



Statewide Coalition Kicks Off Effort to Expand Access to High-Quality Pre-K
'Pre-K for PA' Campaign Seeks to Ensure All Children Enter School Ready to Learn

(HARRISBURG, PA) Jan. 23, 2014 – Citing strong public support for greater investments in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, a newly formed coalition today kicked off a statewide campaign - “Pre-K for PA: All Children Ready to Succeed” – to ensure every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to attend high-quality pre-k.

“High-quality pre-k helps build a foundation for a child’s success in school and in life, but too few Pennsylvania children are able to benefit from it,” said Joan Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), one of 10 non-profit organizations leading the campaign. “We need to elevate the discussion about high-quality pre-k and find ways to help more children benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity.”

The amount of public funds available for pre-k in Pennsylvania is only enough to help fewer than 20 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds access high-quality programs. As a result, many families cannot find or afford high-quality pre-k, despite its proven benefits in preparing children for school.

A growing body of research shows children with access to high-quality pre-k are more likely to do well in school and have improved social and emotional skills. They also tend to need fewer special education and remedial learning services, and they have an increased likelihood of high school graduation and college enrollment.

Pennsylvania voters express strong, bipartisan support for investing more into high-quality pre-k in the commonwealth. A statewide poll of more than 600 likely voters conducted in November 2013 shows 63 percent of Pennsylvanians support increasing funding for pre-k and 58 percent of those polled saying they favor increased funding even if it required a tax increase.

Support for expanding access to high-quality pre-k is strong across party lines. The poll found that in both major parties (and among independents), a majority of likely voters favors giving every 3- and 4-year-old access to high-quality pre-k.

The long-term benefits of high-quality pre-k have been recognized by not only educators and parents, but also business leaders, law enforcement and the military.

“The reality of our modern-day military is that young people in uniform must operate cutting-edge technology and possess critical thinking skills,” said retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Dennis Benchoff. “So, just as in the civilian workforce today, the military increasingly needs better-educated young men and women. Quality pre-k is a proven investment that will help achieve this goal.”

General Benchoff is a member of Mission: Readiness, a national security non-profit that works to reverse the high percentage of American youth that are ineligible for military service. The

Department of Defense reports that 75 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds are not eligible for military service due to educational, health and criminal deficiencies.

York City Police Chief Wes Kahley, speaking on behalf of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids - an anti-crime organization of more than 200 Pennsylvania police chiefs, sheriffs and district attorneys - noted high-quality pre-k helps build a solid foundation for educational success, which in turn benefits communities.

“Research is clear that far too often, today’s high school dropouts are tomorrow’s criminals,” Kahley said. “That is why law enforcement officials place a high priority on education. While we’re never going to eliminate the need for law enforcement and corrections, we have to take every step we can to reduce crime. Investing in these early learning programs provides us with a solid opportunity to offer kids a better future and also to make our communities safer.”

Pre-K for PA campaign partners hosted launch events today in Philadelphia and the Pittsburgh region. Pennsylvanians who support the Pre-K for PA campaign’s goal of ensuring every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania has access to high-quality pre-k and enters kindergarten ready to learn and succeed can get involved by visiting the campaign’s website – prekforpa.org – and following the campaign’s progress on Facebook (facebook.com/prekforpa) and Twitter ([@prek4pa](https://twitter.com/prek4pa)).

Pre-K for PA is a statewide collaboration of the following organizations: Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children, Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, Fight Crime: Invest In Kids, Mission: Readiness, Pennsylvania Association for the Education Of Young Children, Pennsylvania Head Start Association, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, Public Citizens for Children and Youth, and the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey.

CONTACTS:

Michael Race (PPC) - 717-236-5680 or mrace@papartnerships.org

Steve Doster (Mission: Readiness) - 717-343-6403 or sdoster@missionreadiness.org

Bruce Clash (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids) - 717-385-5300 or bclash@fightcrime.org

###