

State Update

**Historic Spending for
Basic Education**

Legislative leaders and Gov. Rendell hammered out a budget deal just in time for fireworks on July 4th. The \$28.2 billion budget requires no tax increase and does not utilize the Commonwealth's Rainy Day fund to make ends meet.

Budget negotiators grappled with an ever-shrinking budget surplus and dire revenue projections for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. The Department of Revenue reported that the Commonwealth ended the 2007-2008 fiscal year with a surplus of \$159.4 million. The surplus was markedly smaller than originally projected when the governor released his executive budget in February. This made budget negotiations and decisions on investments quite difficult. In the end, many budget items were subjected to a 1.3 percent cut.

Despite the economic slowdown and reduced revenues, the budget makes a significant investment in basic education in the amount of nearly \$275 million. The investment will be driven out to school districts according to a formula that is based on the tenets of the General Assembly's Costing-Out Study. The funds will be distributed by taking key factors into consideration including student

enrollment, low-income students, and students who have limited English proficiency. Under the plan, all school districts will receive at least a three percent increase in funding as compared to the prior fiscal year.

"Moving forward, every child, regardless of where they live, will have an equal opportunity to public education that will prepare them for life. Pennsylvanians should commend our policymakers for taking such a courageous step in these difficult economic times. It demonstrates a remarkable bi-partisan commitment to our Commonwealth's children and youth," said Joan L. Benso, president & CEO, PA Partnerships for Children. "We thank the governor and General Assembly for taking this bold step in addressing school funding adequacy, equity and predictability and committing to a goal of closing the education funding adequacy gap in six years."

The budget also includes increased funding for other critical investments in children's well-being including jumps of more than \$11 million for pre-kindergarten, \$2.7 million for Nurse Family Partnerships and approximately \$51 million for child care assistance and services.

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The following are highlights of the enacted budget:

FY 2008-2009 General Fund Budget

Item	FY 2007-2008 Available	Governor's Request	FY 2008-2009	Difference 07-08/08-09
Department of Education				
Assessment	\$31.619 million	\$58.4 million	\$54.4 Million	\$22.781 million
Basic Education	\$4,951,429,000	\$5,242,729,000	\$5,226,142,000	\$274.713 million
Dual Enrollment	\$10 million	\$12 million	\$10 million	LEVEL FUNDED
Pre-K Counts	\$75 million	\$87.550 million	\$86,412 million	\$11.412 million
Accountability Block Grant	\$275 million	\$275 million	\$271.425 million	(\$3.575 million)
Head Start	\$40 million	\$40 million	\$39.480 million	(\$520,000)
Career & Technical Education	\$62.961 million	\$64.535 million	\$63.696 million	\$735, 000
Education Assistance	\$66 million	\$66 million	\$65.142 million	(\$858,000)
Classrooms for the Future	\$90 million	\$90 million	\$45 million	(\$45 million)
Teacher Professional Development	\$30.367 million	\$47.056 million	\$42.556 million	\$12.189 million
Special Education	\$1,010,038,000	\$1,040,339,000	\$1,026,815	\$16.777 million
Early Intervention	\$173.099 million	\$185.133 million	\$185.133 million	\$12.034 million
Project 720 – High School Reform	\$11 million	\$11 million	\$10.857 million	(\$143,000)
Technical Colleges	\$2 million	\$2.4 million	\$1 million	(\$1 million)
Department of Insurance				
CHIP	\$65.931million	\$85.1 million	\$86.9 million	\$20.969 million
Department of Public Welfare				
*Early Intervention	\$119.661 million	\$121.462 million	\$118.336 million	(\$1.325 million)
*Child Care Services	\$144.865 million	\$173.318 million	\$171.720 million	\$26.855 million
Child Care Assistance	\$199.698 million	\$221.331 million	\$224.063 million	\$24.365 million
Nurse Family Partnership	\$7.262 million	\$8.262 million	\$9.978 million	\$2.716 million
*County Child Welfare	\$966.71 million	\$1,061,721,000	\$1,053,890,000	\$87.18 million
*Community Based Family Centers	\$6.563 million	\$6.563 million	\$6.636 million	\$73,000

* A decline in other state and federal funding sources may reduce the impact of the state funding increase.



General Assembly Responds to Proposed Graduation Requirements

At the request of legislative leaders as a condition of the budget agreement, the omnibus school code bill that accompanies the budget includes language that delays the Independent Regulatory Review Commission's (IRRC's) consideration of the proposed regulations changing graduation requirements in Pennsylvania for one year. The legislation does not, however, preclude the Department of Education from moving forward with the development of graduation competency assessments, a model curriculum and diagnostic tools to help identify the learning needs of individual students and make these resources available to school districts.

PPC's Joan Benso maintains the organization will continue to work toward ensuring that all children achieve the Commonwealth's academic standards. "Too many high school students graduate without the skills and knowledge required to be successful in college or careers. PPC will continue to work with the administration, the General Assembly and other parties, including the business community to seek solutions that will ensure the success of Pennsylvania's high school graduates."

Leading up to the compromise on the proposed Ch. 4 regulations changing graduation requirements and in an unprecedented response to the State Board of Education's proposal, the Pennsylvania Senate approved Senate Bill 1442. The bill, sponsored by Sen. James Rhoades (R-Schuylkill), would effectively kill the proposal to establish Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs). Senate Bill 1442 provides that only the General Assembly has the authority to establish any statewide graduation requirements beyond what is currently required. The bill was approved by a vote of 48-2 and now heads to the House for consideration.

While reports from Rep. James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia), chairman of the House Education Committee, indicate that there are no immediate plans to take up consideration of Senate Bill 1442,

the committee held two hearings on the proposed regulations and approved comments to be submitted to the State Board of Education. Benso testified at the June 18 hearing that the Commonwealth and school districts must all do a better job preparing students. "Just saying no to the proposal does absolutely nothing to improve student achievement. It does nothing to help make high school graduates college and job ready. It does nothing to reduce the need for remediation at colleges and universities. It does nothing when it's clear, based on the data about the readiness of high school graduates, we need to be doing something to address the current situation," she said.

On June 26, the House Education Committee approved a letter by a vote of 22-1 (*Rep. Jake Wheatley; D-Allegheny was the only member of the committee to oppose the letter*) to be sent to the State Board of Education on the proposed Ch. 4 regulations indicating that the State Board should step back from the proposal and re-evaluate the proposed regulatory changes. The committee indicated it was concerned that:

- *the proposed regulations violate the statutory authority of school districts to make final decisions on students' graduation from high school;*
- *the new graduation requirements would increase dropout rates and narrow curriculum; and*
- *proponents of the new graduation requirements are using students' PSSA data to justify the need for the proposal.*

In the alternative, the committee recommends that the State Board of Education conduct an analysis/ audit of school districts' local assessments to determine if assessments are aligned with the Commonwealth's academic standards. If school districts are determined to have assessments that are not aligned with academic standards, the committee advises that the Department of Education provide targeted assistance "to increase the school district's capacity to develop adequate, aligned assessment systems."



Bill to Prevent Child Abuse Deaths and Injuries Approved

The Pennsylvania Senate concurred in House amendments to Senate Bill 1147 June 29 and was signed by Governor Rendell on July 3. The bill sponsored by Sen. Leanna Washington (D-Philadelphia) aims to prevent child deaths and serious injuries caused by child abuse.

Specifically, the bill would require the state Department of Public Welfare to review and report on each case of child fatality or serious injury resulting from child abuse. It also would create uniform standards for county children and youth agencies in responding to, reviewing and reporting on child fatalities or near fatalities resulting from child abuse. Current law does not provide specific guidelines for the review and reporting of child fatalities and near fatalities resulting from abuse.

Under the bill, a county children and youth agency would have to convene a child fatality or near fatality review team to analyze a case that resulted from abuse and recommend steps to prevent future tragedies. The team would consist of individuals in the community with expertise in child abuse, such as district attorneys, educators, representatives from domestic violence and drug and alcohol programs, children's lawyers and advocates and health care professionals.

In addition, the legislation would increase accountability and transparency in the child welfare system because the completed review would be released to the public, except for certain identifying information, provided that doing so would not jeopardize a criminal investigation.

In 2007, 46 children died from child abuse in Pennsylvania, an increase of 15 from 2006. Twelve of those children were identified as near-fatalities due to the severity of the injuries.

Proposal to Improve Inspections of Child Care Homes Approved By House

On June 23, the House Rules Committee unanimously approved House Bill 2485, sponsored by Rep. Rosita Youngblood (D-Philadelphia). On that same day, the bill was referred to the House Appropriations Committee for a fiscal note. House Bill 2485 would improve the state's inspection process for family day care homes. Youngblood said the committee's action moves Pennsylvania a step closer to reforming the inspection process for these child care facilities.

The legislation, referred to as the Family Day-Care Home Inspection Act, would require the state Department of Public Welfare to inspect family day care homes at least once every two years. She said existing law limits the inspection process by only permitting DPW to inspect these facilities on a random sample basis, when there is a complaint issued or at the request of the day care home.

Youngblood said that current law requires family day care centers to hold a two-year registration certificate, so it would be logical to require these facilities to be inspected at least once during that two-year period.

To address a related issue with family day care homes, the Pennsylvania Senate Appropriations Committee also approved Senate Bill 1421 on June 26. The bill is sponsored by Sen. Jeff Piccola (R-Dauphin) and would require all family day care homes to carry liability insurance to cover all persons who work on the premises of a family day care facility. The bill awaits consideration by the full Senate.

In addition, Senate Bill 1421 would make certain information more available and visible to parents. Such information would include the facility's registration certificate, a summary of the facility's inspection report and home insurance policy. Operators also would be required to provide copies of and review with parents the facility's registration certificate, inspection summary, insurance policy,



emergency plan, general daily schedule, hours of operation, fees, meal responsibilities, clothing, health, supervision, dismissal and night care policies, and transportation or other pick-up arrangements.

General Assembly sends Autism Insurance Bill to Governor's Desk

Following last minute negotiations between Speaker Dennis O'Brien (R-Philadelphia) and Senator Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware) on July 1, the General Assembly was able to come to an agreement to an amendment for House Bill 1150. The bill requires insurers to provide up to \$36,000 a year for "applied behavioral analysis" and other treatments for children with autism under the age of 21. Under current law, health insurers are not required to cover autism services for children, so most families obtain services through the state Medical Assistance program. The bill also includes language giving the state more oversight of a planned insurance merger, among other changes.

Speaker O'Brien, the prime sponsor of the bill, and the administration were heavily opposed to the changes made to the legislation in the Senate on June 28. A Senate floor amendment removed language defining what treatments are medically necessary for children diagnosed with autism. An agreed-to amendment by Speaker O'Brien and Sen. Pileggi was adopted by the House in a vote of 203-0, which while not defining medical necessity, does provide uniform definitions of medical care and services for individuals with autism.

The Senate concurred in the House amendments on July 2; Gov. Rendell has indicated he will sign the bill.

Pennsylvania Pre- K Counts a Resounding Success for 11,000 Children

A recent study by the Department of Education shows that the inaugural year of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is working. A press release issued by the

department indicated a 58 percent increase in the number of children meeting targets for early language and literacy skills.

First-year reports on children's progress also show nearly 70 percent of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts children have achieved age-appropriate skills and behaviors after participating in the program. Another 25 percent demonstrate emerging age-appropriate skills and behaviors, including:

- A 62 percent increase in the number of children showing age-appropriate positive social/emotional skills (from 4,810 children upon entry to 7,782 now);
- A 58 percent increase in the number of children showing age-appropriate acquisition of knowledge of skills, including early language and literacy (from 5,039 children upon entry to 7,979 now);
- A 51 percent increase in the number of children showing age-appropriate use of behaviors to meet needs (from 5,299 children upon entry to 7,979 now).

At least 21 percent of children progressed from having no age appropriate skills upon enrollment in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts to having emerging or age-appropriate skills after participating in the program. Outcomes for PA Pre-K Counts students compare positively to outcomes in other states that have had pre-K programs in place for as long as 20 years.

"Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is a resounding success for children, families and the commonwealth," said Education Secretary Dr. Gerald Zahorchak. "The children who participated in a Pre-K Counts program will enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed and will carry this success throughout school and into their careers."

Approximately 11,000 three- and four-year-olds in most counties across the state participated in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts in the 2007-08 school year.



Grantees used multiple sources to rate the child's progress on the seven point scale. Sources included child observations, portfolio collection, staff and parent input as well as a valid and reliable assessment tool. In future years, grantees will use the Work Sampling assessment tool.

More information on Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is available at www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood on the "Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts" link on the left side of the page.

Resolution Calls for Study of Afterschool Needs of Children

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives unanimously approved House Resolution 824 on July 3 by a vote of 200-0. The resolution, sponsored by Rep. Jake Wheatley (D-Allegheny), would require the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to prepare a report on the after-school needs of children and youth within the Commonwealth. Specifically, the report would include assessments of:

1. *the availability, types and locations of after-school programs;*
2. *geographical gaps where after-school programs are not available for children;*
3. *statistics on the number of children currently served by after-school programs;*
4. *the per-child cost of high-quality after-school programs; and*
5. *the extent to which private funding is available to finance such programs.*

PPC and the Pennsylvania Afterschool and Youth Development Network (PSAYDN) have worked closely with Rep. Wheatley to ensure the introduction and timely passage of HR 824.

"Afterschool and youth development programs have proven to be a critical component in improving the safety of our children and providing extra learning opportunities that prepare young people to be ready

for school, work and life," said Kisha Bird, director, Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network. "This study will provide the Commonwealth with the knowledge to strategically assess afterschool/youth development programs that will continue to enhance the lives of children, youth and families across the state."

CHIP Enrollment Continues to Climb

CHIP enrollment increased to 174,064 in June, 7.8 percent greater than June 2007. CHIP rose in all categories: Free went up to 151,001; Reduced-Cost totaled 21,661 and At-Cost totaled 1,402. Currently, there are 8,103 children enrolled in CHIP who would have not been eligible before the expansion of the program.

Changes to Child Abuse Reporting Moves Forward in Both Chambers

After delaying votes on House Bills 1022 and 1023 due to negotiations with some stakeholders on a comprehensive amendment, the House Judiciary Committee unanimously amended and reported out House Bill 1022 June 24. The omnibus amendment inserted into House Bill 1022 addressed the provisions included in House Bill 1023 and therefore House Bill 1023 was passed over.

House Bill 1022 is sponsored by Rep. Mike Sturla (D-Lancaster) and amends the Domestic Relations Code to provide for notification of indicated and founded reports of child abuse to the Secretary of Education and employers of a child-care service employee, service provider, administrator or school employee after a final administrative ruling by the Department of Public Welfare. County agencies are responsible for notification and notification shall be made only when the perpetrator's employer is known to county agencies.

The Senate Aging and Youth Committee also addressed child abuse reporting provisions June 25 by considering Senate Bill 26. The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Wayne Fontana (D-Allegheny),



eliminates the separate child abuse reporting standard for school employees. Under current law, school employees are only required to report suspected cases of abuse of a student by another school employee if such abuse includes serious bodily injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. Senate Bill 26 ensures that school employees are required to report child abuse under the same standards as other mandated reporters. The bill now awaits consideration by the full Senate.

Movement for Kids and Families on Child Care Works Waiting List

During the months of March and April, approximately 1,600 children were removed from the wait list based on a governor's initiative. In addition, some funds have been shifted to allow more children to be moved into service from the wait list. As of June 9, the subsidized child care wait list was 6,718 children. This is a significant decrease from the roughly 14,000 children who were on the wait list earlier this year.

Federal Update

Resounding Support for Increased Funding of Pre-K Programs

A national poll conducted by Pre-K Now and released June 17 shows overwhelming support for state and federal support of pre-kindergarten programs. A bipartisan polling team from Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. and American Viewpoint surveyed 800 registered voters, along with an additional 200 "swing voters" who typically split their votes between Democrats and Republicans. Strong support for a new federal investment in pre-kindergarten is evident across all demographic groups, though support is particularly strong among swing voters between 18 and 39 years of age, swing voters in the South, and black and Latino voters. The results indicate that nearly 7 in 10 voters want federal support for state funded pre-kindergarten programs. Other key findings include:

- *Almost 7 in 10 voters want state and local governments to provide voluntary pre-kindergarten for all children;*
- *A large majority of every demographic—including 64 percent of Republican voters—said that a lack of high-quality pre-K programs in their community would be a problem; and*
- *A solid majority (56 percent) of voters said that federal, state and local governments are doing too*

little to make sure that all children have access to affordable pre-K programs.

Kids to Receive Declining Share of Federal Spending

Children are a diminishing priority in the federal budget, a study from the Urban Institute and New America Foundation shows. If current spending and revenue policies continue, the children's share of domestic federal spending—which excludes defense, non-defense homeland security, and international affairs—will be 13.8 percent in 2018, down from 16.2 percent in 2007 and 20.2 percent in 1960.

While domestic spending is projected to grow by \$771 billion—largely because of escalating health care costs—between now and 2018, children will reap only 7.1 percent, or \$55 billion, of this increase under current law. The second annual "Kids' Share" report estimates that the children's slice of gross domestic product will decline from 2.6 percent in fiscal 2007 to 2.2 percent in fiscal 2018, while Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid will rise from 7.9 to 9.6 percent.

"Kids' Share 2008: How Children Fare in the Federal Budget" classifies more than 100 federal programs that spend money on children in eight categories: income security, nutrition, housing, tax credits and exemptions, health, social services, education, and



training. The report defines children as those under age 19 who are not in postsecondary education.

Findings: Fiscal Years 1960–2007

- *Between 1960 and 2007, spending on children rose from 1.9 to 2.6 percent of GDP. By comparison, spending on the non-child portions of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid nearly quadrupled from 2.0 to 7.9 percent of GDP.*
- *Real federal spending per child grew from \$819 in 1960 to \$4,680 in 2005. Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid rose from \$3,057 per senior to \$20,530.*
- *Spending has increasingly been directed toward low-income children through means-tested programs, rising from 11 percent in 1960 to 59 percent by 2007.*

Federal Budget Taking Shape

The U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committee are advancing FFY 2009 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bills. Both versions call for spending more on domestic discretionary investments than proposed by the president. The House measure would invest \$153.121 billion in discretionary programs, which is \$7.765 billion more than the president requested. The Senate measure would invest \$154.9 billion in domestic discretionary programs, which is \$9.5 billion more than the president requested. At the time of publication, a complete run-down of line item funding was not available for these bills. More details on the specific line items will be available in the next issue of *CapWatch*. The Senate measure also contains provisions to halt the 2007 SCHIP Directive.

Pres. Bush has made it clear that he will veto spending measures that stray from his requested budget. Some Congressional observers are speculating that given the legislative and political calendars and the veto threat, we may be looking at a continuing resolution to fund the government

from the beginning of the fiscal year (October 1) through some time in the next calendar year. This would give the new Congress and new president an opportunity to craft a budget for the remainder of FFY 2009.

Harmful Medicaid Regulations Halted

After weeks of negotiations among House and Senate leaders and the Bush Administration, Congress has approved and the president has signed an emergency supplemental appropriations bill that among other things, delays all but one of a series of harmful federal Medicaid regulations. Under the measure, the implementation of the following six regulations will be delayed until April 1, 2009 – Targeted Case Management, Rehabilitation Option, School Based Services, Public Provider Cost Limit, Graduate Medical Education and Provider Tax. Left out of the package was the Outpatient Services regulation. This particular regulation is not expected to be finalized until November at the earliest.

This represents a great victory. However, Congress left one very important issue out of the measure – the 2007 CMS SCHIP Directive. As *CapWatch* readers know, the directive would impose new requirements on SCHIP programs nationwide and impose an effective cap on the use of federal funds at 250 percent FPIG. Congress has little time to address the directive before it takes effect in August.

Federal Home Visiting Bill Gaining Momentum

The U.S. House Education and Labor Committee approved HR 2343, the bipartisan Education Begins at Home Act June 18. The legislation would establish the first dedicated federal funding stream for quality, voluntary home visiting programs for parents with young children. Pennsylvania's Todd Platts is the lead co-sponsor of the measure; other co-sponsors include Representatives Brady, Altmire and Murtha.

Research demonstrates that quality home visitation programs are associated with positive outcomes for



children and families, including greater school readiness, enhanced child health and development, improved parenting practices and reductions in child maltreatment and later criminality. Pennsylvania's Nurse Family Partnership is an example of such a high-quality home visiting program. Dedicated federal funding will help the Commonwealth extend the reach of this successful program that benefits, children, families, communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.

U.S. House Approves the Fostering Connections to Success Act

Legislation approved by the House in late June strengthens federal child welfare supports for kinship care providers allowing children to remain with their aunts, uncles or grandparents and not enter into foster care; extends federal children welfare supports for foster alumni up to the age of 21; allows private providers the same federal training dollars as public agencies; allows Tribal nations direct access to federal child welfare supports; and also enhances the educational and health care services for foster children. Seeking to broaden the permanency options for foster children, the legislation also reauthorizes and strengthens the Adoption Incentives program.

Some provisions of the legislation include:

- *Requires notification of close relatives within 30 days when children are placed in foster care*
 - **Assistance to Foster Youth Up to the Age of 21**
 - *At a state option, extends federal Title IV-E supports for former foster youth living in supervised settings up to the age of 21.*
 - *Requirements for youth include: (1) participation in a secondary education, or a program leading to an equivalent credential; (2) enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education; (3) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove, barriers to employment; or (4) employed for at least 80 hours per month.*
 - *Allows for adoption assistance and guardianship payments up to age 21 for children adopted or entering guardianship after the age of 16.*
 - **Training for Private Agency Workforce and Relative Caregivers**
 - *Allows private child welfare agencies access to Title IV-E training supports that are currently reserved only for public child welfare agencies.*
 - *Provides Title IV-E support for the training of current, or prospective, relative guardians.*
 - **Improving Oversight of Health Care**
 - *Mandates a state oversight plan to meet the health care needs of foster children in their care; this specifically mental health and dental needs of foster children.*
 - **Promoting Educational Stability**
 - *Mandates a state plan for ensuring the educational stability of foster children that includes: (1) assurances that foster placement takes into in consideration current educational setting and the proximity to the school of origin; (2) coordination with local educational agencies (LEA) to ensure that the child remains in the school at time of placement; (3) If remaining in such school is not appropriate, the state agency and LEA will provide immediate and appropriate enrollment*
- **Assistance for Relative Caregivers**
 - *Title IV-E supports for Relative Guardianship Program—Payments must be equal to foster care maintenance payments made for a child if the child would have remained in foster care, or, as a state option, equal to the amount of adoption assistance supports if the child would have been adopted.*
 - *To be eligible, the child must have been in foster care for one year and residing for at least 6 Months with the relative guardian. Children over the age of 14 must be consulted before a decision is made.*



in a new school – with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school; (4) expansion of Title IV-E to allow the cost of reasonable travel for the child to remain in the school in which the child is enrolled at time of placement.

• Encouraging Sibling Placement

- *Reasonable efforts shall be made to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, kinship guardianship, or adoptive placements unless the state determines that a joint placement would jeopardize the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.*

Ensuring Better Quality of State Pre-School Programs

The House Education and Labor Committee approved legislation late June to improve the quality of state pre-school programs, which serve more than one million young children. The Committee passed the legislation, the Providing Resources Early for Kids Act (H.R. 3289), by a vote of 31 to 11.

H.R. 3289 establishes a federal-state partnership to expand high-quality early childhood educational opportunities to more children. It provides incentives to states to ensure that their pre-K programs meet children’s developmental and educational needs.

Under the bill, states receive federal funding that they could use for a variety of program improvement purposes, including: increasing the number of early childhood educators with bachelor’s degrees; reducing student-teacher ratios; implementing research-based curricula; and providing vital comprehensive services such as health screenings and nutritional assistance.

“We have long advocated for not only increased access to pre-kindergarten in Pennsylvania, but for those preschool programs to be of the highest quality,” said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of PA Partnerships for Children. “This legislation gives a tremendous boost to the great gains made in our state in the fast few years in terms of expanding pre-K opportunities for children. This exciting new partnership will help ensure even more kids have access to high-quality preschool programs.”

Research increasingly demonstrates that the first years of children’s lives have a much greater and more lasting impact on their future growth and learning than was previously understood. New research shows that early childhood experiences influence the very architecture and chemistry of a developing brain.