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Groups launch push for pre-K program

Organizations support Rendell's call to spend \$75 million preparing kids for kindergarten.

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By MICHELLE PITTMAN

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Four hundred organizations back Gov. Ed Rendell's proposal to invest \$75 million in a program that would help prepare 11,000 children for kindergarten, according to a news release from a pre-kindergarten advocacy group.

"These organizations have come together to launch Pre-K Today, a statewide, nonpartisan campaign committed to efforts to advance dedicated state financing for voluntary, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs," Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children spokeswoman Kathy Geller Myers said.

Community Services for Children Inc. of Allentown, the Lehigh Valley's provider of the federally funded Head Start program has signed on, as has Northampton Community College Children's Center in Bethlehem.

NCC spokeswoman Heidi Butler said the college has been a proponent of early childhood education for years.

Children who attend quality pre-K programs are less likely to be held back a grade, enter remediation programs or enroll in special education, according to a letter Pre-K Today sent to the General Assembly this week.

Some legislators question such a significant amount of money going only towards early childhood education. Previous Accountability Block Grants, which can be used for pre-K classes, are more often used for math tutors in middle and high school and to boost standardized test scores, according to the state Senate Education Committee.

But members of Pre-K Today maintain that spending on pre-K education will provide a better longer-term investment than spending on older children.

Under the governor's plan, any school district, Head Start program, child care center or nursery school that complies with the Department of Education's standards for pre-K programs would be eligible to receive funds, with priority given to school districts serving 30 percent or more of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

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