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ABSTRACT

Based on the view that the first years of school continue an educational process that began at birth, this report presents the first comprehensive look at learning opportunities for young children in Pennsylvania. The report describes programs in Pennsylvania for children from birth through 8 years of age, providing details on funding, eligibility, and participation. The report's introduction discusses the importance of melding disparate early learning opportunities into a comprehensive system that results in children who achieve and delineating state budget allocation for various state programs. The report is then presented in seven sections, each describing programs, analyzing the current situation in Pennsylvania, and proposing policy directions for improvements. The sections are: (1) child care; (2) early intervention; (3) preschool; (4) reading readiness and success; (5) kindergarten; (6) first through third grades; and (7) educational enrichment. Each section contains endnotes. (KB)

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Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

From Building Blocks to Books:

Learning from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania

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Mission Statement

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is a strong, effective and trusted voice for improving the health, early education and well-being of the Commonwealth's children.

Funding generously provided by the Howard Heinz Endowment, with additional research, data collection, and analysis by Pennsylvania KIDS COUNT and State Fiscal Analysis Initiative staff.

From Building Blocks to Books

Learning from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania

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INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

From Building Blocks to Books: Learning from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania

Milestones of Learning:

The infant reaching for the mobile dangling over the crib.

The toddler patting the bunny in the picture book.

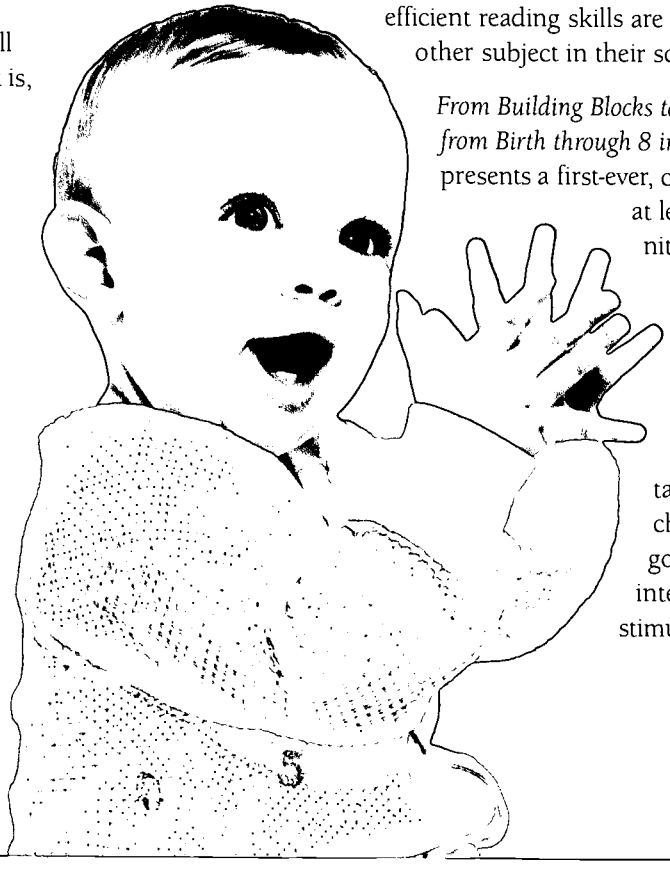
The preschooler counting to 10.

The kindergartner writing her name.

The first grader sounding out a new word.

The third grader reading a book and learning something new about dinosaurs or dancers or baseball or volcanoes.

A classroom can't contain all the learning in the world. It is, instead, the place where education coalesces, the bridge between learning experiences of the past, present, and future. Longstanding tradition had placed the beginning of education at kindergarten, but we know now that tremendous amounts of learning occur from birth, when the young brain absorbs new experiences and builds the mental pathways of thought.



The first years of school, then, actually continue an educational process that began at birth, when children started building a catalog of basic knowledge to anchor learning for the school years – and lifetime – to follow. By the end of third grade, the path to success or failure in school has been charted for most children, much of it depending on the student's ability to read. "Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life... [T]he early childhood years – from birth through age eight – are the most important for literacy development," says the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. In essence, students who do not learn efficient reading skills are blocked from every other subject in their schooling.

From Building Blocks to Books: Learning from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania presents a first-ever, comprehensive look at learning opportunities for young children. It is a resource book, with details on funding, eligibility, and participation in programs targeted at young children, with the goal of safe, healthy, intellectually stimulating

development. One key indicator of program success should be that all children read at grade level by the end of third grade.

In Pennsylvania, early learning programs are gaining bipartisan support from the governor's office and the legislature, and from citizens who fear the high price of sentencing another generation of children to educational exile. But words of support have not come together into a comprehensive, carefully constructed early learning approach, despite glaring warning signs of the danger ahead – particularly, the failure of one-quarter of Pennsylvania's fifth graders to achieve basic proficiency on the 2001 standardized reading test. If ever there were a wake-up call, that should have been it. The long-term impact will touch us all. Without action, Pennsylvania remains in danger of losing its competitive edge in the global marketplace because young children who can't read well won't learn to their full potential and are unlikely to enjoy a productive adulthood.

Early Learning Opportunities

From Building Blocks to Books compiles learning opportunities – and learning gaps – that surround children in their formative years. The report covers:

- **Child Care:** Pennsylvania children receive child care in a realm of settings ranging from the informal to the regulated – from the grandparent who provides care one day a week, to the child care center operating under state oversight. Some is of very high quality, enriching the days of young children with the sights and sounds that exercise curious young minds. But quality isn't assured, and without exposure to educational activities while spending many of their daytime hours in child care, children lose valuable opportunities to learn.
- **Early Intervention:** Through Early Intervention, any young Pennsylvania child with marked developmental delays or disabilities can receive services tailored to maximize their learning abilities and help families manage their unique challenges – a prime example of upfront investments to reduce costs later.
- **Preschool:** Pennsylvania's status as one of nine states that fails to invest in preschool is another example of opportunity lost. Research clearly delineates the educational and societal advantages of quality preschool options, especially for at-risk children who might otherwise not get the chance, but Pennsylvania continues to stall in making the investment.
- **Reading Readiness and Success:** State and federal investments in reading readiness and reading success have ballooned recently, as policymakers grasp the critical role that reading skills play in educational achievement. But investments are scattered among state agencies, without any coordinating mechanism to reduce overlap or plug service-delivery holes.
- **Kindergarten:** The first year of formal schooling sets the stage for the years that follow. For Pennsylvania's at-risk children, full-day kindergarten can be especially beneficial in lifting grades and achievement measures, but availability remains limited because the state doesn't fund it.
- **First through Third Grades:** Third graders who are good students, and especially those who are good readers, are firmly on the path to success and are less likely to need a costly – and often ineffective – game of catch-up later. Although the primary grades, as they're known, must be available for all children, the quality of their educational offerings varies widely, in part because of Pennsylvania's inequitable school funding system.
- **Educational Enrichment:** Children don't spend all their time in school, but educators and communities must consider the out-of-school hours for two reasons: because some children need extra tutoring help to manage academic challenges, and because structured after-school programs can offer safe, supervised learning and recreational activities while parents work.

Each early learning program or service can offer valuable educational opportunities in the prime learning years. Unfortunately, they don't fit together, jigsaw puzzle-style, to form a coherent picture. Instead, they often are disconnected and inconsistent. The disjointed approach contrasts with Pennsylvania's well-managed commitment to other issues of child well-being, such as health coverage – widely accepted as a wise investment because of the benefits it returns and the consequences it prevents. In early learning, despite the benefits of investments and the consequences of neglect, Pennsylvania has been slower to commit to improving quality and availability for all children and has failed to effectively meld its disparate early learning opportunities into a comprehensive system that results in children who achieve.

Principles of Policy

Each program description in this book concludes with policy directions for improvements. But the policy directions share common threads that can be sewn together into an effective early learning approach:

- Invest up front to save money later and, more importantly, help assure children's educational success.
- Partner with parents, to enhance their natural teaching abilities, educate them about their children's developmental needs, and help them be their children's most effective teachers.
- Target government resources first to the children most in need – low-income and at-risk children whose educational prospects may be hampered by a lack of learning opportunities that middle- and high-income children are more likely to encounter.
- Grow to scale. Pilot programs are effective ways to test new ideas, and small investments make differences in individual lives, but failure to fully implement an effective early learning approach creates about as much impact as pouring a teacup of water into the ocean.
- Implement research-based practices. Studies reveal the best methods for teaching reading and encouraging learning, but in Pennsylvania, scientific principles aren't systematically applied to program development, or to teacher credentials and professional development. Other investments are not evaluated for their effectiveness, leaving no assurance that tax dollars are accomplishing their assigned job.
- Set program standards, regularly measure for success and make adjustments as warranted. Far too often, programs begin with a sound premise, but we fail to monitor them effectively and make midcourse adjustments to assure long-term impact.
- Take steps to more formally connect elementary schools to professionals and agencies serving at-risk children, giving students a continuum of learning and addressing their individual needs.
- Better coordinate early learning programs among state agencies, communities, schools, and other service providers, to maximize investments by properly utilizing existing resources, filling gaps where no resources exist, and best meeting the needs of children.

Helping Children Enter the World of Learning

Young children love to learn. To them, the world is fresh, and each day offers so many new things to do – chase a butterfly, build a cardboard playhouse, learn a letter. While the desire to learn still burns, the window of opportunity is wide open for parents, teachers, and policymakers to fill children's days with opportunities to explore.

In Pennsylvania, some of the pieces are there, and some are not. Those that we have are often disassembled, like a puzzle in a box. In short, some children get, and some don't. The unfairness manifests itself all too clearly by the time children complete third grade. Children who started well – because their parents and their communities provided strong learning opportunities – are likeliest to keep learning. Children who somehow fell behind, who didn't get to enjoy their prime learning years because somebody – a parent or a policymaker – did not make learning a top priority, are likeliest to straggle and, ultimately, fail.

Every child should be marked for success from the start. Pennsylvania has the resources to do it. With careful planning and strategic investments, Pennsylvania can tie together its disparate early learning opportunities, so that every young child, in every neighborhood and every family circumstance, grows in a world filled with the wonders of learning. □

State and Federal Spending on Early Learning Opportunities in Pennsylvania

Not counting basic and special education, where spending is not broken down by grade, Pennsylvania invests about 2.5 percent of its annual state/federal budget ($34.4 billion in 2001-02, and $35.6 billion proposed for 2002-03) on early learning opportunities.

	2001-02 (in millions)	Governor's proposed budget 2002-03 (in millions)
Child Care (birth-8)*	$ 328.110	$ 349.663
TEACH	$ 1.500	$ 1.750
Keystone Stars	$ 0.000	$ 6.000
PHEAA Loan Forgiveness	$ 0.100	$ 0.000
Child Care Startup (DCED)	$ 10.500	$ 10.000
Child Care Capacity (DPW)	$ 3.000	$ 6.000
Child Care Health and Safety (DPW)	$ 3.000	$ 5.000
Child Care Quality (DPW)	$ 3.000	$ 5.000
Child Care Planning (DPW)	$ 1.000	$ 4.000
Cyberstart	$ 10.000	$ 10.000
Early Intervention Birth-2	$ 87.600	$ 97.800
Early Intervention 3-6	$ 103.655	$ 104.032
Head Start	$ 209.346	$ 220.600
Family Literacy	$ 19.707	$ 19.707
Parent Child Home Program	$ 3.000	$ 3.000
Read to Succeed	$ 25.000	$ 15.000
Reading Excellence Act	$ 10.000	$ 0.000
Reading First	$ 0.000	$ 28.000
Family Centers	$ 10.055	$ 10.055
I Am Your Child	$ 0.993	$ 4.008
21st Century Community Learning Centers	$ 15.153	$ 26.697
Classroom Plus	$ 23.600	$ 23.600
K-Second Grade Screening***	$ 0.000	$ 1.800
SUBTOTAL	$868.319	$951.712
Percent of state/federal budget devoted to early learning opportunities *without basic and special education*	2.52%	2.67%
Basic Education (K-12)**	$ 3,959.885	$ 3,999.484
Special Education (K-12)	$ 1,226.553	$ 1,279.712
TOTAL SPENDING	***$6,054.757***	***$6,230.908***
Percent of state/federal budget devoted to early learning opportunities *plus basic and special education*	17.60%	17.50%

* Based on a Department of Public Welfare survey of children from birth through age 8 in child care.

** Pennsylvania does not account for education spending by grade.

*** Funding to develop a reading assessment tool.

CHILD CARE

Child care should be safe. Everyone agrees to that. But the quality of the experience – any inherent learning opportunities in the day – is left to chance and the provider's resources. Without exposure to educational activities in the child care day, children lose valuable opportunities to learn and expand their young minds.

Child Care in Pennsylvania

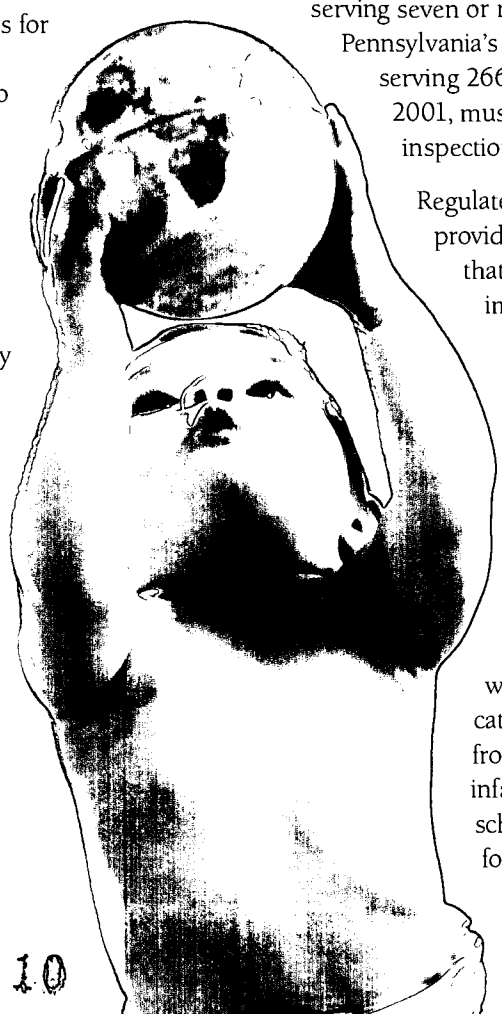
Child care is care outside the home for children, ages birth to 15, while parents work. Pennsylvania children receive care in a realm of services ranging from the informal to the regulated – from the grandparent who provides care one day a week, to the child care setting operating under state oversight. Though the presence of informal arrangements makes a total count difficult to collect, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children estimates that 859,550 Pennsylvania children, ages birth to 8 – the children covered by this report – were in some form of care every day in 2000.

The number of children in regulated care every day, however, is known – 299,659 children from families of all incomes, as of January 2001. The state Department of Public Welfare (DPW) recognizes three types of facilities:

Family day care homes offer care for four to six children not related to the provider in the provider's home. Family child care providers are registered – not licensed – with DPW, and are "self-certified." DPW annually inspects a few of Pennsylvania's 4,149 family child care providers, which served an estimated 24,894 children in January 2001.

Group day care homes are licensed by DPW, caring for seven to 15 children not related to the provider in a home or other setting. To maintain licensure, group child care providers – there were 727 in Pennsylvania in January 2001, serving 8,555 children – must be inspected every year.

Day care centers are usually based in facilities serving seven or more children. Pennsylvania's 3,786 child care centers, serving 266,210 children in January 2001, must also undergo yearly inspections to maintain licensure.



Regulated child care facilities must provide nutritious meals, ensure that enrolled children are immunized, meet state health and safety standards (while facilities in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Scranton must also meet local codes), and provide learning opportunities, although state guidelines don't specify the extent of educational activities. Required staffing ratios, which apply to all three categories of facilities, range from one staffer for four infants, to one for 10 preschoolers, and one for 15 fourth graders and older.

Families can also use legally unregulated child care programs, such as neighbors or relatives caring for three or fewer children not related to the provider, or baby sitters and nannies providing care in the parents' home. Though legally unregulated, these providers can receive child care subsidy payments from DPW.

In Pennsylvania, some low-income families and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients can get help through Child Care Works, the state's subsidy program (see page 11).

Resources for Professionals and Consumers

Low pay and high turnover plague Pennsylvania's child care system, deflating quality by subjecting children to rapid turnover and teachers untrained in their developmental needs. Annual turnover ranges from 31 percent for teachers, who earned an average of $16,556 in 1999, to 51 percent for aides, who earned $11,427.[2]

Child care employees' education requirements depend on the job they hold:

- Child care center directors must have a bachelor's or associate's degree in early childhood education, child development, special education, elementary education or human services, or 30 credit hours in those fields within the degree, plus experience working with children ranging from one year to four, depending on the degree.
- Assistant directors of child care centers and supervisors of group day care homes must have a high school diploma or GED, plus 30 hours of college credit in early childhood education or 15 hours of college credit and one year of experience with children, or a high school diploma and two years of experience.
- Teachers and group supervisors at child care centers need a bachelor's degree or an associate's

Fact Box

Child Care

- **Definition:** Care outside the home for children, ages birth to 15, while parents work.
- **Participation:** An estimated 859,550 Pennsylvania children, ages birth to 8, were in some form of child care every day in 2000.[1]
- **Availability:** In family day care homes, group day care, and child day care centers, all state-regulated and classified by the number of unrelated children served; in legally unregulated care, such as neighbors or relatives who are not regulated by the state but who qualify for state subsidies; and in informal arrangements.
- **Oversight:** Regulated care is overseen by the Bureau of Child Day Care Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.
- **Funding:** $425.5 million in 2001-02, from a combination of state and federal funds: $237.2 million from the federal Child Care Development Fund, $118.5 million in state funds, $34 million in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, $31 million from the federal Social Services Block Grant, $2.5 million in Food Stamp/employment and training funding, $2 million from TANF for Head Start full-day/full-year programs, and $300,000 in federal Head Start Child Care Collaboration project funds.
- **More information:** County Child Care Information Systems, found through the state's Child Care Works helpline, 1-877-4-PA-KIDS, or at www.dpw.state.pa.us/ocyf/childcarewks/ccwccis.asp.

degree with up to three years of experience working with young children.

- Group home assistants and child care aides must have a high school diploma or GED, or an eighth-grade education coupled with training in DPW regulations or two years of experience working with children.

Several public and private programs offer teacher training and professional development incentives, but their impact on quality is limited by their small scope:

- The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps program, or TEACH, provides scholarships and help with books and travel costs for child care staff to earn college credits in early childhood education. Employers, who must sponsor participants, must also contribute 10 percent of costs. Child care staff must work a minimum number of hours per week, take nine to 15 hours of course work a year, and work for the provider for one year after graduation. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare oversees the program, funded with $1.3 million in 2001-02. Since 1998, 1,350 workers have participated in TEACH, and more than 744 of the state's estimated 35,000 to 45,000 child care workers participated in 2000-01.

- Under the Early Childhood Education Professional Loan Forgiveness program, child care teachers may qualify for forgiveness of up to $10,000 in Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency loans. The $100,000 program serves only 54 child care teachers – and faces elimination from the 2002-03 state budget.

- The Keystone University Research Corporation provides free or low-cost professional development training to all child care staffers through the Pennsylvania Pathways Program, but its scope is limited. The program counted services to more than 80,000 people in 2001, but many people received multiple services.[3]

The positive link between quality child care and "virtually every measure" of a child's development is "consistent and ubiquitous" in the research into the effects of child care, says the National Academy of Sciences. But high-quality programs are scattered and unaffordable for low-income families and those who struggle economically but don't qualify for aid.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics' Early Childhood Education Linkage System offers health and safety training, technical assistance, and resource materials to child care providers.

For providers and planners, four regional Child Care Resource Developers (CCRD) are charged with expanding and improving child care. They offer technical advice, needs assessment, and seed money that helps providers grow. Independent regional organizations under contract with DPW, CCRDs help businesses answer employees' questions and guide community planners in addressing service gaps. The CCRDs help DPW direct its Child Care Local Planning Grants, which counties use to identify and address local needs. In 2001-02, the state awarded 27 grants, totaling $1.4 million, to 35 counties, and in 2002-03, the state has proposed funding for the remaining 32 counties.

The state also helps providers with start-up costs and facility and quality improvements:

- The Department of Community and Economic Development's capacity-building challenge grants to start a new center or expand the number of children served. In 2001-02, DCED awarded 24 grants, totaling $10 million.

- Capacity grants from the Department of Public Welfare to fund training, accreditation, and supports for children with special needs, and specialized services for infants and toddlers. By the middle of 2001-02, the $3 million program had awarded $1.4 million to 310 programs, with the balance to be committed by June 30, 2002.

- Health and safety grants from the Department of Public Welfare, ranging from $1,000 to $5,000, to meet local and state regulatory and program requirements. By the middle of 2001-02, the $3 million program had awarded $1.1 million to 346 programs, with the balance to be committed by June 30, 2002.

- Small Business First loans from DCED – low-interest loans, up to $200,000, to help small businesses start or expand in designated distressed communities.
- CyberStart from the Departments of Community and Economic Development and Public Welfare, to help child care centers access information from the Internet and develop educational programs for preschoolers. Funded with $1.6 million in state and $8.4 million in federal funds in 2001-02, the program provides computers, software, hardware, Internet access and training to licensed child care centers and group child day care homes. CyberStart is serving 1,500 programs and eventually expects to reach all of the state's 4,000 providers.

Local economic development agencies can also get grants for two or more businesses to offer child care services to employees.

Parents at all income levels can get help finding child care, subsidized or not, through each county's Child Care Information System (CCIS). CCIS resource and referral counselors can determine a family's eligibility for subsidized child care and provide information about child care programs near parents' homes or workplaces.

Funding

Parents choose child care for a variety of reasons. Quality through attentive, educational care is one, but so are convenience, location, and cost. High-quality care can cost $12,000 a year, according to the Children's Defense Fund, but the average cost for non-accredited care was $3,609 – a gap that's too wide for many families to bridge. Low-income

Fact Box

Child Care Works

- **Definition:** Child Care Works is Pennsylvania's initiative to provide safe, affordable child care for low-income working families.
- **Eligibility:** Families working at least 25 hours a week, with incomes through 200 percent of poverty – up to $35,300 annually for a family of four – including those receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Families can remain in the program until income reaches 235 percent of poverty, or $41,477 for a family of four. Children are eligible from birth through age 12, or through 19 if they have mental or physical disabilities.
- **Participation:** About 44,000 children from low-income families, plus 17,992 children formerly enrolled in TANF and about 34,000 current TANF enrollees, as of October 2001.[4]
- **Availability:** Parents can use any state-regulated or licensed provider, or legally unregulated provider, who accepts state subsidies.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Child Day Care Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families, Department of Public Welfare.
- **Funding:** $189 million in state and federal funds on subsidized child care services for low income, non-TANF eligible families, plus $196 million in subsidies for TANF and former TANF families in 2001-02. Another $40 million is spent on local planning grants, quality and capacity grants, resource and referral services, provider training, and extended-day/extended-year programming.
- **More information:** The Child Care Works helpline, 1-877-4-PA-KIDS, or www.dpw.state.pa.us/ocyf/childcarewks/ccwchildcareworks.asp.

families, in particular, devote 16 percent of their yearly salaries to child care, compared to 10 percent for middle-income families.[5]

While child care is essential to assure that parents of young children can join the workforce, parents are forced to disproportionately bear the burden of child care's high cost. According to Education Week, parents shoulder 60 percent of all child care costs, federal, state, and local governments combine to pay another 39 percent, and the private sector pays the remaining 1 percent.

Pennsylvania invested $425.5 million in child care in 2001-02, from a combination of state and federal funds: $237.2 million from the federal Child Care Development Fund, $118.5 million in state funds, $34 million in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, $31 million from the federal Social Services Block Grant, $2.5 million in Food Stamp/employment and training funding, $2 million from TANF for Head Start full-day/full-year programs, and $300,000 in federal Head Start Child Care Collaboration Project funds.

Child Care Works

Low-income families and parents who were formerly or are currently receiving TANF can get help paying for and finding child care through Child Care Works, the state's child care subsidy system. To qualify, parents must work at least 25 hours a week, undergo eligibility determinations every six months, and obtain child support enforcement orders, if applicable. Child Care Works pays subsidies directly to providers, who must collect co-pays from families – an average of $65 a month for families at 100 percent of poverty, or $152 a month for families at 150 percent of poverty.

All caregivers – regulated and unregulated – must undergo criminal background checks to qualify for subsidies, although parents can waive the requirement for grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

The state's Child Care Works helpline – 1-877-4-PA-KIDS – also helps connect parents with the local CCIS, which can help parents find child care providers and conduct eligibility determinations and serve as the intake agency for subsidized care. Since welfare reform in 1996, the state's child care subsidy system has focused on helping parents hold jobs and shed public assistance, but lower eligibility levels and provider reimbursement rates only worked to separate families from supports. When Child Care Works took effect, income eligibility fell from 235 percent of poverty to 185 percent, and has only risen to 200 percent since then, although families who enter within the guidelines can stay until income exceeds 235 percent of poverty. However, Pennsylvania's eligibility level equals or betters 36 other states, where qualifying incomes range from a high of 319 percent of poverty in Alaska to a low of 108 percent in West Virginia.[6]

Similarly, providers' reimbursement rates had been maintained at the 75th percentile of market rates – standard procedure in half of all states – but after welfare reform, the rates were not raised to reflect the 75th percentile until 1998 and again in 2001.

With its self-sufficiency focus, Child Care Works has benefited from $220 million transferred from TANF funds since 1997. The federal welfare funds have allowed Pennsylvania to make child care more widely available, reduce waiting lists and take some small steps to expand capacity by encouraging providers to extend their hours, offer more infant/toddler care, and upgrade facilities.

Why Child Care Quality Matters

The positive link between quality child care and "virtually every measure" of a child's development is "consistent and ubiquitous" in the research into the effects of child care, says the National Academy of Sciences.[7] But high-quality programs are scattered and unaffordable for low-income families and those who struggle economically but don't qualify for aid.

Quality child care can assure young children an enriching experience, filled with daily interactions with child care providers who are trained in children's development. For at-risk children, in particular – those families stressed by poverty, for example – quality child care can make a difference in later development and achievement. According to the National Academy of Sciences, a child who receives quality care is likelier to:[8]

- Be school ready, with stronger reading and language skills.
- Have better social skills.
- Transition more smoothly into the classroom.
- Continue performing well as the school years progress.

State of the States/Best Practices

In every state and the District of Columbia, licensed child care must meet minimum health and safety regulations, providing a basic floor of protections for children, but only seven states – Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Vermont – require the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) minimum staff-to-child ratios, and Pennsylvania's are very close.

States' administrative procedures and guidelines for subsidized child care vary. Pennsylvania's comparative standing regarding family's ease of accessing care and utilizing the system to maintain self-sufficiency depends on the area under review:

Availability: Availability of subsidized child care in Pennsylvania compares favorably to other states. One-third of all states have enrollment freezes or waiting lists as high as 30,000 children. Pennsylvania's waiting list of 2,134 in January 2002 is expected to be cleared with funds budgeted in 2002-03.[9]

Eligibility: Although the state's eligibility level (200 percent of poverty) equals or betters 36 other states, Pennsylvania's standards for retaining eligibility can be comparatively restrictive:

- More than two-thirds of states, including Pennsylvania, require eligibility redeterminations every six months. States that require only annual redeterminations include Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio.
- All states allow TANF families who work to qualify for child care, and Pennsylvania is among the 26 states that do not put time limits on job searches, as long as parents comply with agreed-to plans for attaining self-sufficiency.
- Pennsylvania is one of only five states requiring low-income families who aren't on TANF to work at least 25 hours a week to qualify for child care subsidy. Another 13 states with work requirements for non-TANF families require 20 hours of work a week.
- Pennsylvania parents striving to improve their education or work skills face the most restrictive conditions in the nation. Low-income parents in college and job training programs must work to retain eligibility – something only a handful of other states require, and Pennsylvania's mandated 25-hour workload is the highest of the pack.[10]

Child support orders: Thirty-eight states, including Illinois, Ohio, New York, and New Jersey, do not require child care subsidy recipients to pursue child support court orders. Pennsylvania is one of only 12 states imposing the requirement, and one of only six that doesn't accept informal or voluntary child support arrangements. The mandate can be a barrier to subsidized care, forcing unwilling parents into court or driving them out of the system for fear of stirring up a volatile situation. A 1999 survey for DPW's Office of Children, Youth and Families found that 9 percent of families who had left subsidized care did so because of the child support regulation, and the Pennsylvania Head Start Association found that the regulation disqualified from subsidized care 21 percent of children in Head Start programs offering child care.[11]

While access to care remains a critical issue, the question of quality continues to haunt Pennsylvania's child care regulators, providers, and parents. What is quality child care? The NAEYC identified six characteristics:

- Children in the program are happy and relaxed, with plenty of materials to share.
- At least two teachers trained in early childhood development are available for up to eight infants, up to 14 toddlers, ages 2 and 3, and up to 20 preschoolers, ages 4 and 5.
- Caregivers have realistic expectations for different-aged children and respect individual differences.
- Equal time is devoted to children's whole needs, making sure they use their developing language, thinking, and motor skills and learn to get along with others.
- Staff regularly plans and evaluates the program, balancing indoor and outdoor, and individual and group activities.

- Parents are welcome to observe, comment, and participate.

Some states have adopted initiatives to give children a quality experience and promote their healthy development:

- **Tiered reimbursement:** In 26 states, including Maryland, Florida, and Ohio, subsidy reimbursement levels are based on achieving quality benchmarks. Under tiered reimbursement, providers' subsidy reimbursements can climb higher with each level of NAEYC or other program standards achieved, such as gains in teachers' education, staff-to-child ratio, or improved classroom environment. With a star awarded for each level attained, the system also gives parents a reliable quality gauge. In New Jersey, similar incentives boosted the number of accredited facilities by 33 percent.

- **Professional development:** North Carolina created two professional development and compensation models adopted by other states. TEACH offers scholarships in 18 states, including Pennsylvania, for child care teachers pursuing higher education, and WAGE$ links stipends and health insurance to advanced training and job longevity for child care teachers in nine states, not including Pennsylvania. In North Carolina, WAGE$ has improved compensation by up to 30 percent for more than 8,000 child care workers, and the state's annual turnover rate dropped from 42 percent in 1994 to 31 percent in 1999. In another interesting approach, Maryland extends financial incentives for professional development, while also offering training for child care workers who serve low-income children.
- **Financing strategies:** In 1999-00, 17 states, including Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York, increased state funding for child care. As state revenues declined in succeeding years, however, many states reduced their child care investment and, like Pennsylvania, supplemented federal Child Care Development Block Grants with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds. A few other states also applied innovative concepts to make small but important investments. Kentucky funds some child care for low-income families through license plate tag renewal fees, planning to open the fund to currently non-eligible families when the balance grows. Louisiana allocates $7.9 million from Outer Banks oil drilling to child care and preschool. Alabama and Maine devoted a portion of their tobacco settlement funds to child care.

Situation Analysis

For some parents, quality child care is a hard find. Only one American child care center in seven was high quality, according to a 1995 study, and seven in 10 provided a mediocre experience.[12] However, another study determined that children who attend child-care centers – one-third of those studied – show better literacy skills than those who are cared for in other arrangements.[13] Those enrolled in higher-quality centers made even greater progress. Still another recent study said the child care system is in "market failure" – failing to provide quality services because parents lack the consumer education skills for

comparative shopping, or they lack the income to pay for quality care.[14]

Changes at the systems level – the type that make a difference from the bottom up – are slow to arrive in Pennsylvania. Only Keystone Stars, a new tiered performance system to reward providers for investing more in quality factors such as teacher training and compensation, slated for 2002-03, can be considered a systemic reform. Pennsylvania has turned some tentative attention to improving child care quality by extending grants and loans for facility improvements. Other plans for child care quality improvement and local planning grants, plus expansion of TEACH and funds to clear child care waiting lists, are positive steps, but they won't yield systemic change.

Like most states, Pennsylvania increasingly relied on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, which now finance one-quarter of the state's subsidized child care system. From 1997 to 2002 – the post-welfare reform era, with declining TANF enrollment and more flexible federal spending rules – Pennsylvania augmented its $611 million in federal Child Care Development Fund dollars with a $220 million transfer of unspent TANF funds.

As federal financial assistance grew, so did the number of child care slots, from 78,539 in 1998-99 to 96,018 in 2000-01, a 22 percent increase. However, the growth still fails to meet the need for subsidized child care in Pennsylvania, as seen in a 1999 Urban Institute report showing that 438,200 Pennsylvania children qualified for subsidized child care – and that was before Pennsylvania raised eligibility levels from 185 percent of poverty to 200 percent.[15]

The use of TANF funding to fuel child care growth is likely to continue. President Bush's 2003 federal budget proposal would keep child care funding at current levels, but as TANF faces reauthorization in September 2002, both the president and Congress would continue letting states use TANF funds for child care services. Given the fiscal constraints imposed in a tight budget climate, Pennsylvania is likely to continue relying on TANF funds – with few new state dollars in the mix – for subsidized child care.

At the state level, legislators frequently introduce bills to amend child care operations, although final passage is unlikely in most cases, because most child care issues are driven by state budget

allocations or by DPW's policy and program decisions. Still, bills have been introduced to:

- Raise eligibility for subsidized care from 200 percent of poverty to 235 percent.
- Exempt religious child care facilities from current standards, regulating them separately – a dangerous precedent that could establish a two-tiered system applying different standards to separate classes of child care.
- Require unannounced, annual inspections of all licensed child care centers and 15 percent of family day cares.
- Stop payment of public child care funding to unregulated child care providers with criminal records.
- Help providers seek national accreditation.

Some advocates have criticized Pennsylvania's subsidized child care system as bureaucratic, with rules that confuse parents and providers. Through their statewide association and regional consortiums, child care providers share with legislators the obstacles they face and their ideas for enhancing quality. In cities statewide, child care providers, local officials, educators, and local businesspeople also cooperate on apprising resources and developing collaboratives to improve child care availability and quality in their own communities. The initiatives include:

- Child Care Initiative, United Way of Berks County.
- Child Care Matters, a partnership of United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children, the Delaware Valley Child Care Council, Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth, and Philadelphia Early Childhood Collaborative.
- Early Childhood Initiative, Allegheny County, Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh.
- One Voice for Excellence, United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley.
- Focus On Our Future, United Way of York County.
- Success by 6, United Way of Carlisle and Cumberland County.
- Success By Six, United Way of Lancaster.
- Success by Six, United Way of Wyoming Valley.
- Center City Child Learning Center at Union Station, Mercyhurst College and YWCA of Erie.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Quality counts in child care. To assure children a learning-filled experience, and communities the long-term benefits of children who are ready for school and parents who can hold good jobs, Pennsylvania should take stronger steps to heighten the quality and educational value of child care:

☐ Fully implement the Keystone Stars rating system to improve quality child care and help parents become informed consumers, with adequate resources for widespread adoption. As initially proposed and funded, Keystone Stars could cover only about 300 to 400 center-based providers — out of 4,000 statewide.

☐ Improve the education and retention of early childhood teachers by expanding TEACH and including teacher retention in performance standards.

☐ Adjust subsidy payments annually to reflect the Consumer Price Index.

☐ Erase barriers to participation in the child care system: Eliminate the child support order requirement; require yearly, instead of twice-yearly, eligibility redeterminations; lower workload required from 25 hours a week to 20; and set eligibility levels to correspond with other income-based programs, such as the Children's Health Insurance Program.

☐ Expand the availability of low-cost or no-cost financing for construction and renovation of child care facilities.

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EARLY INTERVENTION

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

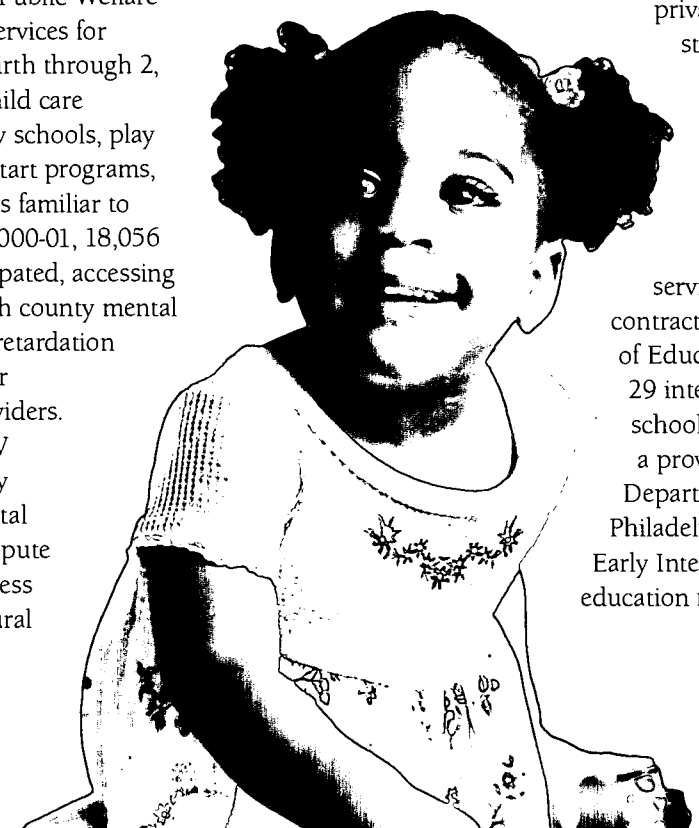
For children with special needs, the earlier help comes, the better. Early Intervention helps young children meet the challenges of their developmental delays and disabilities and maximize their learning power.

Early Intervention in Pennsylvania

Early Intervention offers timely attention to the educational and physical needs of young children with developmental delays or disabilities, working with parents to maximize their child's abilities and help families manage their unique challenges.

Early Intervention is available in two phases, both governed by state Act 212 of 1990, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and – when services are funded by Medicaid – by Medicaid rules:

- **Birth through 2:** The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) offers services for children ages birth through 2, in the home, child care centers, nursery schools, play groups, Head Start programs, or other settings familiar to the family. In 2000-01, 18,056 children participated, accessing services through county mental health/mental retardation offices and their contracted providers. Currently, DPW regulations only delineate parental rights and a dispute resolution process called "procedural safeguards," managing other areas through policy bulletins. DPW has been developing regulations to comply with federal rules for several years and plans to release proposed regulations by late 2002.
- **Ages 3 to 6:** The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) serves children from 3 years old until they enter school – usually at 5 years old, but available to age 6 – when special education begins. Children can get services in the same settings as children from birth through 2, plus regular preschools, specialized Early Intervention classes, clinics, hospitals, and approved private schools, which receive state exemptions from licensing to provide free, appropriate education for students with severe disabilities. In 2000-01, 28,924 children participated, accessing services through providers contracted by the state Department of Education – 27 of the state's 29 intermediate units, six local school districts, and Elwyn, Inc., a provider retained by the Department of Education to serve Philadelphia. The PDE operates Early Intervention under special education regulations.



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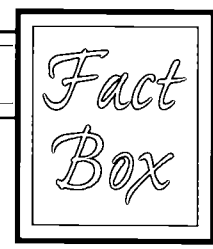
A governor's advisory council, the 15-member Pennsylvania State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) for Early Intervention, offers recommendations on Early Intervention system operations to the state Departments of Health, Education, and Public Welfare. Statewide, 49 local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs) also discuss their concerns and share recommendations on parent training, technical assistance and other matters with state and local agencies to assure continued, comprehensive services.

To meet the needs of individual children and their families, parents and human service professionals develop an Individual Family Service Plan (birth-2) or Individual Education Plan (3-6) that can include instruction and services in:

- Speech and language therapy.
- Occupational therapy.
- Physical therapy.
- Hearing and vision.
- Social work and service management.
- Psychological testing and services.
- Orientation and mobility training.
- Parent counseling and training.
- Transportation.

Families pay no fee for the services.



Early Intervention

- **Definition:** Full-year diagnostic, intervention, and remediation services that build the learning potential of children with developmental delays of 25 percent or greater, or 1.5 standard deviations from the mean in any one of the cognitive, communicative, physical, social/emotional and self-help developmental areas, or informed clinical opinion.
- **Eligibility:** Children birth to age 6 with special needs due to developmental delays or disabilities.
- **Participation:** 18,056 children, ages birth through 2, and 28,924 children, ages 3 to 6, enrolled in 2000-01.
- **Availability:** For children ages birth through 2, services are offered through county mental health/mental retardation offices, and for children ages 3 to 6, through local school districts, intermediate units, or contracted private agencies. Early Intervention is a 12-month program, normally with scheduled breaks during the year.
- **Oversight:** Office of Mental Retardation, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) administers services for children from ages birth through 2, and the Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) administers services for children from 3 years old until beginning school at 5 or 6 years old.[1]
- **Funding:**
  - $87.6 million for DPW's Early Intervention in 2001-02, including $58.2 million in state funds, $14.7 million in federal and state Medicaid, $12.5 million in federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds, and $2.2 million from the federal Social Services Block Grant.
  - $103.66 million for PDE's Early Intervention in 2001-02, including $102.44 million in state funds and $1.22 million in federal IDEA funds. Another $30 million in Medicaid federal funds and $25 million in Medicaid state funds were budgeted for special education, but PDE does not break out Early Intervention spending.
- **More information:** The CONNECT Helpline, 1-800-692-7288, or www.dpw.state.pa.us/omr/omrei.asp (DPW), or Accessible PA, www.accessiblepa.state.pa.us/accessiblepa/cwp/view.asp?a=2&q=24643 (PDE).

Resources for Professionals and Consumers

Qualified professionals, such as state-licensed or certified speech pathologists, audiologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, special education teachers, and social workers, must deliver Early Intervention services. County mental health/mental retardation service coordinators for the birth-2 program are subject to state and county civil service requirements. Some professional development opportunities are available through the state's Early Intervention Technical Assistance program (see below), and through professional and trade associations.

Providers can access two programs for technical assistance and information on meeting the needs of children with developmental delays and their families:

- The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) helps local educational agencies provide appropriate services for special education students.
- The state's Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA) program offers providers and parents training, including help on finding appropriate child care.

Parents can find consumer information through:

- The Special Kids Network, operated by the state to help parents find targeted therapies, counseling, education and training, social services, and recreation for their children.
- Parent to Parent, also a state program, connects families in similar situations to share experiences and advice.
- The Parent Education Network (PEN), a statewide coalition, provides educational resources for parents of children with a range of disabilities and the professionals who serve them. Services are designed to promote mutual respect among parents and professionals for the benefit of children and adults with disabilities.
- Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs) often determine parent training needs and communicate them to county MH/MR offices, providers, and trainers.

Early Intervention helps young children with developmental delays and disabilities build their capabilities and take full advantage of later educational opportunities. Implemented when children are young — and, according to brain development research, most receptive to learning — Early Intervention can have a lasting impact for students, their families, and the community.

Funding

Funding for Early Intervention in Pennsylvania comprises:

- $87.6 million for DPW's Early Intervention in 2001-02, including $58.2 million in state funds, $2.2 million from the federal Social Services Block Grant, $14.7 million in federal and state Medicaid, and $12.5 million in federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding.
- $103.66 million for PDE's Early Intervention in 2001-02, including $102.44 million in state funds and $1.22 million in federal IDEA funds in 2001-02. Another $25 million in Medicaid state funds and $30 million in Medicaid federal funds were budgeted for special education, but PDE does not break out Early Intervention spending.

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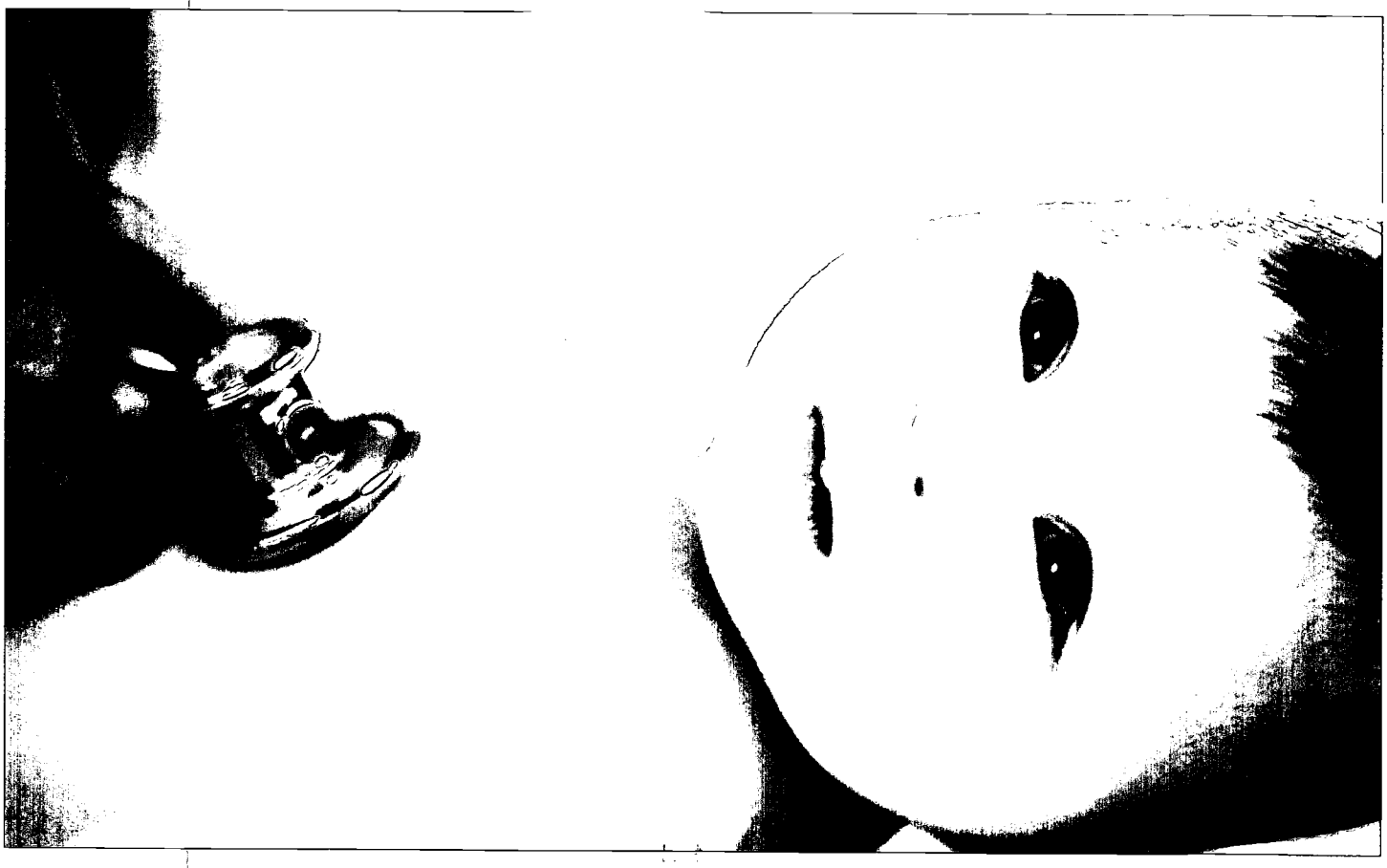
Why Early Intervention Matters

Early Intervention helps young children with developmental delays and disabilities build their capabilities and take full advantage of later educational opportunities. Implemented when children are young – and, according to brain development research, most receptive to learning – Early Intervention can have a lasting impact for students, their families, and the community:

- **Reduced need for special education:** Fewer than half of the preschoolers who received Early Intervention were classified as special education students by age 8.[2]
- **Reduced demand for residential schooling:** Of those children who did receive special education, more than 80 percent went to their own neighborhood schools, and fewer than 1 percent were in residential facilities.[3]
- **Eased family strain:** Families of young children with developmental delays and disabilities often feel disappointed, socially isolated, stressed, frustrated, and helpless, creating compounding stresses that hamper the child's development. Families of disabled children have higher rates of divorce and suicide, and disabled children are more likely to be abused. Early Intervention can enhance parents' attitudes about themselves and their child, help parents become better teachers, and create more time for leisure and employment.[4]
- **Reduced costs:** Every dollar spent on Early Intervention can save from $4 to $7 in special education or institutionalization later.[5] The total cost of services begun at birth can be much lower than interventions initially delivered at age 6, when developmental problems are ingrained and more difficult to correct.[6]



State of the States/Best Practices

The U.S. Department of Education cites several best practices for effectively delivering Early Intervention to children from birth to 2: multi-media outreach campaigns – known as "Child Find" – that provide easy-to-read, culturally appropriate information in many languages; providing services in natural environments, in the home and wherever non-disabled children are typically located; delivering services that focus on the entire family and not just the child; and creating a smooth transition process into the service system for children from 3 to 6 years old. For 3- to 6-year-olds, best practices also include promoting parent involvement and providing a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.[7]

However, the federal government gives states leeway in determining other service delivery practices. Though they save money, they can also restrict availability, and Pennsylvania – commendably – has declined to adopt them:

- Seventeen states define developmental delay more stringently, and more restrictively, than Pennsylvania. New York and New Jersey define developmental delay as 33 percent in one area of development or 25 percent in two or more areas. Connecticut requires a 44 percent delay in one area for eligibility. If Pennsylvania implemented New York's more stringent eligibility requirements, the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee estimated in 1996, 20 percent of the children receiving services would become ineligible.
- Some states, including Massachusetts and Connecticut but not Pennsylvania, require insurance companies to pay part of the costs for medically necessary Early Intervention treatments, such as nursing care, psychological testing and services, and occupational, physical and speech therapy.
- The federal IDEA allows states to charge fees, based on family income, for Early Intervention services. Twelve states, including Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, and Ohio, have fee schedules, but Pennsylvania does not.

Situation Analysis

In the mid 1990s, Early Intervention in Pennsylvania was threatened by an administration proposal to save state funds by withdrawing from an optional part of the federal IDEA for children from birth through 2 – and eliminating many protections for children and their parents. An outcry from parents, providers, advocates, and state legislators blocked the proposal's implementation.

Pennsylvania's investment in Early Intervention – and in the future ability of young children to learn to their full potential – has risen considerably, from $18.8 million in state funds on the DPW side in 1989-90 (when the state first enacted an Early Intervention statute) to $54.5 million in 2000-01, and from $14.8 million for Department of Education services in 1989-90 to $94.7 million in 2000-01. A 2001 law requiring hearing screenings and, if needed, Early Intervention referrals for newborns will open services to more children.

With growth, Early Intervention's fiscal health, and its ability to service all eligible children, remains tenuous. Federal funds, plus the release of Medicaid dollars for Early Intervention, have helped: From using no Medicaid dollars in 1989, Pennsylvania enhanced Early Intervention by utilizing $14 million from Medicaid for DPW in 2000-01 and $20.6 million for Education in 1998-99.

The funding increase has helped the state comply with a federal IDEA requirement for delivery of Early Intervention services for children from birth through age 2 in "natural environments," such as in their own homes and in child care facilities where children without disabilities are educated. The effort – which has attracted criticism from some service providers and some parents who want more intensive center-based programs – is still being implemented and has not been evaluated for its effectiveness in Pennsylvania.

Early Intervention providers serving children from birth through age 2 face other stiff challenges: staff recruitment and retention, training, turnover, and, sometimes, low wages and salaries. The situation could require additional state and county resources to raise wages and salaries, develop new training programs, and provide additional financial incentives to providers and staff.

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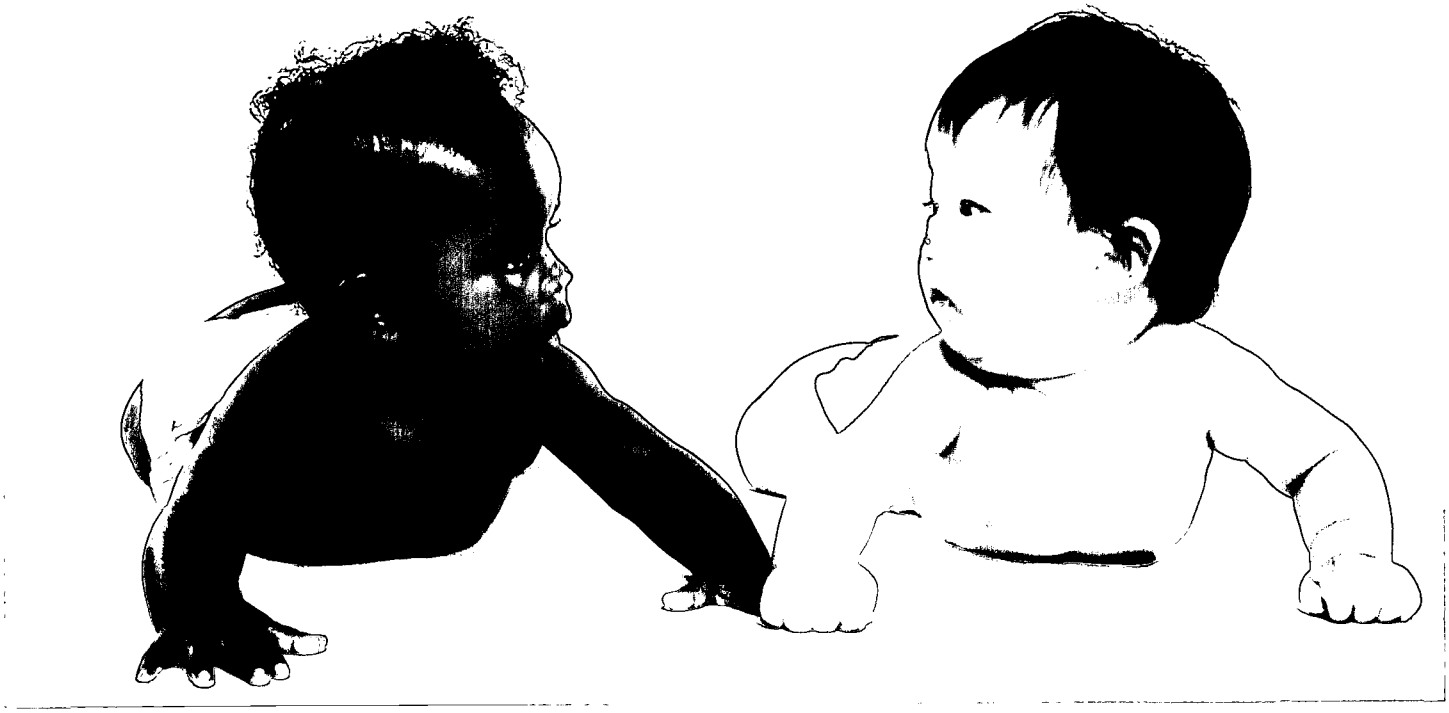
Like Pennsylvania, most states' Early Intervention programs follow the federal IDEA's blueprint. In 1997, the IDEA allowed states to extend the identification of "developmental delay" until age 9, and 16 states are expanding services within the 6 to 9 range. Another 10 states are exploring the option. Pennsylvania is not taking that route, saying that delays should be identified earlier, when children are infants, toddlers, or preschool age. The early identification prevents cost shifting into special education, according to state officials, and saves money with timelier attention to learning disabilities and delays. The state also decided to forgo the extension because special education services fill the need when children enter kindergarten.

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) commended Pennsylvania for compliance with the IDEA in some critical areas:[8]

- Providing more Early Intervention services in natural environments.
- Assuring Interagency Coordinating Councils that function in every county.
- The Pennsylvania Early Intervention Technical Assistance system (EITA), which provides technical assistance to parents, programs, and state and local staff.

However, OSEP determined Pennsylvania was out of IDEA compliance in other areas:

- DPW could do more to identify and refer eligible children, and its public awareness activities do not always reach families, physicians, and traditionally underserved populations.
- DPW assessments don't always adequately identify family needs or the child's educational needs.



- DPW's steps for transitioning children to services for 3- to 6-year-olds are inadequate.
- PDE sometimes excludes its 3- to 6-year-olds from the regular educational environment for inadequate reasons.
- PDE does not always ensure availability of extended school year services.

Pennsylvania is developing a plan to correct the issues raised by OSEP. In the meantime, the federal IDEA law is scheduled to expire September 30, 2002, and lawmakers will consider some major issues during reauthorization, including additional federal funding to help states implement special education mandates, and whether to keep the requirements that infants and toddlers get Early Intervention services in natural environments and in a family-centered manner.

Since its adoption in 1990, Early Intervention has seen few legislative changes, but a bill that passed the state House in 2002 would codify in state law a practice already required by federal rules – the acceptance of "informed clinical opinions" by licensed therapists, pediatricians, psychologists or other qualified professionals to determine eligibility for the birth-2 program when standardized procedures can't determine a child's levels of functioning. The change would also expand the state and local Interagency Coordinating Councils, specifically including parents.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Pennsylvania recognized the proven, long-term benefits of early identification and services for children with delays and disabilities with its commitment to Early Intervention in 1990. Since then, the program has expanded rapidly and continues to be a proven investment in the education and well-being of children with delays and disabilities. Children in Early Intervention get timely attention to their physical and educational needs, while families receive help in managing their unique challenges. Pennsylvania should continue to:

- Fund services for all eligible children who need them.
- Provide technical assistance and support to families, providers, counties, school districts and intermediate units.
- Apply best practices to identify and serve children and their families.
- Assure a smooth transition to school, with services and supports appropriate to young children's needs.

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PRESCHOOL

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

At 3 and 4 years old, children seem to learn faster than the speed of light. Their ability to think logically, to communicate ideas and ask questions, grows stronger each day – if their formulating young minds get the encouragement that sparks neurological growth and lays the groundwork for future thought and learning. That's the preschool ideal – enriching play, learning, and socialization experiences that prepare 3- and 4-year-olds for school.

But the ideal is elusive. Pennsylvania remains one of nine states that fails to invest in preschool, so quality options for parents – especially low-income parents – are slim. Lacking access to quality preschool, too many at-risk children start school at an unfair disadvantage, without the basic tools of learning that are critical to acquiring new knowledge and succeeding in school.

Preschool in Pennsylvania

Parents provide the first foundation of learning, and for most American preschoolers, that foundation can be strengthened with a rich array of quality preschool options such as Head Start, public schools, private schools, and child care. But for Pennsylvania children, the options are limited: Head Start, private preschools, or kindergarten for 4-year-olds, offered by some public school districts. For children in child care settings, the atmosphere may not provide a rich educational experience because state child care regulations address only health and safety needs.

Head Start

Head Start is the federal government's comprehensive child development and school readiness program for low-income children, ages birth to 5 – but in Pennsylvania and nationwide, the vast majority of enrollees are at the traditional preschool age of 4.

Eligible children come from families whose income is 100 percent of poverty or below, but in Pennsylvania, eligibility doesn't guarantee enrollment. Even though federal funding grew to accommodate 80 percent more Pennsylvania children from 1989 to 2002, only 28,895 of the state's 56,895 eligible children were served in 2002. Even more restricted is full-day, full-year Head Start, which 44 percent of all Head Start children needed in 1997-98, but was available to only 3,145 children, or 11 percent of Head Start enrollees.[1]

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families offers Head Start through direct grants to school districts, community action agencies, non-profit Head Start programs, county governments, child welfare providers, and other community-based organizations. Head Start services are delivered in classrooms, run according to federal rules establishing staffing, class size, and school years:

- Every classroom must be staffed by two teachers or a teacher and an aide.
- For 4- and 5-year-olds, class sizes must average between 17 and 20 children. For 3-year-olds, classes must average 15 to 17 children.
- Head Start classes must operate for four days a week, 128 to 160 days a year, or five days, 160 days a year. Classes must operate between three and a half and six hours a day.

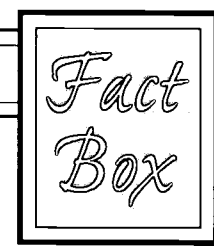
Providers must also meet federal standards for health, education, parent involvement, nutrition, and facilities.

Resources for Professionals and Consumers

By 2003, half of the teachers in every Head Start classroom must have at least an associate's degree in early childhood development or a related field, or be credentialed by the Council for Professional Recognition, with 480 hours of experience with children and 120 hours of child care education. Teachers can receive training and professional development in early childhood through four-year colleges and universities, and the state's 19 community colleges.

Two regional universities, under contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, offer training and technical assistance to Pennsylvania Head Start providers. The University of Maryland offers general programs covering all aspects of Head Start services, while Georgetown University, in Washington, D.C., trains in providing Head Start services for children with disabilities.

For parents and families, local Head Start programs can request training and technical assistance also



Head Start

- **Definition:** Programs designed to increase the school readiness of young, low-income children, with services for 3- and 4-year-olds and their families.
- **Eligibility:** Children through 100 percent of poverty ($17,650 for a family of four) or participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income programs.
- **Participation:** 28,895 children, ages 3 and 4, enrolled in 2002, but another 28,000 children were eligible and unserved.
- **Availability:** Found through 59 programs statewide in 2002.
- **Oversight:** Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.[2]
- **Funding:** $189.53 million in federal funds in 2001-02, plus a 20 percent local match.
- **More information:** Administration for Children and Families, www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/acyf/, or the Pennsylvania Head Start Association, www.paheadstart.org; 717-526-4646.

available at the University of Maryland. Parents can access Head Start through local Head Start providers, sometimes listed in phone books' blue pages, or through the Pennsylvania Head Start Association, www.paheadstart.org.

Funding

Parents pay no fee for Head Start services. The federal government allocated $189.53 million for Head Start to Pennsylvania in 2002, funneling the funds through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pennsylvania does not supplement the federal allocation or devote funds to other preschool options for low-income children. Local grantees must provide a 20 percent match.

Private Nursery Schools

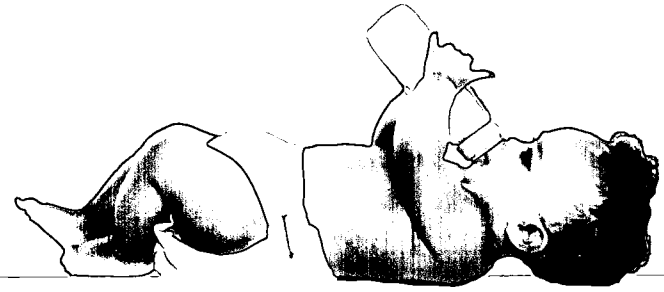
Private nursery schools are major providers of preschool education for Pennsylvania children, serving 32,000 children in 1999-2000. Settings range from single-classroom schools to multi-site chains.

Pennsylvania's private nursery schools can receive recognition in one of three ways:

- Licensure by the State Board of Private Academic Schools. Under the board's regulations, each nursery school class must have at least one teacher with an early childhood teaching certificate; a bachelor's degree with at least 24 credits in child development, early childhood, or elementary education; or a bachelor's degree and at least two years of nursery school teaching experience.
- Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in lieu of state board licensure.
- Affiliation with a religious institution, where regulations do not pertain.

With one notable exception, the state's private preschool requirements don't live up to NAEYC's in many generally recognized quality standards.

- Both state- and NAEYC- licensed facilities have curriculum requirements, but unlike the state, NAEYC requires delivery through developmentally appropriate instructional practices, materials and equipment.



Early Head Start

Early Head Start provides child development and family support services similar to Head Start's, but for children under 3 years old and pregnant women. Services can include health and nutrition services, child care for working parents, and home visits that help parents build their parenting skills and enhance the in-home learning environment (see "Reading Readiness and Success").

Though about 82,000 Pennsylvania infants and toddlers qualified, only 2,428 received services through 25 Early Head Start programs – funded separately from Head Start, but sometimes administered by the same organization – in 2002. Pennsylvania's Early Head Start programs received $19.3 million in 2002.

Fact Box

Private Nursery Schools

- **Definition:** Preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds operated privately or by religious entities.
- **Participation:** About 32,000 children were enrolled in 1999-2000.
- **Availability:** Found through about 700 private nursery schools statewide in 1999-2000.
- **Oversight:** State Board of Private Academic Schools, Department of Education.[3]
- **Funding:** Private preschools charge tuition. A range of rates is unavailable.
- **More information:** State Board of Private Academic Schools, (717)783-5146.

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- NAEYC's staffing requirements are about the same – no more than 10 children per adult – as the state standards of eight and a half 4-year-olds per adult and 10.5 5-year-olds. State standards also allow for classes of 22 3- to 7-year-olds and 25 5-year-olds with better-trained or more staff.
- NAEYC requires certification of compliance with local building codes, sanitation, water quality, and fire protection, while the state – applying a model used in public schools – assumes compliance with local building codes, fire regulations, and other health and safety standards.
- NAEYC requires that providers work closely with parents and families, developing close relationships, communicating openly, and making parents feel welcome in the program.

The exception: Pennsylvania's private preschool teachers must have a bachelor's degree and some early childhood training, while NAEYC teachers need only an associate's degree in child development.

Milder state standards don't necessarily mean a poor-quality preschool experience, because individual providers can choose adherence to higher standards, but the state has an opportunity to assure higher quality across the board during a planned regulation revision process in 2002. Designed as a thorough review of regulations last updated in 1991, the process could incorporate the stricter of NAEYC's or Head Start's standards, particularly in curriculum, health and safety – assuring more private preschool students a quality learning experience.

K-4: Kindergarten for 4-Year-Olds

In Pennsylvania, public schools may offer kindergarten to all 4-year-olds in their districts, and 30 public school districts did so in 1999-2000. Together, they provided kindergarten for 2,550 4-year-olds, and all on a half-day basis.

Districts that offer K-4, as it's often called, usually coordinate their programs with their kindergarten and elementary curricula, offering a continuum of education and preparing children for the school years to come. Although they can use their state basic education dollars, districts get no additional funds for K-4.

Why Preschool Matters

Low-income children, surrounded by poverty and instability, often miss the enriching learning experiences that prepare their more advantaged peers for school. They may spend only 25 hours of their preschool years on reading, compared to middle-class children who start first grade with 1,000 to 1,700 hours of reading behind them.[4]

Fact Box

K-4: Kindergarten for 4-Year-Olds

- **Definition:** Kindergarten for 4-year-olds, also known as K-4, operated by public schools.
- **Eligibility:** All 4-year-olds in school districts that offer it.
- **Participation:** 2,550 children, aged 4, enrolled in 1999-2000.
- **Availability:** Offered by 30 Pennsylvania school districts in 1999-2000.
- **Oversight:** Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** School districts may use basic education funding, but the state does not earmark funds specifically for K-4.

They also start school with just half the vocabulary of middle-class children, and in most cases, the gap doesn't dissipate through the school years.[5]

For at-risk children, quality preschool can be a ticket to school readiness. Since 1997, the federal Head Start Bureau has been studying Head Start children, following them – so far – through kindergarten, and initial results confirm the benefits: Head Start children are ready for school, with strong letter and number skills. Families are also involved with their children's education, with 66 percent reading to their children three or more times a week, and up to 90 percent teaching letters, numbers, or songs.[6]

Other research into young children's development proves that the benefits of quality preschool are dramatic and lasting:

- **Prime time for learning:** With attentive care, enrichment, and exposure to books, the minds of young children develop and build the mental scaffolding that will process thoughts and ideas for years to come.[7]
- **Ready for school:** Children who enter kindergarten from quality preschool have better reading, language, and social skills than those who didn't get preschool.[8]
- **School success:** Children from quality preschool get better test scores in later grades and are likelier to graduate from high school – itself a critical indicator of the adult's life chances.[9]
- **Avoiding trouble:** Young children who received enriching early childhood education experiences, such as nurse home visitors, quality child care, and quality preschool, are less likely to become delinquent as teens.[10]
- **Better citizens:** Children from quality preschool are likelier to mature into responsible citizens – likelier to be married, with higher educational attainments and better-paying jobs.[11]

State of the States/Best Practices

Nationwide, 41 states and the District of Columbia – not including Pennsylvania – invest in Head Start or preschool, so more low-income children can enter kindergarten ready to learn. Many states that are investing have also taken steps to provide a quality experience. For instance, 20 states and the District of Columbia require preschool teachers to have

Signs of Success:
Allegheny County's Early Childhood Initiative

Quality preschool can be the great leveler – bringing children who might otherwise fail in school up to a place where they are much likelier to succeed. Dramatic results from a study of the Early Childhood Initiative, Allegheny County's quality preschool effort for at-risk children, show how:[12]

- 86 percent of the 1,000 children entering ECI were at high risk of falling behind due to shortcomings in overall thinking, language, social, and school-readiness skills. After three years in ECI, they not only avoided declines but improved at an increased rate. About 14 percent of the children were already showing serious delays that would have qualified them for special education, but three years in ECI moved them into the normal range of development, motor, language, social, and thinking skills.
- 18 percent of ECI entrants merited a poor mental health diagnosis, but they showed normal social skills and development patterns three years later.
- 78 percent of ECI children entered school with 11 of the most important "building block" skills for school success, based on Pennsylvania academic standards.
- Of the participating children who entered kindergarten and first grade during the study, only 2 percent were held back a grade – in districts averaging retention rates of 23 percent. Similarly, only 1 percent of ECI children were referred to special education, compared to average rates of 21 percent in their districts.
- At the end of kindergarten and first grade, ECI children performed at average to above-average levels on standardized tests.

bachelor's degrees, and 27 states have adopted or are drafting curriculum standards.

States are taking creative approaches to funding and to program implementation, thinking outside traditional boundaries to give children a quality preschool experience:

- **Targeting at-risk children:** Twenty percent of funds raised for children through a California cigarette tax (see "Funding," below) goes to a school readiness initiative in low-performing schools. New Jersey is implementing court-ordered preschool investments in the poorest school districts. Connecticut's School Readiness Initiative funds full-day, full-year preschool programs in low-income school districts and helps providers attain accreditation and improve their facilities.
- **Broadened risk factors:** Illinois and Kansas allocate funds for preschool based on a combination of risk factors, such as children living in poverty, at risk of abuse and neglect, and with teen parents.
- **Community involvement:** Since 1993, the Community Partnerships for Children in Massachusetts has drawn from and built on community resources to increase preschool access and affordability. Community partnerships, including Head Start, school districts, and child care agencies, collaborate to provide comprehensive child care, early learning, behavioral health services, and family supports.
- **Funding:** In California, voters approved a 50-cents-per-pack cigarette tax to fund child care, health services and preschool. South Carolina combines $30 million in state funds and $7 million in private contributions for a school readiness initiative. Kansas and Kentucky both devoted about $2 million of their tobacco settlement funds to quality early education services.

Situation Analysis

Pennsylvania needs a richer array of preschool options, particularly for children who are low-income and risk educational failure, and for those whose families live above poverty but who struggle to afford quality educational experiences for their 3- and 4-year-olds.

But Pennsylvania remains one of nine states that fails to invest in preschool. Federal Head Start funding assures services for only half of all eligible children – eligibility being determined at a bare level of 100 percent of poverty. Unlike Pennsylvania, states including Massachusetts, Ohio, Michigan, and others extend Head Start to families living above poverty but below true economic independence. In

New Jersey, state courts have mandated preschool services to boost school readiness in the 28 school districts with the highest poverty rates.

In early 2002, President Bush proposed a series of Head Start reforms for the nation, including stricter training and education requirements for Head Start teachers, $45 million to develop research-based curricula, and additional testing of Head Start students – but no extra money to enroll more children in new Head Start slots.

The lack of funding continues to block at-risk and low-income children from quality preschool. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children estimates the annual cost of providing preschool for 37,781 eligible 4-year olds – children under 200 percent of poverty and not served by Head Start – at $188.9 million, and the estimated annual cost to serve 53,994 eligible 3-year-olds at $270 million.

Even foot-in-the-door funding – not enough to meet the need, but enough to get started – has not materialized in the state budget, no matter how strong the state fiscal picture had been in recent years. All four legislative caucus leaders have expressed their support, and pending bills in the state House and Senate would create a state investment in quality preschool – but still, lawmakers have taken no action.

In his 2002-03 budget address, Governor Mark Schweiker did not propose funding but, instead, created an Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force to explore school readiness options and prepare recommendations for his successor to make sure children are healthy, safe, and ready for school.

In fact, all major candidates seeking the governor's office, and hoping to take the oath of office in 2003, have stated their support for a preschool investment. The depth of that commitment to preschool and to a mix of other children's issues depends on the success of Pennsylvanians in convincing the gubernatorial candidates to make preschool a top priority of the new administration. Businesspeople, media, educators, academics, preschool and human services providers, and many other citizens – citizens from all corners who see the community benefits of preschool investments – have sought preschool funding in recent years. In a gubernatorial election year, they continue to force the issue into the public policy arena.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Today's children are the citizens of the future. Their ability to lead full lives — contributing to the workplace, the economy, and their communities — depends on a strong foundation of learning built early in life. Pennsylvania should finally take the plunge and invest in preschool, before the state falls farther behind in the national and global economic competition sweepstakes.

With a five-year plan, Pennsylvania could implement universally available preschool for all 3- and 4-year olds. State dollars should target those most in need, beginning with a $25 million investment in model programs in communities with large numbers of low-income children who are falling behind in school.

To be effective, a state-supported preschool initiative should:

☐ Provide access to quality preschool education for children, involving parents in helping their children learn and connecting children and families with health care and other social services.

☐ Recognize the critical role of parents in the lives of young children — as children's first teachers, as consumers of preschool services shopping from a variety of providers and settings, and as employees whose work schedules often require full-day/full-year services.

☐ Be staffed by highly qualified and appropriately compensated professionals, with early childhood education degrees. It should provide continuing professional development for staff.

☐ Emphasize the importance of preschool in helping children succeed in the primary grades by falling under the Deputy Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education. At the local level, school districts should have operational responsibility for the program and for managing state funding. Programs should use research-based, developmentally appropriate curricula.

☐ Be rooted in the community, with local preschool planning panels within school districts that include providers, parents, businesses, early childhood professionals, and religious and civic leaders. Panels should conduct a community needs assessment, survey providers, offer technical assistance, advise the district on use of state funds, and prepare a two-year local preschool plan.

☐ Be a shared responsibility of government, parents, business, and philanthropy. Today, the missing link is government.

READING READINESS AND SUCCESS

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Reading is the basis of all learning. Children who learn to read and to love reading while they're young win a key that opens the doors of knowledge for a lifetime.

Reading Readiness and Success in Pennsylvania

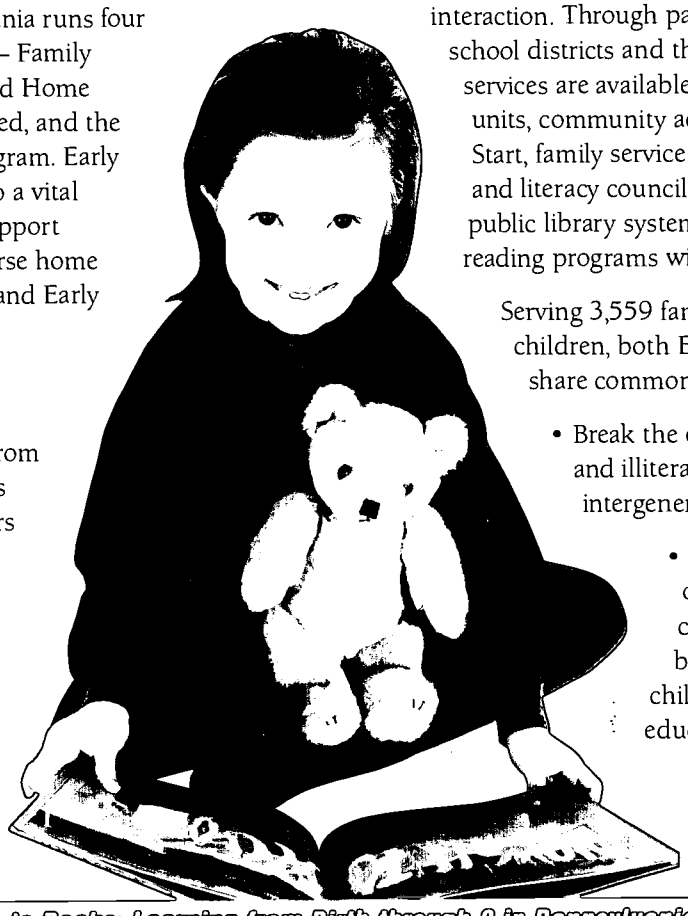
From birth to third grade, children learn to read. From third grade on, they read to learn. Or as a Harvard expert on early literacy said, "After third grade, teachers rely on reading for all the other teaching they do. By fifth grade, it's very difficult to teach anything – whether it's math, science, or history – to a child who can't read."[1]

The importance of early literacy has become increasingly clear to policymakers and educators as they grapple with education reforms and school achievement initiatives. With state and federal funds, Pennsylvania runs four early literacy programs – Family Literacy, the Parent Child Home Program, Read to Succeed, and the Reading Excellence Program. Early literacy education is also a vital component of family support programs, including nurse home visiting, family centers, and Early Head Start.

Family Literacy

Family Literacy works from the premise that parents are a child's first teachers and the most powerful influence on children's academic success. The Pennsylvania Department of Education administers two Family Literacy programs together: the federal Even Start, administered by 33 grantees and available to children from birth to age 7 and their parents, and the state's Family Literacy Program, or Act 143, operated by 29 grantees and available to children of any age and parents who read below a fifth-grade level.

Available in all 67 counties, Family Literacy delivers four components through home visits and other support services: adult education, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent-child interaction. Through partnerships with 183 school districts and three charter schools, services are available from intermediate units, community action agencies, Head Start, family service providers, libraries and literacy councils. Every county's public library system also offers summer reading programs with Act 143 funds.



Serving 3,559 families with 5,305 children, both Even Start and Act 143 share common goals:

- Break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy through an intergenerational effort.
- Improve educational opportunities for children and adults by integrating early childhood and adult education.

- Create a new range of services by building collaborations among community resources.
- Help low-income children and adults meet challenging education performance standards. Both programs follow Family Literacy Program Performance Standards, established in 2001, that set grade-level or reading readiness, school attendance, and grade promotion expectations for participating children.

The Pennsylvania Family Literacy Consortium, a collaborative comprising the state Departments of Education and Public Welfare, Temple University, Penn State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Head Start Association, and the state library system, refines Family Literacy across state agencies and providers. The consortium develops quality indicators and performance standards to support the Family Literacy work of local agencies or partners.

Funding for the $17.8 million effort comes from $8.5 million in federal Even Start funds and $9.3 million in state Act 143 funds.

Parent Child Home Program

The Department of Public Welfare's Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) targets 2- and 3-year-old children whose educational prospects are diminished, particularly by parents' low educational levels, but who also face other challenges, such as teen parents, poverty, language barriers, and homes where single parents are raising several children.

Reaching families whose isolation or poverty might keep them from group or center-based literacy programs, PCHP sends home visitors to the family twice weekly for two years. Each week, the home visitor leaves a new book or educational toy with the family, demonstrating its use in encouraging verbal interaction and good parenting techniques. Families can access the program through the local Child Care Information System office, school, or county Children and Youth office. Families usually participate for 23 weeks a year – spanning the school year – for two years.

The $3 million directed to PCHP from TANF funding in 2001-02 is slated for repeats in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 state budgets.

Fact Box

Family Literacy

- **Definition:** Services addressing the literacy needs of all family members and promoting parents' involvement in their children's education, offered by the state through two programs – the federally funded Even Start and the state-funded Act 143.
- **Eligibility:** For Even Start, children from birth to age 7 and their parents. For Act 143, children of any age and parents who cannot read at a fifth-grade level.
- **Participation:** 3,559 families, with 5,305 children and 3,822 adults, participated in the two programs in 2001-02.
- **Availability:** Offered through school districts, intermediate units, community action agencies, Head Start, family service providers, libraries, and literacy councils in all 67 counties.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.[2]
- **Funding:** $17.8 million, comprising $8.5 million in federal Even Start funds and $9.3 million in state Act 143 funds, in 2001-02.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, 717-772-3737.

Read to Succeed

Read to Succeed, launched in 1999, is the Ridge Administration's primary effort to improve young students' reading skills. Through it, elementary schools where 60 percent of fifth graders score in the bottom half of reading tests or verifiably demonstrate reading failure receive grants to restructure their classroom reading programs and reach students who are not progressing toward reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards.

Participating school districts must also reach young children by collaborating with local Head Start, Family Literacy programs, or local libraries and other agencies that offer reading and literacy instruction. Parents and caregivers must also be part of the literacy effort.

Districts can use the funds for a variety of approaches, including:

- One-on-one or small-group reading and writing instruction.
- Hiring teachers and instructional support staff for extended-day and summer programs.
- Professional development and training.

Schools must apply for the competitive grants, matching $1 for every $2 in state funds. At the end of the state's four-year

Fact Box

Parent Child Home Program

- **Definition:** Services targeting families whose children risk educational disadvantages with home-based parenting and early literacy services.
- **Eligibility:** Families of children ages 2 and 3, with income through 235 percent of poverty ($42,535 for a family of four).
- **Participation:** Participation figures are not available because the program started in January 2002.
- **Availability:** Available at 33 organizations or schools in 29 counties.
- **Oversight:** Office of Children, Youth and Families, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.
- **Funding:** $3 million in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds in 2001-02, to be repeated in 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05.
- **More information:** Office of Children, Youth and Families, 717-783-5836.

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investment, schools will be expected to maintain Read to Succeed efforts without state help – a possible challenge for districts already straining under tight budgets.

Reading Excellence Act

The 1999 federal Reading Excellence Act (REA) required state strategies to ensure that all children become skilled and motivated readers. Through Family Literacy project partnerships, and with a framework for weaving services through homes, schools, and communities, the REA strives to give all children research-based literacy and reading activities from kindergarten through third grade.

Over four years, from 1999-00 through the program's end in 2002-03, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will have received $30 million in federal Reading Excellence funds. The new federal Reading First program is slated to overlap in 2002-03, when – contingent on a successful application to the U.S. Department of Education – Pennsylvania should receive a first allocation of more than $28 million. With a $31 million allocation in 2003-04, Reading First will replace the Reading Excellence Act.

Family Supports

When families struggle to stay afloat, the educational needs of children may be lost in the press to handle more immediate concerns. Family supports can ease the pressures on parents, while helping them devote a part of each day or week to reading with their children.

Literacy activities are core components of three state-funded family support efforts and a federal program:

- **Nurse home visiting:** Similar to the Parent Child Home Program (see page 34) but with a broader mission, Pennsylvania's nurse home visiting programs assign nurses or certified home visitors

Fact Box

Read to Succeed

- **Definition:** A four-year state program designed to ensure that all students learn to read and write by the end of third grade.
- **Eligibility:** Elementary schools, charter schools, Head Start programs and preschools which can show need through reading test results – 60 percent of students scoring in the bottom half of fifth-grade PSSA or other recognized achievement test – or through verifiable data showing that a specific group of students need extra reading help.
- **Participation:** 135,500 students since 1999-00.
- **Availability:** 698 schools, in 235 districts, participated in 2000-01, plus three charter schools, one Head Start program, and two early childhood learning centers.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** $100 million in state funds, allocated from 1999-00 through 2002-03. The competitive grants require a $1 match for every $2 in state funds.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services, 717-787-8913.

Fact Box

Reading Excellence Act

- **Definition:** Reading improvement grants for schools with high-risk students in kindergarten through third grade.
- **Eligibility:** Schools eligible for Title I, the federal supplemental education program for educationally disadvantaged children; state Empowerment Districts, where at least 50 percent of students score in the bottom-measured group of students in statewide PSSA scores in math and reading for the previous two years; or a state's two school districts with the highest percentage of students in poverty (Philadelphia and Chester-Upland school districts).
- **Participation:** About 6,000 children participated from 1999-2000 to 2000-01.
- **Availability:** 25 school districts with 210 eligible school buildings.
- **Oversight:** Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Federal Programs, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** $30 million in federal funds, allocated from 1999-00 to 2001-02.
- **More information:** Pennsylvania Department of Education, www.pde.state.pa.us; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 717-787-2127.

to see at-risk pregnant women and parents of children from birth through age 2. The visitors share advice on health, child development, and good parenting, including the importance of reading. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, part of the Governor's Community Partnership for Safe Children, offers $7.2 million in Nurse Home Visiting grants to 16 programs statewide, serving 3,125 families.

- **Family centers and Parents as Teachers:** Family centers provide integrated neighborhood services to help families become better educated, healthier, and self-sufficient. Literacy training is offered largely through Parents as Teachers, a voluntary family education program available to expectant parents and parents of children from birth through age 5. Each of the state's 48 family centers must serve at least 100 families with children through Parents as Teachers. PAT offers child development activities that encourage language development, intellectual growth, social development and motor skills, helping parents understand healthy child development and strengthening their abilities as the child's first and most important teachers. Overseen by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, with $10 million in state and federal funds, family centers serve 9,900 children, about 6,500 of them under age 6. As a model for home visiting and parent education, PAT is also offered in Pennsylvania by nine Even Start, eight Head Start, and three Early Head Start programs, plus 23 schools, child care centers, and intermediate units. Together, family centers and the other PAT providers served more than 5,680 children in 2000.[3]
- **I Am Your Child:** In 2002-03, Pennsylvania projects distributing a set of six early childhood development videos, produced by the I Am Your Child Foundation, with a child's word book and parents' resource guide, to the parents of every newborn and toddler in the state. The materials, available in English and Spanish, stress the importance of reading to children and share other parenting tips. New parents can request the materials by calling 1-800-986-BABY, or can find them at 7,300 sites, including family centers, libraries, Early Intervention providers, Family Literacy programs, county assistance offices, and local health departments. Under the 2002-03 budget plan, the plan will be financed with $4 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds.
- **Early Head Start:** Early Head Start provides child development and family support services for children under 3 years old and pregnant women. Services can include health

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and nutrition services, child care for working parents, and home visits that help parents build their parenting skills and enhance the in-home learning environment. With $19.3 million in federal funds, Early Head Start served only 2,428 of the 82,000 eligible infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania in 2002.

Why Reading Readiness and Success Matters

Literacy is the anchor of learning, the skill that grounds all school achievement and, for most people, lifetime success. And yet, one Pennsylvania fifth grader in four scored below proficient on state reading tests in 2001-02.

Early attention to reading skills is critical, because most reading problems among teens could have been avoided in the early years of childhood.[4] However, the signs point to deeply seated literacy obstacles, especially among at-risk children:

- The ability to recognize letters is essential in learning to read, but in one study, 33 percent of children entering kindergarten – one new kindergartner in three – were not proficient in recognizing letters. More than half of the beginning kindergartners considered at risk of school failure because of low family income and low parent education could identify only two or three letters of the alphabet.[5]
- 10 percent of fourth graders whose parents didn't finish high school scored at advanced or proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading exam, compared to half of the fourth graders whose parents graduated from college.[6]

The benefits of early literacy investments, before reading problems become entrenched, are evident:

- **Broad impact:** Early attention can correct reading deficiencies in all but about 3 percent to 5 percent of children.[7]
- **Maintaining academic progress:** Some low-income and minority students lose three to four months' worth of literacy skills in the summer, compared to high-income children who generally gain by at least a month.[8]
- **Opening the door to learning:** Students who do not learn efficient reading skills are blocked from every other subject in their schooling.[9]

Pennsylvania's existing early literacy investments pay off in stronger reading skills for children and auxiliary benefits for parents:

- In Parents as Teachers, participating 3-year-olds are significantly more advanced in language, problem-solving abilities, and social development. As they grow, they score higher on kindergarten readiness tests and on reading, language, and math tests through fourth grade. Their parents are also more involved in their schooling and have lower rates of suspected or documented child abuse and neglect.[10]
- In the Parent Child Home Program, at-risk children show substantial improvement in school success and standardized achievement tests, and their high school graduation rates match those of middle-class students. Their parents often return to school, get a GED, or find employment.[11]

State of the States/Best Practices

The National Research Council said that effective reading instruction for children must include:[12]

- Instruction in phonics, or the links between sounds and spelling.
- Frequent opportunities to read and write, and to discuss and analyze texts.
- Access to early literacy experiences, including family literacy.
- Professional development and education in literacy instruction for all levels of teachers and for parents.

- Help for students who don't progress or whose English proficiency is limited.
- Manageable class sizes, high-quality instructional materials, good school libraries, and a school-wide commitment to literacy success.

A few states have adopted innovative literacy approaches that draw students, teachers, schools, parents, and communities into the efforts:

Early literacy and motivation: Delaware was the first – and only – state to adopt the U.S. Department of Education's Reading Is Fundamental Initiative. Developed in 1997 and funded entirely by Delaware businesses, private foundations, and the Delaware Department of Education, the five-year effort follows two tracks for the state's eligible children:

- Early literacy for Delaware's children in Head Start, Even Start, Early Childhood Assistance child care programs, and Parents as Teachers. This component features RIF's National Book Program, which provides free, new books to every participating child and also includes parent and community involvement and motivational activities, a two-week reading challenge program, and training for early childhood center staff.
- Running Start, an intensive reading motivation program for every Delaware first grader that promotes parent and community involvement in children's reading.

In home, at school, in the summer: The $15 million Reading Plan for Michigan, or RPM, offers tools for young readers, their families, and their schools, including:

- R.E.A.D.Y. (Read, Educate, and Develop Youth) Tool Kits for parents and caregivers to help children build reading skills.
- The Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, an assessment tool kit to mark progress toward the goal of all students becoming independent readers by the end of third grade.
- The Preschool-Grade 3 Reading and Writing Portfolio, which gives teachers and parents a clear picture of a student's progress.
- The Model Summer School Program, which will provide best practices in all school districts.

Classroom grants: Ohio's Fourth Grade Guarantee offers classroom incentives to ensure that every fourth grader passes the state's reading proficiency test. The program offers prevention, immediate and early intervention, and intense remediation for first through third graders reading below grade level.

Ohio also allocated $19.7 million in 2002-03 for OhioReads. The program offers classroom grants, averaging nearly $58,000, for schools that don't achieve a 75 percent reading

standard on state tests, and for community literacy projects, with average grants of nearly $30,000.

Early literacy through schools: Indiana's 1997 Reading and Literacy Initiative for a Better Indiana originally allocated $14 million for an Early Intervention Reading Grant program, school library printed materials, and adult education. The Early Intervention Reading Grants help local school districts adopt proven early intervention programs, including Even Start and full-day kindergarten (see "Kindergarten").

Situation Analysis

Early literacy has gained new respect in the policy world, winning funding from state and federal lawmakers who see it as a tool for progress toward the primary goal of lifting student achievement. With the exception of Family Literacy, born in 1986, the major federal and state initiatives – the Parent Child Home Program, Read to Succeed, and the Reading Excellence Act – have all been introduced since 1999. Together, they represent a new $139 million, four-year investment in reading readiness and success.

In 2001, a new state law codified the use of at least 25 percent of state literacy funds for Family Literacy – a level the state had been exceeding for a decade – and articulated the program's goals to make sustainable changes in family interaction, literacy levels, parents' self-sufficiency, and children's school success.

But in Pennsylvania, literacy funds aren't necessarily accumulating by the year. As new programs emerge, some old ones disappear. In 2002-03, school districts will see the last of their Read to Succeed funds. Unless the state renews Read to Succeed in 2003-04, schools must fill the gaps from their own limited resources. The Parent Child Home Program is funded only through 2003-04, and family centers have received only cost-of-living increases year after year. Family Literacy could continue receiving federal

funds, but Even Start may face a 20 percent cut – for a $1.7 million hit – in 2003.

While the federal government cuts Even Start, new funding streams for early literacy are appearing:

- Reading First has emerged from the eliminated Reading Excellence Act, with funding increases to $900 million in 2002 and a proposed $1 billion in 2003. Pending approval by the U.S. Department of Education, Pennsylvania's share could be $28 million in 2002-03 and $31.23 million in 2003-04, up from $10 million received annually through Reading Excellence. Funds will flow from the federal government to states, based on their number of low-income children, and then competitively to schools, with high-poverty, low reading-achievement districts getting priority. The money will fund professional development activities for kindergarten through third grade teachers.
- Early Reading First, part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, will award competitive grants to schools or community organizations to offer research-based literacy instruction for low-income, preschool-age children. However, with grants of $250,000 to $1 million awarded from a $75 million funding pool in 2002, Early Reading First will reach – at most – 300 programs nationwide.

In the meantime, Pennsylvania has no overarching agenda that unifies the many disparate state and federal early literacy programs. Instead of coordinating existing funds and melding early literacy efforts with proven, existing approaches, such as preschool and full-day kindergarten, Pennsylvania's dollars flow through a variety of pipes to a variety of disconnected destinations.

The natural advocacy base for early literacy programs, such as Family Literacy providers, Head Start and preschool providers, is augmented by others who see ways to enhance reading readiness offerings – such as foundations, researchers, business leaders, and librarians – and those who see the impact of failing to grasp early literacy opportunities – namely, elementary and secondary school teachers whose students are hampered by poor reading skills.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Pennsylvania lacks an overarching literacy agenda — a failing when it comes to assuring that every child, and not just those who land in good early education programs, prepares to read well.

To plug the holes and effectively apply its early literacy resources, Pennsylvania should focus on reaching children where they spend their time — at home, in preschool and child care, in school, and in after-school activities — and strengthening existing efforts.

☐ **Coordinate for accountability:** Pennsylvania's literacy programs are scattered across three state agencies. To reach as many at-risk children as possible, they should flow through schools, intermediate units, Head Start providers, and community organizations. As the need for accountability in federal and state spending increases, Pennsylvania should create a collaborative process that points agencies toward a unified goal of improving reading rates before children leave third grade. A good model to start: The Pennsylvania Family Literacy Consortium, which focuses the various players within the Family Literacy program on a common agenda.

☐ **Evaluate and expand:** National studies have shown that literacy approaches such as Even Start, the Parent Child Home Program, Early Head Start, and nurse home visits — all in place in Pennsylvania — have positive impacts on early literacy. But their impact on Pennsylvania has not been studied, and each reaches only a fragment of eligible children. The state should evaluate its literacy programs here in Pennsylvania and, as they're shown effective, expand funding to reach every community with at-risk families.

☐ **Review and renew Read to Succeed:** Read to Succeed is a major, $100 million early literacy effort, but its impact has not been studied. Pennsylvania should evaluate Read to Succeed and, if it's proven effective, renew funding for schools.

☐ **Secure all available federal funding:** The federal focus on early literacy offers an opportunity to retain and strengthen Pennsylvania's literacy programs. The state should secure all available federal funding and target the dollars toward at-risk children in existing early literacy programs and other educational efforts that teach the foundations of reading, such as preschool and full-day kindergarten.

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KINDERGARTEN

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

For most Pennsylvania children, kindergarten is the gateway to school. Like any introductory experience, kindergarten can set the stage – for better or worse – for the years to follow.

Kindergarten in Pennsylvania

A good year in kindergarten can pave the way for 12 good years in the grades that follow. Pennsylvania's public school districts don't have to offer kindergarten, but every one of them does, using the discretion given them to fashion programs for children from ages 4 to 6, and for a half or full day. Once established, and as long as at least 10 children are enrolled, kindergarten must remain "an integral part of the elementary school system," according to state law.[1]

Kindergarten attendance is not compulsory, because state law doesn't mandate school attendance until children are 8 years old. A child can get kindergarten in one of three ways:

- **Public school.** In 1999-2000, 121,000 children enrolled in kindergarten in Pennsylvania's 500 public school districts (the 501st, Bryn Athyn, does not operate any schools but pays tuition for its students at other districts). Public school districts may also offer kindergarten for 4-year-old children, but only 30 Pennsylvania districts offer the option. They serve about 2,550 children – only about 2 percent of the next year's public kindergarten class, and all with half-day programs.
- **Private or nonpublic school.** In 1999-2000, 35,412 children enrolled in kindergarten in private and nonpublic elementary schools. Of all private and nonpublic elementary students, 91 percent attended religious schools and 67 percent attended Catholic schools. The State Board of Private Academic Schools oversees secular schools, and religious schools, while not subject to state regulation, must certify that they teach the required basic courses for at least 180 days a year.
- **Home schooling:** In 1999-2000, 501 children, ages 5 and 6, were home-schooled. Local public school superintendents oversee home schoolers in their districts.

The state Department of Education oversees public education in Pennsylvania, implementing state laws, regulations devised by the State Board of Education, and its own guidelines to regulate kindergarten and all the other public school grades. Locally, kindergarten is governed by school boards, elected to four-year terms, and the administrative staff they hire. Exceptions are three low-performing districts subjected to state action: the Philadelphia School District, overseen by a five-member School Reform Commission jointly appointed by the governor and mayor; the Chester-Upland School District, with a three-member Board of Control appointed by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education; and the Harrisburg School District, with a five-member Board of Control appointed by the mayor.

Kindergartners often receive their first formal introduction to literacy, including exposure to the structural elements of print and encouragement of positive attitudes toward learning. They are read to and given opportunities to develop early reading skills, including letter and word recognition and understanding of printed words as a form of communication. They are taught early mathematical concepts such as "more," "less," and sequences of numbers. They have opportunities to relate play, exploration, and learning. And they learn how to function in more structured group settings than they may have experienced before.

Many children enter kindergarten with some preschool experience. Those who arrive with basic knowledge of letters, numbers, and shapes, and who have been read to at least three times a week, show higher reading and math capabilities in the spring of kindergarten and first grade.[3] When preschool and kindergarten administrators plan an orderly transition, children have even greater opportunities to benefit from a continuum of educational services and from similar approaches to teaching. Unfortunately, transition planning is the exception, rather than the rule, since school systems and preschools are not linked in most communities.

Fact Box

Kindergarten

- **Definition:** Kindergarten generally is the first year of school for most children.
- **Eligibility:** Children ages 4 to 6.
- **Participation:** In 1999-2000, nearly 121,000 children enrolled in public school kindergarten; 35,412 enrolled in private and nonpublic schools, and 501 children, ages 5 and 6, were home-schooled.
- **Availability:** At or through all 501 Pennsylvania school districts, and at private and nonpublic schools (number not available).
- **Oversight:** The Pennsylvania Department of Education oversees public kindergarten programs. The State Board of Private Academic Schools oversees secular schools, and religious schools are not subject to state regulation, although they must file an affidavit indicating that they teach the basic required courses for at least 180 days a year.[2]
- **Funding:** Local taxes fund an average of 58 percent of public school costs, and state subsidies cover 38 percent. Federal support and other minor sources cover the remaining 4 percent. Private and nonpublic schools charge tuition.

Resources for Professionals and Consumers

To teach in kindergarten, public school teachers must have either:

- An early childhood certificate that permits teaching in nursery school through third grade. College coursework for the certificate focuses largely on early literacy;
- An elementary school certificate, a more broadly based credential, that permits teaching in kindergarten through sixth grade;
- Or a kindergarten-through-12 special education, art, music, or physical education certificate.

School districts tend to hire teachers with elementary rather than early childhood certificates because they can be placed more flexibly, although many experts believe the early childhood teaching standards advance the best teaching approaches for the primary grades. Under state law, up to 25 percent of the faculties at charter schools – independent public schools, chartered by school boards and operated free of many state legal requirements by groups of teachers, parents, institutions of higher education, or museums – may lack certification. Although private and religious school teachers do not need to be certified, most of them are, particularly in Catholic schools, which educate two-thirds of nonpublic elementary students.

Pennsylvania is among the many states with new policies designed to enhance overall teacher quality. Public school teachers must pursue continuing education and professional development to maintain certification, in courses usually offered through colleges and universities, intermediate units, and professional associations, although the path they follow is largely their own choice. The new teacher preparation requirements also include higher entrance and exit requirements for teacher training programs, and tests of basic skills, subject knowledge, and teaching acumen of would-be teachers.

The state does not offer technical assistance specifically for kindergarten, although the Department of Education provides information and some limited help with state and federal programs. School districts can receive technical assistance from various sources, including colleges, professional associations, and numerous consultants and program vendors, but most commonly, from intermediate units, the regional education agencies providing a variety of services to member school districts. The IUs provide curriculum development, instructional technology, professional development, special education, and a variety of management assistance to their districts. They are also the principal providers of Early Intervention services to children from 3 to 5 years old (see "Early Intervention"). The IUs have also partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Education in providing technical assistance resources to help districts implement the state's academic standards.

Kindergarten makes a difference. Students from kindergarten enter first grade with higher levels of reading and math skills than students who missed kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten is especially beneficial. For at-risk children, in particular — low-income children from high-poverty communities — full-day kindergarten can plant the seeds of school success.

Most school districts give parents, especially those whose children are entering kindergarten or first grade, information that helps them understand the schools. Some districts let parents choose among elementary schools, providing guidance on weighing the options. Charter schools provide parents with information as a recruiting tool. The state Department of Education Web site profiles every public school with a considerable amount of consumer information, at www.paprofiles.org.

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Funding

Kindergarten is funded as part of the regular public school system, and while the state has begun to require accounting by grade level, no reliable information exists yet about actual spending on kindergarten.

School districts do not receive additional state funds for operating full-day kindergarten. Since 1991-92, any district that has shifted from half-day to full-day programs must absorb the additional costs entirely from local revenues, because the state subsidy does not recognize what amounts to a doubling of the kindergarten student population.

Why Kindergarten Matters

Kindergarten makes a difference. Students from kindergarten enter first grade with higher levels of reading and math skills than students who missed kindergarten.[4]

Full-day kindergarten is especially beneficial. For at-risk children, in particular – low-income children from high-poverty communities – full-day kindergarten provides both immediate and lasting benefits:[5]

- **Higher test scores:** In Ohio, full-day kindergartners scored higher on first-grade reading readiness tests, on reading tests in the early elementary grades, and on achievement tests in third, fifth, and seventh grades.[6]
- **School success:** Full-day kindergartners receive better report cards, experience fewer grade retentions, require less remedial instruction, and receive fewer special education placements than their peers who attended half-day programs.[7]
- **More time:** In full-day programs, teachers have more time for both formal and informal instruction and can give children more individualized attention and reinforcement for positive behavior.[8] School officials also have more chances to spot learning and behavioral problems and address them promptly when kindergartners attend school all day.[9] Full-day kindergarten also creates fewer disruptions and transitions in a child's day.[10]
- **Better behavior:** Full-day kindergartners are more creative and cooperative, more involved in classroom work with other children, and learn and think more independently than their peers in half-day programs.[11]
- **Better nutrition:** The longer school day provides more opportunities for nutritious meals and snacks – particularly important for low-income children.[12]

State of the States/Best Practices

In the U.S., 36 states require districts to operate kindergarten and 11 require kindergarten attendance. Neither mandate exists in Pennsylvania, although all districts do offer kindergarten.[13] Fourteen states, including North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia, require that districts offer full-day kindergarten.[14] Nationally, about 55 percent of all kindergartners attend full-day programs, compared with just about half as many – 29 percent – in Pennsylvania.[15]

The thinking that links delivery of kindergarten services to effective practices in early childhood education has not seeped into most state policies. As far as can be determined, only Ohio, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin require that kindergarten teachers be certified or trained in early childhood, and transition efforts are left largely to local communities. In Braddock, Pennsylvania, the Woodland Hills School District offers a good example of local transition efforts. There, the former school superintendent and the community heath center director developed a plan with teacher training and facility sharing that eases children from the health center's preschool to the public school's kindergarten.

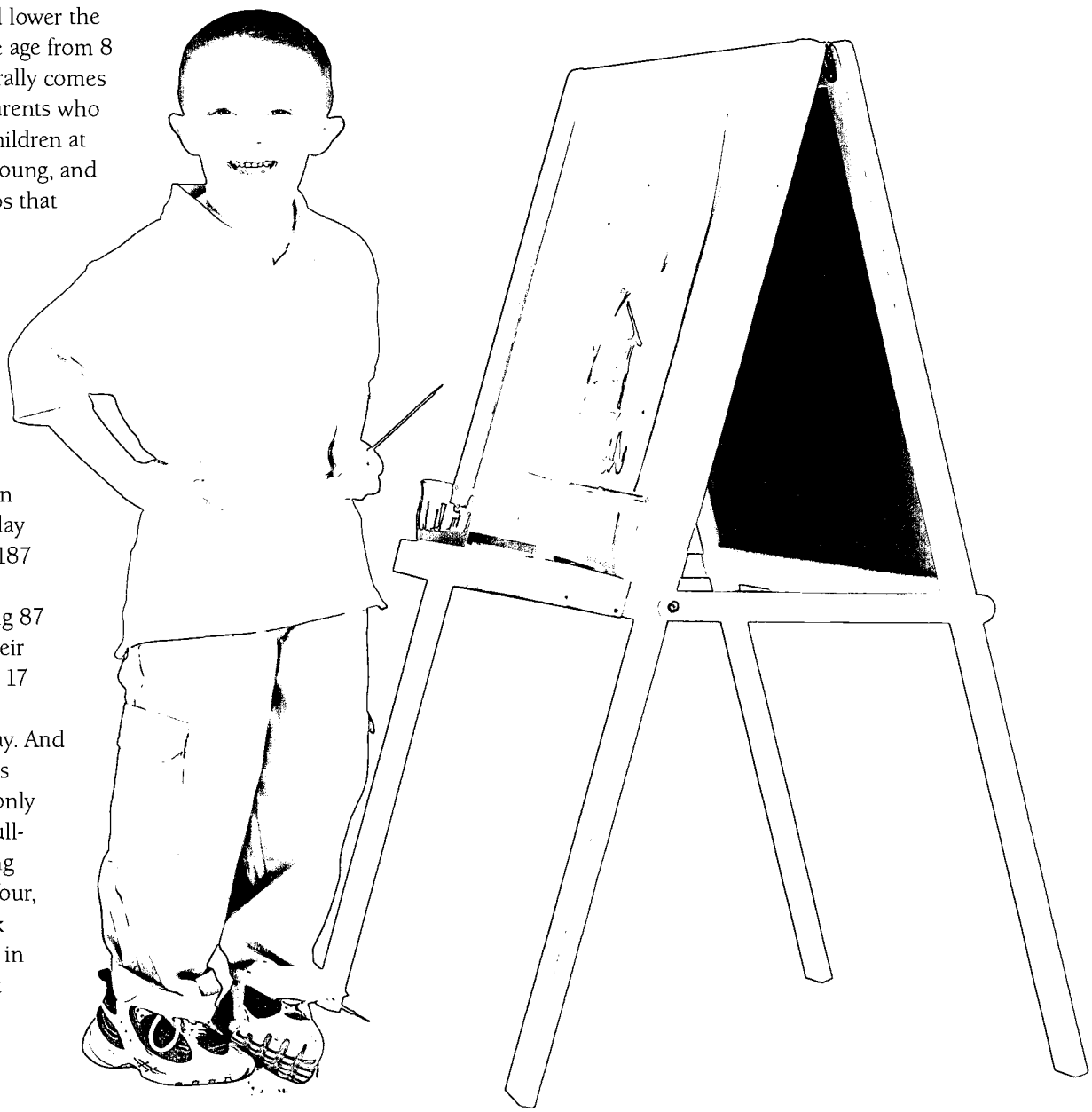
Situation Analysis

Though many children entering kindergarten have some sort of early learning experience in child care and preschool, Pennsylvania has only one, limited-application policy addressing the transition to kindergarten – a guarantee that children in Early Intervention continue getting services, accompanied by a review of services in kindergarten to determine future special education needs.

Occasionally, state legislators introduce bills that would require children to attend kindergarten or would lower the mandatory attendance age from 8 to 6. Opposition generally comes from two sources – parents who prefer to teach their children at home while they are young, and some education groups that view the proposals as unfunded state mandates.

Among the state's 121,000 public school kindergartners, 34,776 – 29 percent, or one kindergartner in three – attended full-day programs. Statewide, 187 districts offer full-day kindergarten, including 87 that offer it to all of their students, and another 17 where at least half of students attend full-day. And full-day kindergarten is growing. In 1996-97, only 154 districts offered full-day programs, reaching one kindergartner in four, or 24 percent.[16] At-risk children, as measured in districts where at least one-third of children qualified for free lunches, were much likelier to attend full-day programs than kindergartners statewide, or 68 percent compared to 29 percent. Still, the outlook for many at-risk children remains bleak. In 27 of the 65 highest-poverty districts, fewer than 10 percent of kindergartners receive the school-preparation advantages of full-day programs.

Many districts do not introduce full-day kindergarten for three primary reasons. The first is money; full-day kindergarten requires twice the teachers and more materials.



The second is space, to accommodate twice the number of classrooms. The third is attitudinal – a belief among some that young children should be home with parents rather than in school. As more parents work outside the home and the benefits of full-day kindergarten become better known, the third challenge is waning, but the first two – money and space – remain daunting problems for school districts that want to offer full-day kindergarten.

The growth in full-day kindergarten demonstrates that many districts are finding ways around the obstacles. School administrators and school board members are coming to see full-day kindergarten as an important first step toward their primary goal – increasing student achievement. In the meantime, periodic legislative efforts to enact incentives for full-day kindergarten have failed for lack of executive branch leadership, legislative champions, and committed interest groups for which this might be

a primary issue. School officials have increasingly focused on equity in education funding, to lessen reliance on shrinking local tax bases and free money for effective school reforms (find discussions of education equity in the Funding and Situation Analysis sections of "First through Third Grades").

Many groups advocate for a variety of state policy perspectives in the K-12 education arena. Among those they represent: parents, teachers, school board members, school administrators, principals, school business officials, rural school districts, urban school districts, pupil transportation companies, teacher education institutions, private and nonpublic schools, charter school operators, home schooling parents, and private school management companies.

Most of these groups, especially the traditional education groups such as the teacher unions, school boards, and school administrators, have some common issues, primarily focused on increased and more equitable state funding for public education and opposition to school vouchers and various privatization proposals. But over the past 20 years, the "education lobby" has divided over many significant issues – particularly new state programs and funding, collective bargaining, and the distribution of power and authority among the state, districts, schools, and school personnel – so state government has become as much an arena for deciding disputes among advocates as a target for unified advocacy.

While some advocacy groups support full-day kindergarten and others would find it acceptable if funded by the state, this is not a top priority of any of the traditional education organizations.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

As the first step in formal learning, a good kindergarten experience can position children for success in the 12 years of schooling that follow. Every Pennsylvania child has access to kindergarten, but in many cases, programs can do more to prepare children for the classroom and assure a successful school career:

☐ **Full-day kindergarten:** To reach more at-risk children, the state should create a permanent incentive subsidy to help school districts and charter schools with high concentrations of low-income students offer or maintain full-day kindergarten. The subsidies would lift some of the cost concerns that continue to separate at-risk children from the benefits of full-day kindergarten. They would also help ease the financial burden for school districts that have implemented full-day kindergarten at the expense of other priorities. The incentive would not cover the full costs of the program, so local dollars still would be required. And in districts that do not have space, even this subsidy might not be enough to spur development of full-day programs.

☐ **Small classes:** Since small class sizes in the lower grades can improve academic achievement, particularly for low-income children, any class size reduction initiative should apply to kindergarten. Initially, the state could target funds to school districts with high percentages of low-income students, and low-performing students on fifth grade state tests. The program should begin in kindergarten and first grade and expand to second and third grades over the next two years (see "First through Third Grades").

☐ **Teacher training:** Districts should be encouraged to hire kindergarten teachers with early childhood certification or with training and experience in teaching young children. Veteran kindergarten teachers should be encouraged to focus their professional development activities on early childhood development. A recent state law, Act 48, requires educators to take continuing professional development courses every five years to maintain their state certification. The law gives educators and their districts considerable leeway in determining which courses qualify.

☐ **Education equity:** Finally, state lawmakers should recognize their constitutional responsibility to "provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth" by reforming the state's public education funding system.[17] The state should assume a larger share of funding, shifting school financing away from over reliance on local property taxes. A revised system should also diminish the gap between high- and low-spending districts, so all children have an opportunity to learn and succeed in school — regardless of where in Pennsylvania they happen to live.

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FIRST THROUGH THIRD GRADES

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

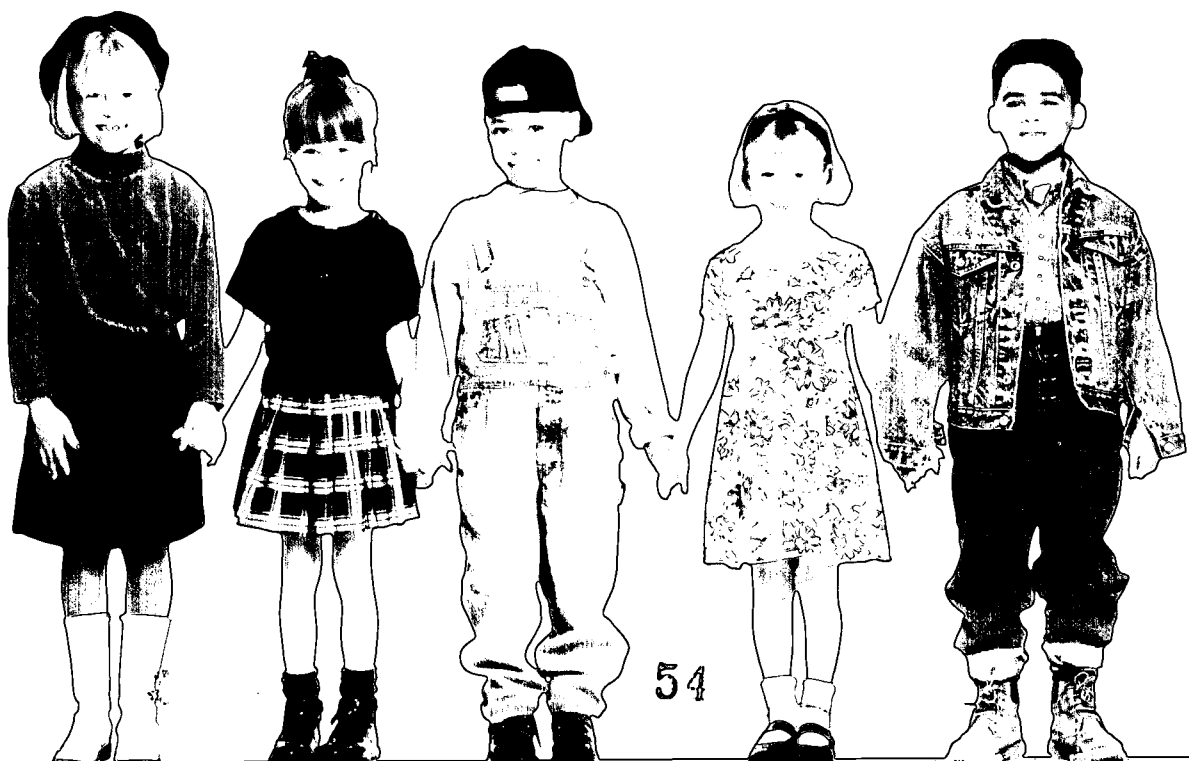
The first three grades are the critical time for equipping children with the tools for school success. Third graders who are good students, and especially those who are good readers, are firmly on the path to success and are less likely to need a costly – and often ineffective – game of catch-up later.

The Primary Grades: First through Third Grades in Pennsylvania

Children bring widely varying skill levels to the first grade classroom, their learning abilities already influenced by the depth of parental involvement and preschool experiences in their young lives. Even the preparatory advantages of kindergarten aren't a given, because kindergarten attendance is not mandatory, and 9 percent of Pennsylvania first graders had not attended kindergarten in their school district the year before.

A child can get primary grade schooling in one of three ways:

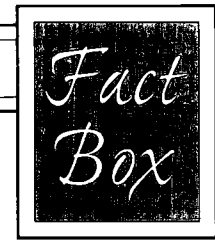
- **Public school.** In 1999-2000, 416,000 children enrolled in grades one through three in Pennsylvania's 500 public school districts (the 501st, Bryn Athyn, does not operate any schools but pays tuition for its students at other districts).
- **Private or nonpublic school.** In 1999-2000, 87,600 children enrolled in grades one through three in private and nonpublic elementary schools. Of all private and nonpublic elementary students, 91 percent attended religious schools and 67 percent attended Catholic schools. The State Board of Private Academic Schools oversees secular schools, and religious schools, while not subject to state regulation, must certify that they teach the required basic courses for at least 180 days a year.



- **Home schooling:** In 1999-2000, almost 4,000 6- to 8-year-olds were home-schooled. Local public school superintendents oversee home schoolers in their districts.

The state Department of Education oversees public education in Pennsylvania, implementing state laws, regulations devised by the State Board of Education, and its own guidelines to regulate the primary grades and all the other public school grades. Locally, the primary grades are governed by school boards, elected to four-year terms, and the administrative staff they hire. Exceptions are three low-performing districts subjected to state action: the Philadelphia School District, overseen by a five-member School Reform Commission jointly appointed by the governor and mayor; the Chester-Upland School District, with a three-member Board of Control appointed by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education; and the Harrisburg School District, with a five-member Board of Control appointed by the mayor.

In most Pennsylvania school districts, kindergarten and the primary grades – housed in the same buildings and overseen by the same principals – flow in a continuum of curriculum, materials, and academic goals. First through third graders, generally from 6 through 8 years old, spend most of their days in one classroom, taught by one teacher, five hours a day in the state-mandated 180-day school year. Some get additional help, inside the classroom or separately, to overcome learning difficulties.



First through Third Grades

- **Definition:** The first three grades in Pennsylvania elementary schools, also known as the primary grades.
- **Eligibility:** Children who turn 5 years, 7 months old by September 1 may enter first grade, and they generally complete third grade at about age 8. However, school attendance in Pennsylvania is not mandatory until children are 8 years old.
- **Participation:** 416,000 Pennsylvania children enrolled in grades one through three in public schools in 1999-2000, and 87,600 enrolled in nonpublic and private schools. Almost 4,000 6- to 8-year-olds were home-schooled.
- **Availability:** At or through all 501 Pennsylvania school districts. Of the state's 77 charter schools, 43 offer classes in the primary grades, five through online programs. Children may also enroll in private and nonpublic elementary schools or be home-schooled.
- **Oversight:** The Pennsylvania Department of Education and local school boards oversee public school programs; the State Board of Private Academic Schools oversees private secular schools; and nonpublic, religious schools must file an affidavit confirming that they teach basic required courses for at least 180 days a year.[1]
- **Funding:** Public school per-student instructional costs ranged from a high of $13,096 to a low of $3,932 in 1999-2000. Local taxes fund an average of 58 percent of public school costs, and state subsidies cover 38 percent. Federal support and other minor sources cover the remaining 4 percent. Private and nonpublic schools charge tuition.

Resources for Professionals and Consumers

To teach in grades one through three, public school teachers must have either:

- An early childhood certificate that permits teaching in nursery school through third grade. College coursework focuses largely on early literacy;
- An elementary school certificate, a more broadly based credential, that permits teaching in kindergarten through sixth grade;
- Or a kindergarten-through-12 special education, art, music, or physical education certificate.

School districts tend to hire teachers with elementary rather than early childhood certificates because they can be placed more flexibly, although many experts believe the early childhood teaching standards advance the best teaching approaches for the primary grades. Under state law, up to 25 percent of the faculties at charter schools – independent public schools, chartered by school boards and operated free of many state legal requirements by groups of teachers, parents, institutions of higher education, or museums – may lack certification. Although private and religious school teachers do not need to be certified, most of them are, particularly in Catholic schools, which educate two-thirds of nonpublic elementary students.

Pennsylvania is among the many states with new policies to enhance overall teacher quality. Public school teachers must pursue continuing education and professional development to maintain certification, in courses usually offered through colleges and universities, intermediate units, and professional associations, although the path they follow is largely their own choice. The new teacher preparation requirements also include higher entrance and exit requirements for teacher training programs, and tests of basic skills, subject knowledge, and teaching acumen of would-be teachers.

The state does not offer grade-specific technical assistance, although the Department of Education provides information and some limited help with state and federal programs. School districts can receive technical assistance from various sources, including colleges, professional associations, and numerous consultants and program vendors, but most commonly, from intermediate units, the regional education agencies providing a variety of services to member school districts. The IUs provide curriculum development, instructional technology, professional development, special education, and a variety of management assistance to their districts. They are also the principal providers of Early Intervention

The Home Schooling Option

A small but distinctive exception to the typical classroom is home schooling, a growing movement in Pennsylvania. Since 1988, Pennsylvania has allowed parents to educate their children at home, and their numbers have grown from 4,844 in 1990-91 to 23,313 in 1999-2000.

To home school their children, parents must teach a 180-day school year and file an affidavit with the local school superintendent every fall, indicating proof of immunization and subjects to be taught, including the basic courses required in public schools.

Home-schooled children must take national or state reading and math tests, and their parents must keep portfolios of the students' work available for review by the local school superintendent. Superintendents who determine that the schooling is inadequate may request a school board hearing on returning the child to public school. Parents and superintendents may appeal the determination to the Secretary of Education or to Commonwealth Court.[5]

services to children from 3 to 5 years old (see "Early Intervention"). The IUs have also partnered with PDE in providing technical assistance resources to help districts implement the state's academic standards.

Most school districts give parents, especially those with children entering kindergarten or first grade, information that helps them understand the schools. Some districts let parents choose among elementary schools, providing guidance on weighing the options. Charter schools provide parents with information as a recruiting tool. The state Department of Education Web site profiles every public school with a considerable amount of consumer information, at www.paprofiles.org.

Funding

Though Pennsylvania's schoolchildren share a home state, spending on their education varies widely among districts – from a high of $13,096 per student in 1999-2000 to a low of $3,932, or a spending range of 3.3 to 1.[2] The inequity has not gone unnoticed. Education Week's highly regarded *Quality Counts 2002* report gave Pennsylvania a D- grade in education equity – behind all but three other states.[3]

Private and religious schools are financed through tuition, support from religious denominations, and endowments, but their students also benefit from state-financed transportation, textbooks, instructional materials, and other services, totaling $155.4 million in 2001-02.[4]

Why the Primary Grades Matter

By the end of third grade, the path to success or failure in school has been charted for most children. "Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life... [T]he early childhood years – from birth through age eight – are the most important for literacy development," says the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children."[6]

But success is a long way off. Nationally, 37 percent of all fourth graders scored below basic proficiency on the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test.[7] In Pennsylvania, where state testing currently begins in fifth grade, 23 percent scored below basic proficiency on the 2001 PSSA reading test.[8] Though the two exams determine proficiency levels differently, "below basic" is the lowest level on both, so the unpleasant message is the same – too many children face serious obstacles to future learning because they can't read well.

State of the States/Best Practices

Most states adopt academic standards and perform assessments to advance student achievement in the early grades. Pennsylvania is among the 49 states with standards and the 37 with standards-based state assessments.[9] Many states, including Pennsylvania, do not test students until fourth or fifth grade, but that will change by 2005-06, when a new federal law requires annual reading and math tests for all third through eighth graders.

But standards aren't the only achievement booster. Other proven state policies – a balanced approach to literacy, improved teacher quality, and smaller classes – can heighten the academic prospects of children in the primary grades and point them toward long-term school success.

Reading: More and more studies are demonstrating the effectiveness of research-based literacy approaches, with instruction balanced among phonics, vocabulary, literature, and comprehension.[10]

At least 31 states, including Pennsylvania, offer reading-improvement programs in the early grades. Pennsylvania's four-year, $100 million Read to Succeed provides competitive grants to school districts. The program identifies children who need help and boosts their reading power through

research-based instruction, continuing classroom assessments, and targeted professional development for preschool and primary teachers.[11] However, Read to Succeed heads to its final year in 2002-03. Unless the state renews Read to Succeed in 2003-04, schools must fill the gaps from their own limited resources (see "Reading Readiness and Success" for more on Read to Succeed and federal reading initiatives).

Teacher quality: When it comes to student success, the most important factor in the classroom is the quality of the teacher, but many teacher training programs aren't aligned with new research on effective teaching, and many veteran teachers don't have access to it.[12]

Pennsylvania is among the many states with new policies designed to enhance overall teacher quality, including:

- Higher entrance and exit requirements for teacher training programs.
- Tests of basic skills, subject knowledge, and teaching acumen of would-be teachers.
- Continuing professional development requirements.

However, more can be done to align both initial preparation and professional development – training for new teachers and continuing education for veterans of the classroom – with research-based, effective practices in literacy instruction. Of the five states that require early childhood certification for kindergarten teachers, only Ohio extends that mandate through third grade.

Smaller classes: Many struggling students, especially low-income children, improve significantly when they get smaller classes in the early grades. The most vivid demonstration is Tennessee's Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio program, or STAR, which put some kindergartners through third graders in classes of 13 to 17 students, while others stayed in "regular" classes of 22 to 26 students. In every grade, small-class students, especially those who entered the program early and stayed for three or four years, scored better on standardized achievement tests. Even through ninth grade, the gains have persisted, even though all students returned to "regular" classes in fourth grade. The gains were most significant for low-income, minority, and urban students.[13]

Wisconsin found classroom benefits, too, when kindergartners through third graders were assigned to classes of 15 or fewer students through its Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program – fewer discipline problems, more time for instruction and in-depth study of material, more time for individualized instruction, and increased parental satisfaction.[14]

At least 20 states have reduced class sizes.[15] Pennsylvania is not among them, although Empowerment Districts – the poorest-performing districts – can use additional state funding to reduce class sizes in kindergarten through third grade. However, initial use of empowerment funds has focused on more basic structural needs of the districts, such as updating curricula, buying textbooks and supplies, and providing professional development. Most states target their class size reduction dollars at low-income children, but California's initiative is the largest – a statewide move toward classes of

20 or fewer students in kindergarten through third grade. At $1 billion a year, the program has increased student achievement but also fostered some unintended consequences. For instance, wealthier districts initially got more funds than poorer districts, and more advantaged schools have lured some of the best urban teachers away from their districts, so urban teachers' overall qualifications and experience levels have declined significantly.[16]

Situation Analysis

The first requirement imposed on school boards by the Public School Code of 1949 is the requirement to "establish, equip, furnish, and maintain a sufficient number of elementary public schools."[17] The law does not single out the primary grades, but they are affected by the entire body of state law, State Board of Education regulations, and standards and guidelines of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. However, the federal government expanded its role in education – and especially early education – with passage in early 2002 of the No Child Left Behind Act. The law requires states to set proficiency standards, test all third- through eighth-graders annually, increase teacher quality standards, and assist failing schools. It creates two new federal reading programs and continues funding for before- and after-school programs, class size reduction, and professional development for teachers

Occasionally, state legislators have tried to enact voluntary class size reduction programs, but the costs and a lack of consensus among lawmakers and education groups about the efficacy of class size reduction have kept the idea on the ground.

In the school funding arena, legislative interest in correcting school funding inequities has been rising since the state Supreme Court decided not to intervene in 1999. A select committee in the state House of Representatives began holding hearings on education equity in 2001, for a report scheduled for release in May 2002. In the meantime, two major school finance bills were introduced in the 2001-02 legislative session:

- The Successful Schools Budget proposal, introduced as House Bill 2344 by Rep. Nicholas Micozzie (R- Delaware), would shift most of the school funding burden from the local property

tax to the state income tax. The proposal would reduce the gap between high- and low-spending districts, pegging per-pupil spending to spending in the most successful districts, and fleshing out the formula with adjustments for the percentage of students eligible for subsidized lunch, requiring special education, and speaking languages other than English. Low-spending districts could increase their spending while lowering local taxes, and high-spending districts would receive additional state funds that would let them reduce taxes.

- Senate Bill 1373, introduced by Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill), would increase the state income tax and mandate local tax reductions of $1 for every new dollar of state funds received. The formula would be based on the state's median instructional spending and local wealth, with poorer districts receiving a greater share of state funds. However, the dollar-for-dollar tax reduction requirement would not allow low-spending districts to increase overall spending. After the first year, districts' local tax increases could not exceed median statewide spending growth, although voters could approve higher local taxes through referenda.

Pennsylvania's school funding will also depend on the new governor who takes office in 2003. All of the candidates have addressed school funding with proposals ranging from raising state taxes to offset local tax cuts, to funding education through riverboat gaming or slot machines at race tracks.

In the state policy arena, many groups represent a variety of interests, including parents, teachers, school board members, school administrators, principals, school business officials, rural school districts, urban school districts, pupil transportation companies, teacher education institutions, private and nonpublic schools, charter school operators, home schooling parents, and private school management companies.

Most, particularly the traditional education groups, share some common issues, such as support for increased funding and education equity, and opposition to school vouchers and privatization. But over the past 20 years, education groups have divided over many significant issues, particularly new state programs and funding, collective bargaining, and the distribution of power and authority among the state, districts, schools, and school personnel. In this atmosphere, state government has become as much an arena for deciding disputes as a target for unified advocacy.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Some Pennsylvania children enter fourth grade after four unfruitful years of school. Pennsylvania's schools are inequitably funded, many classes are too large, and teachers are not always attuned to the latest research on reaching the youngest minds.

Pennsylvania could start more children on a successful school career through:

☐ **Smaller classes:** To improve children's learning by the end of third grade, the state should reduce class sizes, targeting school districts with high rates of low-income and low-performing students on fifth grade (and eventually third grade) state tests. The program should begin in kindergarten and first grade, expanding to second grade in the second year and third grade in the third year.

☐ **Enhanced teacher training:** The state should reinforce its existing teacher-quality policies with a stronger literacy focus in the primary grades. Potential approaches include requiring that kindergarten through third grade teachers have early childhood teaching certificates or concentrate their professional development on early literacy instruction.

☐ **Education equity:** Finally, state lawmakers should recognize their constitutional responsibility to "provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth" by reforming the state's public education funding system.[18] The state should assume a larger share of funding, shifting school financing away from over reliance on local property taxes. A revised system should also diminish the gap between high- and low-spending districts, so all children have an opportunity to learn and succeed in school — regardless of where in Pennsylvania they happen to live.

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EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Success in the classroom can depend on factors beyond the school day. With a safe place to go after school, children can explore their talents in constructive activities, while tutoring can smooth the way for students traveling a bumpy road to academic achievement.

Educational Enrichment in Pennsylvania

The reality of the times: Nationwide in 1998, both parents or the custodial single parent of 5.3 million low-income children, ages 6 to 12, worked during the after-school hours.[1] Many low-income children are at risk of failing, and where they spend their time out of school can make a difference in the school, in higher achievement and better behavior. In Pennsylvania, three formal educational enrichment programs – youth development, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and Classroom Plus – are designed to provide academic or developmental boosts, while subsidized child care can offer parents safe out-of-school options for their children up to age 12. All, however, fall short of the need in most communities.

After School/Youth Development

Introduced in 2001-02, Pennsylvania's youth development program operates through local and regional Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), the economic development panels within the state Department of Labor and Industry's Team Pennsylvania effort. The program serves 9,409 low- and moderate-income 5- to 18-year-olds, including a small percentage – 3.3 percent, or 311 children – from 5 to 8 years old. The WIBs work with local youth-serving organizations to establish programs in community places such as child care programs, children and youth agencies, and schools.

Operation by the WIBs gives the programs a job-training character while remaining focused on their primary purpose – giving disadvantaged children and youths enriching after-school activities, including tutoring, homework help, remedial schooling, job training, and recreation. Because the program is in its first year, its effectiveness for the 5-to-8 age group has not been determined.

Of the $15 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding allocated for youth development, $10 million goes to all WIBs through a formula based on local rates of TANF-eligible families. Another $5 million is awarded in challenge grants to WIBs serving families up to 35 percent of poverty.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

The core mission of 21st Century Community Learning Centers is improving academic achievement, but the school-based centers can strive for their goals through a variety of activities – drug- and violence-prevention programs; technology education; art, music and recreation programs; counseling; and character education. Nearly every program offers reading enrichment, and most also offer tutoring, homework help, and math enrichment. Targeted at schools where students face multiple risk factors, including poverty, limited English proficiency, high dropout rates, and low literacy, the program served about 5,000 Pennsylvania children, ages 5 to 18, in 2001.[3]

When first created in 1998, the federal government administered all the funds allocated for 21st CCLCs. However, since passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002, some of the program's $1 billion will funnel through states. In Pennsylvania, the 35 programs previously funded with $15.15 million will remain under U.S. Department of Education oversight, but the state will now control, develop standards for, and distribute an additional $11.5 million for new programs.

The No Child Left Behind Act further emphasized the 21st CCLC's mission of academic performance improvements, but the revision also extended funding to non-school groups, including faith-based organizations.

Classroom Plus

Introduced in 2001-02, Classroom Plus is designed to help students overcome academic challenges by the middle of their elementary years and achieve grade-level reading standards. Third and fourth graders who score in the bottom quartile on recognized achievement tests are eligible, while fifth and sixth graders qualify by scoring below basic proficiencies on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. Eligible students must be enrolled in public, private, or nonpublic schools.

With a $23.6 million allocation, the Pennsylvania Department of Education issued 1,500 grants in 2001-02. For their academically eligible children, parents of any income can use grants of up to $500

Fact Box

After School/Youth Development

- **Definition:** Local after-school educational and job training programs for children ages 5 to 18.
- **Eligibility:** Funds are distributed through a formula based on percentage of area residents eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or through challenge grants available to programs serving families up to 235 percent of poverty ($42,535 for a family of four).
- **Participation:** Of the 9,409 children served statewide in 2001-02, 311 children were ages 5 to 8.[2]
- **Availability:** Offered by 23 regional Workforce Investment Boards and their Youth Councils, in 67 counties in 2001-02.
- **Oversight:** Team Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board, Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.
- **Funding:** $15 million through the state Department of Public Welfare in 2001-02, with $10 million allocated by formula and $5 million awarded in competitive challenge grants.
- **More information:** Team Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board, www.paworkforce.state.pa.us; 717-772-4966.

to buy individual or small-group tutoring from any Department of Education-authorized provider. Statewide, most Classroom Plus tutoring programs are offered by school districts and intermediate units, but other options are available, including for-profit tutoring centers or programs run by non-profit or private schools, faith organizations, and other community groups. Individual reading and math teachers can also receive approval, and English as a Second Language is available in many areas. Services can be provided before or after school, on weekends, or in the summer, although the $500 ceiling can limit services to an initial assessment and about 10 hours of tutoring, especially at for-profit centers.

Why Educational Enrichment Matters

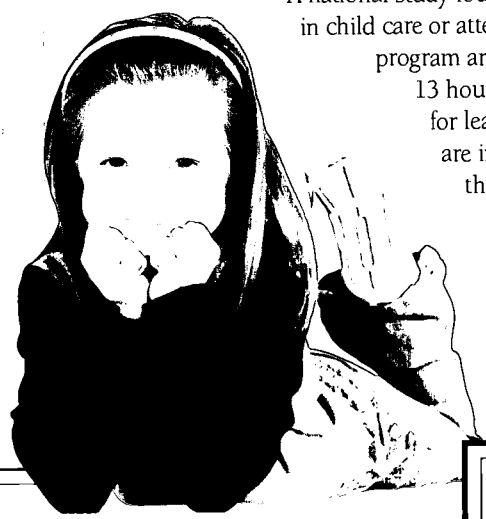
In an atmosphere where many young schoolchildren are not building elemental reading skills – 23 percent of Pennsylvania fifth graders scored below basic proficiency on the 2001-02 PSSA test – after-school programs and carefully structured tutoring can bridge the gap.

For young children, structured after-school programs can promote school achievement. In Milwaukee, for example,

The Child Care Factor

More than half of the 95,992 children in Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program – 53,755 children – are school age, between 5 and 12 years old.

Of these, about 31,000 are in state-licensed center-based or group home child care settings, which must provide "homework supervision... in accordance with arrangements determined by the parent and the operator" but are not required to provide educational programming. The rest are in family child care homes or watched by neighbors and relatives, where formal education may or may not be a part of the day.



A national study found that 6- to 9-year-olds in child care or attending an after-school program are there for an average of 13 hours a week – an opportunity for learning.[5] When those hours are in a high-quality program, the benefits surface in children who get better grades and have better social adjustment and conduct in school than their peers who aren't in after-school programs.[6] (See "Child Care").

Fact Box

21st Century Community Learning Centers

- **Definition:** After-school and summer programs providing academic enrichment for children in schools with students facing multiple risks of educational failure.
- **Eligibility:** Schools that provide after-school, evening, and weekend learning opportunities, designed to meet the needs of local children and in collaboration with community-based organizations, including faith-based groups. New federal rules will extend eligibility to community-based organizations without school involvement.
- **Participation:** About 5,000 Pennsylvania students, ages 5 to 18, participated in 2001.
- **Availability:** Offered at 35 sites operated by school districts, intermediate units, and charter schools, in collaboration with community-based organizations. Growth in federal funding will expand the program in 2002.
- **Oversight:** U.S. Department of Education, distributing funds to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- **Funding:** $15.15 million in federal funds in 2001, distributed in minimum $50,000, three- to five-year competitive grants.
- **More information:** 21st Century Community Learning Centers, www.ed.gov/21stcclc/.

216 low-income third graders in an after-school program showed better grades, improved study habits, and fewer behavioral problems than their peers who didn't attend. In another study, 150 low-income first graders got better grades and developed improved work habits after attending an after-school program.[7]

Researchers agree that success in tutoring hinges on the presence of key factors that assure quality and yield a return on the investment. They include:[8]

- Close coordination with the classroom or reading teacher.
- Intensive and ongoing training for tutors.
- Well-structured and carefully scripted tutoring sessions.
- Careful monitoring and reinforcement of progress.
- Frequent and regular tutoring sessions. The more sessions each week, the greater the gains.

Young children who get tutoring benefit from improved classroom performance:[9]

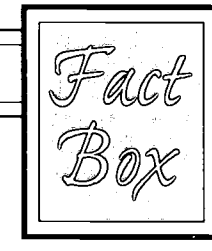
- **Language enhancement:** In one study, low-achieving second- and third-graders tutored twice a week for an hour outperformed their non-tutored peers in word recognition, reading accuracy, and spelling. Half of the tutored children made a full year's gain in reading, compared to only 20 percent of the comparison group.
- **Social gains:** Low-achieving elementary school students tutored by older students in one program had lower absentee rates and fewer disciplinary problems, as well as improved reading scores. As a bonus, their tutors also had lower dropout and absentee rates.
- **Confidence booster:** Students who are tutored in reading have shown higher self-confidence as readers and are more motivated to read.

State of the States/Best Practices

Youth Development

According to the National Governors Association, state efforts to implement successful extended learning opportunities, such as youth development, tutoring programs, and 21st CCLCs, are most effective when they:[10]

- Build infrastructure that supports collaboration and coordination.
- Complement, rather than duplicate, regular instruction.



Classroom Plus

- **Definition:** State grants for parents to buy math or reading tutoring services for their children.
- **Eligibility:** Children in third through sixth grades in public, private, or nonpublic schools who fall below established standards on achievement tests.
- **Participation:** 1,500 grants were issued in 2001-02.
- **Availability:** Individual or small-group tutoring services at approved for-profit or non-profit programs during non-school hours and the summer.
- **Oversight:** Bureau of Community and Student Services, Pennsylvania Department of Education.[4]
- **Funding:** $23.6 million in state funds in 2001-02, with grants of up to $500 per child.
- **More information:** The Classroom Plus hotline, 1-800-219-9740, or www.essp.org.

- Include evaluations of programs and initiatives.
- Recruit and retain highly qualified staff.

The NGA reported that 26 other states fund youth development after-school and summer programs, with investments averaging around $20 million. Among them:

- Illinois is targeting $8.5 million to Summer Bridge, a literacy program that includes after-school opportunities for 19,000 selected students, ages 6 to 18, from the lowest-performing schools in the state.
- New York invests $10 million in after-school programs for 6- to 18-year-olds.
- California provides $117.5 million for after-school programs, to improve student academic performance and to offer students a safe and enriching environment. Schools partner with city, county, and community organizations to provide before- and after-school programs to students in kindergarten through ninth grade.
- Washington, D.C., is using $20 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding to expand its Afterschool for All program from 70 schools to all 140 of them. The program offers free after-school activities to all public school students.

Tutoring

Many tutoring programs for young children focus on literacy, ingraining the key to learning before the opportunity is lost (see "Reading Readiness and Success"). Exemplary tutoring programs for young children include:

- Jumpstart, founded in 1993 by two students at Yale University to engage young people in community service and promote the literacy development of low-income children in child care and Head Start. Operating in New Haven, New Jersey, Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C., Jumpstart trains and supports college students to work one-on-one with young children and their families. More than half of the college students receive work-study wages. With part-time services in the school year and full-time services in the summer, Jumpstart provides child care for participating families.
- University programs that take comprehensive, community-based approaches.
  - In partnership with Philadelphia Reads, 60 University of Pennsylvania students tutored 250 children in schools and community centers, and among the results, a group of low-achieving second graders jumped more than two grade levels in reading ability.
  - Miami-Dade Community College led a local consortium that sent tutors to inner-city schools, while a Washington State University-led consortium sent tutors to work with rural migrant children.
  - New York University's 700 work-study students tutored more than 5,000 urban school children and saw reading scores rise in one year.
  - At the University of Maryland at Baltimore, work-study students contributed to a comprehensive after-school intervention and to an intensive summer reading camp for third and fourth graders.

Situation Analysis

Pennsylvania's approach to after-school issues has been fragmentary. Before 2001-02, some funds were allocated for education mentoring and Communities That Care, the local resource assessment and violence-prevention program. In the late 1990s, support began building among local officials, law enforcement professionals, families, and lawmakers, visible in unanimous state House votes for youth development legislation. The movement resulted in the new, $15 million allocation devoted specifically to after-school programs, which was followed by $23.6 million for Classroom Plus, the tutoring grants for students who are falling behind academically.

But the state's investment still does not meet a much greater need. In Pennsylvania, the parents of 1.2 million school

POLICY DIRECTIONS

In Pennsylvania, the parents of 1.2 million schoolchildren are working, setting the stage for many latchkey afternoons. However, the situation opens the door of opportunity for learning enrichment. To address gaps in educational out-of-school services, the state should:

☐ **Coordinate programs:** The state should take advantage of its new control of 21st Century Community Learning Centers by better coordinating existing after-school and youth development programs, such as the Workforce Investment Board's youth development programs and Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program. The effort should also include evaluation of the effectiveness of after-school programs in reaching and meeting the needs of elementary-school-age children.

☐ **Build capacity:** With a state investment significantly higher than current allocations, the youth development initiative could support a range of additional after-school and youth development programs, from homework assistance and extra learning opportunities, to mentoring and programs that build skills for the workforce, to tutoring arrangements in child care centers. New programs should be accessible to urban and rural students as well as suburban, and should be judged by strong performance standards to ensure their effectiveness.

☐ **Evaluate Classroom Plus:** An evaluation would determine Classroom Plus' effectiveness in improving academic performance. The state should also determine the impact of making high-quality tutoring more affordable and accessible for low-income children.

☐ **Enhance child care quality:** The state should continue quality improvement efforts to enhance the educational content of child care, subsidized or not. Incentive programs such as Keystone Stars (see "Child Care") can improve educational activities and teacher credentials in after-school child care.

☐ **Provide information:** The state Departments of Education, Labor and Industry, and Public Welfare should compile information on available programs in regional or county resource guides and Web sites, giving parents, educators, child care providers, human service professionals, faith leaders, and community officials a central source for available educational enrichment programs. The state should also consider public outreach campaigns to inform parents about the availability of educational enrichment opportunities.

children are working. A nationwide survey found that 5 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds are usually unsupervised while their parents work, and overall, 10 percent regularly spend time by themselves. Families of school-age children often need reliable after-school care because in most American households – among 69 percent of married couples, 71 percent of custodial mothers, and 85 percent of custodial fathers – parents work outside the home. The result can be a 20- to 25-hour weekly gap between parents' work schedules and children's school time.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 cemented the relationship between after-school programs and academic achievement, transferring control of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers to states. Although it opened eligibility for 21st CCLC grants to non-school organizations, including faith-based groups, the act re-emphasized the centrality of academic improvement, continuing to target children at risk of failing in school. The transfer of control, says the National Governors Association, offers states an opportunity "to promote a cohesive agenda" by coordinating the programs that NGA calls "extra learning opportunities."

Like the youth development allocation, Classroom Plus tutoring grants, designed to bring children up to third- and fifth-grade reading standards, extend limited services to a limited audience. A typical session at a for-profit tutoring center costs about $30 to $40 an hour, plus $175 for a basic reading assessment, while non-profit programs usually charge about $20 to $30 an hour. Families could stretch the grant by utilizing a low-cost, non-profit tutor – at least one is available in most counties (exceptions are the rural Juniata, Pike, Sullivan, and Wyoming counties, but providers may be within commuting distance in neighboring counties). However, for families who find that a for-profit center best fits their child's and family's needs, a $500 grant couldn't buy the continuous and frequent sessions needed for tutoring success.

Advocates for tutoring and after-school programming include parents, law enforcement officials, teachers, faith-based organizations, family center programs, and child welfare agencies – citizens who see opportunities to enhance learning in the after-school hours, but whose communities may lack good programs.

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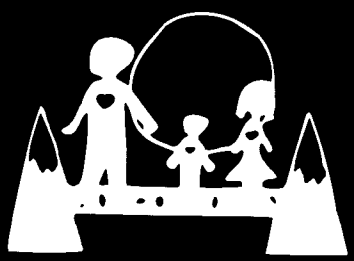

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