Since 1989, the Pottstown district has supported half-day pre-k for any child in the district. In 2006, the district’s commitment grew to embrace the community, with creation of the PEAK Partnership, funded through a Pre-K Counts Public Private Partnership grant. The district is the senior manager of the PEAK Partnership, which stands for Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness, and which convenes community partners in community outreach, family engagement, quality improvement, kindergarten transition, and health/wellness to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Today, the district still runs its self-funded half-day pre-k in three of its four elementary schools, and it is piloting a full-day Pre-K Counts classroom in the fourth school. It is also the Pre-K Counts grantee for 10 classrooms established throughout the community.

Quality pre-k doesn’t just teach children their letters and numbers, but also how to share, take turns, and learn to self-regulate their behavior during the critical developmental years before kindergarten, says retired Superintendent Jeff Sparagana. “Without those things, they are not going to be successful in kindergarten. Once you hit age 5, a lot of characteristics are in place, and it’s hard to have children relearn things.”

The impact of quality pre-k is evident in Pottstown schools:

Kindergarten readiness: Children from Pottstown Pre-K Counts classrooms enter kindergarten better prepared to learn than the district-wide average. In 2014, 75 percent of students entering kindergarten from pre-k had the core skills of literacy, compared to the district-wide average of 52 percent.

Academic progress: By third grade, students from Pre-K Counts outpaced the district average, 70 percent to 60 percent, in meeting benchmarks of learning.

Less special education and remediation: With the advent of the PEAK Partnership and the district’s Pre-K Counts program, the district saw a reduction in its special education population, according to Sparagana.