



Testimony of
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“Improving Early Childhood Policies and Practices”

Good morning. I am Harriet Dichter, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Child Development and Early Learning of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare, and co-chair of the Pennsylvania Early Learning Council.

Recently, Congress recognized the economic and educational payoff of early education and development and included existing early education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start, and Early Intervention for infants, toddlers in preschoolers. Thank you for dedicating hearings to early childhood development as you plan for the next phase of federal leadership and investment.

My office was created by Governor Rendell to link the Department of Public Welfare and the Department of Education in order to raise the priority level for early learning and to create an early learning system.

Improving the national track record for investments and outcomes for young children is essential. Based on our experiences in Pennsylvania, I have three points:

- 1) There is no one silver bullet, not just one investment or program that works. What matters, regardless the program, is a common framework of high standards, accountability and sufficient investment to make a difference.
- 2) The federal government has not been sufficiently proactive in this area, leaving too much to the states to do, especially on financing.
- 3) Proper public-sector governance needs to be a focus to assure good outcomes and efficient use of public dollars.

First: To meet children's and family needs, we need a continuum of quality services. We can and should expect to make investments in programs with different names, such as child care, pre-kindergarten and Head Start for example, and we should expect to invest in infants, toddlers and preschoolers in each and every year until they enter school.

In Pennsylvania, we take advantage of the existing array of early childhood providers to create our system and to respond to the diverse needs of young children and families. Programs in our office are reaching 300,000 children and their families through a large network of school district, child care, Head Start, Early Intervention, and home visiting providers—but let me stress that we reach only 40% of our birth to five population.

We insist that our programs share certain commonalities: high program and specific early learning standards for each age group from birth to second grade that links to our 3rd grade standards; degreed and credentialed early childhood staff; curriculum and assessments aligned with early learning standards; partnerships with parents; program accountability; documentation of children's progress; and sufficient financial and "helping hand" supports that endorse and demand excellence.

Some examples:

We systematically and voluntarily are improving child care quality through Keystone STARS, which integrates research-based standards and ratings, improvement supports, and financial resources. An independent evaluation shows that Keystone STARS reversed Pennsylvania's ten year decline in child care quality. Nearly 80 percent of our centers participate, and last year 25 percent of participating programs moved up at least one STAR level. We serve 170,000 children across the commonwealth, and have seen a trend of more of our families who participate in the Child Care Works subsidy program choosing Keystone STARS programs.

Through our PA Pre-K Counts program, we reach 11,800 at-risk three and four year olds using our Keystone STARS, school districts, and Head Start providers. In our start-up year (07-08) 94% of the children finished the school year with age-appropriate skills and behavior, or emerging age-appropriate skills and behavior, a stunning success rate.

For at-risk infants and toddlers, we have home visiting through the Nurse-Family Partnership and Parent Child Home Literacy programs.

We serve infants, toddlers and preschoolers with developmental delays and disabilities through Early Intervention, where we focus on and are getting more children enrolled in inclusive typical early childhood programs.

We support Head Start by adding state dollars to enroll more children.

We are the only state in the country to house all of these programs (plus others I did not name and shown in Appendix 1) in one office.

We cannot serve our families well using a silver bullet approach that focuses on one program, one age group, or one financing stream. Pennsylvania has developed a common framework that serves the diverse needs of families while building confidence from business and other community leaders. Our framework includes:

- 1) High standards and expectations for program quality, based on research and experience, and focused on the best outcomes for children;
- 2) Professional preparation and ongoing education of teachers and administrators to whom we delegate the responsibility of delivering these programs. It is not enough to tell people to achieve high standards, assistance is needed to achieve and maintain them;
- 3) Accountability for results—and a practical way to help those people the broader community understand these results and why they matter for our entire society;
- 4) Financial supports that are linked directly and clearly to the standards we articulate at sufficient levels to get the job done.

While the framework does remind us that the work is complex, it can be broken down and a realistic, achievable strategy.

Chart 1: How Pennsylvania Approaches Its Early Childhood Programs



My second point is the importance of shared, responsible, and sufficient public investment in these programs. The established and dedicated funding streams in areas such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, and IDEA Early Intervention for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, are not keeping pace with the need. As one of only eight states to consistently improve state investment in a continuum of programs, Pennsylvania has made progress, but we still have gaps in services.

In 2003, less than 20% of Pennsylvania's young children (0-5) could participate in a good quality program. Today, we are reaching about 40%. This is only possible only because of our investment of new state dollars so that our children are well prepared for school.

We have children at risk in every county, city and state in the United States. New funding is needed to help close the staggering gap between those children, particularly those at-risk of school failure, who are in our quality early learning programs and those who are not. We need to assure a public funding base for early education, just as we work to assure a public funding commitment to K-12 education. First, we should enhance investment in the established federal programs and funding streams. Second, we should commit to new federal funding that will push a unified approach that insists that states have meaningful, research-based standards and accountability based on nationally acceptable minimums, and to facilitate coherence across the federal programs to produce quality results. It is possible to have a national baseline that does not interfere with the states' implementation of programs.

This brings me to my third and final point--the organization of early education programs and resources needs to make sense. Our families do not care what we call the programs--whether it's Keystone STARS, Child Care Works, Head Start, PA Pre-K Counts or something else. Parents and taxpayers want to have confidence in the responsiveness and

quality of early education services and that public investments are made efficiently and are well-leveraged.

Governor Rendell created my office in our Departments of Education and Public Welfare to efficiently unify and integrate the early childhood programs of both agencies. The office covers the waterfront—we encompass school and community-based programs for children from birth through full-day kindergarten. Working across two agencies allows us to take advantage of the assets of our human services and educational systems. At the same time, we have a single staff and a consistent framework that we use to systematically advance the work. The federal government must find new ways to do the same.

There is not just one program that works. Children need a continuum of early learning services, and a commitment to infants, toddlers and preschoolers alike. It is fine to have programs with different names, and different hours of service. What is objectionable is to have programs that do not have the same expectations for child outcomes, the same standards for serving children, the same expectations for performance and accountability, and sufficient financing. Parents expect that a program that opens its doors to them will serve them and their children well. From these simple precepts, there are several lessons to inform the next phase of federal investment and policy.

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Appendix 1
PA Office of Child Development & Early Learning
Selected Programs

Child Care Certification- certification and inspection of over 9,000 regulated child care programs serving 350,000 children.

Child Care Works-tuition assistance for 130,000 children (monthly average) of low-income working families.

Children's Trust Fund-initiatives to prevent child abuse as determined by the Trust Fund board, a mixed group of legislators and gubernatorial appointees, and staffed by OCDEL.

Community Engagement-local groups to work on community education on early childhood education and to focus on the transition between community early childhood education programs and school district k-12 programs.

Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative-early childhood mental health specialists who consult with Keystone STARS programs about program and child needs and interventions when behavioral issues with children arise.

Early Learning Network- To use technology to collect indicators of child outcomes so that the analysis of this information can be used to better manage state investments for early learning programs. Pennsylvania's goal is to use the information to manage its finances more effectively by targeting resources to those programs and services that bring about good progress while considering individual circumstances and demographics that also may affect results. This information will also be available to local teachers and administrators and provide them with real time data so that they may continuously improve their performance to better meet the needs of the children they serve. The objectives are:

1. To know if Pennsylvania's early education programs are making a difference,
2. To understand how financial resource levels relate to child outcomes,
3. To meet state and federal reporting requirements related to child progress,
4. To compare programs serving similar types of children on ability to enhance child progress,
5. To tailor professional development and technical assistance to address most pressing early learning needs, and
6. To understand how program factors work together to impact children.

Full Day Kindergarten (through Accountability Block Grant)-dedicated resources for school districts to implement research-based interventions that improve student performance, with nearly 2/3 of the money invested in Full Day Kindergarten now serving 65% of PA children and with OCDEL providing on-site observations and professional development for teachers and administrators.

Early Intervention Birth to Five- Infant/Toddler and Preschool Early Intervention (under IDEA) for nearly 74,000 children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Early Intervention Technical Assistance-professional development and technical assistance for sound implementation of Early Intervention services, including new communications certification.

Head Start State Supplemental Assistance Program- state resources to enroll over 4,000 more children in Head Start.

Keystone STARS- a quality rating and improvement system serving over 170,000 children enrolled in thousands of child care programs with a combination of standards, financial and professional supports, and third party monitoring on accountability.

Nurse Family Partnership-evidence-based nurse based home visiting model for very high risk first time mothers and their young children.

Parent Child Home Literacy Program-evidence-based play and literacy based home visiting program for at-risk young children with a focus on toddlers.

PA Early Learning Keys to Quality-regionalized approach to improved professional development of early education teachers, aides and administrators, offering a career lattice with resources to obtain early childhood degrees and credentials, and technical assistance to support program quality improvement. Statewide, support for the T.E.A.C.H. educational scholarship program, a voucher program for practitioners in Keystone STARS and PA Pre-K Counts earning college credits, an articulation project with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education to bring two and four year colleges together to assure program to program articulation and transfer in early childhood education; an oversight system for certifying instructors and technical assistance staff to deliver professional development; support for PA certification programs in early childhood, including director's credential and school-age credential. Additional statewide and regional supports are also in place, all linked to the programs engaged in quality through STARS, EI, Pre-K Counts, etc.

PA Pre-K Counts-preschool program of 2.5 or 5 hours a day, 180 days a year, for at-risk 3 and 4 year olds, with high standards, offered by a diverse array of school district, Keystone STARS, Head Start, and licensed nursery school programs.

PA's Promise for Children-public information resources to inform and educate parents, business leaders and others in the general community about early childhood education.

Public-Private Partnerships-These are partnerships with foundations and the research community and include Pennsylvania's participation in the national BUILD initiative, a financial investment by foundations in the Early Learning Network, the Early Learning Investment Commission, community engagement, and continued development of the capacity of higher education to assist community-based teachers earn early childhood teacher certification by responding to their unique needs.

Appendix 2 Children Served Over Time

| Program | FY 02-03 | FY 08-09 ¹ | FY 09-10 ¹ | Program | FY 02-03 | FY 08-09 ¹ | FY 09-10 ¹ | |
|--|---------------|-----------------------|---|--|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Class Size Reduction (K-3rd Grade) | Did not exist | 16,705 ² | 16,705 ² | Head Start | | | | |
| Child Care Works | | | | Federal Head Start | 30,986 | 35,311 ² | 35,311 ² | |
| TANF | 33,939 | 31,988 | 32,628 | Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program | Did not exist | 5,620 | 5,620 | |
| Former TANF | 20,000 | 42,663 | 43,729 | Keystone STARS | | | | |
| Low-Income | 45,908 | 62,614 | 64,614 | Estimated Children in Keystone STARS | 45,745 | 170,935 | 170,935 ² | |
| TOTAL (monthly average) | 99,847 | 137,265 | 140,971 | Number of Providers in Keystone STARS | 898 | 4,798 ² | 4,798 ² | |
| Early Intervention | | | | Nurse-Family Partnership | 3,092 | 4,287 | 4,287 | |
| Birth to 3 Program | 22,020 | 33,972 | 35,844 | Pre-K | | | | |
| 3 to 5 Program | 33,726 | 44,976 | 46,083 | School Based Pre-K and K4 | 2,684 | 18,022 | 20,551 | |
| Full Day Kindergarten | 42,015 | 77,505 | 77,505 ² | PA Pre-K Counts | Did not exist | 11,800 ² | 12,850 ² | |
| ¹ Fiscal year End Goal or Projection | | | ² Projection based on Current FY Participating | | | | | |

Appendix 3

Pennsylvania Reach and Risk Executive Summary

http://www.pakeys.org/Reach_Rpt.aspx

http://www.pakeys.org/docs/2007-2008_Reach_and_Risk.pdf

Research consistently reports that all young children benefit from quality early learning opportunities, with children at risk of school failure showing the greatest benefit. Children affected by risk factors such as income, family status, or poor school system, which can affect their performance in school, benefit most from high quality early education. When they have access to quality early education before age five, children at risk of school failure can often make up for setbacks in their development, enabling them to enter kindergarten on par with their peers.

Children who are encouraged and supported through quality early childhood education demonstrate significant progress in acquiring early learning skills and may save schools money for special education and remediation costs. These children are more likely to graduate from high school, to attend college or quality job training programs, and be valuable members of the workforce. The benefits of quality early education to children and families translate into a more competitive workforce and greater tax base, while reducing public expenses in special education costs, public assistance, crime control and lost taxes.

Pennsylvania's investments in quality early education will provide our communities with benefits for years to come, but it is important that these investments are strategically made to provide the greatest return possible for the commonwealth.

In order to support sound programmatic and investment decisions regarding the distribution of early education services, the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) annually compiles the Program Reach and County Risk Report. This report provides county, as well as city, specific information on the level of risk for school failure for children (based on seven risk factors) and the availability, or reach, of most OCDEL programs to children in each county and in the 27 largest cities in Pennsylvania.

To enhance the risk and reach report, OCDEL is including city level data for the first time. Please note two caveats about the city data and how it was calculated in this first year of its inclusion in the Risk and Reach report. In the risk data, the percentage of children receiving aid through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) could only be determined at the county level. This might reflect a modest understatement of risk in these communities. In some instances, the reach data may not have been available at the city level, and thus, the calculations for reach may be lower than actual reach at the city level.

OCDEL's Program Reach and County Risk Assessment for fiscal year 2007-2008 shows that Pennsylvania continues to make progress serving at-risk children, but still experiences gaps in serving children who could benefit the most from a quality early education experience.

- Children are at risk of school failure throughout the commonwealth. Of the 67 counties, children in 46 (69%) counties are at moderate-high or high risk of school failure; of the 27 largest cities, children in 20 (74%) are at moderate-high or high risk of school failure.
- Less than four in 10 young children participate in a quality early education program. Thirty-eight percent of children under the age of five participate in state and/or federally funded quality early childhood programs in Pennsylvania. In the commonwealth's 27 largest cities, 50% of children under the age five participate in state and/or federally funded quality early childhood programs. Quality programs are defined as: Nurse-Family Partnership, Parent-Child Home Program; Head Start State and Federal; Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts; Accountability Block Grants for Pre-K, School Based Pre-K; Early Intervention; and Keystone STARS.
- Approximately two in 10 young children participate in a high quality early education Program. Only 22% of children under age five participate in state and/or federally funded high quality early childhood programs in Pennsylvania. In the commonwealth's 27 largest cities, 27% of children under the age five participate in state and/or federally funded high quality early childhood programs. High quality programs are defined as: Head Start State and Federal, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Accountability Block Grants for Pre-K, School Based Pre-K, Early Intervention and Keystone STARS 3 & 4 only.
- Approximately half of Pennsylvania's preschoolers participate in quality early education programs and one-third of preschoolers participate in high quality early education programs. Among preschool aged children, 56% of three and four year olds statewide are served in early childhood education settings and 87% of three and four year olds in Pennsylvania's 27 largest cities are served in early childhood education settings. Only 35% of children ages three and four participate with a state and/or federally funded high quality early childhood program in Pennsylvania, defined as Head Start State and Federal, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Accountability Block Grants for Pre-K, School Based Pre-K, Early Intervention and Keystone STARS 3 & 4 only.
- Pennsylvania's investment per child is \$2,722 annually. Children are served in these state and federally funded early childhood programs at the rate of approximately \$2,722 per child, an amount which is significantly less than the cost of providing a quality early education experience that produces positive outcomes for children, families and communities. In general, the national cost for a five hour day at 180 days a year for a pre-kindergarten program is \$8,700 per child. This represents a gap in our public investment to achieve the most positive results for children.
- Reach by county is greatest for Head Start and Keystone STARS. The Head Start State and Federal programs and Keystone STARS were the only direct impact programs for children under the age of five to reach children in all 67 counties.

- Reach is greatest across the commonwealth for Keystone STARS. Of all the state investments, most children were reached through the Keystone STARS program, which averages service to 18% of children from birth to five years. An average of 3% of children under age five in Pennsylvania were served in STAR 3 and 4 programs. As of June 2008, there were 5,022 child care providers within the Keystone STARS system, covering all counties and reaching an estimated 140,000 children under age five.

The quality of a child's early education affects their learning for life. By understanding the needs of our young children across the commonwealth and the reach of our early childhood programs, Pennsylvania can make smarter investments in a brighter future.

Appendix 4 Highlights

1. Excerpt from OCDEL Annual Report 07-08
2. Highlights of PA's Framework- High Level Points of Progress Made Over Time and Work in Progress Now

1. 2007-08 Excerpt from OCDEL Annual Report:

In 2007-2008 OCDEL focused on creating more quality early learning opportunities for children, assuring strong implementation and coordination among programs, building accountability into the system, and beginning development of a system to document positive outcomes for children. Here are some highlights from the year:

Quality program design and implementation

- The Pennsylvania General Assembly approved Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, a high quality pre-kindergarten program which served 10,945 children in 2007-2008.
- In partnership with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, Pennsylvania granted three higher education institution team grants to develop program to program articulation agreements that will make it easier for students in early childhood education to transfer credits from two-year institutions to four-year institutions and earn higher degrees.
- For the first time in 16 years, Pennsylvania has revised its regulations for child care facilities which went into effect September 22, 2008.
- In order to make it possible for Keystone STARS programs to serve more children receiving Child Care Works, OCDEL began offering a "subsidy add-on" rate for child care programs participating in Keystone STARS. These programs receive an additional subsidy for each child they serve that is participating in Child Care Works. This add-on rate helps to cover the additional costs of providing higher quality early education.

RESULTS:

- 25% of Keystone STARS programs moved up at least one STAR level in 2007-2008.
- 30% more TANF children receiving Child Care Works subsidy are using regulated child care in 2007-2008 than in 2006-2007.
- 33% more teachers and directors were awarded T.E.A.C.H. scholarships than in 2006-2007.
- 20% more professional credentials (Director's Credential, School-Age Credential) were awarded than in 2006-2007.

Accountability:

- The kickoff of the Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) system began with the rollout of PELICAN Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and PELICAN Provider Certification to track vital data regarding Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts programs and certified and registered child care.

- Pennsylvania implemented independent Environment Rating Scales (ERS) assessments in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classrooms and increased assessments for Keystone STARS, resulting in 82% more classroom assessments than in 2006-2007.

RESULTS:

- ERS scores increased among Keystone STARS programs. Average classroom scores in STAR 3 facilities increased from 5.01 in 2005-2006 to 5.06 in 2007-2008. Average classroom scores in STAR 4 facilities increased from 4.15 in 2005-2006 to 5.31 in 2007-2008.
- Over 7,000 parent surveys returned in 2007 showed that most families agreed that Early Intervention has empowered families to make the best choices for their children.

Documenting positive outcomes for children

- The first phase of Pennsylvania's Early Learning Network began (ELN) with Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts grantees submitting child outcomes twice during the year using the Work Sampling Online tool.

RESULTS:

- Ninety-four percent (94%) of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts children finished the school year with age-appropriate skills and behavior or emerging age-appropriate skills and behavior – a stunning success rate.
- Child assessment data from infants, toddlers and preschoolers who entered Early Intervention after July 1, 2007 and exited Early Intervention prior to June 30, 2008 shows that nearly every child (99%) made progress from entry to exit.
- By the end of the Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) pilot phase nearly 70% of children demonstrated that their original issues had ceased or had significantly decreased, or they had been referred to other support services.
- Children participating in Pre K Counts Public-Private Partnership classrooms showed significant progress in acquiring early learning skills during their participation, particularly those who were at risk of school failure. In fact, the length of time the child was enrolled in the program was a good predictor of their progress.

Meeting the diverse needs of families:

- Publication of the 2007-2008 OCDEL Program Reach and County Risk Assessment included data on children served in more OCDEL programs and reach and risk information for Pennsylvania's 27 largest cities.
- Kickoff of the Race Matters initiative began in Pennsylvania, resulting in more than 300 individuals oriented to the Race Matters framework and toolkit.

Leadership at all levels:

- Pennsylvania conducted a statewide public information campaign for Keystone STARS and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, resulting in nearly 30,000 web visitors and thousands of calls inquiring about the two programs in a six week period.
- Community Engagement Groups reported that 894,728 children, parents and families throughout the commonwealth were involved in events such as recognition events, legislative meetings, Week of the Young Child events, or community fairs.

•OCDEL launched the OCDEL Community Education listserv to provide OCDEL programs with tips and tools to reach out and spread the word about their programs in the community.

RESULTS:

•Between February 2007 and June 2008, subscribers to the Build listserv increased by 65%.

Vision for tomorrow

Pennsylvania has made great progress in developing an early education system that offers quality programs that can work seamlessly together and meet the diverse needs of families.

Pennsylvania's new challenges include the continuous quality improvement of programs and professionals and providing greater access for families.

Pennsylvania's efforts in 2008-2009 will focus on helping programs and professionals meet the higher quality expectations required in the next few years; facilitating greater collaboration between early education and the full education continuum and other child-serving organizations; continuing the establishment of common accountability and child outcomes reporting among all OCDEL programs; and maximizing resources.

2. Using the OCDEL Framework, a high level overview of progress to date and work in progress:

Planning Monitoring and Accountability

- Have:
 - Quantitative and qualitative measures to assess program quality and performance
 - Standards and support to help people and programs meet standards & expectations
 - Ranking of each community of risk to children and reach of OCDEL programs for all children
- Working on:
 - Creating the Early Learning Network
 - One reporting system for assessment of children in ALL of our programs
 - Comprehensive data system taking into account child's background and public investment in the program

Standards & Assistance to Meet Them

- Have:
 - Early Learning standards birth - 2nd grade
 - Program quality standards
 - Early childhood professional standards
 - Early childhood career lattice

- Professional development, technical assistance, and higher education assistance for building staff and program capacity
- Working on:
 - Minor modifications for all the early learning standards to fully mesh with 3rd grade standards in response to the alignment study we commissioned
 - Smooth transfer of college credit for practitioners from two to four year institutions, and across four year institutions of higher learning
 - Strengthening Families/Preventing Child Abuse implementation
 - Practices to support administrators and teachers in responding to the diverse needs of young learners

Financing

- Have:
 - New funding streams to fill gaps in building ECE system
 - Strong connections between financing, standards and accountability
- Working on:
 - Help for providers to combine funds from different funding streams
 - Help to address additional “gaps” in financing to reach children and to provide sufficient resources

Parents: Engagement and Outreach

- Have:
 - Counseling: face to face, phone, computer search
 - Parent Advisory Council for input and advice
 - “Tip sheets”
 - Advocacy training for parents
- Working on:
 - OCDEL wide parent survey for parents in all OCDEL programs on satisfaction and ideas for improvement
 - On-line search for all early childhood programs
 - More parent engagement in public policy and outreach

Partnerships: Engagement and Outreach

- Strong commitment to leadership at all levels
 - Governor’s Early Learning Council
 - Governor’s Early Learning Investment Commission (CEO group)
 - Public awareness campaign on value of quality early education
 - Engaging leaders and communities to become children’s champions
- Strong partnerships with foundations/philanthropy
- Research and data to inform public policy and outreach
- Unified messaging and framework for all to use