ANNOUNCEMENT: EI-07 #12
ANNOUNCEMENT: ELS/PKC-07 #16
OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT & EARLY LEARNING
BUREAU OF EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES
BUREAU OF EARLY LEARNING SERVICES

ISSUE DATE: October 24, 2007
EFFECTIVE DATE: October 24, 2007

SUBJECT: PA Pre-K Counts and Early Intervention, Working Together
TO: Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Grantees, Administrative staff for Infant Toddler and Preschool EI Programs
FROM: Harriet Dichter **Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Announcement is to provide information on 1) the Early Intervention (EI) program and 2) the relationship between Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PA Pre-K Counts) and EI in supporting preschool aged children with disabilities or developmental delays.

BACKGROUND: PA Pre-K Counts requires providers to "coordinate with the Infant and Toddlers and the Preschool EI programs." The purpose of this requirement is to ensure a smooth transition for children coming into Pre-K Counts from the Infant and Toddler program and who may be receiving Preschool EI services. In this Background section, we provide a brief overview of EI.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning is responsible for the state level administration of the Commonwealth's EI system. The Infant Toddler program is managed at the county level by the County Mental Retardation program and the Preschool EI program is managed locally through local Preschool EI agencies, which primarily consist of Intermediate Units but also include 4 school districts and one provider. Children from birth to school age are eligible to receive EI services if they have a significant developmental delay in one or more areas of development including cognition, communication, gross motor, social emotional, or sensory (hearing or vision loss); or have a known physical or mental condition which has a high probability for developmental delays.

Upon referral to the EI multidisciplinary team, children are evaluated to determine eligibility. Children found to be eligible for EI services then have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), for children birth to three, or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), for children three to school age, developed to meet their individual needs. This written plan is developed by a team including the child's parents and professionals and reflects the child's unique needs and strengths. The Preschool EI plan, the IEP, can be delivered in regular preschool classrooms within the child's community which is preferred or in Preschool EI classrooms.

The practice of enrolling children with developmental delays in typical environments is often referred to as Inclusion. In order for a PA Pre-K Counts classroom to be an inclusive early childhood setting, it may not have an enrollment that is predominantly children participating in EI. A good measure to use of what constitutes an inclusive early childhood setting is no more than 1/3 of the classroom enrollment being children diagnosed with developmental delays or disabilities.

DISCUSSION:

Transition from Infant Toddler Program to Preschool Programs Including Pre-K Counts.

When discussing "Transition" in regards to EI, Transition refers to the process of an eligible child exiting the Infant Toddler Program and determining continued eligibility for the EI Preschool Program. In the Infant Toddler EI Program, eligible children begin the process at least nine months prior to their third birthday. During this process parents are supported in exploring options for their child when they turn three. By coordinating with the Infant Toddler EI Program in your community, procedures can be established to allow parents to explore PA Pre-K Counts Classrooms as an inclusive preschool option when the child is age eligible to participate.

Outreach and Enrollment into Pre-K Counts/Coordination with EI.

PA Pre-K Counts Providers need to actively coordinate with the EI program on "Child Find". Child find is the requirement under federal law for the Infant Toddler and Preschool EI programs to reach out and identify children eligible for EI services. By working cooperatively with Child Find to assure that there is good understanding of Pre-K Counts, Pre-K Counts can offer parents of children involved with Child Find access enrollment opportunities in PA Pre-K Counts classrooms.

If you are not sure who provides Infant Toddler EI services in your community call CONNECT at 1-800- 692-7288. CONNECT is a PA hotline able to link parents or programs to provider information in their local communities and to make referrals to EI

Referring a Pre-K Counts Child to EI

If you have a concern regarding a child's development, discussion should occur with the child's parents. A referral can be made by calling CONNECT by the parents or with their consent, the PA Pre-K Counts staff. Also with parents' permission, the Pre K Counts staff could make a referral directly to the Preschool EI agency if the EI agency and the Pre K Counts program have developed a referral interagency agreement

Enrolling Children with EI services in a PA Pre-K Counts Classroom

EI is based on the philosophy that young children with special needs should receive their services and supports in settings where children would be if they did not have a disability. This philosophy is grounded in the federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA requires states to provide services for preschool aged children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Through outreach to the Preschool EI agency in your community, PA Pre-K Counts classrooms can enroll children receiving EI services. In the Pa Pre-K Counts Program Guidance, children with disabilities meet the definition of "at-risk" for targeted enrollment. Through collaboration with the EI Preschool program, parents can be made aware of enrollment opportunities in PA Pre-K Counts.

Upon enrollment into a PA Pre-K Counts classroom, the child's multidisciplinary team (MDT), including the PA Pre-K Counts teacher and aide, should meet to discuss strategies to make the transition into class successful. Strategies may include modifying the environment, adapting the curriculum or simply informing the PA Pre-K Counts staff of the best techniques to use for the child's success. In addition, communication strategies between the PA Pre-K Counts staff, parents and MDT members should be determined.

How EI Services Interact with Pre-K Counts Classrooms Services

When children with disabilities or developmental delays are enrolled in a community classroom such as PA Pre-K Counts, services are likely to be provided through a consultative model. This model is a method of EI staff working with other adults to achieve desired outcomes for children by educating the teachers and making changes to the environment.

Pre-K Counts providers will also need to work with the EI agencies to ensure that the services needed to make a Pre-K Counts program accessible to a child identified as having a disability or developmental delay are made available. EI staff support PA Pre-K Counts teachers and staff by helping them integrate targeted skills for children into everyday routines and activities. EI staff are available to problem solve and provide additional resources in support of children to the PA Pre- K Counts staff.

Partnerships

In addition to directly supporting children with developmental delays or disabilities in the PA Pre-K Counts program, partnering with EI Preschool Programs can provide the following benefits:

- Referral to PA Pre-K Counts for families of children eligible for EI Preschool as well as those seeking preschool services who are not eligible for EI Preschool services.
- Development of joint professional development opportunities
- Shared Transition to Kindergarten strategies

Resources

CONNECT Hotline: 1800-692-7288

Early Intervention Technical Assistance- Pennsylvania's training and technical assistance entity supporting the Infant Toddler and Preschool EI programs
www.pattan.k12.pa.us

Guidelines to Support Early Intervention Process: Inclusion, available on the PaTTAN website, www.pattan.k12.pa.us. This resource is hot off the presses and provides and overview of Inclusion and is packed with recommended resources.

Office of Child Development and Learning page located on the PDE website:
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/

Pennsylvania Department of Education
http://www.pde.state.pa.us

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Early Intervention
http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/Child/EarlyIntervention/

NEXT STEPS:

1. Lead agencies in partnerships are expected to distribute this Announcement to all partner agencies participating in their PA Pre-K Counts partnership.

2. PA Pre-K Counts grantees should complete outreach to the Infant Toddler Program and the EI Preschool Program in their community. Discussions should involve
   a. A PA Pre-K Counts overview.
   b. Discussion of enrollment opportunities
   c. Discussion of referral protocol for families seeking enrollment in PA Pre-K Counts and for children potentially in need of further evaluation for EI Preschool services.
   d. Discussion of the local ChildFind activities and how Pa Pre-K Counts can participate in these activities.
   e. Discussion of communication strategies between Pa Pre-K Counts staff and MDT members in order to support children enrolled with EI services.

Attachment – Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Map of MAWAs and Counties

Comments and Questions Regarding this Announcement Should be Directed to Tracey Campanini at (717) 213-2066 or tracam@berksiu.org.