

SCHOOL READINESS

Promoting high quality early care and education so that all children will enter school ready to learn.

This Community Engagement Group report card provides an opportunity to communicate clearly on current levels of performance and continuous improvement over time for the United Way of Westmoreland County School Readiness.

School Readiness Goals

The United Way of Westmoreland County School Readiness proposes to obtain this objective by addressing the following goals:

- Enhance the quality of early childhood early care and education in Westmoreland county
- Help parents and the community to better understand the importance of high quality early care and education
- Support successful transitions to kindergarten through the collaborative efforts of early care and education practitioners and school districts.

Pa Pre K Counts

With the passing of the 2007-2008 state budget, the children of Pennsylvania were provided with an opportunity to participate in a program that would enable them to begin school ready to learn. Pa Pre-K Counts was established through out the state to provide quality early care and education to 11,000 children ages 3-5 who may be at risk of school failure due to low income.

“Every \$1 spent on high quality early education saves \$7 in reduced future expenditures for special education, delinquency, crime control, welfare and lost taxes.”
– United Way Success by 6

In Westmoreland County, Seton Hill Child Services was awarded the grant to provide services to 203 eligible children. Pa Pre-K Counts sites were established in Greensburg, Jeannette, Mt. Pleasant, Arnold, Ligonier and Youngwood.

An overwhelming majority of children who participated in the program ended the year with improved skills and behaviors according to year-end assessments:

- 58% increase in the number of children meeting targets for language and literacy skills
- 70% have achieved age appropriate skills and behaviors after participating in the program.
- 21% of the children participating progressed from having no age appropriate skills to have emerging or age-appropriate skills

“The children who participated in a Pa Pre-K Counts program will enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed and will carry this success throughout school and into their careers,” stated Governor Edward G. Rendell.

Month of the Young Child Activities

School Readiness and the Early Childhood Education Club of Westmoreland County Community College (WCCC) were proud to sponsor the first “Night of Books” held at the Youngwood campus. In collaboration with Beginning with Books, 150 children enjoyed an evening of reading and activities. WCCC Early Childhood Education majors planned the evening which included readings of several different children’s books including “Up, Down and Around,” the children’s book selected by the Pennsylvania Library Association as the “PA One Book” for children ages 3-5.

“Ninety percent of brain development occurs by the age of five.”
– PA Promise for Children



Rep. Pallone Reads and Celebrates the Month of the Young Child

Rep. John Pallone visited *All Kids Are Special Childcare and Learning Center* to read the PA One Book, *Up, Down and Around* as part of county wide celebrations during Month of the Young Child. Other elected officials visited various sites through out Westmoreland County.

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Quality Improvement Grants

In an effort to support early care and education practitioners in providing high quality services, School Readiness provided \$29,000 in grants to Westmoreland County practitioners. These grants were issued to meet the needs in very specific areas – professional development, curriculum and literacy. Professional development opportunities included staff trainings, college courses and participation in national, state and regional professional development conferences.

Curriculum grants were awarded for those providers looking to update their curriculum to be more in line with the state mandated Early Learning Standards. Some providers chose to supplement their current curriculum framework with addition in the area of science or health.

Literacy grants were made available for those sites wishing to increase the literacy opportunities in areas such as multi-cultural books, science or more age appropriate selections for infants and toddlers.

In addition to providing funding, School Readiness Advisory Board members visited sites submitting grant applications to review the identified need as well as provide ongoing support to local early care and education providers.

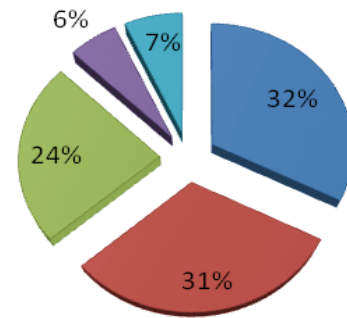
Keystone Stars Grows

Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources) provides families with a tool to gauge the quality of child care programs.

Westmoreland County Early Care Providers

102 Providers

■ Start w/STARS ■ STAR Level 1 ■ STAR Level 2
■ STAR Level 3 ■ STAR Level 4



The STARS program supports childcare programs in the commitment to continuous quality improvement. Programs may enter Keystone STARS at the "Start with STARS" level and earn a STAR 1 through STAR 4 rating using research-based standards those measure areas that make a difference in the quality of care a child receives."

Since inception of School Readiness, over 102 early care providers have participated in the Keystone Stars program. Of those, seven have attained STAR 4 status.

Children at Risk in Our County

19,000+

Current population of children Under 5 in Westmoreland County

35%

Percentage of children living with families of low-income status

53%

Percentage of single mother headed families with children under 5 and are living below the poverty level.

Source: OCDEL, Program Reach & County Risk Assessment 6/07



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Sixth Annual Transition Retreat

School Readiness hosted the Sixth Annual Transition Retreat on June 20th at Saint Vincent College. The event was attended by fifteen school districts from Westmoreland, Fayette and Greene County along with staff members from twenty-two early care and education facilities. Dr. Victoria ENT, Chair of the Education Department at Saint Vincent, welcomed the audience.

The focus of the day was working with school district teams to develop a plan for providing seamless transition to kindergarten. Rita Catalano, Associate Director of the center, provided a tour of the Fred Rogers Center for Literacy and Children's Media. "The Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media is a national program that provides leadership to advance best practices on childhood development and media for children in the tradition of children's television pioneer, Fred Rogers." It was appropriate that our transition teams visit this site to reaffirm our commitment to quality early childhood education.



"I have participated 5 years in the United Way School Readiness Retreats. I believe that these effective transition teams have a beneficial impact on incoming kindergarten students by providing meaningful learning opportunities and collaboration between school district kindergarten teachers, administrators, and local child care providers." – Cindy Patton, Reading Specialist

The 150 participants collaborated together to design and plan quality transition activities. Evaluations completed by participants indicated a general consensus of excitement over the transition plans that were begun that day.

Now, is our most important step - implementation of these plans. These pertinent transition activities designed by our transition teams will affect 3,185 incoming kindergarten students for the 2008-09 school year. We must continue to pursue our long term investment in building the bridge between child care providers, parents, community and school districts to sustain our goal that *"all children will enter school ready to learn"*.

Transition Teams for 2008-2009

This coming year we anticipate a record number (15) of school districts having active transition teams.

Albert Gallatin (Fayette County)
Belle Vernon
Derry Area
Franklin Regional
Greater Latrobe
Greensburg Salem
Hempfield
Jeannette
Jefferson Morgan (Greene County)
Kiski
Ligonier Valley
Monesson
Mt. Pleasant
New Kensington Arnold
Norwin

Pre-K and Child Care Advocacy Activities

Westmoreland

68 verified letters sent to Westmoreland legislators
4 "potential champion" legislators identified
2 Roundtables with Westmoreland Federal Legislators
28 Senate Colleagues received letters of support from one Westmoreland Legislator
1 Legislative Breakfast in Westmoreland County

Southwest PA (including Westmoreland)

41 Meetings with legislators (of 48 in SW PA)
60 additional tracked and documented legislative office visits in Southwest PA
2 Roundtables with Southwest PA Federal Legislators

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