

PEAK program expands to serve more children

By Antoinette Colón; Connection Editor

The next chapter in the book of early learning has begun for Pottstown students. Thanks to additional funding added to the 2008-09 school year, Pottstown early childhood learning programs will be able to service more students. The Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK,) in collaboration with the Pottstown School District and community programs will receive an additional \$141,300, according to information forwarded by the office of Dr. Jeff Sparagana, Director of Education and Human Resources for Pottstown School District.

This additional funding will allow enrollment to increase this school year in order to service more children in the Pottstown area.

PEAK Coordinator Mary Rieck said, "We will now be able to have a state funded full day program including Head Start. More children will receive a high quality education before beginning kindergarten."

There will be a new class for 18 additional students to set-up and new teaching staff to hire before the school year begins in August. Rieck predicts it may not be ready until early September.

The program targets at-risk children which includes those considered to be at federal poverty level, those where English is a second language, and children who have demonstrated and tested to have developmental delay by early intervention services.

In the 2007-08 annual PEAK report, "PEAK expanded its impact from working five sites with 13 classrooms serving three and four year old children to now working with 35 classrooms in 11 community sites."

"It's grown a lot," said Rieck. "We will now have a total of 126 students.

The state made it a priority. Governor Rendell got it passed. When state and local priorities comes together we better serve all of our families."

Now the expansion of the program will continue to grow due to the additional funding allotted due to the outstanding progress recognized by the state.

Sparagana wrote: "This is certainly a victory for the community of Pottstown, the district and the PEAK partnership during a time when the governor's focus has been on developing more partnerships across the commonwealth in every county. We were concerned that our expansion grant would be overlooked due to the Governor's plan to add new partnerships and therefore possibly not having the funding to acknowledge the great work than an exemplary partnership such as PEAK has accomplished. To have PEAK be awarded all 126 slots requested is outstanding."

The goals of the PEAK program are to assure that:

- Every three and four-year old child has access to high-quality child-care and early childhood education including pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.
- Every parent of young children has access to high-quality, skill-building resources that help them fulfill their role as their child's first teacher to prepare for academic success.
- Every child has access to health and wellness services to maximize school potential.

"Early education is very important to build a foundation for learning. The experiences (through PEAK) will set an attitude along the line in all elementary school levels. It is backed by research that it makes a substantial difference for children," explained Rieck.

"I look forward to the second year of implementation. I am very excited about training teachers for the new curriculum to include socio-emotional development," added Rieck.