

Date

The Honorable _____
House/ Senate
Address
Address

Dear Representative/ Senator _____:

Just four years ago, Pennsylvania was among only nine states that made no investment in pre-K programs. Two state funding sources now contribute to increased pre-K opportunities for our youngest learners – the Head Start Supplemental Appropriation and a portion of the Education Accountability Block Grant. At their current funding levels, these programs fall short in assuring that all Pennsylvania children at-risk of education failure can access high quality pre-K to assure that they enter school ready to learn.

In his Executive Budget, the Governor proposed to invest \$75 million to create Pre-K Counts to help our children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Any school district, Head Start program, child care center or nursery school that complies with the early learning standards and the quality pre-K program standards that have been set by the State Board of Education can apply for funding. Priority will be given to programs in school districts serving 30 percent or more children participating in the free and reduced lunch program or individual programs focusing on the needs of at-risk children. *It is important to note that every community will be eligible for funding.* The proposal will fund approximately 11,000 children on a voluntary basis.

Research has proven that children who attend high quality pre-K enter school more prepared and achieve greater education success, including fewer grade retentions, less remediation, fewer special education placements, higher standardized test scores and higher graduation rates. Pre-K funding yields significant return on investments – as high as \$17 for every \$1 of investment.

A recent Pennsylvania study shows that school districts investing in pre-K could recoup as much as 78 percent of their pre-K spending in other education savings. Some school districts with very high special education expenditures could recoup as much as \$1.16 for every dollar invested.

States across America are making wise investments in pre-K. For example, Illinois is currently investing over \$283 million in pre-K services for 3 and 4 year olds and is expanding its program as a result of a state statute that passed last spring to serve all children whose parents choose to participate. New York is currently investing \$198 million in pre-K and is considering a pledge from its governor to make pre-K universally available to all 4 year olds. Pre-K is already fully funded in Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma.

As members of a statewide coalition, Pre-K Today, we respectfully urge you to support the Governor's \$75 million proposal in the 2007-08 budget to create Pre-K Counts. If enacted, Pre-K Counts will provide approximately 11,000 3- and 4-year-olds with voluntary, high-quality pre-K delivered through a mixed service delivery system in which all providers comply with State Board of Education pre-K regulations and the state's early learning standards.

Investing in high-quality pre-K creates successful students and successful communities, and is for the betterment of the entire Commonwealth. We hope you agree.

More information on Pre-K Today and the many benefits of pre-K can be found at our website, www.prektoday.org.

Sincerely,