

Partnerships

KIDS COUNT Data Book

Two governors speak out for ECE

As Pennsylvania lawmakers debated education reforms, the annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* revealed children whose living circumstances punctuated the need for early childhood education to boost their learning potential.

The *Data Book*, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual compilation of state data on children's well-being, showed the ground Pennsylvania must cover to alleviate the challenges facing children every day — poverty, ill health, family instability, and educational shortfalls. In news conferences featuring Governor Rendell in Harrisburg and former Governor Schweiker in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children elicited the book's primary messages of helping children overcome obstacles, achieve their full potential, and take their place in the state's economic engine.

With early childhood education investments, Pennsylvania would become a serious player in its bid to create jobs and attract new businesses, PPC President and CEO Joan Benso said. While Pennsylvania rose from 16th among states in child well-being in 1990, she noted, competitor state and neighbor New Jersey, which has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in early childhood education, set a blistering pace by climbing from 11th to 4th.

"Early childhood education is an investment in the state's economic future and the economic future of each child,"



ECE investments for future success

Pennsylvania lawmakers should pass education reforms, including early childhood education, to assure Pennsylvania's economic vitality, Governor Rendell said at release of the 2003 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. He joined PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso in drawing attention to the book's portrait of children in need.

Benso said. "Kids who participate in early childhood education programs, especially those from struggling families, make better grades, have better high school graduation rates, have fewer problems with the law, and go on to earn more money as valuable employees or business owners."

Still, she noted — and the two governors echoed — that Pennsylvania remains one of nine states that do not fund prekindergarten, and investments in full-day kindergarten and small class sizes in the early grades are also lacking.

With the report's release in the heat of the state budget debate, Governor Rendell urged state lawmakers to adopt education reforms that include early childhood education and position more children — especially those profiled in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* — for school success. Former Governor Mark Schweiker, whose high-level Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force called for substantial ECE investments, envisioned a vibrant future built on a foundation of young learners.

"Make no mistake, brain drain starts in kindergarten," Schweiker, now president and CEO of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, said. "If this state is going to continue to move forward, we have to invest well in early childhood education programs."

For more on the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and to order a copy, visit www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/.

ECE update: The Pennsylvania legislature is scheduled to return to Harrisburg on Sept. 9. Education reforms — embodied in quality prekindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and small class sizes — remain on the budget negotiating table. Pennsylvanians should continue to contact their state lawmakers, reminding them that investments in early childhood education are a strong investment in the future.

Data Book findings

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book's* listing of Pennsylvania's overall rankings included these key indicators:

- **Child poverty:** Children in poverty, where a family of four earns only \$18,100 a year, are likelier to endure learning disabilities and grade retentions and to drop out of school — obstacles to learning that early childhood education can help to counteract. Pennsylvania's 2000 rate of 14 percent of children in poverty places it in the middle clumping of states, at 16th.
- **High school dropouts:** Quality early childhood education reduces the likelihood of dropping out of school. But while the national rate for teens who are high school dropouts — indicator of idle teens with few prospects for good jobs or further education — improved slightly in the 1990s, Pennsylvania's rate stagnated at 7 percent, or one teenager in 14. Pennsylvania ranks 7th among states.
- **Single-parent households:** Children living in single-parent households are likelier to be poor and have diminished academic standing. Pennsylvania ranks 9th among states, but mirroring the national trend, the state's rate rose from 21 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 2000.

Joan Benso is on vacation. Her *Partnerships* column will resume in the next edition.

60 Second Interview



Peter P. Brubaker

- PPC Board member
- President/CEO of Susquehanna Media Co., a diversified radio broadcaster and cable operator.

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children's Founder and Board Chair Lucy D. Hackney is preparing to retire. Her successor is Peter P. Brubaker, a well-known business leader and respected voice in early childhood education. Here, he reveals the genesis of his interests in children's policy issues and his hopes for PPC.

Background: Joined Susquehanna Pfaltzgraff Co. in 1977 after three years with Mellon Bank. Named VP/Finance and CFO of Susquehanna Pfaltzgraff in 1980 and President of Susquehanna Media in 1995.

How did your interest in child well-being develop? As a father and as the husband of a talented and dedicated preschool educator, I learned how young children respond to developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Unfortunately, I also learned that too many children are never exposed to this type of learning.

What is your primary area of interest? My focus has been on early childhood care and education because 60 percent of the children under age 5 in Pennsylvania have all available parents in the workforce, because about 85 percent of brain development occurs by age 4, and because fewer than 1 percent of Pennsylvania's nearly 9,000 regulated and licensed child care facilities in the state are accredited.

What is your greatest success? It was my good fortune to be associated with an exceptional group of people, who came together about eight years ago to improve the accessibility, affordability, and quality of child care in York County. The result was Focus on our Future, which has become a model for community involvement in early childhood issues.

Greatest challenge? Educating the citizens of Pennsylvania about the severity of the problem. It will be difficult to make meaningful progress on these issues until parents start insisting on high-quality care for their children, and all of our community leaders recognize that the benefits associated with providing high-quality care more than offset the cost.

What are your goals as PPC Board Chair? Pennsylvania Partnerships has accomplished a lot over the last 13 years with minimal resources. In order to maximize our effectiveness, we need to broaden the base of support.

Personal: Married to Meg Donnelly Brubaker for 35 years. Both of our sons, Patrick and Joshua, live in Boston with our brand new daughters-in-law, Jessica and Jennifer.

Information explosion . . .

Well, maybe it's not an explosion. But a variety of new sources now offer current data and other information on child well-being in Pennsylvania. All are available online to anyone interested in detailing life for children in Pennsylvania and its communities.

CLIKS: How many children in your county were born to women who used tobacco during pregnancy? How many children live in poverty? Find answers to these and other data questions at CLIKS, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's new online data system. CLIKS provides data for every Pennsylvania county, and statewide figures for comparison, on:

- Babies born to mothers receiving late or no prenatal care, to mothers with less than a high school education, to mothers who used tobacco during pregnancy, and to single, teen mothers.
- Low birth weights and infant mortality.
- Child abuse and neglect.
- Delinquent children.
- School dropouts.



Find CLIKS at www.aecf.org/cgi-bin/cliiks.cgi. For a list of counties, click the plus sign beside Pennsylvania on the state list.

New look, same address: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children redesigned its Web site, for easier access to its body of publications and resources, plus new engagement tools that help visitors speak up for kids and reach their elected officials directly:

- Find the names of your elected officials by typing in your ZIP code, and contact them directly with messages in support of children's policies.
- Get direct links to newspapers and broadcasters.
- Track key legislation affecting children and their families.
- Find PPC's publications categorized by budget issues, child well-being, education, health, government and elections, parental supports, and after-school programs and youth development.

The Web address stays the same, www.papartnerships.org.

County fact sheets: PPC recently released the first in a series of county-level fact sheets on Census 2000 indicators of children and their families, www.papartnerships.org/kc.

The fact sheets present data on demographics, diversity, and poverty for every Pennsylvania county. They also include short summaries on the data's significance to the well-being of children. Future fact sheets will present data on living arrangements, such as children being raised by grandparents, and family employment.

Data by legislative district: The Annie E. Casey Foundation now has a Web-based compilation of children's data by legislative district — a valuable tool for winning lawmakers' support for children's policies. Find selected Census 2000 data by Senate district, www.papartnerships.org/kc/senate_data_district.asp, and House district, www.papartnerships.org/kc/house_data_district.asp.

Collaborations fill health coverage gaps

From the case files of the Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County:

- Miss Irene was raising her grandson. The boy was ill, and he had special needs, but he had no health insurance.
- Mr. William, single father of five, was laid off from his job. With the layoff, his children, ages 7 through 19, lost their health insurance.
- Ms. Holly, 21 years old, was pregnant, with no insurance and little money for doctors' visits.

Challenging cases, but the people of the Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County (MCHC) took them on— and found solutions. Miss Irene learned about available health insurance through the school district and was also connected with the Special Kids Network. Mr. William, referred to MCHC through domestic relations, enrolled his oldest in Medicaid and the younger children in CHIP. Ms. Holly got insurance that covered prenatal visits plus prescriptions and check-ups for her baby.

Since 1991, MCHC has been a community presence, building collaborations to improve the health of women, infants, and children in southeastern Pennsylvania's Chester County. The county's unique circumstances — a high number of low-wage, immigrant families in one of the state's wealthiest counties — create major challenges. Language barriers prevent families from applying for health coverage. Documenting income, earned in informal arrangements or in cash, is difficult. Undocumented immigrants fear detection by immigration authorities. And the unique barriers of Chester County are compounded by a common misperception — that eligible families don't believe they qualify for Medicaid or CHIP.

The need is evident for cross-system approaches that reach Chester County families through all avenues of their lives and help them access quality health care. Rates of low birth weights, infant mortality, and lack of prenatal care are particularly high among African-American and Hispanic residents. To bridge the gaps, MCHC operates five interconnected programs: Healthy Start, the national initiative to improve the health of women, infants, and children in communities with high rates of low birth weights and infant mortality; health insurance outreach and enrollment assistance for infants, children, and adults; prenatal and parenting education in English and Spanish; provider education and training, to help a culturally diverse community access services; and medical interpreting and translating. Most of MCHC's work runs through the health insurance enrollment

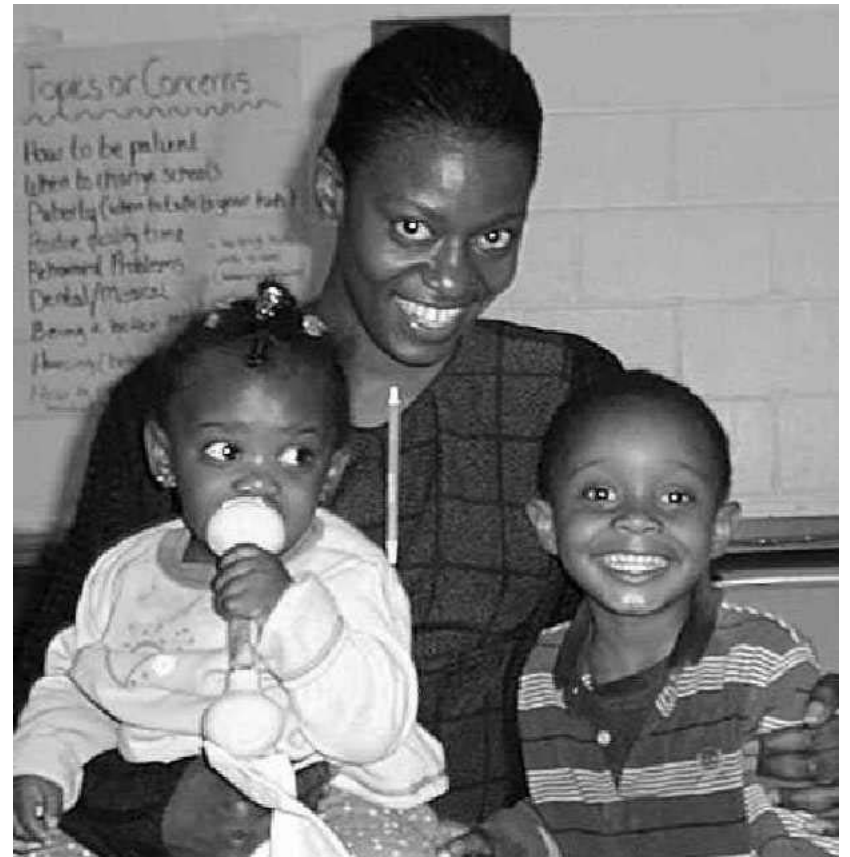
Back-to-school outreach

In July and August, the Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County visits local organizations, Santa Claus-like, with bags full of goodies — back-to-school bookmarks, stickers, fliers, and CHIP information for agencies to distribute to parents. And at the Coatesville Center for Community Health's Back to School Week, MCHC raffles a backpack loaded with donated school supplies among parents who complete a survey on their family's health insurance — prelude to contact from an MCHC staffer to offer help with coverage.

The drive is part of the national Covering Kids and Families' Back-to-School Campaign, reminding parents to put health coverage on the back-to-school checklist. Keeping with its philosophy of reaching families through the differing avenues of their lives, MCHC spreads the health coverage message through various community activities and organizations:

- Food pantries and a local farmers' market.
- Oxford Neighborhood Services Center
- The anniversary celebration of the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, and the annual Phoenixville sidewalk sale and art festival.
- Chester County Government Services Center.
- WIC walk-in clinics and well-baby clinics.
- Chester County Family Academy Charter School.
- Coatesville's annual Rip Hamilton Day, honoring a native son's basketball career.

Healthy families



A Healthy Start family: Living proof that expectant mothers who get early prenatal care are likelier to adopt healthy habits and get regular check-ups. (Photo: Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County)

effort, said Pamela Bryer, Executive Director of the Maternal and Child Health Consortium. With its 22 bicultural and bilingual staffers, MCHC seeks systemic ways to remove the roadblocks that prevent families from accessing health care and information. Staff community health workers and family health advocates disperse through the community and into social service agencies, working under the direction of Project Specialist Denise Franco to enroll families in health insurance.

"It's a wonderful web of people we work with to identify, enroll, and track these families," Bryer said.

MCHC is not an isolated entity, working from the outside in, but is thoroughly steeped in the community — its government offices, social service agencies, health care facilities, and schools. Well-facilitated partnerships are the project's "hallmark," Bryer said. For instance, CHIP and Medicaid applications are coded with the name of any assisting agency, so the county assistance office can more easily resolve problems by returning to the application's originator.

"It makes collaboration easy," Bryer said. "They're all very busy agencies, so the more we can anticipate some of the difficulties and make it easy for them, the more likely they will participate."

Another critical relationship effort: MCHC's training in health insurance outreach and enrollment for health care providers and other agencies builds their capabilities to manage complicated health coverage issues.

Significantly, MCHC uses its community relationships to track the status of the children and families it has touched and help them maintain health care access. Lapsed enrollments can start the cycle of roadblocks all over again — income documentation difficulties, stretched-out application processes, the looming risk of a medical emergency — so MCHC makes tracking and reenrollment a priority.

While MCHC and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children seek restoration of funding lost by elimination of the state's Reaching Out grants for community outreach and enrollment, the impact of personal outreach is undeniable. Last year, 694 women, 539 infants, and 703 children received services through MCHC's efforts. More than 800 women, infants, and children were enrolled in health insurance. Of the nearly 400 pregnant women enrolled, 97 percent received prenatal care — in a county where African-American and Hispanic women are much less likely than white women to get early prenatal care.

Advocacy Network takes virtual steps

The Pennsylvania Children's Advocacy Network has been reconfiguring, replacing its regional approach with a virtual network of Pennsylvanians motivated by the array of individual and comprehensive children's issues. Now linked in cyberspace and with direct connections to elected officials, PA-CAN has matured into a statewide cadre of Pennsylvanians connected to news and information from the child policy world.

Technology spurred the change, streamlining communications and connecting Pennsylvanians who don't live within designated team boundaries.

Technology also allows PPC to classify PA-CAN members by primary interests, whether it's any issue that affects children or a single area relating to children's education, health, or well-being. At enrollment on PPC's Web site, PA-CAN members can indicate their particular interests, and PPC can tailor communications to those areas, sending alerts and updates on current policy movements.

Finally, PPC's Web site now features direct communication with elected officials, one of the most valuable citizen engagement tools available. Online visitors to PPC's site can find the names of their federal, state, and local elected officials. They can send direct e-mails, with or without messaging help on children's issues. They can send letters to local media and find information on legislation.

Since PA-CAN's inception, members have expressed appreciation for PPC's distillation of children's policy news from Harrisburg and Washington. So, the revamped PA-CAN retains two of its most popular features — the flow of reliable information, and community meetings for in-person updates. Anyone can join PA-CAN, to receive:

- **Capitol Watch for Children, PPC's monthly update on legislative and policy news from Harrisburg and Washington.** *Capitol Watch* follows bills as they move through the legislature, proposals that could affect children — adversely or beneficially — from the state and federal levels, and the budget debates and spending decisions that determine resources devoted to children's health, education, and well-being. *Capitol Watch* also includes action steps to help advance critical children's issues.
- **Targeted action alerts.** With PA-CAN's classification by issues, members can now be alerted when their voice is needed to move or

block a bill that particularly interests them.

- **Notices of regional meetings.** PPC will continue to hold regional meetings to update Pennsylvanians on key issues in children's advocacy and impress elected officials with the impact of children's issues on their districts and constituents. The series includes the popular budget briefings, legislative forums, and the Candidate Conversations events for local legislative candidates. Often sponsored jointly with community organizations and leaders, the regional meetings offer an opportunity to gather with others interested in the well-being of children and discuss current and upcoming issues.
- **PPC materials.** PA-CAN members receive PPC's quarterly newsletter, *Partnerships*, and notices whenever PPC releases reports, briefings, or other informational products. They also learn how to hone their messages to elected officials, to cut through the information overload, through helpful materials such as talking points, message memos, and sample letters.

PA-CAN members who wish to receive materials by mail can subscribe for an annual \$25 fee. To join the Pennsylvania Children's Advocacy Network, visit www.capwiz.com/papartnerships/mlm/, or contact Ebonnie Simmons-Hall at 1-800-257-2030, ext. 109; esimmons-hall@papartnerships.org.

Voices for kids

The Pennsylvania Children's Advocacy Network has gone virtual — the statewide connector for Pennsylvanians who want to speak up for kids and need reliable information on children's policies. Sign up at www.papartnerships.org. (Photo: 4 Kids Early Learning Centers, Braddock).



Published by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children with news on policy and program activities affecting children. PPC is a strong, effective, and trusted voice for improving the health, early education, and well-being of Pennsylvania's children, 1-800-257-2030; www.papartnerships.org. Joan L. Benso, President and CEO.

Partnerships, August 2003

Partnerships
is published by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Harrisburg, PA 17101-1632, 717-236-5680, 800-257-2030
President and CEO: Joan L. Benso
Chair of the Board: Lucy Durr Hackney
Editor: M. Diane McCormick
PPC is a 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation. A copy of PPC's official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.
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