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NEW PRE-KINDERGARTEN REPORT SHOWS PA HAS GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN TOP STATES IN COMMITMENT TO PRE-K

(HARRISBURG) April 17, 2007 – A report published today by Pre-K Today shows why the business community, law enforcement officials, educators and providers are joining forces to fight for state funding for pre-kindergarten initiatives: Pre-K works.

The report shows that high quality pre-K programs work for kids who participate; for schools seeking to make wise investments of tax dollars; and for entire communities seeking to reduce crime and dependence on welfare.

“We now have more than 500 members of our Pre-K Today coalition and they all understand what this report tells us: Other states are stepping up and making significant pre-K investments because these programs deliver a tremendous value,” said Joan Benso on behalf of Pre-K Today. “Pennsylvania needs to move into the top tier of states committing to the school readiness of their children.”

Each year the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) grades publicly-funded preschool programs based on a list of 10 quality indicators. In its 2006 State of Preschool Yearbook, PA’s programs received a grade of 4 out of a possible 10. But Pennsylvania could become one of the top 10 states in terms of quality through the governor’s pre-K proposal and standards under consideration by the State Board of Education. When fully approved and implemented, the requirements will boost Pennsylvania’s grade on the NIEER standards to a 9.

(MORE)

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Approximately 16 percent (49,000) of the state's nearly 299,000 3- and 4-year olds are enrolled in pre-K through public schools and Head Start, the report states. Gov. Ed Rendell's proposal before the General Assembly could increase that tally to 60,000 children.

Pre-K Today supports Gov. Rendell's \$75 million proposal in the 2007-08 budget to create Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. If enacted, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts will provide approximately 11,000 additional 3- and 4-year-olds with voluntary, high-quality pre-K delivered through a mixed service delivery system in which all providers comply with State Board of Education pre-K regulations and the state's early learning standards.

High-quality pre-K helps improve the school readiness of young children by enhancing their social, emotional and cognitive development. Children who attend high-quality pre-K enter school more prepared and achieve greater success, including fewer grade retentions, less remediation and higher standardized test scores. Years later they also are more likely to stay in school and graduate and earn a family-sustaining wage.

The report notes that competitor states including New York, Illinois and Florida are making significant investments in pre-K that positively affect those states' bottom lines through decreased criminal and welfare involvement of its pre-K graduates:

- ◆ A referendum in Florida amended the state Constitution to establish universal pre-K, currently funded at about \$400 million.
- ◆ Illinois began its efforts just last year with a state appropriation of \$283 million and promised annual increases of \$45 million for each of the following two years.
- ◆ New York adopted legislation in 1997 establishing a blueprint for voluntary pre-K in all of the state's school districts and now spends in excess of \$300 million per year.
- ◆ In New Jersey, the courts in 1998 ordered state support for pre-K in the 30 poorest school districts. State funding for pre-K in those districts totals over \$578 million.
- ◆ The West Virginia legislature has passed legislation requiring that pre-K be offered to all 4-year-olds by 2012; it is currently offered universally in 5 of the state's 55 counties at a state cost of almost \$48 million.

The report can be accessed online at www.prektoday.org/tools_report.shtml

Pre-K Today is a statewide non-partisan campaign launched by a broad-based coalition from around the Commonwealth committed to efforts to advance dedicated state financing for voluntary high-quality pre-kindergarten programs designed to assure that Pennsylvania's children enter school ready to learn and prepared to succeed.

