

Building a quality early learning system in Pottstown.



Start Early. Reach Higher.

Annual Report 2007-2008



Pottstown continues to be a leader in building a quality early learning system through the collaboration between Pottstown School District and community programs known as PEAK (Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness). The ongoing work in the area of early childhood education in the community results in higher quality early learning programs, increased resources for families, a strengthened work force and improved readiness of children and families for school. In 2007-2008, PEAK expanded

its impact from working with five sites with 13 classrooms serving three and four year old children to now working with 35 classrooms in 11 community sites. Significant funding resources were added to the PEAK initiative during the year through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Montgomery County Foundation and the continued funding from Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

While continuing the work started the previous year focusing on community outreach, family engagement, quality improvement and kindergarten transition, PEAK launched the PEAK Health Initiative with community partner sites. Funded through Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, the PEAK Health Initiative provides funding for a health specialist to work with community programs in improving health and safety practices. The health specialist provides on-site technical assistance and targeted professional development for community programs.

The summer of 2007 saw the passage of the state-funded Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, which provided funds to serve 11,000 at-risk children statewide. The Pottstown Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts partnership was approved to serve 108 children in a high quality, full-day instructional program at five partner sites. Additional funding was received to support PEAK's family engagement efforts through Montgomery County Foundation. The partnership with United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania continues with funding to support current strategies and to pilot a work force development initiative. The addition of Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation funding, PA Pre-K Counts, Montgomery County Foundation with the continued funding from Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership and United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania allowed PEAK to increase its support for community programs and to impact more Pottstown families.



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PEAK Annual Report July 1, 2007 - June 30, 2008

Community Outreach



Visit by Senator Bob Casey

The PEAK community outreach efforts seek to educate families, legislators, Borough officials, business leaders and the public on the importance of quality early learning experiences. The outreach work began in August with a visit by Senator Bob Casey to Pottstown. Senator Casey talked with educators, children and community members about his Prepare All Kids Act and spoke in support of the Children's Health Insurance Program. He also spent time visiting the classrooms at Montgomery Early Learning Centers and reading to children.



Regional Superintendent Forum on Early Childhood Education

Educating superintendents in the region concerning the relationship between early learning and later school success was the purpose of the Regional Superintendent Forum sponsored by Montgomery County Child Care Consortium, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and PEAK. Dr. Rudy Crew, Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, served as the keynote speaker. Dr. Crew told the audience that preschool can improve children's school readiness, early achievement and school competence. "If we really want no child to be left behind, we have to become collaborative in how we provide early education," Dr. Crew noted. As such, he praised Pottstown's efforts to partner with local private early education providers to ensure that the curriculum taught there meshes seamlessly with the curriculum children will encounter in kindergarten.

Media for Outreach

PEAK used print, radio ads, and flyers to educate the community on PEAK and early childhood. This year PEAK added two billboards focusing on kindergarten readiness. Banners were also displayed at all of the Pottstown School District schools.

PEAK—Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Press Event

Montgomery County District Attorney Risa Vetri Ferman joined PEAK, the Pottstown Police Department and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids to highlight the research study of the Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership. The findings show that the children enrolled in the programs exceeded national norms for school readiness and early school success in major pre-academic skill areas. The study included 200 Pottstown children enrolled at the partner programs.

Business Leaders Summit on Early Childhood Education

The work of the PEAK partnership was discussed during the Business Leaders Summit on Early Childhood Education. The summit, sponsored by United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce, PEAK and other organizations, highlighted the point that an investment in early childhood education is an investment in the future success of the entire community. David Lawrence, president of Early Childhood Initiative Foundation and keynote speaker, praised PEAK's partnership as a "splendid example of a community seeking to ensure that every three and four-year-old has the maximum opportunity for real school readiness."

Month of the Young Child

Pottstown celebrated April as the Month of the Young Child. Mayor Sharon Thomas began the month with a proclamation applauding the efforts of PEAK and other agencies to improve early learning opportunities in the community. Senator John Rafferty issued Senate Resolution Number 280 urging the Senate to recognize and support the people, programs and policies that are committed to high-quality early childhood education as the right choice for kids and further encouraging all citizens to work to make a good investment in quality early learning in the Commonwealth. The Month of the Young Children serves as an opportunity to reach out to the community through events and special activities. During the month, "guest readers" visited the classrooms and many special events were planned to engage families and children.

Community Outreach Event at the Pottstown YMCA

Three hundred people enjoyed an afternoon of games and activities at the Pottstown YMCA as a part of the Month of the Young Child. The petting zoo greeted families as they approached the YMCA and children had an opportunity to see a variety of animals. The Reading Phillies mascot, Screwball, kept the afternoon lively and all of the children enjoyed the moon bounce. Community agencies provided families with information and activities for the children.



PEAK's partnership is a splendid example of a community seeking to ensure that every three and four-year-old has the maximum opportunity for real school readiness.

—David Lawrence, president
Early Childhood Initiative Foundation

Opposite Main: Family participating at community event at Pottstown YMCA.

Senator Casey reading to students at Montgomery Early Learning Center.

Above: Child participating in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program.

Left: PEAK billboards were added to the media outreach.

One Book Campaign

Up, Down, and Around by Katherine Ayers was the featured book for the 2008 One Book, Every Young Child Campaign. The Pottstown Public Library and PEAK distributed over 500 copies of the book to all three and four-year-old children in community partner programs. Teachers also received the big book version of the book for use in the classroom. Mike Packard, Children's Librarian, led professional development for teachers on how to use the book effectively in classrooms. The library reached out to families through a workshop focusing on reading aloud and using props to extend the story. The One Book Campaign offers the opportunity to provide high quality children's literature to many community families.

Guest Readers

Family members, the children's librarian, Congressman Jim Gerlach, Mayor Sharon Thomas and Representative Tom Quigley all served as guest readers at community programs during the month. The children enjoyed the special visitors to the classroom and the guests had the opportunity to become better acquainted with what is happening at the community programs.

...findings show that the children enrolled in the programs exceeded national norms for school readiness and early school success in major pre-academic skill areas.

Center: PEAK children receiving copies of *Up, Down and Around*, as part of the 2008 One Book, Every Young Child Campaign.

Opposite: Family workshop at Pottstown Public Library.





Family Engagement

PEAK Family Resource Centers were added to community early learning sites, to provide resources, referrals and and support to families.



Recognizing that families are the child's first and most important teacher, PEAK provides resources, referrals and workshops to support families in that role. The PEAK Family Engagement Specialist serves as an important link between the instructional programs and families. Last year PEAK Family Resource Centers were added to the community early learning sites. This outreach effort was expanded this year by placing the resource centers at additional community agencies that families frequent.

Helping preschool children manage their behavior was the popular topic for a family workshop provided by Pottstown Family Center staff. Families received suggestions on dealing with problem behavior and were able to share information with other families.

The PEAK Breakfast Clubs, held monthly at the community sites, offer families the opportunity to network with other parents and to talk with the PEAK Family Engagement Specialist concerning needs and how to support their child at home.

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, smiling and playing on a yellow monkey bar structure at a playground. The boy is on the left, wearing a blue t-shirt and jeans, and the girl is on the right, wearing a pink patterned shirt and jeans. They are both holding onto the yellow bars. In the background, another child is visible on a similar structure, and there are trees and a clear sky.

Quality Improvement and Work Force Development

The PEAK Pre-K Coach provided 283 hours of on-site technical assistance to community partner programs in 2007-2008. The in-depth mentoring provided by the coach is an essential part of the quality improvement efforts. Through the Public-Private Partnership grant, programs benefited from additional supplies and resources for the classrooms. To assist teachers in implementing the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards, copies of the standards were provided to all community classrooms. The Pre-K Coach publishes a monthly newsletter for teachers with activities aligned with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards and provides a series of “Best Practices” resources for teachers on the PEAK web site. To provide additional support to site directors, the PEAK Pre-K Coach facilitates monthly directors meetings that allow the directors to share information, support each other and receive updates on the various PEAK initiatives.

Through United Way funding, PEAK is implementing a pilot program with four core partner sites to design and implement strategies for recruiting and retaining staff.

Professional Development

In 2007-2008, PEAK facilitated 64 hours of professional development. Teachers from across the region participated in the training sessions which included an all-day New Teachers' Institute, sessions on literacy, assessment and preschool behavior.

DVAEYC Conference

PEAK paid registration fees and provided bus transportation for 20 community teachers to attend the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children Conference. The teachers received six hours of professional development and were able to network with teachers from across the region.

CDA Class

Twenty-three local teachers completed the PEAK sponsored Child Development Associate credential class. This is an important step on the career lattice for teachers seeking to improve their credential level and for programs moving to higher Keystone STARS levels. Teachers attended weekly classes from September through May and completed out-of-classroom assignments. The teachers celebrated the completion of the program with the CDA instructor and other staff at a local restaurant. All of the teachers are to be congratulated for their achievement.



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Career Counseling

PEAK contracts with Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children to provide career counseling for teachers in community programs. The career counselor meets with each teacher to develop a career plan and identify resources to assist the teacher in implementing the plan. In the past year, the career counselor has spent 232 hours working with local teachers.

Collaboration with Eastern University

PEAK is working with Eastern University to offer a 4-year degree program in early childhood education in Pottstown. The program is designed for working professionals and will enable teachers with an Associate's degree to receive their certification in early childhood education within two years. Eastern is in the final stages of approval from the middle states accrediting agency and anticipates beginning the cohort model classes in the fall of 2008.

Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Through United Way funding, PEAK is implementing a pilot program with four core partner sites to design and implement strategies for recruiting and retaining staff. Some of the strategies to be used include signing bonuses, bonuses for degree completion, paid planning time and retention incentives. PEAK will analyze the results of the pilot to see the effectiveness of reducing staff turnover and increasing quality.



Top: Teachers enjoying the bus ride to the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children Conference.

Below: Teachers celebrating the completion of their credentials for Child Development Associate.

Opposite: Community children visiting kindergarten.

Health and Wellness

The PEAK Health Initiative, funded by Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, was launched in 2007-2008 to improve practices and polices related to health, nutrition and safety in community programs.





The PEAK Health Initiative, funded by Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, was launched in 2007-2008 to improve practices and policies related to health, nutrition and safety in community programs. The PEAK Early Childhood Health Specialist works with sites to develop a health improvement plan to address areas of improvement and move the program to higher quality. In addition to on-site guidance, the health specialist delivered 34 hours of professional development at partner sites related to health and safety practices and distributed printed resources for teachers and families.

Through PEAK Health Initiative and a collaboration with VNA Community Services, 179 community children received hearing, vision and speech screenings.

Screenings for Community Children

Through the PEAK Health Initiative and a collaboration with VNA Community Services, 179 community children received hearing, vision and speech screenings. The early identification of any physical issues that may impede a child's ability to learn is an important component of school readiness.

Partnership with Cedar Crest College Nursing Students

Senior level nursing students from Cedar Crest College worked in community programs as a part of their practicum experience. The students led health and wellness activities for the children in the classrooms and developed resources for teachers. They also collaborated with the Pottstown Public Library Family Place to meet families, provide activities and develop resources.

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Left: Students participate in vision screenings at partner sites throughout the community.

Top: Physical activities led by Cedar Crest College nursing students.



Mental Health Consultation

Behavior problems in preschool classrooms are a national problem as more and more children are exhibiting violent and aggressive behavior. To support programs in dealing with difficult behavior problems, PEAK provided professional development for teachers and contracted with a mental health behavioral specialist to provide in-classroom support to teachers. Through classroom observations, the behavioral specialist developed plans to address challenging behavior and met with families to discuss the behavior and assist in the referral process.

Outreach to Families through Medical Offices

PEAK is beginning a new outreach to families through collaboration with local dental and pediatric offices. The medical offices will distribute Family Fun Packs to families with three and four year old children when they bring the children to the office for check-ups. Family Fun Packs focusing on nutrition, exercise and health are being developed and will include a high quality children's book, family activities and other resources for families. This will offer another avenue for reaching out and connecting local families with resources.

Kindergarten Transition



Moving children and families smoothly from community programs to the public school system involves connections between the two educational settings; connections between the families and kindergarten; and connections between the community and kindergarten. PEAK's kindergarten transition initiative has made tremendous progress in forming those connections.

Connecting Teachers

The community Pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers participate in joint professional development and cross-classroom visits. Teachers are able to share ideas and become familiar with each educational setting.

Connecting Schools and Children

This year community programs were paired with elementary schools as "Buddy Schools." The teachers worked together to plan a variety of transition activities between the community programs and kindergarten. Letters were exchanged between kindergarten children and Pre-K children, kindergarten teachers created DVDs about kindergarten to send to their partner schools, teachers and principals visited community programs and community children were invited to visit kindergarten classes and participate in special events. To further connect the programs, PEAK Kindergarten Transition folders were created which will allow community programs to transfer relevant child information to the kindergarten teacher.

Connecting Families

A kindergarten transition workshop acquainted families with activities that they can use with their child over the summer and gave them an opportunity to talk with kindergarten teachers. To further support family involvement, *Summer Transition Book Bags* were distributed to all of the PEAK children entering kindergarten in Pottstown School District. The book bags were filled with resources and activities to support the child's continued learning during the summer. Each of the activities will make the transition to kindergarten easier for both the children and families.



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Connecting the Community

PEAK led a media and outreach campaign to increase early kindergarten registration. Radio and print ads were used, along with flyers, billboards, banners, and posters. Increasing the number of children registered for kindergarten in the spring will allow the elementary schools to create class lists and have a smoother start to the year for both children and families.

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Opposite: PEAK child visiting an elementary school.

Top: Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers attend an Educator's Night Out to share ideas and become familiar with each educational setting.

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts

In July 2007, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was approved and provided funding to serve 11,000 children statewide in high quality Pre-K programs. The Pottstown PA Pre-K Counts partnership received funding to serve 108 children in a full-day program at five community partner sites. Through PA Pre-K Counts, three new classes were added at community sites increasing the capacity of local programs to serve an additional 60 children. PA Pre-K Counts has met a need for Pottstown families for full-day quality preschool services. One mother tearfully told the director of her program, "Pre-K Counts has really prepared my daughter for kindergarten in the fall and for that I am truly grateful."

Sustainability and Looking to the Future

PEAK is working with the Center for Schools and Communities to develop a sustainability plan to continue and enhance the various PEAK strategies. To assist with that process, a part-time Resource Development Specialist was hired to guide the sustainability process and look for additional funds to support PEAK. Through the ongoing sustainability planning, PEAK seeks to diversify its funding base and expand its impact in the community.

With the goal of ensuring that all children arrive in kindergarten ready to learn and achieve, PEAK will maintain the current strategies and seek funding to reduce teacher turnover and establish a highly qualified teaching force for the community partner programs. In addition to work force development, funding will be sought for hearing/vision/speech screenings, behavioral consultation, and infant/toddler classrooms.

PEAK at a Glance

PEAK is providing technical assistance, on-site coaching, professional development and resources to:

- 11 Community early learning sites
- 35 Classrooms serving three and four year old children
- 563 Children enrolled in PEAK impacted classrooms
- 64 hours of professional development in 2007-2008

Pottstown School District and the community partners share a common vision of using education as a tool of community revitalization. Strong community partnerships are essential to the continued success of PEAK and positive change in Pottstown. By working together to build a comprehensive quality early learning system, the entire community reaps the benefits of a better educated work force, more successful students and families who are stable and engaged in the educational program.

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 Area Health & Wellness Foundation
Pottstown Family Center
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania

PEAK Collaborating Partners

Montgomery County Child Care Consortium
KinderCare Learning Center
Warwick Child Care Center
Dotlen Academy
Tot Spot Preschool
Grace Lutheran Preschool
HENS Preschool
Pottstown Public Library
Montgomery County Community College
Penn State Cooperative Extension
Southeast Regional Key

PEAK Staff

Mary Rieck, PEAK Coordinator
Emily Baddeley, PEAK Pre-K Coach
Kathy Perry, Early Childhood Health Specialist
Lori Davidson, PEAK Family Engagement Specialist
Tanna Wagner, Resource Development Specialist
Karen Shaner, Grant Fiscal Manager

PEAK Funding

In 2007-2008, PEAK received funding through:
Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts
Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation
Montgomery County Foundation





POTTSTOWN EARLY ACTION FOR KINDERGARTEN READINESS

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