability of high-quality child care (NAEYC and NAFCC accredited or Keystone Stars 4) for children 0-4 in need of child care services.	Children who receive high-quality child care show better literacy skills and score higher on tests of both cognitive and social skills than children cared for in other arrangements. High-quality early care and education programs have demonstrated a strong return on investment.	3.9%	4.8%	Made Improvement
<b>Access to Child Care Subsidy</b> Number of slots for infants, toddlers and preschool children in the state's subsidized child care system.	The availability of child care subsidies to low-income families increases the opportunity for them to access high-quality care for their children enhancing their school readiness and increasing the likelihood that parents remain employed.	66,407	78,388	Made Improvement
<b>Ready Schools</b>				
<b>Pre K-3 Class Size</b> Percent of students in pre-K through third grade in school districts and charter schools in classes with 17 or fewer students.	Children who are in classes of 17 or fewer students in kindergarten through third grade score better on standardized achievement tests than their peers in larger classes.	16.8%	16.3%	Lost Ground
<b>Full-day Kindergarten</b> Percent of kindergarteners in district and charter schools who attend full-day programs.	Students who attend full-day kindergarten score higher on achievement tests, experience fewer grade retentions, require less remediation and special education, are more involved in learning, and are better behaved than students in half-day programs. These students make more successful transitions to first grade.	51.2%	54.6%	Made Improvement

Detailed source information available on-line at [www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org)