



Tips on working with the media

Although many of you have developed good relationships with media in your community, some of these tips may be helpful reminders or tools you can use to train your staff and/or members.

If you have any questions or would like help developing releases, op-eds, or letters to the editor, please contact Kelly Swanson at (717) 213-2074 or kelswa@berksiu.org.

Building relationships with reporters in your area

A great way to have regular influence with the media is to develop relationships with individual reporters. Reporters need to come up with new stories every day, and usually have very little time to gather facts. If they see you as a trusted resource on early learning in your community, someone they can turn to for reliable information when they need it, they will be more responsive to you when you'd like them to cover an event or write an editorial.

So how do you build a relationship? It's helpful to first do a little research on which reporters cover stories that address child development, early education, or young families. Read articles in your paper to get a sense of how well they understand early education and what topics they seem to cover most. For example, if the reporter focuses mostly on school district news, you will want to push the pre-kindergarten angle with them. If the reporter focuses more on family stories, the importance of early learning to child development or the importance of access to quality child care for working families may be more appealing to them.

Your first introduction to a reporter may be by sending them a press kit, setting up a lunch or meeting, or inviting them to a public event, following up with a phone call to make sure they received the information and asking if they have additional questions. Once a reporter receives your information, they will try and determine if you are a reliable source, so include any press clippings on your organization or letters to the editor you've gotten published, even if they appeared in a different paper. If you have a website, also include the web address in your materials; that will be the first place that the reporter goes to find out more about you.

If a big story breaks, such as the announcement of PA Pre-K Counts grantees, you could be proactive and contact them with additional information, for example, the grant awards in your county. This way you establish yourself as a reliable information source that can quickly provide them with facts or individuals to interview.

If you can make the reporter's job easier by providing reliable information and sources, they are more likely to turn to you when they are writing a story or help you when you want a story written.

Planning an event? Send out a Media Advisory

A media advisory is a quick list of facts to alert media that an event is happening and encourage them to cover that event. It is much shorter than a press release, which is usually written after the event.

Here are some tips on writing and distributing a media advisory:

- Send your advisory 3-5 days before the event.
- The advisory should be short, with one or two paragraphs describing the event (esp. why it would be newsworthy), and the when, where, who, and any photo opportunities.
- If your advisory is simply to invite media, send to education, community, family/life reporters and to the news editor. For radio and TV, always send to the news desk, and if there is a reporter that you think would be interested, send to them as well.
- If your advisory is both to invite media and to be listed as a community event, include information on registration fees, or how to attend for the public, and send also to the community calendar. Many papers like community events announcements well in advance.
- Email your advisory in the main message of the email. Do not include an attachment. If the reporter asks you to send them something, then an attachment is fine.
- Call the reporter the following day to make sure they received the advisory. You can simply say "I'd like to invite you to our event..." They will probably start asking questions about when and where, and then you can offer to email them the advisory. You may want to write up a script for yourself first before you call. If a legislator is coming or other VIP, be sure to mention that in your call. Reporters tend to be available in mid-afternoon; also some don't come in until after 3 or 4. The best option is to talk with them directly, i.e., not leaving a message on their voicemail, but if you are short on time, a voicemail message is fine.

Got News? Send out a Press Release

A press release is a way to let the media know your good news. It may be that a report was published on early education, a Children's Champion spoke at a leadership event, or an enrollment announcement. Although you will provide enough information in your press release that a paper may publish as is, many reporters will do their own research and write their own article.

Here are some basic tips on writing and distributing a press release:

- Is your story newsworthy? Do people really want to read about it? That's a tough question for many groups, because to them, everything they do is newsworthy. Part of the purpose of submitting press releases to the media is to educate them about your work, but if you send too many press releases that have no news value, they will start to ignore you. For example, when a CEG publishes their community report card, the story is NOT that the report card was published, but something newsworthy included in the report card, such as "new resource for families looking for child care," or "more quality child care available in county." You may want to run your idea or the release draft by a friend who is

not as close to ECE to see if he/she thinks it is newsworthy. Depending on your relationship with the reporter, you may want to run the idea by him/her and ask for their professional assistance in finding the “newsworthy” idea in your event/activity.

- Include a contact name at the top. The heading to most press releases looks like this

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[DATE]

CONTACT: [NAME]
[PHONE]

The contact person should be your media relations person, not necessarily the person who may know the content of the press release. The media relations person should have a general understanding of the content of the release, but it is okay to forward the reporter to other staff once the reporter has made initial contact. It is helpful to appoint individuals in your organization who will be the designated media relations people so you are not scrambling when a reporter calls.

EMBARGOED. If you have news that you want to let the press know about before it officially goes public so they can prepare a story to run the day you make the information public, instead of putting “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” on the top, write “EMBARGOED UNTIL [DATE AND TIME].” If you attach a report, also place the embargo message at the top.

- Put the most important information at the beginning of the release. The reporter or editor may only read the first sentence or two to decide if they want to read further. The first paragraph should carry the most punch, with lesser information further down the release. It is also nice to add a quote within the second or third paragraph to break up the release a bit, but it’s not essential.
- Most press releases should be two pages or less. If you are talking about a report, you may want to post the report on your website and include a hyperlink in your press release.
- At the end of the press release, include a general paragraph about your group or organization. You can use the same paragraph at the end of all of your press releases. Include your web address if you have one.
- Email the release (as part of the email, not the attachment) to the news editor and relevant reporter for the paper (depending on the story, it may be the education reporter, family/life reporter, etc.)
- Later that day or the next day, call the reporter or editor and ask if they received your release. Don’t ask them if they plan to publish it. If they ask you questions you cannot answer, simply say that you will get the answer for them and call them back. It is much better to say you don’t know than to give them misinformation.

Got an opinion? Write an Op-ed!

Op-eds, or Opinion Editorials, are essays written by someone in the community to state their position on an issue. They are published in the Editorial section of the newspaper. Unlike editorials, which reflect a position of the paper's editorial board, these pieces reflect the position of a reader, but are usually quite a bit longer than a letter to the editor and have a more prominent position in the paper. The most coveted days to have an Op-ed run are on the weekends.

Major papers like the Patriot-News and Post-Gazette may run several Op-eds at a time, while other papers will run only one, and some of the smaller papers almost never run Op-eds (although smaller papers tend to allow larger letters to the editor).

Here are some tips on writing and submitting an Op-ed:

- Find out the word count and submission guidelines for your paper. The usual word count is about 500 words. Many newspapers list the word count and submission guidelines for their papers online in the Editorial Section. If they don't, contact the editorial page editor. Some papers ask for photos or one sentence descriptors of the author, so check before you submit.

Sometimes when you call the editorial page editor and tell them the topic of your Op-ed and who your author is, they will hold a weekend slot for you, especially around budget time. So, if you call and say "I am interested in submitting an op-ed on the education budget on behalf of my Executive Director and wanted to find out your submission guidelines," the editor may say "if you can get this to me by Wednesday afternoon, I'll run it in Saturday's paper."

- An Op-ed needs to express an opinion. Provide local data to support your position. The more you can relate the issue to your community the better. This is a great opportunity to use local statistics on numbers of STARS programs, PA Pre-K Counts enrollment, percentage of children living in low-income families, etc.
- An Op-ed is also a good opportunity for a call to action. If your piece addresses the importance of quality early learning to workforce development, you can end your piece by asking business leaders to show their support for quality early learning as a way to insure higher qualified workers in the future.
- Find a local leader to author your Op-ed. Most papers want a local person to be the author of the Op-ed. Even though you may write it, try and recruit a local leader to be the author. It will give the Op-ed a better chance of being published and of having an impact in the community.
- Once you've submitted the Op-ed, call the editor to make sure he/she received it. Even after I've secured a weekend spot and told the editor I was sending a piece, many times I need to re-send after my follow up call because they haven't received it or have lost track of it.

Want to respond to another opinion? Write a letter to the editor

If there's an article that you don't agree with or you do agree with and want to reinforce the message, writing a letter to the editor is a great way to get your message out in the community. Letters are usually shorter and easier to get published than an Op-ed, and once you've had one published, you can share it with legislators and business and community leaders.

Here are some tips on writing and submitting a letter to the editor:

- Check the submission guidelines for your paper. Most papers have their guidelines for submitting a letter to the editor online, including the word count and contact information you must provide. Most letters are between 250-300 words and require the author's address and phone number for verification.
- In most cases, your letter should be responding to an article, editorial or other letter published in the paper, but you can also write a letter related to a current event, i.e., reminding people about the Week of the Young Child or encouraging our legislators to vote in favor of a budget that is good for children. Mention the title and date of the original piece in your letter. Try to respond within a few days of the date the original article, editorial, etc. was published.
- Make your letter have local appeal by including data or information relevant to the local community. Unless the letter is to be signed by an executive from a state or national organization, try to get a local person to be the author.
- Newspapers usually have a limit to how frequently you can submit a letter or have a letter published, so if you want to submit several letters in a row, have different members of your CEG or leadership network team author each one.
- Most papers will call you to verify your information before publishing your letter, so if you are going to be out of the office a lot, give them your cell phone number or check your messages frequently so you don't miss this opportunity to get published.
- Even if your letter isn't published, it is still a good exercise in forming your arguments for quality early learning and a way to educate the editorial staff of the paper.
- Don't forget the weekly papers. People read local and weekly papers, so this is another good avenue for delivering your message.

Got an article published? Follow up

After you have an article, op-ed, or letter to the editor published, there are many ways you can make that piece live on an impact even more people:

- Forward on to your friends, family, colleagues, members of your CEG or Leadership Network Team etc.
- Send a copy of the article to your legislative representatives, with a cover letter explaining the importance of quality early learning in your community.

- Write a letter to the editor in support of quality early learning, how it benefits children and families. Use examples of how quality early learning benefits the children and families in your community.
 - Include the article in packets for the media, legislators, and leadership events.
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Sample media advisory

MEDIA ADVISORY

April 10, 2008

CONTACT: Kelly Swanson
(717) 213-2074

BUSINESS LEADERS CONVENE TO ADDRESS QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN AND RELEASE RESULTS OF TWO YEAR STUDY OF *PRE K COUNTS* PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

[HARRISBURG]: The *Pre K Counts* Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success is holding the second annual meeting of its Executive Leadership Council, Monday, April 14, in Harrisburg. Co-chair Jim Rohr, CEO and Chairman of PNC Financial Services, Inc., will convene approximately 100 business and education leaders to evaluate pre-kindergarten as a strategy for Pennsylvania to improve our children's academic performance and improve our economic outlook.

The Public-Private Partnership will also release the latest results of children's outcomes in Public-Private Partnership classrooms from 2005-2007 conducted by SPECS Program Evaluation Research Team from Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and the UCLID Center at the University of Pittsburgh. These results illustrate the positive development young children are making in quality pre-kindergarten programs.

WHEN: Monday, April 14, 2008
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

WHERE: Hilton Hotel Harrisburg
York Room
One North Second Street, Harrisburg

PRESENTERS: The Honorable Donna Cooper, Secretary, Governor's Office of Policy and Planning
Jim Rohr, CEO & Chairman, The PNC Financial Services Group
Robert Dugger, Ph.D., Managing Director, Tudor Investment Corporation
Lynn Abraham, District Attorney, City of Philadelphia
Stephen Bagnato, Ed.D, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
Harriet Dichter, Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Departments of Education and Public Welfare

Pre K Counts Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success facilitates local pre-kindergarten partnerships among school districts, community-based providers and early intervention. The public-private partnership provides quality supports to 30 communities so that they can solidify partnerships and provide quality pre-kindergarten in all settings. For more information on the public-private partnership, visit www.prekcounts.org.

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Sample press releases

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2008

CONTACT: Kelly Swanson
(717) 213-2074

Pre K Counts Public-Private Partnership Releases Results of Children's Outcomes in Quality Pre-Kindergarten to Pennsylvania Business Leaders

Business leaders examine quality early education as economic development, crime prevention strategy for Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG: In a meeting of nearly 100 business, education and civic leaders on Monday, April 14, 2008, Pre K Counts Public-Private Partnership released the results of a two-year study on the positive benefits of quality pre-kindergarten to 10,000 children in Public-Private Partnership classrooms between 2005-2007.

According to the study conducted by SPECS Program Evaluation Research Team from Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and the UCLID Center at the University of Pittsburgh:

- Children participating in Public-Private Partnership classrooms showed significant progress in acquiring early learning skills during their participation, particularly those who were at risk of school failure. In fact, the length of time the child was enrolled in the program was a good predictor of their progress.
- Children with average/above average early learning capabilities at entry into a Pre K Counts program showed steady growth and progress during and after program participation at expected rates, with most notable progress in spoken language skills. These children averaged 1.5 months of developmental gain per each month of participation in a Pre K Counts program.
- Children with at-risk or delayed development at entry into a Pre K Counts program showed statistically significant progress that outpaced maturational expectations in all early learning skill areas, with most notable gains in spoken language, reading and daily living skills. These children averaged a developmental gain of 2.5 months for each month of participation in a Pre K Counts program.
- The total number of children with at-risk or delayed development were reduced by 50% after participation in Pre K Counts.

"The results for the children in Public-Private Partnership programs is reinforcing the results we are seeing time and time again: children who participate in quality pre-kindergarten are better prepared for kindergarten, do well in school, and go on to good jobs and successful careers," stated Jim Rohr, CEO & Chairman of the PNC Financial Services Group and co-chair of the Pre K Counts Executive Leadership Council. "These positive results don't only affect the child's quality of life, they affect our state's and nation's bottom line. Money that we invest in quality early education is saving us money in special education, remediation, crime control, public assistance and lost taxes. In fact, every \$1 dollar we invest in quality early education saves us \$7 in these other costs."

Earlier results of the Public-Private Partnership helped to inform the quality components of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, the state funded initiative bringing quality pre-kindergarten to 11,000 children across the Commonwealth. Governor Rendell has proposed a \$12.5 million increase to Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts in FY 2008-2009, which would bring the state's investment to \$87.5 million to serve an additional 1,000 children and to respond to parent requests that some half-day programs be extended to full-day.

The study was released at the second annual meeting of members of the Public-Private Partnership's Executive Leadership Council, which consists of more than 100 business, education and civic leaders

from across the Commonwealth. The group also heard from investment management and law enforcement experts why quality early education is a smart investment for Pennsylvania.

Tudor Investment Corporation Managing Director and co-founder of the Partnership for America's Economic Success Robert Dugger shared compelling evidence that quality early education is an economic development strategy for future success. Dugger noted that the skills employers look for in quality employees, such as being team-oriented, literate and numerate, are capacities that are essentially shaped by age five. Dugger noted that a child's early years provide a small window of opportunity for development. Once that window closes, it is much more difficult for children who are behind in their development to catch up. For example, if 50 1st graders have problems reading, then 44 of them will still have problems reading when they reach 4th grade.

Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham shares the view of many law enforcement officials that quality early education is a crime prevention strategy. In 1980, Pennsylvania had 8 state prisons housing about 8,500 inmates. In 2007, Pennsylvania has 26 state prisons housing nearly 45,500 inmates with crime rates on the rise. Any comprehensive plan to beat back crime must include long-term solutions like quality pre-kindergarten programs that are proven to help cut the pipeline that funnels young people into lives of crime and violence. Each at-risk child that we can prevent from adopting a life of crime will save the country between \$1.7 million and \$2.3 million.

The meeting was held at the Hilton Hotel Harrisburg. Speakers included The Honorable Donna Cooper, Secretary, Governor's Office of Policy and Planning; Jim Rohr, CEO & Chairman, The PNC Financial Services Group; Robert Dugger, Ph.D., Managing Director, Tudor Investment Corporation; Lynne Abraham, District Attorney, City of Philadelphia; Stephen Bagnato, Ed.D, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine; Harriet Dichter, Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Departments of Education and Public Welfare

Pre K Counts commissioned the SPECS Program Evaluation Research Team from Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and the UCLID Center at the University of Pittsburgh to conduct a four year study (2005-2009) of the impact and outcomes for children and participating in Public-Private Partnership programs. The independent SPECS research has been funded by the Heinz Endowments. For an Executive Summary of the study, visit www.prekcounts.org.

Dr. Stephen J. Bagnato, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology and Director of SPECS, and his team implemented an authentic assessment and program evaluation research model to rigorously train teachers to conduct ongoing observational assessments twice per year to monitor the progress of children and to focus their teaching. SPECS uses various normative measures to document the early learning competencies of children and the quality of the programs and teaching practices in PKC classrooms. SPECS appraises the status and progress of children in such areas as spoken language, reading, writing, mathematics, classroom behavior, and daily living skills which are linked to the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards.

Pre K Counts Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success facilitates local pre-kindergarten partnerships among school districts, community-based providers and early intervention. The public-private partnership provides quality supports to 30 communities so that they can solidify partnerships and provide quality pre-kindergarten in all settings. For more information on the public-private partnership, visit www.prekcounts.org.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 24, 2007

COMMONWEALTH

PENNSYLVANIA

Department of Education
Commonwealth News Bureau
Room 308, Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

CONTACT: Michael Race (PDE)
(717) 783-9802

New state report shows need for early childhood development programs

Findings Will Help State Target Funding for Programs Like Pre-K Counts, Head Start

HARRISBURG – More than two-thirds of Pennsylvania’s counties have social and economic conditions that put young children at a higher risk of academic failure, according to a new state report.

The report, conducted by the state’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning, will help state officials and educators better target funding for early childhood programs such as Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start, said Education Secretary Gerald L. Zahorchak and Public Welfare Secretary Estelle B. Richman.

“This information helps us gauge our efforts in reaching those children who face the greatest risks and obstacles to learning,” Zahorchak said. “When we are able to identify these at-risk children, we can invest our precious education funds more strategically.”

“There is no better gift to give children than to provide them with the tools necessary to help them enter school ready to succeed,” said Richman. “With this new information, we are more prepared than ever to continue working with families to ensure that vital funding is available for necessary services and support to reach those most in need.”

The report compiled information from 2006-07 on the number of children served by state and federal early childhood programs and the funding levels for those programs. It includes an analysis of educational and family risk factors and identifies counties most likely to benefit from early childhood investments based on those risk factors.

Each county’s risk level was calculated using seven criteria:

- The percentage of children under age five living in low-income families (based on 2000 U.S. Census data that defines low income as below 200 percent of federal poverty level).
- The percentage of families with children under age five living below poverty level.
- The percentage of single mother-lead families with children under age five living below poverty level.
- The percentage of children receiving aid through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, program.
- The rate of births to mothers with less than a high school degree.
- The percentage of students who were below proficient in 3rd grade math on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment.
- The percentage of students who were below proficient in 3rd grade reading on the PSSA.

Counties were given numeric “average risk levels” that ranged from 1.00 to 4.00. Those at 1.00 or lower were deemed low risk, while levels from 1.01 to 2.00 were considered moderate-low risk. Counties with risk levels ranging from 2.01 to 3.00 were considered moderate-high risk, while those above 3.00 were classified as high risk.

Only two counties – Bucks and Montgomery – were classified as low risk, while 16 were high risk, including two – Fayette and Green – that had risk levels of 4.00. Another 31 were classified as moderate-high risk, while the remaining 18 were moderate-low risk.

The statewide average risk level was 2.49.

On average, the report found, state and federally funded early childhood programs reached about 26 percent of the approximately 728,000 Pennsylvania children under age five during 2006-07.

Research shows children who attend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs tend to do better in school, are less likely to repeat a grade, and are more likely to attend college and be more productive adults.

Recognizing these outcomes, the 2007-08 state budget signed into law in July by Governor Edward G. Rendell included \$75 million for the launch of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. The funds will enable 11,000 Pennsylvania three- and four-year-olds to have access to pre-K programs.

The budget also increased funding for Governor Rendell's Accountability Block Grant program to make an additional \$20 million available for full-day kindergarten to nearly 7,600 more families. The budget also continued Pennsylvania's landmark funding for Head Start. In all, the budget invests at least \$95 million this year in quality early childhood programs.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning, which is overseen by the departments of Education and Public Welfare, was created under Governor Rendell to bring a stronger focus to helping the commonwealth's youngest children develop and learn to their fullest potential.

Detailed information on the Office of Child Development and Early Learning study, including county-by-county statistics, can be found at the Pennsylvania Department of Education Web site at www.pde.state.pa.us, the Department of Public Welfare Web site at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/>, or at http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/cwp/view.asp?a=179&q=106802&early_childhoodNav=10723&early_childhoodNav.

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Sample Op-ed

Allentown Morning Call

Quality child care is an investment in children

By Katie Loeb-schwab and Cheri Sterman

April 11, 2008

What do you think of as a wise investment in the future?

We think of young children and the child-care providers who care for them. As a community, consider that an investment in the Lehigh Valley's young children and the early childhood educators who teach them have the most potential to pay back in the future.

Child development experts report that what happens in a child's first five years of life is critical. Having high-quality child care, delivered by trained professionals who understand child development and how children learn, is key to each child's long-term success. Making sure children get off to the right start saves the entire community money due to less remedial education, truancy, and delinquency -- costs we all end up paying in we don't invest in their early years.

Nationally, April 13-19 is the Week of the Young Child. This week is a good time for us to reflect on the needs of young children. Nationally, the face of poverty is a young child. In the United States, 35 percent of people living below the poverty level are children. In order for our nation, and our local community to succeed, we must invest in improving conditions for kids. Statistics provided by the United Way show that too many Lehigh Valley children are at risk of not getting the "right start":

One-third of children live in poverty;

One in six children have a mother without a high school education;

Sixteen percent are born to mothers without early pre-natal care;

One in 12 children is born at low birth weight.

Children living in poverty tend to have weaker school performance and less opportunity to reach their full potential than other children. What matters to them affects our entire community.

The good news is that quality early childhood programs can help fill in the gaps and improve these children's chances of being successful. Every community needs high quality early childhood programs so children can be cared for while their parents work or go to school and so children can learn during those precious, critical years. During this Week of the Young Child, we'd like to focus your attention on the incredibly generous and underappreciated child care providers who are subsidizing this care, out of their own pockets. According to the U.S. Census Bureau reports, the average child day care teacher earns \$9.05 per hour. Compare that to the Census Bureau data that shows the average hourly wage for barbers is \$12.76, pest control workers \$14.11, crossing guards \$10.71, school bus drivers \$12.08, and parking enforcement workers \$15.03. They are all doing important work -- but we question why they are paid more than the teachers of our youngest children.

Early childhood educators need to be valued for the work they do. Our local United Way Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) is investing in early childhood educators. In partnership with programs such as TEACH, Northampton Community College, East Stroudsburg University, and others, we are providing scholarships for early childhood educators to obtain associate and bachelors degrees. We are mentoring these women so we can provide ongoing listening ears as they face new challenges. Our volunteer group of "women helping women" is a small start to a big problem that needs to be addressed. Public attention to the issue is important to create change.

This week, think about the thousands of local kids who are counting on the child care providers in our community. We challenge others to invest in early childhood educators, like WLI is doing. Advocate that the professionals who care for the youngest children earn what they deserve. Let us know about your innovative programs -- every effort matters, regardless of size. Consider how we will all reap the benefits that quality child care can provide to our community's long term success.

Katie Loeb-Schwab is community chair of United Way of the Lehigh Valley's Women's Leadership Initiative. Cheri Sterman is a member of the initiative and a community child advocate.

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Sample letters to the editor

Letter to Editor: Pre-K Counts a worthy program

Lancaster Intelligencer Journal
July 20, 2007

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing to address misinformation in Andrew LeFevre's letter, "'Pre-K Counts' is a costly government program" (Intell, July 11).

While there are merits to the Pre-K Educational Improvement Tax Credit program, it does not give families choice to every pre-k program (pre-k programs have to register with a scholarship organization to accept EITC scholarships). The average cost per child may be \$1,370 for EITC but that does not cover the cost of most quality child-care slots.

LeFevre also is correct when he states that Pre-K Counts is a "one-size-fits-all" program. Pre-K Counts grants were written individually by the applicants with cooperation between schools and early childhood education programs.

EITC is not a substitute for Pre-K Counts. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is a targeted investment to provide high quality pre-kindergarten to children who are at risk of academic failure. This up-front investment in our children's education will set them on a path to succeed in school and life while saving us future costs in special education, crime prevention and public assistance. Studies have shown that for every dollar invested early childhood education, society saves \$7 in the future.

Legislators who support Pre-K Counts have wisely seen the importance of planning for the future.

EITC does not ensure quality pre-kindergarten since it includes a single requirement that the program provides a curriculum aligned with the curriculum of the school with which it is affiliated. This weak mandate is not meaningful or comprehensive enough to ensure the kind of high quality education that produces positive results for our children such as those in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts.

The program will provide quality choices through school districts, Head Start, child care programs and nursery schools that meet the quality expectations of being designated two stars or higher in the Keystone stars quality early childhood education program.

Pennsylvania needs a program like Pre-K Counts. I thank our administration and legislative leaders, including Sen. Gibson Armstrong, for including it in the budget.

Rhea Starr, Lancaster

State must support early childhood education

Pocono Record, February 07, 2008

Editor, the Record:

A new year always brings to mind resolutions and what people will change to make a fresh start. But this letter asks not for anything to change, but for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to continue to make critical investments in three early childhood priorities: Child Care Works, Keystone STARS, and Pre-K Counts.

Child Care Works provides additional resources to assure access to quality child care for low-income working families; Keystone STARS is a program that supports improving the quality of child care programs for children in Pennsylvania (essentially professional development for child care staff), and Pre-K Counts created the opportunity for 11,000 new 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds to attend high quality pre-k in Pennsylvania this year.

As we embark on a New Year thinking about things we would like to change, let us not change what works. Let us all support access to high-quality early childhood programs that make a difference in a young child's life.
Jessica Betler