

## PEAK Health Initiative

The PEAK Health Initiative, funded through Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, focuses on improving the health, safety, and nutritional practices at the community partner sites.

### On-Site Coaching and Professional Development

Kathy Perry, PEAK Early Childhood Health Specialist, provides on-site technical assistance, resources and facilitates a variety of professional development related to health and wellness. Through Kathy's assistance, programs have improved health and safety practices which are often the lowest scoring area on quality evaluations. Professional development topics offered this year include common illness, childhood obesity, first aid, allergies and other health related training.

### Screenings

In addition to improving the environment for the children, the PEAK Health Initiative provides hearing, vision and speech screenings for children at community sites. This school year, 190 children received vision and hearing screenings. PEAK is working with Montgomery County Intermediate Unit to provide speech screenings during the summer. A new collaboration with Montgomery County Health Department to offer lead screenings at community sites will begin in May.

### Behavior and Social/Emotional Competence

Behavioral health and social emotional development are other important strategies of the PEAK Health Initiative. As described on page two, PEAK provides on-site behavior management support. To increase social/emotional competence of the children at community programs, the Preschool PATHS social/emotional curriculum is implemented in partner classrooms. This curriculum teaches children how to problem-solve, work cooperatively and to verbalize their emotions. PATHS is proving very helpful in teaching appropriate behavior in the classrooms and the curriculum will be expanded to additional classrooms in 2009-2010.

### Partnership with Cedar Crest College

PEAK partners with Cedar Crest College to provide senior-level nursing students community health practical experience at the partner programs. The students develop and lead classroom activities for the children focusing on aspects of health and wellness. In addition to spending time in the community programs, the students work with the Pottstown School District head nurse to gain experience in the public school setting.

### Collaboration with Medical Offices

PEAK is working with local medical offices, the Montgomery County Health Department and Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities to distribute PEAK Family Fun Packs to families with young children. The packs contain a high quality children's book related to exercise, nutrition or health, an activity guide for the book and a variety of resources.

### Keystone Color Me Healthy/Go Active

The PEAK teachers were trained on the Keystone Color Me Healthy/Go Active curriculum during the summer. As a part of Color Me Healthy, the children participate in weekly lessons related to nutrition and exercise and families receive a monthly Color Me Healthy newsletter.



## Outreach to Home Child Care Providers

PEAK is expanding its impact in the community through a new outreach to regulation-exempt and family child care home providers in Pottstown. While both regulation-exempt and family child care providers care for children in their home, they vary in the system of oversight.

Family Child Care Homes are licensed through the Department of Public Welfare and are eligible to participate in the Keystone STARS continuous quality improvement system. Pottstown has seven licensed family child care home providers.

Regulation-exempt providers are not licensed and have limited access to resources for improving quality. The providers register with Montgomery County Child Care Information Services and receive subsidy payment for caring for up to three eligible children.



The Borough of Pottstown has 56 regulation-exempt child care providers and seven family child care home providers.

Often the regulation exempt providers care for children of families just re-entering the workforce who must work evenings or weekends and frequently receive low entry-level wages. Pottstown has 56 regulation-exempt providers who care for approximately 110 children.

Partnering with Montgomery County Child Care Information Services, Penn State Extension, Pottstown Family Center, Pottstown Fire Department, YWCA Tri-County Area Family Literacy Center and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, PEAK is creating a new outreach initiative to provide support to the regulation exempt and family child care providers. The providers receive monthly packets of information and resources and are eligible to participate in professional development/networking opportunities. PEAK will, also, partner with the Pottstown Fire Department to offer home safety checks and provide smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, first aid kits and other safety equipment.

Funded through United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, this outreach provides an opportunity to positively impact children and families who are not enrolled in one of the partner early learning programs.

#### PEAK Managing Partners

Pottstown School District  
Montgomery Early Learning Centers  
Montgomery County Head Start  
Pottstown YMCA  
YWCA Tri-County Area  
Montgomery County Intermediate Unit  
Pottstown Family Center  
Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation  
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania

#### PEAK Community Partners

Montgomery County Child Care Consortium  
Montgomery Child Care Information Services  
Pottstown Public Library  
Penn State  
Cooperative Extension  
TriCounty Chamber of Commerce  
Grace Lutheran Preschool  
Congregation Mercy and Truth  
HENS Preschool  
KinderCare Learning Center  
Warwick Child Care Center

#### PEAK Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness

Pottstown School District  
230 Beech Street  
PO Box 779  
Pottstown, PA 19464  
**610-970-6655**  
**Fax: 610-326-6540**  
**www.peakonline.org**  
**Email: mrieck@pottstownsd.org**  
Mary Rieck, PEAK Coordinator  
Emily Baddeley, Pre-K Coach  
Whitney Tyng, Family Engagement Specialist  
Kathy Perry, Early Childhood Health Specialist  
Sue Yocom, Resource Development Specialist  
Jeff Sparagana, Ed. D. Director of Education and Human Resources

#### PEAK Mission

Every child in Pottstown will enter Kindergarten ready to learn and achieve.



## Partnership to Reach Pottstown's Vulnerable Families

PEAK is collaborating with The Salvation Army of Greater Pottstown and Pottstown Public Library to provide support and supplies to Pottstown's homeless families with young children. Partnering with the YWCA Tri-County Area Family Literacy and the Pottstown Rotary Club, PEAK will provide support to the families at the Lessig-Booth Shelter of The Salvation Army. Learning materials will be added to the community room and preschoolers will receive a "reading bag" with several children's books, a stuffed animal, games and other resources. Through this outreach some of Pottstown's neediest children will receive a personal set of books. PEAK will also partner with Pottstown Public Library to offer learning materials for families with young children. With the library serving larger numbers of families with young children,



### "School, Here I Come!"

A comment overheard from a Pre-K Counts child happily rushing into the classroom at the Pottstown YMCA.

PEAK is providing a learning area with a variety of activities for counting/sorting, language development and science development. This new outreach will assist some of the areas' vulnerable families and impact more children entering kindergarten.

## YWCA Tri-County Area-STAR 3

YWCA Tri-County Area was designated a Keystone STAR 3 site by the Pennsylvania Southeast Regional Key. Keystone STARS is the continuous quality improvement for early learning programs in Pennsylvania. There are four STAR levels that denote quality in the area of the education and training of staff, instructional environment, the leadership/management and family/community partnerships. Congratulations to the staff of the YWCA for achieving STAR 3.

## On-Site Behavior Management Support

Many early learning sites are facing problems with violent and aggressive behavior problems in their very young children. The PEAK partner sites receive on-site behavior management support through a contract with Montgomery County Intermediate Unit. A behavior management specialist spends three days each week in Pottstown working with the teachers and children in the community programs. The on-site behavior support is made possible by funding through United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund.

## PEAK Family Engagement

The PEAK family engagement support services to community partner programs increased to full-time in 2008-2009 with funding from Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania. PEAK uses the *Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education* model which focuses on building protective factors that prevent child abuse and neglect. Whitney Tyng, PEAK Family Engagement Specialist, assists families with referrals and resources. She also facilitates Breakfast Clubs at the partner sites monthly which give families an opportunity to create connections with each other and to talk with Whitney. Each month approximately 55 families participate in the PEAK Breakfast Clubs. Families are assisted in their role as their child's "first teacher" through workshops, classroom activities and printed resources. A *Count Down to Kindergarten Family Workshop* focusing on early math skills was held at the Pottstown YMCA during April.



## Work Force Development

Improving the skills of the community work force is critical to raising child outcomes and making long-lasting change in Pottstown. Through United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, PEAK supports the staff at the partner sites in their professional growth.

### Career Counseling

PEAK partners with Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children to provide individual career counseling to community teachers. The career counselor works with staff to create career goals and investigate resources for implementing the plans.

### Conference Attendance

PEAK pays registration fees and provides transportation for community teachers to attend the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children Conference held yearly in Philadelphia. This year, 26 PEAK teachers attended the day-long professional development event.

### Teacher Mini-Grants

A new initiative was begun this year to support staff in professional growth by providing the opportunity to apply for mini-grants. Five community teachers were awarded grants of \$500 each for projects they developed to improve the classroom environment and instruction.

### CDA Class

Last year, 23 teachers graduated from the PEAK sponsored Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. PEAK offered the class again in 2008-2009 and 16 teachers will finish the program in May. The CDA is 120 hours of classroom instruction and articulates to 6 hours of credit toward an Associate's Degree.

### Eastern University ECE Degree Program

A Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education program was brought to Pottstown this year through a collaboration with Eastern University. Fifteen teachers are enrolled in the cohort model program and anticipate receiving their BS degree in two years. The availability of the Eastern program in Pottstown is assisting the PEAK Pre-K Counts teachers to meet the requirement of early childhood certification by 2011.

### Individual Development Account Program

A new incentive for work force development was put into place this spring with the Individual Development Account (IDA) program. Teachers, who are enrolled in higher education and meet income guidelines, open an IDA account and make monthly deposits. After making deposits for six months and attending a financial literacy class, the IDA program matches the deposited funds at a rate of 3:1 to provide scholarships for tuition and other education expenses. This offers another support mechanism to encourage teachers to increase their credential levels.

### Recruitment and Retention Strategies

PEAK is piloting an initiative with four core partner programs to reduce staff turnover and increase the stability of staff. The directors worked together to create incentive plans for the sites which reward staff but do not undermine other programs. In the first year of implementation, one director commented, "All staff who received incentive pay or who attended trainings are still employed at the site. Recognizing there is a frequent staff turnover in early childhood education centers; this is a significant positive outcome. Our staff is recognizing the direction early childcare education programming is taking and is grateful for the funding that has been available to help them grow professionally in the field."