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## Education seminar gave local meaning to statewide issue

**Gov. Ed Rendell's budget proposals for early childhood education affect everyone in the commonwealth, but local educators are trying to put a local face on the initiative -- particularly the faces of local children.**

A seminar hosted at the Pottstown Middle School last week was held to explain the initiative, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, which is part of Rendell's budget proposal to fund the early education of 11,000 3- and 4-year-olds in the next year.

"If this (Pennsylvania Pre-K) passes, it will have a significant impact right here in Pottstown. A marvelous impact," said Mary Rieck, Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness coordinator.

PEAK members and many of those who attended the forum are already a part of the [Pre-K Counts](#) Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success, a three-year project funded by foundations and supported by the state that has taken root in Montgomery County and will be the groundwork for the up-and-coming budget proposals.

The program is intended to increase the access of quality pre-kindergarten to children and families throughout the state, with a focus on at-risk communities and children. The program will be administered through many different early-education providers.

Pennsylvania Pre-K is the newest proposal for funding early education. Rendell has also proposed expanding existing programs, which were outlined during the forum:

- The Child Care Works subsidy program would change to accommodate the minimum wage increase and serve 400 more children.
- The Early Intervention program would be expanded to help 4,300 more children who have developmental delays and disabilities.
- More money will be allocated to districts through the Accountability Block Grants to create or expand full-day kindergarten programs.
- Funding for the [Keystone STARS program](#), which measures the quality of early child care providers in the state, would be increased by \$9 million to improve merit awards. It also would provide subsidies for educational providers with 5 percent or more children who are considered at-risk and receive subsidies themselves.

Though early education is a priority for Rendell and those at the forum, it is not now mandated by the state, which currently says a child doesn't have to go to school until they are 8 years old.

That's why those who support early childhood education are lining up their resources to fight for the \$75

million Rendell has proposed for pre-kindergarten programs.

"Harrisburg is fraught with good ideas, but you have to fight for them to happen. You have to earn them," said Joe Willard of the [United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania](#), one of the organizations supporting [Pre-K Today](#).

The United Way was among the co-sponsors of the program at Pottstown, which was attended by local and regional educators, parents and day-care providers.

The initiative to explain the governor's budget proposal and to give it local and regional meaning was a good way of putting a local face on a statewide issue.



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