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New Pre-K Counts invests in children

To the Editor:

As the administrator of Child Development Inc., I see every day the impact that quality, comprehensive preschool experiences have on children and their families.

Head Start provides comprehensive child development services to children from low-income families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.

Head Start values parents as their child's first and most important teacher and supports families in this role to ensure that children are ready for school and a lifetime of learning.

The results are tremendous: children who participate in pre-kindergarten programs go off to kindergarten with better reading, math, language, cognitive and social skills. They 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.

Currently, Head Start programs are restricted to serving only families whose income is below the federal poverty guidelines — \$20,000 a year for a family of four. That leaves a gap for families who make too much to qualify for Head Start, but don't make enough to be able to afford private preschool.

A new opportunity for families wanting to participate in pre-kindergarten is Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, the governor's \$75 million initiative to create half- and full-day preschool programs in school districts, Head Start, child care centers and licensed nursery schools across the state.

These voluntary programs would serve as many as 11,000 3- and 4-year-olds. PA Pre-K Counts would allow Head Start and other qualified providers to offer high-quality pre-K programming for at-risk children and their families whose income is above the federal poverty guidelines.

There is value in PA Pre-K Counts for individual children, families and the entire state of Pennsylvania.

Extensive studies of a landmark pre-K program in Michigan conclude that every \$1 spent on high-quality pre-K returned an estimated \$17 in lower public expenditures for welfare, education and other services. Many other states have seen the value of these programs, and it is time that Pennsylvania began to invest in its future by investing in young children.

All children deserve these opportunities. It is time for Pennsylvania to make this investment in our kids — and for its future. Please join me in supporting pre-K in Pennsylvania.

Mary Ann Devlin

Administrator

Schuylkill County

Child Development Inc.

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