



**Pennsylvania
Partnerships for Children**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Early Education in PA Takes Giant Leap Forward in 2007
State Still Has Room to Grow in Improving Child Care Access & Quality
PPC Releases its 2007 School Readiness Report**

(HARRISBURG), Sept. 13, 2007 – Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today released its annual report on *School Readiness in Pennsylvania*. The publication highlights key indicators that illustrate the health, education and well-being of our youngest learners. The indicators are divided into four categories that measure school readiness: Ready Communities & Families; Ready Services – Health; Ready Services – Early Care & Education; and Ready Schools. This report and the indicators shown were designed to give policymakers and community leaders the information they need to measure the outcomes of their investments and to target resources for the future.

The report indicates that investments in school readiness programs have reached an all-time high, due in part to the implementation of the Commonwealth's "Cover All Kids" CHIP expansion and the growth of early learning programs. With the passage in July and recent implementation of Pre-K Counts, more children than ever before have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten this school year leading to even stronger gains next year. However, despite the gains, more needs to be done to provide access to child care (more than 8,000 children are on the waiting list to receive subsidized child care) and improve the quality of child care (only 4.1 percent of the child care available in the Commonwealth is of the highest quality).

"Without a doubt this is a positive report card for Pennsylvania," said Joan L. Benso, President & CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. "The Commonwealth clearly is taking important steps to improve the school readiness of our youngest learners and should continue its successful investment strategy in the years to come. We look forward to releasing this report annually so policymakers, parents and the public can see how far we've come – and what more needs to be done."

(MORE)

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While there was slight improvement in availability of high-quality child care (from 3.8 percent in 2006 to 4.1 percent in 2007), the reality is that more than 95 percent of child care in Pennsylvania is not of the highest quality, defined as NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and NAFCC (National Association for Family Child Care) accredited or Keystone Star 4 rating. 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.

“While passage of Pre-K Counts in July enabled 11,000 new children to start pre-kindergarten classes a few weeks ago, it’s just the tip of the iceberg in creating access to high-quality early education for all 3- and 4-year-olds in Pennsylvania,” Benso added. “We need to grow this investment and build on the victory achieved this year.”

Furthermore, while passage of “Cover all Kids” last year expanded eligibility for CHIP and created an opportunity for every child in Pennsylvania to have access to health insurance, that opportunity hangs in the balance as Congress works to reauthorize SCHIP, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, by the Sept. 30 deadline. The Bush Administration – while threatening to veto reauthorization – also compounded the situation by releasing a directive a few weeks ago that said states cannot sign up any new enrollees until they have enrolled 95 percent of eligible children under 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines. This move threatens the future of “Cover All Kids” in Pennsylvania which raised income eligibility limits to insure children whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, yet still don’t make enough to afford private, employer-based insurance.

More information may be obtained by visiting www.papartnerships.org or by calling Kathy Geller Myers, PPC Communications Director, at 717-236-5680, kgmyers@papartnerships.org.

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