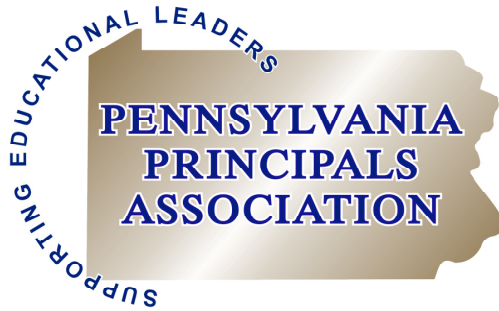


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***** EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 20 *****

PA Principals Association, Early Learning Advocates Urge Support for Substantial Investments in High-Quality Pre-k

Report Highlights Need for State to Close Opportunity Gap

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Harrisburg, PA (September 20, 2017)—Nearly 99 percent of elementary school principals agree that publicly funded, high-quality pre-k is an important tool for preparing children for kindergarten, particularly those at risk, according to a report released today by the PA Principals Association in partnership with the statewide Pre-K for PA campaign.

“Elementary School Principals Resoundingly Support Pre-K Investments” details findings of a recent statewide survey of elementary school principals to better understand their perception of high-quality pre-k and its importance in building the foundation necessary for children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

According to the report, more than 97 percent of elementary school principals in the Commonwealth strongly agree or agree that additional state investments in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k should be made. They join an ever-growing list of supporters who have articulated strong support for state funding increases in pre-k, which also includes governors and legislators from both sides of the aisle, business and education leaders, law enforcement officials, high-ranking military officers, pediatricians and world-class athletes.

In addition, principals, who are on the frontline of delivering quality education, reported they can easily distinguish between those students who attended high-quality pre-k and those who missed this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

“When a child enters kindergarten unable to recognize some letters and numbers, complete a puzzle, or lacks other skills that can set that child on a path to succeed in school, that child is at an unfair disadvantage,” said Dr. Paul Healey, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Principals Association.

“Principals face challenges leveling the playing field to ensure that child can reach his or her full potential. If every child who needs it had access to high-quality pre-k, we would see fewer children struggling or needing special education or remediation. We would see more self-confident children who love education as much as we do.”

Responses to the survey were received from a diverse group of rural, suburban and urban school principals who are responsible for educating nearly 60 percent of elementary students statewide. They reported improvements in age-appropriate behaviors and the ability to reach academic milestones in students who attended high-quality pre-k.

Their perceptions confirm research that shows that high-quality pre-k is especially beneficial for children from low-income families, helping put them at the same starting line as their more economically advantaged peers by the time they start school.

However, approximately 64 percent or 2 in 3 eligible preschoolers don’t have the opportunity to attend publicly funded, high-quality pre-k. As a result, many children entered kindergarten this fall at a disadvantage.

“Too many children at risk of school failure miss the opportunity to attend high-quality publicly funded pre-kindergarten. Pre-k works! Decades of research has proven it and this survey adds the validation of Pennsylvania’s elementary principals to the value of the public investment,” said Joan Benso, President and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a founding member of the Pre-K for PA Campaign.

Benso noted Pennsylvania ranks 20th in its per capita investment in high-quality pre-k when compared to the 27 states and the District of Columbia with publicly funded, high-quality programs. The unmet need is felt sharply in every community: nearly 420 of Pennsylvania’s 500 school districts enroll a kindergarten class where 40 percent or more children eligible for publicly funded, high-quality pre-k miss this opportunity, according to the report.

The Pre-K for PA Campaign’s goal is to increase the investments needed to close the opportunity gap and ensure every child enjoys enriching learning experiences that prepare them for school to include an additional \$310 million in state funding for pre-k by 2022, and the Commonwealth should also take steps to improve affordability for middle-class parents, because no child should miss out on quality pre-k due to the financial pressures facing families up and down the income scale.

“Elementary School Principals Resoundingly Support Pre-K Investments” can be found at www.papprincipals.org or www.prekforpa.org.

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