

Pre K Counts Application and Guidance Summary

The Application and Guidance has been issued for Pre K Counts grant proposed in the 2007-08 budget and is available on line at www.pde.state.pa.us in the eGrants section of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) web site. Potential applicants should read all areas of the application and guidance.

This application provides a very unique opportunity for child care, Head Start, private nursery schools and school districts as it affords the opportunity to expand high quality pre-K services to 3 and 4-year olds at-risk of education failure. At-risk is defined in the RFP in two equally weighted priorities – children living in school districts with 30% or more Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility or programs operating in any Pennsylvania community that target children who are at-risk as defined by poverty, disability, limited English proficiency, etc.

The program will operate full-day or part-day (at the discretion of the applicant) in a traditional 180 day school year calendar. Pre-k Counts provides for generous per child funding. Successful applicants will be funded at approximately the rate of \$3950 for part-time enrollment/child and \$7,900 for a full-time child.

A summary of the guidance and process follows.

Who should apply, what is the process, what are the deadlines?

- 1) All providers of preschool should apply including **community based** providers. These include: child care centers and group day care homes which are at and will maintain a rating of STAR 2 and above, Head Start grantees, licensed nursery schools, and school districts.
- 2) Joint applications may be submitted and are encouraged. Such applications will receive additional consideration in the review process. A lead administrative agent who will have the fiduciary responsibility for the grant must be designated and indicated in the application.
- 3) An entity may participate in more than one application as long as each application serves a different geographic area.
- 4) Applicants must provide evidence of their existing competencies to provide ece programs to “at-risk” populations. An applicant may serve 3 and 4 years old children who reside in various and different school districts at one location; children do not all need to reside in the same school district.
- 5) Seven (7) bidders’ conferences are scheduled in various locations in the state for individuals from community programs to find out details and ask questions about the application and the guidance. Bring the application and guidance with you to the sessions.
- 6) Nine (9) technical assistance teleconferences have been scheduled during the application period. Additional conference calls may be scheduled as needed. Individual assistance is encouraged in completing the application. General questions may be addressed to Linda Brown Warren at liwarren@state.pa.us or (717) 346-4036. Applicants are advised to ask for technical assistance.

7) Deadlines are:

- **March 2007 eGrants application open.**
- **April 12, 2007 Letter of Intent to apply due** using the form available at www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/site/default.asp Click on “Pre K Counts and then select “Letter of Intent.” Submit the form to Bobbi Lehman be email at bolehman@state.pa.us or Fax to (717) 346-9330.
- **May 25, 2007 Application deadline.** The eGrants system will close at 5:00 PM on this date. Application must be electronically submitted.
- **July 2007 Award of grant funds.** Grants will be awarded as soon as possible after the General Assembly passes the budget.

Highlights of Program Requirements:

Design and structure

- A quality Pre K program must offer either 2½ hours of instructional activities (part-time) or 5 hours of instructional activities (full-time) per day per child in a school year (180 days).
- A program that includes an on-going schedule of home visitations may include these hours as part of instructional day only with advance approval from the Department. This should be a topic for advice and technical assistance while completing the application.
- Curriculum in Pre K Counts classrooms must be aligned with the Early Learning Standards established by PDE.

Assessments

- Assessments of student progress are to be conducted at least three times over the course of the Pre K Counts program year. Assessments should be authentic, comprehensive and aligned to the Early Learning standards. In the first year, programs are free to select an assessment approach that meets the guidance of student progress; the Department anticipates that assessments of student progress in subsequent years may require the use of the Work Sampling System.
- Assessing Learning Environments will be required and the Department has identified the Early Childhood Environmental Rating scale (ECERS) as the tool to be used.

Class size and ratios

- Class size and student/teacher ratios: no more than 20 students for 1 teacher + 1 teacher aide. The term “teacher aide” has a public school context; therefore, child care providers should equate this term to “assistant group supervisor”.

Staff qualifications

- Teachers and aides in the Pre K Counts class must have the following qualifications at the start of the program
 - a. In school districts the lead teacher must possess a bachelors teaching certificate for early childhood education (ECE).
 - b. Lead teacher in licensed nursery schools must have a bachelor degree and a license to teach in a private academic school.
 - c. Child Care and Head Start programs must have staff possessing an associate degree or greater in early childhood education or development. Child care and

Head Start have until December 2011 for the Pre K lead teacher to possess a bachelor degree and early childhood certification.

- d. Teacher aides must meet the requirements that govern the particular provider type. By 2009-2010 school year, teacher aides in all Pre K counts classrooms must meet one of the following: completion of at least 2 years of postsecondary study, or an associate's degree or higher, or ability to meet a rigorous standard of quality and demonstration of knowledge in and ability to assist a teacher in instructing reading, math and writing. Demonstration can be accomplished through a formal assessment or a Child Development Associate's (CDA) certificate.

Parental Involvement

Parental Involvement is another important element to the Pre K Counts program that must recognize the critical role parents play in the lives of their children. The guidance speaks to activities and resources that assist in design and implementation of this element to make it meaningful and purposeful.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the Pre K Counts contracts will be done by Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). Monitoring will include site visits, self-assessment and outside-assessment, provision of required information such as budget and budget follow up to PDE. Grantees must submit a final fiscal report by August 31.

This grant will only happen if the proposed 2007-08 budget passes the General Assembly as proposed for Pre K Counts and the funding is appropriated! So, your advocacy matters this spring.