

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.goerie.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back to the article](#)

Article published Apr 30, 2007

Pre-kindergarten state funding must be priority

Pennsylvanians have no doubt heard about Gov. Ed Rendell's important Prescription for Pennsylvania health-care plan and his ambitious reform proposals. Rendell is also pushing property tax reforms and trying to figure out how to pay for major upgrades to transportation infrastructure. But the program many Pennsylvanians haven't heard the governor talk about might be the most important for the state's future: Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts.

Pre-kindergarten funding is a crucial element in Rendell's 2007-08 budget plan.

Backed by a state coalition that includes Erie schools Superintendent Jim Barker, Rendell proposes investing \$75 million in preschool funding.

This funding would provide 11,000 children ages 3 and 4 with access to half- and full-day preschool programs in school districts, Head Start, child-care centers and nursery schools.

The Erie School District started the ball rolling two years ago by developing a pre-kindergarten program with the Boys & Girls Club of Erie Inc.

This and other preschool programs would be enhanced under the new funding. This is crucial.

To fully understand where Rendell is going, consider where Pennsylvania was just four years ago, when Pennsylvania was one of nine states that didn't invest one dime in pre-kindergarten education.

That changed when Rendell, early in his first term, pushed through programs that utilized block grants and Head Start.

Now Pennsylvania must take the next steps. The new proposed funding would be made available to all Pennsylvania communities, with priority given to school districts and other providers that serve at-risk students. The programs would be voluntary and operate on a 180-day school calendar.

There is simply no arguing the value here. Studies continually show that it's critical to stimulate preschoolers as early as possible. It's clear that children who participate in pre-kindergarten programs enter kindergarten with better reading, math, language, cognitive and social skills. As Joan L. Benso, president of Harrisburg-based Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, points out, preschool-aged children in these programs "perform at a higher academic level, are less likely to require special-education services, are more likely to continue their education and will be better prepared to be successful adults."

Anyone who still wants to ask how Pennsylvania can afford this \$75 million, think again. We can't afford not to do it.
