



# Legislative Event Toolkit

2007

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# Steps to Planning a Legislative Event

Hosting a legislative event this spring is a strategic way to inform policymakers of Pre-K Today as well as gain media attention. It's important that legislators in their local districts understand how beneficial pre-K is to children and families in your communities. The following are action steps to take to planning your event:

Now

- Set the date, time and site for the event. Work with your legislator's aide to determine what days and times would be best. Pennsylvania's General Assembly is in session Monday through Wednesday allowing most legislators time in their home districts on Thursday and Friday. Please refer to the weekly and monthly calendars received as part of your Pre-K Today Monday Morning Memos for dates on when the House and Senate are in session. The site for your event should be chosen based on its potential impact on the legislator and the media.
- Make sure there is ample parking and AV equipment hook-up available at your site.
- Your events should be no longer than 90 minutes.
- Send invitations to legislators. Ideally, the legislator should receive a personal invitation from a key constituent - someone who has a personal connection to the legislator. Once the legislator is committed to the time and date, it should be communicated that this event will be canceled if they cannot attend on that date (unless you have more than one legislator committed).
- Also send invitations to local officials including school superintendents and principals, county commissioners, the chamber of commerce president, other business leaders, faith community leaders, and presidents of local civic groups.
- Secure caterer if holding an event that requires food/refreshments.
- Make every effort to involve every children's advocacy and early education group that has members in the legislator's district. This could include schools, child care centers, Head Start providers and early intervention providers. Urge community non-profit providers to invite their board members.
- When planning the agenda for your event, follow a schedule that would give parents of preschoolers, and pre-K and kindergarten teachers an opportunity to tell their stories about the benefits of pre-K on school readiness. Make every effort to secure other speakers that demonstrate powerful community support for pre-K. Business leaders and law enforcement officials are excellent choices to join school superintendents. Let us know if you need help reaching out to these groups - we can connect you with them through Pre-K Today.
- Follow up the invitations with a personal phone call and a confirmation letter once confirmation is made. This should also be done for the local officials.
- Make copies of materials to distribute at the event. If you decide to distribute the Pre-K Today Report/White Paper and would like copies of the publication, please let us know! Call PPC at 717-236-5680.
- Create indoor and outdoor signs and banners for the event.

## One - Two Weeks Before the Event

- Develop talking points and/or scripts for the event and the order in which people will speak. You can use the Pre-K Today talking points housed on the [www.prektoday.org](http://www.prektoday.org) web site under Tools for the Campaign. Include introductions for Legislators. For biographical information regarding Legislators, click on [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us). Conduct a dry run with event coordinators.
- Draft a news advisory to announce the event and send it to your media list the week before the event. Refer to the news advisory template in this kit. All media invitations should be confirmed with phone calls a week prior to the event and then again the day prior to the event.
- Arrange for a photographer.
- Follow up with caterer to confirm food plans for event.
- Call legislators to confirm their attendance a few days before the event.
- Complete nametags for guests and speakers.
- Create a sign-in sheet.

## The Day of the Event

- Distribute the News Release at the completion of the event. Fax or e-mail it to those members of the press who did not attend.
- Place signage at all key intersections leading to the facility to ensure that everyone who is invited arrives AND to give all participants a sense of attending a very important event. Consider making colorful signs and banners to post around the outside of the facility and in the halls and the meeting room where the event will be held.
- Supply a sign-in sheet so these advocates can be mobilized for other grassroots lobbying activities. Nametags should be provided for all participants.
- Make sure host/co-host recognizes elected officials and staff as well as other dignitaries in the audience.

## Immediately After the Event

- Send personal thank you letters to all those who helped in the preparation for the event.
- Send thank you letters to all public officials and reiterate your key messages.
- Log on to [www.prektoday.org](http://www.prektoday.org) and fill out the Survey Monkey form with your reactions and comments from any legislators at your event. Include any tips or lessons learned for others planning legislative events.

## Other Ideas

- If your organization has a newsletter, write an article about the event and include photos. Send a copy of the newsletter to the legislator along with any photos they may be able to use in their own newsletters.
- Send a follow up News Release with a photo of you and your legislator(s) to the local papers. Contact Kathy Geller Myers at 717-236-5680 for assistance, if necessary.

# Sample Event Invitation

(Date)

The Honorable John Doe  
Pennsylvania Senate  
Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

or

The Honorable Jane Doe  
PA House of Representatives  
Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

On behalf of the (Event sponsor or name of local event planning committee), I am writing to invite you to attend our (Legislative Breakfast/Other Event) on (time and date). This will be an excellent opportunity for you to hear from the members of our community -- your constituents - about the state's proposed investment of \$75 million for pre-K and why we believe pre-K is necessary for young children, families and schools in this community.

Children who are exposed to high-quality pre-K score better on standardized tests, perform better in school, need less special education, experience fewer grade retentions and are more likely to graduate from high school. The entire community benefits!

At this event, you will have the chance to visit with parents, teachers and other early education advocates who can share their experiences about the positive effects of pre-K on young children.

During this event, we also would welcome your thoughts on this issue.

I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Sincerely,

(name)  
(title)

# Sample Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Date)

For more information, contact:  
(Name/phone #)

(Event sponsor or name of local event planning committee) to Host (Name of Event) in Support of \$75 million Investment in Pre-K for PA and (this community.)

**Who:** More than (\_\_\_\_) parents, teachers and other early education advocates will meet with (State Representative/Senator) to share their support for the state's proposed \$75 million investment in pre-K. The (name of event) is being hosted by (insert host organization or committee name).

**What:** Parents of preschoolers, pre-K and kindergarten teachers and other pre-K advocates will share their experiences with pre-K and voice their support for the state's proposed investment of \$75 million that would enable 11,000 3- and 4-year-olds across the state to access pre-K in their communities in the 2007/08 school year.

**When:** (Date and time)

**Where:** (Place)

**Why:** The purpose of the event is to support the proposed investment of \$75 million in pre-K and tout the many positive effects pre-K delivers for young children, schools and communities.

Research shows that young children who are exposed to high-quality pre-K experience greater behavioral, emotional and cognitive development that increases their school readiness. They score better on standardized tests, have greater academic success, experience fewer grade retentions, need less special education remediation and are more likely to graduate from high school.

"We support pre-K in this community because we know that kids who attend high-quality pre-K do better in school, are more likely to graduate from high school and thus, more likely to secure decent jobs, pay taxes and become active, valuable members of this community," said (name of Executive Director of Board or other Committee official). "Everybody wins. To not invest in pre-K simply doesn't make sense to the financial viability of this community and Pennsylvania as a whole."

# Sample Media Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Date)

For more information, contact:  
(Name/phone #)

(Event sponsor or name of local event planning committee) Hosts (Name of Event) in Support of the State's Proposed \$75 million Investment in Pre-K for PA and (this community)

(City), PA - Parents, teachers, early education advocates and other pre-K champions met with (State Representative/State Senator) today to express their support for the state's proposed investment of \$75 million in pre-K. The (name of event), was hosted by the (insert host organization or committee name).

Parents of preschoolers shared their positive experiences with pre-K and how their children have benefited; pre-K and kindergarten teachers echoed the positive news in an attempt to let (State Representative/State Senator) know how important pre-K is to this community. Include a compelling quote here from a parent, pre-K teacher or other pre-K champion who spoke at your event.

"We appreciate the time (State Representative/State Senator) spent today to meet with us to learn about pre-K and why so many of his constituents support public investments in pre-K," said (name of Executive Director of Board or other Committee official).

At stake in the governor's budget is a proposal for \$75 million for pre-K that would enable 11,000 3—and 4-year-olds across the state to access pre-K in their communities beginning in the 2007/08 school year.

More information on the event maybe obtained by contacting \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

###

# Sample Event Agenda

Registration and Breakfast		8:30 AM
Welcome	Event Coordinator	9:00 AM
Overview of Pre-K Investment	Team Head	9:05 AM
Statement by prominent \community leader		9:15 AM
Testimony from parents, teachers, etc.		9:30 AM
Legislator(s) Comments	Legislator(s)	9:45 AM
Q&A	Audience	10 AM
Close/Acknowledgements	Team Head	10:15 AM

# Sample Thank You Letter

(Date)

The Honorable John Doe  
PA Senate  
Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

or

The Honorable Jane Doe  
PA House of Representatives  
Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for attending the (name of event) earlier this week. It was a tremendous opportunity for us to familiarize you with the state's proposed investment of \$75 million for pre-kindergarten and why your constituents believe pre-K to be a valuable investment for this community.

I urge you to support investments that not only advance the school readiness of young children in your district, but investments that produce social and economic benefits to the community as well. We hope we can count on your support when the budget is considered by the General Assembly this spring.

I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions or concerns relating to pre-K.

Sincerely,

(name)  
(title)

# Tips for Talking with Your Legislator

Keeping in mind that your goal is to develop an on-going personal relationship with your elected representatives, as well as to influence their position on specific issues or bills, here are a few things to remember when speaking to them:

- Know who your legislator is before making initial contact on an issue.
- Find out what legislative committees your legislator serves on.
- Do not be intimidated. Legislators will view you as the expert on the issue.
- Share your personal story if it helps to make your point.
- Do not assume that your legislator understands pre-K and the benefits to children and communities. Take the time to educate him/her. Do not use jargon.
- Know your issue. Provide facts and figures to back up your position. Refer to the talking points and legislative briefing scripts located at [www.prektoday.org](http://www.prektoday.org).
- Remember all causes are good causes. You must convince your legislator that there is something extra special about yours.
- Don't debate with a legislator or give ultimatums such as "I won't vote for you if you do not support my position." Respect the legislator's right to disagree with you.
- Know your opposition. Be able to address the objectionable part(s) of the opposition stance directly and effectively, using verifiable examples and statistics.
- Put the legislator at ease by convincing him/her that you are there to serve as an educational resource. Act like a partner, not an adversary.
- Put broad policy issues in a local perspective. Legislators who know how issues will impact local voters tend to grasp ideas more easily and are generally more receptive.
- Be a good listener and hear out what your legislator has to say on the issue.
- Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time to hear your position.
- Once a legislator gives you a commitment, it is all right to check back with him/her later. Do not badger him/her with phone calls.
- Do not be disappointed if your legislator sends an aide. Aides are critical to the process.
- Spend your time working with legislators who haven't made up their minds.
- Be brief; prepared; clear; honest; accurate; persuasive; timely; persistent; and grateful.
- Always follow up with a thank you note, and amplify your main points.
- When your legislator goes the extra mile, you may consider acknowledging his or her efforts by writing a letter-to-the-editor in your local paper.

# Tips for Working with the Media

In many ways, the rules that apply to educating your legislator also apply to members of the media. In each case, it is easy to become unnecessarily intimidated, and you must remember that these "experts" need us to provide the information required for their job. Develop your media relations plan by focusing on establishing relationships and crafting a consistent message and repeating it in all your communications.

- Press releases should be brief, concise and contain name and phone number of a contact person. They should be written in the third person, using quotes if applicable.
- Wait one day and then follow up on your Media Advisory with a phone call. Be persistent but friendly.
- When speaking with the journalist, ask if this is a good time to talk. If not, schedule a time to call back.
- Keep in mind that many reporters do not get in until 10:00 a.m. Also, do not call after 4:00 p.m. as most journalists are up against a deadline by this time.
- Be upbeat, energetic and excited about your event. State the reasons why you think the event is important to their readers and ask if the journalist has any questions.
- Be a good resource to reporters; develop personal rapport with members of the press.
- Include contact information on the Media Release of someone who is available after 5:00 p.m. and include a website address.
- If a reporter attends your event, provide him/her with the press release as well as any information that helps them tell the pre-K story: for example, the Pre-K Today Report/white paper.
- Line up a spokesperson and individuals to be interviewed ahead of time.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know or you aren't sure. Get back to the reporter with the requested information, if you don't have it.
- Greet the journalist when he or she arrives at the event.
- If you are expecting the television media to be present, remember to keep the event visual and think in terms of 7-8 second sound bites.
- Fax or e-mail copies of the release to those members of the media who were unable to attend the event. Follow up with them and invite them to do a related story.
- Small dailies or weekly community newspapers are always looking for local news items. Be sure to send them your press releases. Get to know the editor of the local newspapers.

For more information or assistance in  
planning your event, please contact:

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