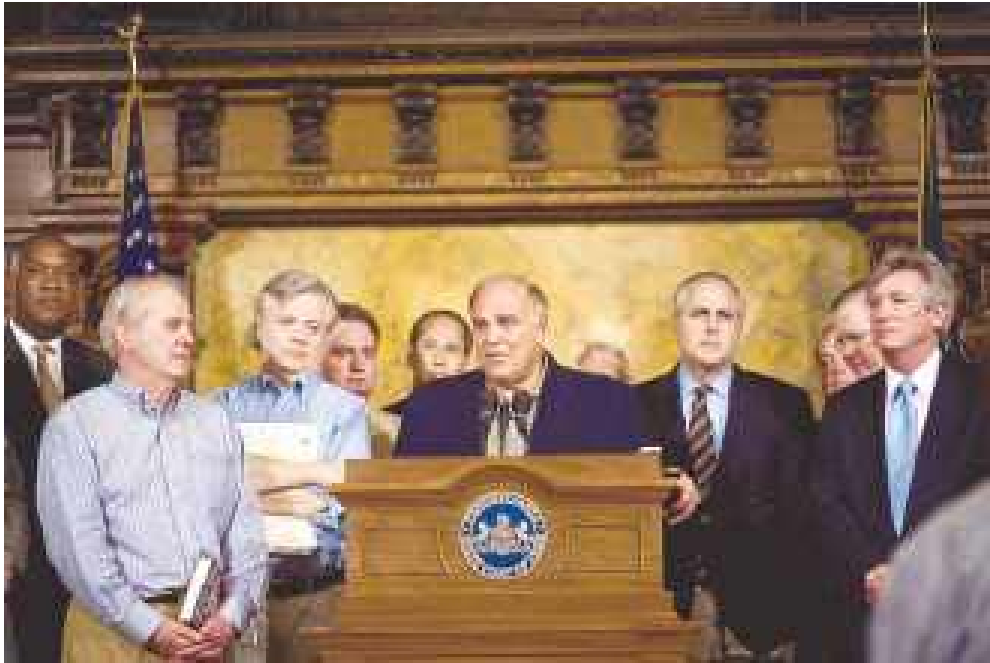


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## PEAK Pre-K Program Gets Grant

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Governor Ed Rendell

POTTSTOWN — Efforts to provide an early education to more than 100 borough children just got 18 children larger thanks to the school district's successful efforts to obtain an additional \$141,000 in state funding.

An additional \$135,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund will also aid those efforts over three years.

Given that the Pennsylvania Department of Education received applications for money to service 7,000 more children across the state, and that the state had only enough money to provide for 800, Pottstown's success in obtaining the grant is significant, Jeff Sparagana, the district's director of education, wrote in a congratulatory e-mail to staff.

In Pottstown, the program is called PEAK, which stands for Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten readiness.

The funding comes to Pottstown through a state program called PA Pre-K Counts, which represents the largest portion of Pottstown's funding. It is also a funding vehicle that this year was geared primarily to making new partnerships.

The fact that Pottstown has already received money and was applying for an increase so as to serve more children, makes the district's success doubly significant, wrote Sparagana.

The grant brings Pottstown's total annual funding to \$989,100, providing 126 slots for borough children to receive pre-kindergarten education from private providers who have partnered with the district in terms of goals and curriculum.

"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," Sparagana wrote.

"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 that an exemplary partnership such as PEAK has established," wrote Sparagana. "To have PEAK awarded all 18 slots as requested is outstanding."

District Attorney Risa Vetri Ferman agrees.

During a "town meeting" Monday night, Ferman singled out PEAK as an example of the kind of program that helps prevent crime before it takes root in young lives.

She said several studies show that every dollar spent on early education saves seven dollars later on in preventing crime, court costs and the costs of incarceration.

The program has also won praise from Terri Lampe, Pottstown's director of economic development, who told borough council this month that programs like PEAK are important for making the community more attractive and helping to build an educated work force.

And, more recently, PEAK has won more than praise.

In August, it was one of six programs in all of Pennsylvania to receive a grant from the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund.

The \$135,000 grant will be provided over three years and will be used to implement PEAK's "Strengthening Families Initiative."

The grant will enable the program to focus on "increasing family engagement support" through collaboration with the Pottstown Family Center and provide behavior management help to community programs through collaboration with the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit.

Dollars from the Children's Trust Fund will be combined with funds from United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania to provide a full-time "family engagement specialist" who will provide resources, workshops activities and referrals for families with young children.

The collaboration with the Intermediate Unit will provide in-classroom assistance to teachers and families dealing with behavior problems in pre-school-aged children.

All this effort toward early education in Pottstown is taking place within the larger framework of efforts statewide.

Tuesday, Gov. Ed Rendell announced the formation of two new state panels to increase awareness of early education and to encourage the involvement of business and civic leaders.

The Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission is aimed at the latter. "It makes perfect sense to have our business leaders play an active role in this effort, since today's children are tomorrow's work force," Rendell said in a release that accompanied the announcement.

The Early Learning Council will be composed of representatives of educational and business entities, higher education, Head Start agencies, local governments, law enforcement agencies, the media and others, the release said.

"The new council and commission will help Pennsylvania build a quality early education continuum that can help children reach their promise while meeting the diverse needs of families," Estelle B. Richman, Pennsylvania's Public Welfare Secretary, said in the release.