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Support Rendell pre-K plan

We all know learning doesn't begin in school — it begins in the earliest years when babies, toddlers and preschoolers are actively absorbing the world around them. That's why working parents in Butler County rely on a safe, high-quality and nurturing environment for their children.

Working parents need to know their children are being looked after by child care professionals and cognitively engaged in a way that prepares them down the road for social and classroom settings.

Because we know learning begins long before kindergarten, those of us in the child care profession support Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed pre-K initiative for the state's next fiscal year. It calls for a \$75 million investment to create half- and full-day preschool programs in school districts, Head Start, child care centers and nursery schools across the state, serving as many as 11,000 children ages 3 and 4.

The funding would be made available to all Pennsylvania communities through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, with priority given to school districts and other providers who serve children at risk of education failure. In Butler County, 11 percent of children birth to age 5 live in poverty, and 27 percent of children living below 200 percent of poverty are eligible for a child-care subsidy.

Though all children — regardless of family income — can benefit from quality early education programs, the research is strong for the effects on low-income children.

Pre-K Counts can be delivered in a variety of settings including a child care setting. As the Head Start provider in Butler County and a child care provider having reached the top Star 4 rating from Keystone STARS, the Keystone State system to rate child care centers, I will be applying to be a Pre-K Counts provider partnering with both the Butler and Karns City school districts.

Utilization of this model will maintain and strengthen the child care system for infants through school-age children in Butler County.

The governor's initiative strongly encourages and promotes community partnerships that help to strengthen existing systems. For example, school districts and child care programs working together to deliver pre-K will strengthen their relationships and help to improve the transition from child care/preschool to kindergarten.

If passed, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts will help child care programs meet the needs of working families and developmental needs of children. Research studies have shown that children who attend high-quality preschool programs benefit socially, behaviorally and cognitively. Kids who attend pre-K do better on standardized tests, need less remediation and special education, and are more likely to stay in school and graduate.

High-quality child care produces enormous benefits for working families, so shouldn't we make sure we're serving the needs of children at the same time?

Kids who start school behind stay behind, so if we can help level the playing field while children are still in a child care setting, why wouldn't we take advantage of this enormous opportunity?

I support pre-K as an early learning opportunity for children in Butler County, and I'm asking others to do the same.

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