

# Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Education Innovation Zone Grants



Providing Pennsylvania's children with quality early learning experiences is a collaborative effort of families, schools and communities that can produce a huge return on investment for all. As part of its Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, Pennsylvania will offer 50 Early Childhood Education Community Innovation Grants to at-risk elementary schools and neighborhoods. Grantees may receive up to \$75,000 a year for three years.

Phase I of the grants was awarded in October 2014 to twelve communities with exemplary programs in place who are willing to mentor Phase II grantees. Grantees will implement innovations that address one or more of the following objectives:

- Developing stronger relationships between early learning programs and school districts to build birth-3rd grade alignment. Comprehensive birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade approaches hold potential to dramatically affect achievement gaps and to set young children on solid pathways to educational and lifelong success.
- Increase family supports and engagement. Family engagement is a critical element to improving child outcomes. Pennsylvania's overarching goal for family engagement is to support strong partnerships between families, communities, early learning programs, and schools to promote children's school readiness and achievement.
- Strengthen the network and coordination of community organizations that serve children and families with young children. Real and sustainable improvement in child outcomes requires strong collaboration between the families, schools and communities that serve them. Solid local partnerships among organizations in the education, child welfare, health and mental health, dental health, housing, and workforce development can ensure that children and families get access to the services they need to provide a healthy, stable and positive learning environment for young children.

Grant recipients will also receive intensive supports focused on increasing the use of developmental screenings, implementation of the Kindergarten Entry Inventory and the Early Learning GPS. Best and promising practices will be documented and shared with other communities throughout the state. For more information, visit the [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge web page](#).

Listed below are brief summaries of each innovation.

## **Allegheny County - Pittsburgh Public Schools, serving Pittsburgh Arsenal Elementary School (Pittsburgh Public Schools) - \$75,000**

Since 2007, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and the University of Pittsburgh Office Of Child Development (OCD) have developed strategies to bring schools, parents and organizations in low-income communities together to promote school achievement. As part of the increased focus on kindergarten, PPS partnered with OCD to develop the Ready Freddy program.

For more information, contact Samantha Gray at 717.346.0650 or [samgray@pa.gov](mailto:samgray@pa.gov).

Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Human Services | 333 Market Street, 6th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126 [www.dhs.state.pa.us](http://www.dhs.state.pa.us).

January 2015

Working with community partners, the project has developed processes to encourage parents to enroll their children for kindergarten on time, prepare their children for school, and help them attend every day. Through this grant, the partnership will expand the Ready Freddy approach to birth through 3rd grade and implement a comprehensive model in Pittsburgh Arsenal Elementary School and the Lawrenceville community. Ready Freddy will be supplemented by three additional strategies to engage families in their children's success through 3rd grade: 1) Ready Rosie, a daily email/text with simple activities for families; 2) Attendance texting, a two-way texting system to provide families with timely and customizing messages to encourage school attendance; and 3) building on the strengths of the community-school partnership. The partnership will be able to collect student-level data on academic performance and daily attendance and how that data aligns with the use of human services and social supports. The partnership will also monitor usage of Ready Rosie and Attendance texting systems. For more information visit [www.readyfreddy.org](http://www.readyfreddy.org).

**Allegheny County - Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, serving Faison Elementary School (Pittsburgh Public Schools) - \$75,000**

In 2011, the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children partnered with Homewood Children's Village to open the Homewood Early Learning Hub (The Hub) in the Homewood neighborhood in Pittsburgh. The Hub is a place where young children and their families and child care providers can gather to play, learn and grow. One strategy to engage families and support children's development is the Message from Me technology. Currently, Message from Me is used in the Hub and in 129 classrooms in two counties impacting 1,660 children and their families. Children use Message from Me to take a photo and record a message and send them to a family member or caregiver. Educators receive professional development and technical assistance on how to effectively use the technology. As part of this grant, the partnership plans to extend Message from Me to four kindergarten classrooms in Faison K-5 Elementary School. By using Message from Me, providers and teachers can help children acclimate to transition more easily, improve average daily attendance, and communicate information about the school to the child's child care/after school caregivers. The partnership will contract with Townsend and Associates to collect and evaluate Message from Me usage and useability data. In addition community organizations are working together to develop a data-sharing plan to better support Homewood families and increase referral rates among organizations. For more information on PAEYC visit <http://www.paeyc.org/homewood>.

**Chester County - Chester County Intermediate Unit, serving Jordan Bank Elementary School (Oxford Area SD) - \$75,000**

In 2013, Chester County Intermediate Unit introduced its Preschool Online (PSO) program to provide a rich, engaging and innovative preschool experience to underserved, at-risk children in their own homes. Using a blended learning format that research has shown to be beneficial for school-age students, PSO provides 90 minutes of high quality preschool programming four days a week for 16 families. PSO empowers parents through modeling, training and instructional resources. In addition to the daily instruction, the preschool teacher communicates with families regularly through email and home visits. The program provides family access to additional

services to meet their particular needs. Through the grant the partnership will expand the PSO program to hire a full-time staff member and serve an additional 19 families.

Instructors will collect information on children's skills using the BRIGANCE Early Childhood Inventory to identify areas of strength and need to inform instruction and select supplemental materials for individual students. Instructors will also survey families to determine what community resources would most benefit them. For more information visit <http://www.cciu.org/preschoolonline>.

**Dauphin County - The Foundation for Enhancing Communities, serving Downey and Foose elementary schools (Harrisburg SD) - \$74,830**

The new Parents & Partners initiative will work with families to lower barriers and help them make the most of their role as their child's first teacher and best advocate. The grant will target two of Harrisburg city's five elementary schools. Strategies include pre-k Family Fun Events where families move through stations with fun activities that also assess the child's skills and families meet with a Parents & Partners manager and the Parent Liaison to talk about what families can do at home to prepare their child for kindergarten and how to build a good relationship with their child's teacher. In partnership with the Hamilton Health Center, the initiative will start the "Quality Time with Me" program, supporting families to engage as active partners in their child's education. Parents & Partners will work with Temple University Harrisburg's Nonprofit Evaluation Services and Training for evaluation services include family surveys and focus groups. For more information on the Foundation for Enhancing Communities, visit [http://www.tfec.org/index.cfm?act=capital\\_beginnings](http://www.tfec.org/index.cfm?act=capital_beginnings).

**Fayette County - Private Industry Council of Westmoreland / Fayette, Inc., serving Masontown Elementary School (Albert-Gallatin Area SD) - \$70,287**

The Private Industry Council (PIC) has forged a strong partnership with Masontown Elementary and German-Masontown Public Library to deliver preschool, afterschool, and adult education. Through this grant, the partnership will bring the age-appropriate version of the phonemic awareness (literacy) curriculum used at the elementary school into Head Start and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classrooms, match preschool and kindergarten families to make joint school visits and communicate with each other, bring family engagement strategies used in Private Industry Council's preschool program into the elementary school, and help families learn together through special events. The school will build on its current tracking of student performance with DIBELS Next, family surveys, and a dedicated staff person to spend part of their time collecting and analyzing data. For more information on PIC, visit <http://www.privateindustrycouncil.com>.

**Greene County - Community Action Southwest, serving Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School (Jefferson-Morgan SD) - \$75,000**

Jefferson Morgan School District currently partners with Community Action Southwest and several other community partners to serve 60 percent of its four-year old population in high quality pre-kindergarten including Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. The school district promotes pre-k - 3<sup>rd</sup> grade alignment among school and community partners with a district Early Childhood

Coordinator and transition activities that involve families. Through this grant, the team will meet quarterly to examine alignment of standards and effectiveness of transition activities; school district Kindergarten teachers will visit early childhood programs to strengthen relationships with the teachers, families and children; create transition videos for families as children enter pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; and provide each family with a “Welcome to JM” kit. The team will use information on demographics, needs assessments, strengths, and child outcomes to engage families, improve instruction and evaluate the success of the innovation. For more information on Community Action Southwest, visit <https://www.caswg.org/>.

**Lebanon County - Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, serving Northwest Elementary School (Lebanon SD) - \$75,000**

The partnership will be serving children birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who either attend or will attend Northwest Elementary School in the Lebanon School District. Nearly 94 percent of children in this community are economically disadvantaged. Lebanon- Lancaster IU has a long history of working with the Lebanon School District to align standards, curriculum, assessment and instructional methods, and institute the Intervention, Prevention, and Transition (IPT) instructional methodology. IPT preceeds and aligns with the Response to Intervention and Instruction (RtII) methodology used with school-aged learners. The IPT framework includes universal screening of early literacy skills, three tiers of increasingly intense interventions, an evidenced based core program and interventions, and continuous monitoring of student performance. The partnership will update and align benchmark assessments with the Kindergarten Entry Inventory, fully incorporate OCDEL’s Transition Toolkit into the IPT framework and share IPT with the larger community. Formative, benchmark and summative assessments will be used to determine the effectiveness of the IPT innovation. For more information on Lebanon-Lancaster IU, visit <http://www.iu13.org/StudentsandParents/Pages/LebanonEarlyChildhood.aspx>.

**Luzerne County - Greater Nanticoke Area School District, serving KM Smith and Kennedy elementary schools (Greater Nanticoke Area SD) - \$27,738**

The partnership currently serves 50 children ages birth- five through its Parents as Teachers (PAT) home-visiting program and 38 preschool children through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. Through this grant, the partnership will serve all 140 children who will be entering kindergarten at KM Smith Elementary School in 2015-16 through a family-community engagement program using the PAT focus on family well-being, parent-child interaction and developmental-centered parenting. For example, the partnership will develop a My School My Community Passport, a comprehensive listing of recreational and cultural places, organizations and events in the community. Enrolled families may receive free tickets to family-fun events. The partnership would also like to extend the PAT approach through third grade. Through its Visitracker software, the partnership can document information on the demographics and activity with the families it serves. For children and families participating in the Family Center it also documents community resource connections made, family goal-setting progress, annual health screening completion, establishment of daily meal and bedtime routines, and DIBELS scores of children as they enter kindergarten. For more information on the Family Center, visit <http://teacherweb.com/pa/greaternanticokearea/familycenter/index.aspx>.

**Montgomery County - Pottstown School District, serving Barth, Franklin, Lincoln, Rupert Elementary Schools - \$75,000**

Pottstown School District has partnered with community early learning programs since 2006 through PEAK (Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness) initiative. PEAK will focus on strategic alignment of community early learning programs and the Pottstown School District in the areas of 1) social-emotional development birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 2) increased outreach and support to hard-to-reach families, and 3) partnerships with community agencies to implement trauma-informed practices related to both children and families.

To increase partnerships to implement trauma-informed practices, the Pottstown School District will partner with the Institute for Family Professionals to provide training for community early learning teachers focusing on the impact of trauma and stress in young children. A consultant will establish the Adverse Childhood Experiences Task Force that will include community leadership and agency representatives. The task force will enable Pottstown to use research on brain development, adversity and toxic stress in its work with children and families. For more information on PEAK, visit <http://www.peakonline.org>.

**Philadelphia County - Drexel University, serving Alain Locke, McMichael Morton, Samuel Powell, Martha Washington Elementary Schools (Philadelphia SD) - \$74,914**

The West Philadelphia Early Childhood Education Initiative (WPECE) is a Drexel-led collaboration of social services and education agencies and community stakeholders working to create an education support system for students and families in the 19104 zip code – primarily in the neighborhoods of Mantua, Powelton Village, West Powelton and Belmont. The initiative aims to build awareness around the importance of early childhood education; to strengthen the capacity of child care centers, Head Start and pre-k programs to support pre-k and K-3 instruction with a strong emphasis on literacy; and to more effectively link early childhood education centers to kindergarten programs to ensure a seamless transition so that children and parents are better prepared for kindergarten. Through this grant the partnership will extend programs in the critical areas of kindergarten transition and curricula alignment from child care through 3rd grade. Working directly with the District, the partnership will continue to collect, manage and analyze data such as the PSSA, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Kindergarten Entry Inventory, Kindergarten Parent Interviews, Open House attendance, Teacher Surveys; STAR levels and Environment Rating Scores for child care programs. For more information visit <http://www.drexel.edu/now/archive/2014/August/William-Penn-Grant-Childcare-Center/>.

**Philadelphia County - Parent Power (What Will You Do With Yours?), serving General George Meade Elementary School (Philadelphia SD) - \$73,316**

Parent Power is on a mission to organize and educate families and caregivers in North Central Philadelphia with the goal of preparing them to be strong advocates in the academic success of youth. In partnership with the Women’s Christian Alliance and Educational Advocates Reaching Today’s Hardworking Students, the partners hold monthly Family Nights and other community

activities, recruiting up to 40 family members to participate in each event. As part of this grant, Parent Power will create the Parent Leaders' Advisory Network (PLAN), to conduct train-the-trainer workshops with at least 25 family members who have actively participated in Family Night events. These family trainers will become facilitators and leaders of topics such as Grade Level Reading, Reinforcing Learning at Home, Cultural Sensitivity, and Navigating the School District. PLAN is parent-led and designed to help parents/caregivers who are active in their child's center and/or school to recognize their assets and develop personal and professional skills. The program, which empowers community residents to become parent/community leaders, provides real opportunities for neighborhood residents to participate in the design and delivery of school and early learning services. For more information on Parent Power, visit <http://parentpower.vpweb.com>.

**Venango County - Child Development Centers, Inc., serving Hasson Heights Elementary School (Oil City Area SD) - \$75,000**

In 2010, the Child Development Centers established a part-time school psychology program at its Oil City center. Using the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) Pyramid Model for promoting social-emotional development of infants and young children, the psychologist provides one-on-one support to teachers, families and children. The center also implemented the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) social-emotional curriculum. Some of the child outcomes include reduced aggression; improved problem-solving, attention, and communication and self-regulation skills. The program also greatly reduced the need for therapeutic support specialists who helped manage the children because of behavioral and other problems. Through this grant the partnership will expand and intensify the psychology program to serve children from the center who will attend Hasson Heights Elementary School. The goal is to intervene at an early stage so the children are better equipped to succeed when they start their elementary school education.