

**CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT**

 UPDATED May 2014

**About the “Pre-K for PA” campaign**

Our Vision: “Pre-K for PA: All Children Ready to Succeed” was launched in January 2014 with the goal of ensuring every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to attend high-quality pre-k.

In order to educate the public and policymakers about the benefits of and public desire for high-quality pre-k, we will engage civic, business, education and child advocacy leaders to elevate the civic and media discussion during a critical election year in Pennsylvania. High-quality pre-k can be available to every family who wants it for their child. To realize this goal, we must work together across the commonwealth to educate, coordinate, magnify and mobilize public support for high-quality pre-k.

We are a growing coalition of organizations committed to achieving the Pre-K for PA goals:

* 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
* The United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey

This toolkit is intended as a resource to prepare Pre-K for PA supporters as they join us to raise awareness about the benefits of high-quality pre-k and the clear public support for expanding access to it.

To learn more about the campaign, visit [prekforpa.org](http://www.prekforpa.org/).

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ADDENDA

* Sample Powerpoint presentation

**Sample organizing flyer**



**All children ready to succeed**

A statewide campaign to put high-quality pre-k in the election-year spotlight

Join us to advocate in your community on behalf of children. Every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania can access high-quality pre-k and be ready to start school, but we all need to work together to make it happen. We know the facts about high-quality pre-k:

* High-quality pre-k really works, giving all children the opportunity to learn.
* High-quality pre-k strengthens our schools, making every classroom a place where learning is a joy.
* High-quality pre-k is critical to Pennsylvania’s success and a smart choice in these challenging economic times.

Yet Pennsylvania currently helps only about 1 in 6 of our 3- and 4-year-old children access high-quality pre-k. Far too many families simply can’t afford quality, and too many children are not ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Get involved now!

Visit [prekforpa.org](http://www.prekforpa.org/) and follow the campaign on Facebook ([facebook.com/prekforpa](https://www.facebook.com/prekforpa)) and Twitter ([@prek4pa](https://twitter.com/%40prek4pa))

*Pre-K for PA is a coalition initiative of 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.*

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**High-quality pre-k can be essential to brain development**

* Quality interactions, experiences, and relationships help strengthen the young child’s brain architecture.
* The basic capabilities of cognitive and linguistic understanding, emotional foundation, and social skills are all well-developed before children reach school.
* We can counter any damaging effects of negative influences by providing positive experiences during critical early years.
* High-quality programs that provide appropriate, interactive, supportive, and stimulating environments for young children – all rooted in the findings of research – help assure a brain architecture that’s sturdy and strong.

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**Messages targeted to specific audiences**

The campaign has a central message in the drive for investments in high-quality pre-k:

**Pre-k for PA: All children ready to succeed.**

Our vision is that every 3-and 4-year-old in the commonwealth has access to high-quality prekindergarten.

Still, in any communications campaign, messages must be tailored to varied audiences. If you want to build a new sports stadium, you don’t talk about baseball to a football fan. The same goes for early childhood development. Messages must target the core beliefs, hopes, and fears of key audiences – in this case, every individual, community stakeholders such as educators and parents, and state officials, elected or appointed.

All these people have different priorities and perspectives. Winning their support requires tapping into their unique worldviews with messages that resonate and demonstrate the benefits coming their way. It’s done by stressing one of these three key messages and backing them up with supporting points.

**Message 1**

**Target: Every individual
Message: Access to high-quality pre-k gives all children the opportunity to learn.**

**Supporting Points**

1. When all children arrive ready to learn, they are best able to take advantage of the educational benefits of classroom learning.
2. Children with access to high quality pre-k are more likely to advance grades and have improved social skills.
3. Education investment must start early, before the achievement gap is too wide and very costly to overcome.
4. Far too many children attend pre-k programs that lack the key elements to ensure they are ready for kindergarten.
5. A child’s brain is 90% developed by age 5, making the early years a crucial time in a child’s development.
6. The annual cost of high-quality pre-k can be as high as a family’s rent, mortgage or the cost of college tuition. As a result, too many families cannot afford high-quality pre-k essential to their children's success.
7. 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 essential to their children's success.
8. We know high-quality pre-k works. The percentage of 4-year-olds with proficient academic and social skills more than tripled from 22 percent to 82 percent after participating in PA Pre-K Counts programs and increased more than six-fold - from 12 to 76 percent - after participating in Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs in 2012-13. Pre-k is working in Pennsylvania, but serves far too few children.

**Message 2**

**Target: Community
Message: Pre-k Strengthens Our Schools**

**Supporting Points**

1. Children only have one chance to be preschoolers and benefit from early learning opportunities.  They don’t get a do-over.
2. A growing body of research demonstrates that high-quality pre-k:
	1. Significantly improves children’s early literacy, language, math and social/emotional skills as they enter kindergarten.
	2. Reduces special education placements by nearly half through 2nd grade.
	3. Reduces grade repetition by as much as a third through 8th grade.
	4. Increases the likelihood of high school graduation and college enrollment, which in turn leads to stronger employment opportunities and increased lifetime earning potential.
	5. Decreases the likelihood of at-risk children committing crime later in life.
3. Prepared young learners are apt to be more focused and engaged in the classroom, meaning fewer disruptions or delays that can sidetrack others.
4. Pre-k is a proven “success story” and something we should immediately expand that will have a direct impact on all of our schools.
5. A Pennsylvania study found school districts investing in pre-k could recoup as much as 78 percent of their pre-k spending in education savings. Providing targeted preschool programs could reduce special education expenditures in the state by at least 8 percent annually ($68 million).

**Message 3**

**Target: State officials
Message: Pre-k lays the foundation for a more successful Pennsylvania**

**Supporting Points**

1. Pre-k has short- and long-term economic benefits.
2. It helps build intellectual infrastructure for the future (positive impacts in school and life).
3. Other states, such as Georgia, New York, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and West Virginia, along with the District of Columbia, either provide high-quality pre-k or are on the pathway to providing it for all their 3- and 4-year-olds.
4. Invest wisely! Build on our current investments in Pennsylvania’s high quality pre-k programs in these tight fiscal and economically uncertain times.
5. Investment in pre-k saves taxpayers’ money in the long term by reducing the need for special education and remedial instruction, and increasing the rates of graduation and college enrollment.
6. Investment in pre-k preserves taxpayer dollars by decreasing dropout rates that can increase the likelihood for crime and incarceration during teenage years, while boosting the economy through increased lifetime earnings and a reduced reliance on social services.
7. Economic stimulus and job creation: Projections estimate that for every dollar Pennsylvania invests in early childhood programs, more than $2 is circulated throughout local economies through employment and purchasing of goods and services; and for every 10 jobs created in the Pennsylvania early care and education sector, three jobs are created outside that sector.
8. Every dollar spent on pre-k returns up to $17 in later public savings and benefit.
9. An unprepared workforce comes at a cost to society and the economy. The median income for a Pennsylvania high school dropout is $20,547, compared to $28,245 for a high school graduate, $33,989 for an Associate’s degree and $48,667 for a Bachelor’s degree.  The estimated additional lifetime income if Pennsylvania’s dropouts had graduated with their class in 2011 is more than $4 billion.

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**Elements of High-quality Pre-k: Assuring Quality**

When we talk about brain architecture and the benefits of prekindergarten, we’re not talking about every pre-k program available to families. Only high-quality pre-k yields the positive results proven by research. That’s why it’s important to know the specific elements that go into high-quality pre-k. Our audiences need to understand that the amazing benefits for kids and society are based on achieving strict standards of quality in many more prekindergarten programs.

A core ingredient of high-quality pre-k programs is degreed teachers with early childhood training. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) set the standard for high-quality pre-k programs. NIEER convened a national research advisory panel to review the literature on pre-k and created a 10-point quality scale (PA Pre-K Counts received a ranking of “7” and Head Start is ranked at “8”). Additional NIEER research supports that a core element of quality is the qualifications of the pre-k teacher. All publicly funded pre-k programs in Pennsylvania require teachers to have college degrees and early childhood training.

Accreditation is another indicator of high-quality. The Council on Accreditation, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation and the National Association of Family Child Care all provide accreditation for Pennsylvania pre-k programs based on high-quality standards.

For additional information, below is a listing of NIEER’s ten quality benchmarks:

1. Teacher has a bachelor’s degree
2. Teachers have specialized training in preschool education
3. Teacher assistants have a Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent credential
4. Teachers have at least 15 hours in-service training
5. Class size of 20 or lower
6. Staff/Child Ratio 1:10 or better
7. Early learning standards that are research-based, age-appropriate and cover all areas of a child’s development.
8. Screening/Referral – vision, hearing and other screenings and referrals address a child’s overall well-being.
9. At least one meal is provided – comprehensive services are important to ensuring physical, social and emotional health.
10. Site visits – allow standards to be enforced and ensure public funds are spent on high-quality.

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**What the Polling Tells Us**

**Polling shows strong, bipartisan support for pre-k investments**

A well-structured opinion poll takes the pulse of the public on critical and trending issues. It can find support in surprising places and reveal whether key messages are penetrating into the public consciousness. When it comes to public policy, poll findings shouldn’t be in the driver’s seat, but they make terrific navigators in the passenger seat. Then can affirm when you’re on the right track, or guide you in new directions to win over key audiences that remain skeptical.

The Pre-K for PA campaign commissioned a statewide poll from the experienced and trusted pollsters Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting. Conducted in November 2013, the poll surveyed 601 likely voters in Pennsylvania’s November 2014 general election.

For pre-k advocates, the findings were very good:

**Voters strongly support access to pre-K programs**. A 67 percent majority favor ensuring that every 3 and 4 year old in Pennsylvania has access to voluntary high quality pre-K programs, including 54 percent who strongly favor. Just 18 percent oppose and 16 percent remain undecided. Voters across lines of partisanship, age and gender strongly support ensuring access.

**Pennsylvanians strongly support increasing funding to ensure all children have access to voluntary, high quality Pre-K programs.** A 63 percent majority of voters support increasing funding, including 51 percent who strongly support, while 23 percent oppose and 14 percent say they are not sure.

**Support remains strong even if such funding increased voters’ taxes**. A 58 percent majority say they favor increasing funding for Pre-K programs even if it increased their taxes, while 27 percent oppose and 15 percent are not sure.

**Women, voters under 50, and Democrats are among the strongest supporters of increasing funding even if it increased taxes, but strong support can be found across demographics.**

* **Gender**: Sixty-six (66) percent of women favor increasing funding as do 59 percent of men. When it would increase taxes, 58 percent of women still favor increasing funding as do 57 percent of men.
* **Age**: Voters under 50 favor increasing funding the strongest (74 percent) but majorities of voters between age 50 and 64 (57 percent) and those over 65 (60 percent favor) favor an increase in funding as well. When it would increase taxes, 65 percent of voters under 50 favor increasing funding as do 59 percent of those between age 50 and 64, and a 48 percent plurality of those over age 65.
* **Partisanship**: Seventy-nine (79) percent of self-identified Democrats favor increasing funding as do 60 percent of Independents and a 43 percent plurality of Republicans (of whom 36 percent oppose). When it would increase taxes support erodes among Democrats (71 percent) and Independents (51 percent) but actually increases among Republicans (50 percent). Republicans are typically more tax sensitive than other voters, and while their increase in support when linking funding to tax increases could be statistical noise, it could also be that Republicans want to know how an increase in pre-K programs would be funded. When that question can be answered, they can better assess their opinion.

**Education is a core issue for Pennsylvania voters.** Forty-one (41) percent of voters identify education and schools as one of the most important issues for elected officials to focus on, second only to jobs and the economy (49 percent).

**Just 14 percent think Pennsylvania spends too much on Pre-K programs.** More voters think Pennsylvania spends too little (38 percent) on pre-K education. Half think Pennsylvania spends about the right amount (24 percent) or say they are unsure (24 percent).

**Voters say they would reward candidates for elected office if they favored increasing funding for pre-K programs, and punish those who opposed increasing funding.** Forty-three (43) percent of voters say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who favored increasing funding for pre-K programs, while just 20 percent say they are less likely. Thirty-seven (37) percent say they are less likely to vote for a candidate who opposed increasing funding for pre-K programs, and just 20 percent say they are more likely.

**Support for increasing funding for pre-K programs rests on two strongly held values:**

**First, voters say it is very important to ensure that all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.** Eighty-eight (88) percent of voters found the statement “ensuring that all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn” important to them personally, including 68 percent who say it is very important to them personally. Increasing access to underserved communities is an important value, and voters favor an inclusive approach that favors all children. They understand the connection between pre-K programs and being prepared for the K-12 system.

**The K-12 education system has long been a strong priority for voters, and today voters connect the pre-K system to K-12.** Parents recognize that students in their children’s classroom who have not had the benefit of pre-K programs are more likely to cause disruptions, to the detriment of their children. These parents want their own children to have the best education possible, and want other students to have access to pre-K programs in part to benefit the environment for the rest of the class.

This understanding leads many voters to reject the notion that ensuring access to pre-K programs would be at a detriment to K-12 education.

**Secondly, voters recognize the positive outcomes that pre-K programs generate** in the form of higher graduation rates, increased employment rates, and higher earnings later in adulthood.

Voters reacted to statements about the benefits from children participating in high quality pre-K programs. They indicated for each statement how believable it was and if it would make them more likely to support increased funding.

**Positive personal impacts emerge as strong motivators and believable proof points driving support for increased funding**. The strongest drivers for increased funding include significantly greater high school graduation rates, increased employment rates and higher earnings in adulthood, improved social and emotional skills, and higher test scores through K-12. Positive impacts such as budget savings and reduced crime resonate less than the personal impacts on children.

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**Sample Pre-k Fact Sheet**

Fact sheets are typically one-page resource documents that give hard data on the issue to which you are trying to draw attention. The “Pre-K for PA” campaign has fact sheet available on its website that you can use to discuss high-quality pre-k in your community.

[You can find it here.](http://www.prekforpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Pre-K_for_PA_Learn_More.pdf)

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**Effective Messengers Make a Difference**

While it’s important that everyone involved in a campaign understands and uses the same messages, it’s also essential that certain people be designated as primary messengers.

Why does it matter? Because designated messengers:

* Give the public and key audiences a recognizable spokesperson for the issue.
* Enhance credibility of the message and the campaign through their expertise and passion.
* Provide a known source for journalists, legislators, and other community members to contact when they need quotes, information, and speakers.

Effective messengers are well-versed in the campaign’s key messages and supporting facts. They are articulate, comfortable with the media, and good public speakers. Ideally, these messengers also have a personal story that illustrates the benefits of high-quality pre-k or shows why a lack of access to high-quality pre-k is problematic.

However, messengers don’t have to be one-size-fits-all. Varied messengers give voice to the issue from different perspectives. Even the surprise factor of hearing from “nontraditional” messengers -- a top business leader or local police chief, for example – gets attention.

Consider these effective messengers for spreading the word about the value of pre-k in your community:

* Directors of high-quality pre-k programs: They can talk about the gains they see children make from the start of the school year to the end.
* Elementary education teachers: They can talk about the individual school success of children form high-quality pre-k. They know the importance of a classroom atmosphere focused on learning, without distractions created by children unprepared for school.
* School board members, superintendents, principals and other local education leaders.
* Scientists: Authorities on research can discuss brain architecture and the impact of experiences – for better or worse – on the developing brain.
* Pediatricians and nurses: Medical professionals can address the health benefits of proper growth in the early years.
* Law enforcement officers: They’d much rather prevent crime than arrest teens and young adults. Strong research links quality pre-k with a lower likelihood of getting tangled in the criminal justice system.
* Military personnel: They understand the need to provide children a good start to build a strong workforce for the future, including being able to participate in the military to ensure our country is secure in the years to come. Currently, many individuals are ineligible to serve our country due to poor education, a criminal record, or because they are not physically-fit.
* Faith-based leaders: Faith groups seek fairness in their communities. Assuring access to quality pre-k for all 3- and 4-year-olds is about nurturing the potential of every child.
* Businesspeople: They can share their difficulties in hiring capable workers and the importance of a long-term view toward workforce development and economic development.
* Parents with children who attend/recently attended high-quality pre-k: They know firsthand the impact a high-quality program had on their child.

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**Giving a Speech**

If you find yourself having to speak publicly about the benefits of high-quality pre-k, it’s best to have your remarks sound like they didn’t come from a speechwriter. You want to speak in “your voice,” but you also want to make sure you cover the main messaging points of the campaign. If you want to craft your own speech, here’s an outline of the campaign’s three main talking points:

**We know high-quality pre-k works.** Access to high-quality pre-k gives all children the opportunity to learn.

* 4-year-olds in Pennsylvania’s publicly supported pre-k programs achieved dramatic gains in academic and social proficiency in 2012-13.
* Educational investment must begin in the early years before the achievement gap is too wide and very costly to overcome.
* Despite its benefits, far too many families in Pennsylvania cannot afford to enroll their kids in high-quality pre-k and often resort to programs that lack elements essential to their child’s success.

**Pre-k strengthens our schools.** When children arrive ready for kindergarten, classrooms are a more effective place for all kids to learn.

* High-quality pre-k reduces grade repetition and special education costs.
* Students who benefit from high-quality pre-k are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in higher education and have increased lifetime earnings.
* At-risk youth with access to high-quality pre-k are less likely to commit crime later in life.

**Pre-k is a critical investment in Pennsylvania’s success.** Early learning investment is a smart choice during challenging economic times.

* ReadyNation, a business leaders’ partnership, notes: “We rarely have the luxury of making business investment decisions with as much evidence as we have to support the economic value of investing in early education.”
* Every dollar invested in early learning generates over $2 in local economic impact and up to $17 in long-term public savings and benefit.
* Other states have successfully implemented pre-k investments with impressive results, including Maryland, Oklahoma, Illinois and others.

If you don’t feel comfortable crafting your own speech, here’s a sample speech you can use, but it should be tailored to add your own perspective and be in your voice to the greatest extent possible.

**High-quality pre-k: It works, it strengthens schools, and it’s critical to Pennsylvania’s success**

Anyone who’s ever been around a young child knows what a wondrous time those early years are. All that play and imagination – young children seem to live in a magical wonderland.

But we are also astounded at how quickly young children grow and change. Weeks and even days bring about enormous leaps in language capabilities and behavior. Little bodies grow healthy and strong. Little minds gain understanding of the world around them.

I’m here today to talk about how high-quality pre-kindergarten strengthens that growth in a child. It also strengthens our schools and it’s a critical investment in strengthening Pennsylvania’s future.

A large and growing body of research proves that high-quality pre-k works. Access to high-quality pre-k gives all children - every one of them - the opportunity to learn. Those educational investments in the early years prevent the achievement gap from growing too wide and too costly to overcome.

Yet despite the benefits of quality pre-k, many children lack the stimulation needed for proper brain growth because far too many families can’t afford to enroll their kids in quality programs. These families are forced to accept pre-k that lacks the stimulation elements essential to their child’s success.

Pennsylvania has made a lot of progress in expanding access, but the public funds that are available help only about 1 in 6 of the commonwealth’s 3- and 4-year-olds access high-quality programs.

The programs we have in place have made a dramatic difference in the lives of young children lucky enough to participate. Consider this: The rate of children with proficient academic and social skills more than tripled after participating in the state’s quality program known as Pre-K Counts, from 22 percent to 82 percent.

High-quality pre-k also strengthens our schools. When children arrive ready for kindergarten, classrooms are more effective places for learning. All kids benefit through an environment focused on learning and free of disruptions.

High-quality pre-k reduces special education placements by nearly half through second grade and reduces grade repetition by as much as one-third through eighth grade. It increases the likelihood of high school and college graduation – helping assure that those children who received enriching experiences as youngsters reach their full potential as adults.

Finally, high-quality pre-k strengthens communities and lays the foundation for a more successful Pennsylvania. It’s critical to Pennsylvania’s success because its economic benefits are measurable. Children who graduate from high school and pursue higher education have stronger employment opportunities and increased lifetime earning potential. They are also less likely to commit crimes later in life.

Here in our community, high-quality prekindergarten stimulates the economy and creates jobs. Every dollar Pennsylvania invests in early childhood programs circulates more than $2 dollars in local economies through employment and purchasing of goods and services. When we create 10 jobs in Pennsylvania early care and education, we create three more jobs outside that sector.

The long-term gains are even more astounding. Think about it. We’re spending less on welfare and criminal justice and generating more through productive citizens. So, every dollar invested in high-quality pre-k returns up to $17 dollars.

Plus, we all know that the higher the education, the higher the income. The median income for a Pennsylvania high school dropout is $20,547. Compare that to the median of $48,667 for the person with a bachelor’s degree, and you know who’ll be better equipped to contribute in every way to a strong, healthy community.

An unprepared workforce comes at a real cost to society and the economy. If Pennsylvania’s dropouts had graduated with their high school classes in 2011, the additional income would have totaled more $4 billion. Instead, those dollars are never generated, and all that potential is lost to businesses desperate to hire skilled, capable employees.

This is our opportunity to help unlock the potential of every child in Pennsylvania. Investments that assure access to high-quality pre-k for every 3- and 4-year-old are investments in our future.

It’s a win for Pennsylvania, ready to compete on the global stage with a talented, capable workforce that’s second to none.

It’s a win for schools, where every classroom is energized by enthusiastic learners.

And it’s a win for children, who start their lives on the pathway to success.

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**Creating a Presence at Candidate Forums**

Candidate forums are an important part of the “Pre-K for PA” work because every person in the room is a key target of our campaign. In particular, two vitally important groups we want to influence are present at candidate forums: the media and the candidates. Our presence at these forums encourages the candidates to be more overt and specific during the forum while press is present.

Additionally, the people who attend candidate forums likely are highly engaged voters and/or community political leaders, and the organizers of the events are people we want to see demonstrating public support for pre-k.

**Goals: Use the venue of a candidate forum to demonstrate to the candidates the level of public support “Pre-K for PA” and garner press coverage focused on pre-k as a key election issue.**

**2-4 weeks ahead**

* Contact the organizers of the forum about “Pre-K for PA” and ask that the forum include at least one specific question on high-quality pre-k.
* Email your list 2-3 times and make calls to those who live close by inviting them to join you and/or your staff at the event to:

 1) talk to people about “Pre-K for PA”

2) ask people to wear “Pre-K for PA” stickers

3) collect business cards of new supporters for addition to our list

* Post to Facebook and Twitter about the forum with encouragement to attend as a “Pre-K for PA” supporter.
* Contact a pre-school to see if they could attend the forum at the beginning holding up signs: “More Pre-K Please” … “ I (heart) pre-k” … etc.
* Contact a high-quality pre-k program to have a [cutesy marching action](http://kstp.com/article/stories/s3295770.shtml) like they did in Minnesota. The TV news there covered a class of smiling, marching kids (in two straight lines) with banners and signs asking for pre-k.
* If needed, register attendees or buy a suitable number of tickets (5-10).

**1-2 Days before**

* Gather your materials – stickers, glossy cards, business cards, petition sheets, etc., supporting “Pre-K for PA” (grows our list) and flyers about upcoming events.
* Count the number of activists you have committed and call to confirm their attendance. You need five, but 10-15 is better, depending on the size of the forum. At a minimum, you can pull this off with just three.
* Assign roles- Front door distributes glossy cards. Coffee station gets stickers onto people. Inside the forum distributes our upcoming events or additional info. Candidate trackers spot candidates and urge support for “Pre-K for PA.” (Ideally, one “Pre-K for PA” person per candidate.)

**Day of the Forum:**

* Get there early. Make friends with the organizers of the forum and explain the “Pre-K for PA” campaign. Ask them to wear a sticker and get their card.
* A designated “Pre-K for PA” person should speak to each candidate personally to urge them to explicitly support the goal of the campaign. Smile, spread out and talk to people, asking them to wear “Pre-K for PA” stickers.
* Tell candidates and others how popular “Pre-K for PA” is in your community.
* Collect business cards of supportive people to add to our list.
* Do not plan on sitting together - spread out so supporters seem everywhere.
* Assign a recorder to write down the remarks about pre-k from each candidate attending.
* Leave materials about our upcoming events, fact sheets, etc., with attendees and all press members.
* Take pictures of our supporters to document our presence to share on social media.

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**Contacting Candidates for Governor**

In the May 20 primary, the following candidates were formally nominated for the general election:

**Tom Corbett (Republican) - incumbent**

[info@tomcorbettforgovernor.com](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cmrace%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CTemp%5Cinfo%40tomcorbettforgovernor.com)

<http://www.tomcorbettforgovernor.com/>

**Tom Wolf (Democrat)**

info@wolfforpa.com <http://www.wolfforpa.com/>

Also expected to run in November are:

**Ken Krawchuk (Libertarian)**

info@KenK.Org

<http://www.kenk.org/I.php>

**Paul Glover (Green Party)**

metroeco@gmail.com

<http://www.paulglover.org/governor.html>

To help ensure candidates are aware of the “Pre-K for PA” campaign and its goals, supporters of high-quality pre-k should be encouraged to write each candidate. Below are sample emails that can serve as the framework for a personalized message …

**Sample message from a high-quality pre-k provider**

Dear (name of candidate):

I am the director/a staff member at (name of provider and location) and I support the Pre-K for PA campaign – a statewide, issue-focused campaign to ensure that all 3-and 4-year-olds in the commonwealth have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.

I can tell you firsthand that high-quality pre-k works. The early academic and social/emotional skills we teach the children in our pre-k program result in their readiness for kindergarten. This is a smart investment because we’re reaching these kids early and giving them the strong start they need to be successful learners.

Please consider making high-quality pre-k a priority in your campaign for governor of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

(your name, address and contact info)

**Sample message from a parent of a child in pre-k (or previously in pre-k)**

Dear (name of candidate):

I am the parent of a child who (attends/attended) a high-quality pre-k program and I support the Pre-K for PA campaign – a statewide, issue-focused campaign to ensure that all 3-and 4-year-olds in the commonwealth have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to enroll my child in (name of provider and location). It has been amazing to see how much they have learned – from basic math and language skills to understanding how to get along with other children. I know this program (made/will make) a difference as my child progresses through school.

Many parents aren’t as lucky as I am and don’t have access to this kind of program, either because they can’t afford one or there is no availability where they live. That’s why this campaign is so important.

Please consider making high-quality pre-k a priority in your campaign for governor of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

(your name, address and contact info)

**From a citizen/voter**

Dear (name of candidate):

I support the Pre-K for PA campaign, which is seeking to ensure that all 3-and 4-year-olds in the commonwealth have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.

Studies show pre-k benefits children by preparing them for kindergarten. It helps reduce grade repetition and special education costs in K-12 and increases rates of graduation and college enrollment. It also benefits taxpayers by helping to increase lifetime employment opportunities and earning potential and reducing costs associated with crime and public assistance.

High-quality pre-k is a wise investment in our commonwealth’s greatest resource – our children.

Please consider making high-quality pre-k a priority in your campaign for governor of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

(your name, address and contact info)

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**Contacting Your Pennsylvania Legislator**

To find out your legislators names and/or to obtain their contact information, follow these simple steps:

* Go to: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>
* On the left side of the website, you’ll see a section titled “Find My Legislator”
* To find your legislators, select “Your address” and fill in your street, city and zip code.
* You will be provided with the name of your state representative and state senator.
* Their names will be links you may select to find their contact information in Harrisburg and their district office.
* The “Find My Legislator” section of the site also allows individuals to find legislators based on their names, district number and county.

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**Tips for Talking with Your Legislator**

When you talk with legislators, focus on developing an ongoing personal relationship as well as trying to educate them on the benefits of high-quality pre-k and the importance of stronger investments. Lawmakers are bombarded with pleas for support or help all day, every day. They appreciate the constituents who provide information, enlighten them on key issues, and speak with unified voices on their most cherished issues.

Follow these dos and don’ts when speaking to legislators:

* DO know some basic background information.
	+ Know who your legislator is before making initial contact. Nothing gets you written off faster than the lawmaker realizing that you’re not even a constituent.
	+ Find out which legislative committees your legislator serves on in the General Assembly.
	+ Try to get a sense of how much the legislator knows about pre-k. Do they have a track record in support or opposition?
* DO work on your messaging.
	+ Consider the key messages that fit with the legislator’s background. For instance, concentrate on the benefits to schools for the former teacher, or the crime-fighting aspect for those from law enforcement.
	+ Many legislators understand the issue of early childhood, but start from the assumption that your legislator doesn’t. Take the time to do some educating, and avoid using jargon.
	+ Share your personal story if it helps to make your point.
* DO know your issue.
	+ Put broad policy issues in a local perspective. Legislators want to know how issues will impact local voters. Provide facts and figures to back up your position. Data specific to the legislator’s district is particularly helpful.
	+ All causes are good causes, and legislators hear about them every day. Convince your legislator that your cause is extra special.
	+ Help your legislator see you as the expert on the issue. There’s no reason to be intimidated, because you’re the one providing valuable information.
	+ Know your opposition. Be prepared to address the opposition stance directly and effectively, using verifiable examples and statistics.
* DO agree to disagree, if necessary.
	+ Don’t debate with a legislator or give an ultimatum. Respect the legislator’s right to disagree.
	+ Put the legislator at ease by showing that you’re there to serve as an educational resource. Act like a partner, not an adversary.
	+ Be a good listener. Hear out what your legislator has to say.
	+ If the legislator has a question you can’t answer, promise to get the answer, and follow up promptly.
* DO respect the legislative process.
	+ Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time to hear your position.
	+ Leave behind a fact sheet.
	+ Once a legislator gives you a commitment, it’s okay to check back later, but don’t badger them.
	+ Don’t be disappointed if your legislator sends an aide to meet with you. Demands on legislators’ time are intense, and aides are critical to the legislative process.
	+ Spend your time working with legislators who haven’t made up their minds.
	+ Be brief, prepared, clear, honest, accurate, persuasive, timely, persistent, and grateful.
	+ Always follow up with a thank you note, and amplify your main points.
	+ When your legislator goes the extra mile, consider acknowledging the efforts with a letter to the editor in your local paper or some other public form of thanks.

It is advisable to visit the Pennsylvania Department of State’s website and the Alliance for Justice online guide for election-related activities regarding any questions/concerns about rules for engaging legislators and candidates:

Dept. of State website:

<http://www.dos.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/lobbying_disclosure/12746>

Alliance for Justice guide:

<http://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Rules_of_the_Game_paywall.pdf>

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**Planning a Legislative Event**

**Careful planning assures success of your pre-k legislative event**

Every member of the Pennsylvania House and Senate must understand firsthand the value and benefits of high-quality pre-k for children and families in their districts. Hosting a legislative event at a high-quality prekindergarten is a strategic way to inform policymakers about the importance of investments and to gain media attention.

Take these action steps to plan your event:

**Now**

* See “Tips for Talking with Your Legislator” to prepare for the interaction.
* Set the date, time, and site for the event. Work with your legislators’ aides to determine the best days and times. Check the legislative calendar to see when your legislators are on recess in their home districts.
* Choose a site that wows. Aim for impact on the legislators and the media. Consider selecting a site with a diverse group of children and enthusiastic directors.
* Make sure the site has ample parking and AV equipment hook-up available. If you’re not sure about AV needs, perhaps a local media production company or television station will volunteer a small amount of time to explain the technical requirements.
* Keep the event to no longer than 90 minutes.
* Send invitations to legislators. Ideally, each legislator should receive a personal invitation from a key constituent – someone with a personal connection. Once legislators commit to the time and date, it should be communicated that this event will be canceled if they cannot attend on that date (unless you have more than one legislator committed).
	+ Be sure to let legislators know that the event will be open to the media. Legislators might have staffers who can help with media outreach.
* Also send invitations to local officials, including school superintendents and principals, county commissioners, the chamber of commerce president, other business leaders, faith community leaders, and presidents of local civic groups.
* Secure a caterer if the event requires refreshments.
* Make every effort to involve every children’s advocacy and early education group that has members in the legislators’ districts. This could include schools, child care centers, Head Start providers, and Early Intervention providers. Urge community non-profit providers to invite their board members.
* Also strive to secure speakers who demonstrate powerful support. Business leaders, law enforcement officials, and military officers are excellent choices to join school superintendents.
* When planning the agenda, build in time for:
	+ Welcoming the legislators and thanking them in a space absent of children before the event.
	+ Introducing legislators and other speakers for remarks.
	+ Stories about the benefits of pre-k on school readiness from parents and teachers.
	+ A tour of the facility.
	+ Interaction between the children and the legislators.
	+ Questions and answers from legislators in a quiet space and time to wrap up and thank the legislators.
* Follow up invitations with a personal phone call and a confirmation letter. This should also be done for local officials.
* Make copies of materials to distribute at the event.
* Create indoor and outdoor signs and banners for the event.

**One to two weeks before the event**

* Develop talking points and/or scripts for the event and the order in which people will speak (see “Sample agenda.” Include introductions for legislators at the beginning of the event.
* Conduct a dry run with event coordinators.
* Make sure the facility has informed its families about the event.
* Make sure the facility has media waivers for all children who could possibly be filmed, photographed, or quoted. For children who don’t have waivers, talk with facility staff about keeping them off camera and discreetly informing media which ones don’t have waivers.
* Draft a news advisory to announce the event and send it to your media list the week before the event (see “Sample media advisory”). Confirm all media invitations with phone calls a week before the event and again the day before the event.
* Draft news release (see “Sample news release ”).
* Arrange for a photographer and plan how to use the photos (websites, social media, newsletters, annual reports).
* Follow up with caterer to confirm food plans.
* Call legislators to confirm their attendance a few days before the event.
* Create nametags for guests and speakers.
* Create a sign-in sheet.
* Provide the legislator’s office with a one-page, program-specific summary noting such information as the demographics of the population served, the number of employees, and the program’s best features. Also provide an agenda and guest list.
* Prepare press kits with a news release, the pre-k fact sheet from this toolkit, facts on the program being featured, and data on local access to quality pre-k and unmet need.

**The Day of the Event**

* Distribute the press kit at the completion of the event. Fax or e-mail the news release to those members of the media who did not attend.
* Place signage at all key intersections leading to the facility to ensure that everyone who is invited arrives AND to give all participants a sense of attending a very important event. Consider making colorful signs and banners to post around the outside of the facility and in the halls and the meeting room where the event will be held.
* Supply a sign-in sheet so these advocates can be mobilized for other activities. Provide nametags for all participants.
* Make sure the host/co-host recognizes elected officials and staff as well as other dignitaries in the audience.

**Immediately After the Event**

* Send personal thank you letters to all those who helped in the preparation for the event.
* Send thank you letters to all public officials and reiterate your key messages.

**Other Ideas**

* If your organization has a newsletter, write an article about the event and include photos. Send a copy of the newsletter.
* Also send the legislator your summary and any photos for use in their own newsletters and websites.
* Share the write-up and photos with others who participated and ask that they include it in their newsletters and websites.

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**Sample Event Invitation**

(Date)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The Honorable John DoePennsylvania SenateMain CapitolHarrisburg, PA 17120 | Or | The Honorable Jane DoePA House of RepresentativesMain Capitol Harrisburg, PA 17120 |

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

On behalf of the (Event sponsor or name of local event planning committee), I am writing to invite you to attend our (Legislative Breakfast/Other Event) on (time and date) at (place). This will be an excellent opportunity for you to hear from the members of our community -- your constituents – about why we believe high-quality pre-k is a necessity for young children, families and schools in this community.

Children who are exposed to high-quality pre-k enter school ready to learn, need less special education, experience fewer grade retentions and are more likely to graduate from high school. The entire community benefits!

At this event, you will have the chance to visit with parents, teachers and other early education advocates who can share their experiences about the positive effects of high-quality pre-k on young children. You will also get a chance to interact with some very important people – the young children who enjoy the once-in-a-lifetime, stimulating learning experiences that come with high-quality prekindergarten.

During this event, we also would welcome your thoughts on this issue.

I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Sincerely,

(name)
(title)

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**Sample Event Agenda**

Just like any other meeting, your event will go more smoothly with a well-planned agenda. Keeping the event to 90 minutes, assign a time block to each element of the day. Make sure that a specific person is responsible for each element, including announcements and the introductions of speakers. Assign one person to watch the clock and keep the event running on time.

Inform guest speakers well in advance how much time they’ll have to speak.

Make copies of the agenda available to all participants, and adhere to it as strictly as possible. Be prepared to adapt if circumstances change, and explain all changes to your guests.

Here is a sample agenda:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Registration, Breakfast, and “Meet & Greet” | Event Coordinator and Team Head | 8:30 AM |
| Welcome | Event Coordinator | 9:00 AM |
| Overview of the benefits of pre-k investments | Team Head  | 9:05 AM |
| Statement by prominent community leader/guest | Event Coordinator | 9:15 AM |
| Testimony from parents, teachers, etc. | Event Coordinator | 9:30 AM |
| Legislator(s) Comments | Team Head | 9:45 AM |
| Q&A from audience | Event Coordinator | 10 AM |
| Close/Acknowledgements | Team Head  | 10:15 AM |

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**Event Planning Checklist: Staying on Message and Hitting the Highlights**

**Purpose:**

* To advocate for high-quality pre-k investments, so all children are ready to succeed. The vision: Every 3- and 4-year-old in the commonwealth has access to high-quality prekindergarten.
* To demonstrate the benefits of high-quality pre-k for children and families, communities, schools and the state.
* To build a relationship with legislators and increase awareness of the importance of high-quality pre-k to their constituents.
* To generate positive media coverage about the benefits of high-quality pre-k.

**Audiences:**

* My state Representative and Senator
* Local media

**Target Dates:**

* When the General Assembly or Congress is not in session.
* When the program is open and children are active.
* Be flexible if possible, and work with the legislator’s office to find a date and time that accommodates their schedule.

**In Preparation:**

* Know your message and create a plan for the visit based on the particular highlights you want to share about the program and how your legislator’s actions can make a difference.
* Determine who should speak (briefly) during the visit.
* Do a “dry run” before the legislator arrives.
* Prepare all presenters on the “message” of the day and practice with them.
* Make sure children have waivers to be photographed, filmed, or quoted. Arrange for discreetly alerting media to any children without waivers.

**During the Event**

* Include time for interaction with staff, children and parents.
* Include time to ask questions.
* Take pictures.
* Ask specifically for support for investments in high-quality pre-k.

**Event Follow-up**

* Send a thank you letter to the legislator.
* Share event photographs and media coverage on your website and in your next newsletter, and share the postings and newsletter with your legislator.
* Share event photographs and summaries with the legislator and all other guests, for use in their newsletters and websites.
* Congratulate yourself and your staff for a successful advocacy effort.

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**Sample ‘Thank You’ Letter**

(Date)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The Honorable John DoePennsylvania SenateMain CapitolHarrisburg, PA 17120 | or | The Honorable Jane DoePA House of RepresentativesMain Capitol Harrisburg, PA 17120 |

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for attending the (name of event) earlier this week. It was a tremendous opportunity for us to familiarize you with the benefits of high-quality pre-k to children and families, communities, schools, and Pennsylvania. As you could see, your constituents believe that high-quality pre-k is a valuable investment for this community.

I urge you to support investments ensuring that all Pennsylvania children are ready to succeed. Our vision is that every 3- and 4-year old in the commonwealth has access to high-quality pre-kindergarten. Now that you have seen the educational, social, and economic development benefits firsthand, we hope we can count on your support.

I have shared photos and a summary of the event with your staff. You’re welcome to use them in your newsletter, website and other communications vehicles.

I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

(name)
(title)

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**Tips for Working with the Media**

Journalists are increasingly expected to do more with less time and fewer resources. It’s not an ideal dynamic, but you can make it work in your favor by establishing yourself as a trusted and timely resource to help reporters get their jobs done. If you have a good working relationship with a member of the news media, nurture it. If you don’t have one, work to build one. As in all business dealings, a good rapport helps get things done.

Today’s media is more diverse than ever, with bloggers and other social media practitioners increasingly playing a role in disseminating news. While larger media outlets need to be included in your outreach efforts, don’t overlook any media as being too small for your attention.

Here are some basic dos and don’ts when dealing with media:

1. DO prepare as best you can before talking to a reporter, and stay on message.
	* Review your talking points and have them in front of you for the interview, if possible.
	* Rehearse the main messages until they become second nature and you can repeat them in a conversational style.
	* Try to anticipate what questions will be asked (some reporters will even tell you the questions beforehand if you ask).
2. DO be timely in responding to media requests.
	* If you can’t answer a reporter’s question immediately, ask for the reporter’s deadline and try to provide the fullest information possible within that deadline.
	* If you can’t make the deadline, let the reporter know, so they won’t be left waiting on an unreturned phone call or e-mail.
	* If you get the requested information after a reporter’s deadline, pass it along to the reporter, anyway. It helps build a good rapport, and the reporter might be able to use the information for follow-up coverage.
3. DON’T take it personally.
	* If a reporter raises a controversial issue or poses a confrontational question, don’t get defensive or aggressive. Any point you try to make, no matter how valid, will be eclipsed by your negative demeanor.
4. DON’T discuss what you don’t know.
	* If a reporter asks a question and you don’t readily know the answer, politely tell them you don’t know. If it’s information you might be able to gather, tell the reporter you’ll try to provide it later and ask for a deadline.
	* If a reporter keeps asking a question you can’t answer (or don’t want to), redirect your response back to your main messages.
	* Do not ever mislead or make something up. If you burn a reporter by giving bad information, your credibility (and that of the campaign) is damaged.
5. DON’T speak in acronyms and jargon.
	* Remember, your audience is not the reporter or your professional peers. It’s the readers/viewers of the media outlet. It’s unlikely they’ll know what terms like OCDEL or NIEER stand for, so don’t sprinkle such terminology into your sound bites.
	* Keep your statements short, quotable and conversational. Good quotes come in small packages.
6. DON’T speak “off the record” without clear ground rules.
	* Avoid having conversations “off the record” or “on background” unless you know exactly how the reporter interprets those terms. They don’t have uniform definitions, especially in today’s rapidly evolving and increasingly competitive media environment. (Historically, talking “on background” means the reporter can use the information you provide as part of their coverage, but without attributing it to you. “Off the record” means the information you provide can't be used in a story or tracked back to you as the source.)
	* For safety’s sake, assume anything you say to a reporter can and will show up in print, so be wise with your words. Remember, this rule applies to e-mails and texts, too.
7. DO be considerate of the reporter’s time constraints.
	* When you call, make your first question, “Is this a good time to talk?” If the answer is no, ask when you can call back or offer to email your information so the reporter can review it when time allows.
	* Call between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Most reporters don’t start their day until 10 a.m. or later, and by 4 p.m. or even earlier, they’re working on deadline.
	* Provide contact information where you can be reached after regular business hours.
8. DON’T ask to read the reporter’s story before it goes online, on air, or in print.
	* Media outlets have strict rules about maintaining editorial control over the stories they generate.
	* Instead, make yourself easily available to the reporter for follow-up questions. Provide your cell number and e-mail address, and offer to help with anything that needs further clarification.

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**Writing a Media Advisory**

A media advisory alerts the media about an upcoming event and your role in hosting. The advisory must include the obvious basics (time, date, and place of the event) plus a brief description of why the event is worth covering. If you have a local angle, stress it in pitching the event to a local reporter. And if you have appealing visuals (groups of kids, props, signs) make sure to note it to increase the attraction.

Media advisories should be sent to all known reporters, editors, and news directors in the coverage area, even if that means sending the advisory to multiple people within the same news organization. If you know of bloggers and other non-traditional media who might generate positive coverage, alert them, too.

An important note on timing: Try to send the advisory ***at least 3 to 5 days in advance*** of your scheduled event, and then send it again with a “reminder” note the day before the event. (Certainly, there will be times when an event has to be scheduled quickly on short notice, but try to get the advisory out as soon as possible in advance of a hastily scheduled event.)

Also, make sure the advisory includes the name and contact information for a person involved in planning/hosting the news event. If a reporter or editor has any questions, they’ll be calling, and you need to have someone easily available and ready to help.

The more you assist the media in making it easy to cover your news event, the more likely they’ll be to provide the positive publicity you seek. Conversely, if you cause a reporter needless frustration through poor planning or bad communications, the less likely they’ll consider covering your events in the future.

Here’s a sample advisory:

MEDIA ADVISORY For more information, contact:

Jan. 7, 2014 NAME OF CONTACT WITH PHONE/EMAIL

***\*\*\* For planning purposes only \*\*\****

**‘Pre-K Action Day’ Will Urge Greater Investments in High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

**(HARRISBURG) –** Hundreds of early learning advocates from across Pennsylvania will take part in an action day at the state Capitol on Tuesday, Jan. 14, to highlight the importance of increased investments in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. Research shows these programs improve school readiness and contribute to a child’s long-term academic success.

Advocates for stronger pre-k investments will be available to discuss how increased investments in pre-k generate long-term benefits for students, schools, taxpayers and local communities. Speakers will include (LIST ANY PROMINENT NAMES THAT MIGHT DRAW MEDIA INTEREST).

**What:** Press conference highlighting the benefits of greater state investments in high-quality pre-k programs.

**When:** 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2014

**Where:** Capitol Rotunda

(NOTE ANY SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING CHECK-INS, OBTAINING MEDIA CREDENTIALS, PARKING OR OTHER ACCOMODATIONS.)

“Pre-K Action Day” is hosted by (LIST ALL SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS).

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**Writing a News Release**

A news release is a useful tool for telling the public and media your story, and a well-crafted release can be helpful to reporters who are unfamiliar with the issue of high-quality pre-k and/or have little time to familiarize themselves with the issue. (As a bonus, news releases also are increasingly run on media websites as though they were staff-written news stories, so taking the time to write one well can really pay off in getting your message out exactly the way you want to present it.)

The most important rule for writing a news release is to **stay focused on the primary issue** that makes the release newsworthy and explain why it’s news. Keep it concise, grammatically correct and include additional resources (such as a link to a website) if possible for reporters who might want to delve deeper.

A few other tips:

* Use a focused, attention-grabbing headline.
* Include quotes (and make sure they are in a conversational tone and sound like the person you’re quoting).
* Include hard data to back up your arguments. Don’t just claim there’s a lack of access to high-quality pre-k – cite statistics to demonstrate it.
* Include contact information for reporters who want to get more details.

Here are links to news releases that were issued as part of the “Pre-K for PA” launch in January 2014. Feel free to use them as models for your own release:

[Statewide Coalition Kicks off Effort to Expand Access to High-Quality Pre-k](http://www.timesherald.com/social-affairs/20140126/statewide-coalition-kicks-off-effort-to-expand-access-to-high-quality-pre-k)

[Coalition forms to create more pre-k opportunities in PA](http://www.publicopiniononline.com/local/ci_24976738/coalition-forms-create-more-pre-k-opportunities-pa)

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**Writing an Op-ed**

**Op-eds make the evidence-based case**

An “op-ed” is an opinion piece or guest column published in a newspaper or on its website. (“Op-ed” is shorthand for “opposite the editorial” because these reader-submitted pieces traditionally appeared on the page opposite the newspaper’s editorial page.)

Who can write an op-ed? Newspapers want to hear from a diverse sampling of people in the community, so a designated spokesperson for a local group or organization is a great choice to write and submit an op-ed. Or, an op-ed can be written for someone with an interest in the cause – in this case, perhaps, a businessperson who supports pre-k investments – and submitted under that “author’s” name (making sure that the author has approved the wording).

A strong op-ed should introduce and/or reinforce your viewpoint to readers in a persuasive, non-confrontational way – stressing facts and data over conjecture. It should be written in a conversational style and using the first-person “voice” of the writer. If possible, it should have local relevance (such as the use of localized statistics) and be signed by a prominent local leader.

Most newspapers have word limits for an op-ed, typically in the range 500-750 words. Op-eds are typically submitted to a newspaper’s editorial page editor. Information on length and methods for submitting an op-ed can typically be found on a media outlets website under the “Opinion” section or the contact information.

Here are two sample op-eds as examples – one for a pre-k spokesperson, the other for a businessperson. Be sure to localize, stressing the positive benefits that high-quality pre-k brings to the communities in the newspaper’s coverage area. Write a headline that summarizes the op-ed’s message. Check newspaper websites or directly with editorial page editors for word count – typically, 500 to 750 words – and submit to the editorial page editor, with a note including contact information for someone who can answer questions.

Sample op-ed: Pre-k spokesperson

**High-quality pre-k gives all children the opportunity to learn**

Childhood is fleeting. In early years from birth to age 5, children develop rapidly – cognitively, socially, emotionally. Years of research shows that every moment matters, as a variety of influences help shape the brain architecture that will carry thought, cognition and behavior for the lifetime to follow.

The research tells us, though, that the quality of those experiences makes a difference for better or worse. Children exposed to positive interactions and learning experiences designed to maximize the development of their growing brains are likelier to do well in many ways. Children deprived of positive experiences, on the other hand, can fall behind developmentally.

This is why support for high-quality prekindergarten is essential. Access to high-quality pre-k gives all children the opportunity to learn. We have seen the dramatic gains among 4-year-olds fortunate enough to participate in Pennsylvania’s quality pre-k, as the rate of those with proficient academic and social skills jumped from 22 percent to 82 percent in 2012-13. Among children in Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs in 2012-13, academic and social proficiency increased more than six-fold, from 12 percent to 76 percent.

These early investments minimize the need for costly and difficult interventions meant to close the achievement gap in later years. And yet, available public funds help only about 1 in 6 of our 3- and 4-year-olds attend quality programs. Far too many families can’t afford to enroll their kids in high-quality pre-k. Their annual cost for high-quality pre-k can be as high as a family’s rent, mortgage or the cost of college tuition. They’re forced to choose pre-k that lacks the distinctive elements that assure quality and promote their child’s success.

High-quality prekindergarten strengthens our schools, because every child who arrives in kindergarten ready to learn helps the classroom become a more effective place for the learning of all children. Disruptions are fewer, and teachers can create an atmosphere focused on the joys of learning.

The benefits accrue from kindergarten to 12th grade. With high-quality pre-k, there’s less need for grade repetitions and reduced special education costs. Students who benefit from high-quality pre-k are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in higher education, building their skills and talents to the fullest.

The evidence is overwhelming in proving that investing in high-quality pre-k is a smart choice during challenging economic times. At-risk children who experience high-quality pre-k are less likely to commit crimes later in life. Society gains more productive citizens, with reduced reliance on social services and higher lifetime earnings. The economy gets a boost, in both the short term and long term. In the immediate picture, every dollar invested in pre-k circulates $2 in local economic impact. And there’s an astounding long-term return of $17 for every dollar, through public savings and benefit.

The foundations for the success of every child are laid in the first, critical years of life, from birth to 5. When we invest in high-quality pre-k, we invest in a stronger Pennsylvania, where all children are assured the chance to overcome obstacles and learn to their fullest potential.

Sample op-ed: Business

**High-quality pre-k prepares workforce for a world-class economy**

The children of today are the workforce of tomorrow. Here in Pennsylvania, we are justly famous for the quality of our workforce – the people who have manned our mines, factories, and offices for decades – but most businesspeople today are deeply concerned about the quality of job candidates seeking work. Skills in communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and even basic math are sorely lacking, These absences diminish the ability of businesses to compete in the global marketplace and continue creating jobs.

Good businesspeople are long-term thinkers, which explains why we are looking beyond our high schools and colleges for solutions in workforce development, and turning toward prekindergarten classrooms. High-quality pre-k equips young learners with the skills for school success and, after graduation, workplace competence.

We know this because decades of scientific and behavioral research prove the long-term impact of quality learning experiences from birth to age 5. Neuroscience has revealed that the young child’s brain is a work in progress, following strict timelines as it builds increasingly complex pathways to absorb learning and control behavior.

We’re talking about the foundation for life and learning. Positive interaction and quality learning experiences make the foundation sturdy. Deprivations such as poverty or abuse increase the odds that the brain’s foundation will be fragile and difficult to alter for the better in later years.

Fortunately, we can stack the deck, assuring that every child has the positive experiences that build a strong foundation for learning. High-quality prekindergarten assures that children are ready to learn and equipped with the social skills needed for lifetime success. A Harvard University study shows that 90 percent of the brain’s capabilities for teamwork, problem-solving, communications, and critical thinking – the exact skills that businesspeople seek in their hires -- are built before age 5.

Without school readiness and strong brain architecture, it is highly likely that there won’t be a chance to correct the deficiencies. If educational investments don’t start early, the achievement gap grows too wide and very costly to overcome.

It’s time to unlock the potential of our young children. We know that high-quality pre-k puts young children on the path to learning, graduation, and lifetime success. It dramatically increases their academic and social proficiency. And as they grow, children from high-quality pre-k are likelier to earn higher salaries and live productive lives as contributing members of their communities. Without high-quality pre-k, at-risk children are likelier to turn to crime and welfare dependence, increasing societal costs.

High-quality prekindergarten follows strict protocols in curriculum, environment, and teacher training to extract the highest level of brain-development benefits. Unfortunately, too many Pennsylvania children attend pre-k programs that lack the key elements to ensure they’re ready for kindergarten. The amount of public funds available for pre-k in Pennsylvania is only enough to help 1 in 6 of the commonwealth’s 3- and 4-year-olds access high-quality programs. And because the annual cost of high-quality pre-k can be as high as a family’s rent or mortgage, many families just can’t afford it.

Pennsylvania’s business community prefers to see potential nurtured, not squandered. We can teach our employees the specific skills needed in the workplace, but we can’t instill the academic and social basics that contribute to the collaborative and creative skills so essential to success in the 21st century economy. The time to nurture those skills begins in the earliest years of life, from birth to age 5, because rigorous research tells us so.

High-quality pre-k is a smart choice in these challenging economic times, building on the successes we’ve already had. The reward is a workforce capable of great things, and citizens ready to contribute to their communities.

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