

Spring 2010 Newsletter

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PA PIRC (Pennsylvania Parent Information & Resource Center) Director's Letter

President Obama's fiscal year 2011 proposed budget eliminates funding for all 62 Parent Information and Resource Centers across the United States and its territories. Funding for the centers this year totaled \$39.3 million. The administration's proposal consolidates five programs under the general heading, Expanding Educational Options, and provides funding for two new programs: Supporting Effective Charter Schools and Promoting Public School Choice. The first program would enable state education agencies, charter school authorizers, charter support and management organizations, along with other nonprofit organizations to compete for funds to plan, open and/or expand charter schools or other "autonomous schools." The second program would enable local education agencies (LEAs) individually or in a consortium to compete for funds "to increase the range of high-quality educational options for students, especially for those attending the lowest performing schools. The options would include "inter-and intra-district choice programs, academic pathways and online learning programs." Parent involvement efforts, many of which are now

conducted by the PIRCs, would become required components of the new projects funded by this program.

In the event that the aforementioned proposal is approved, PA PIRC's funding would cease as of September 30, 2011. In the meantime, regardless of what the future holds, the PA PIRC staff will continue its efforts to inform parents of their rights and responsibilities under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, help prepare our youngest learners to transition smoothly to kindergarten and work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education as well as PIRC's partner organizations to strengthen parent involvement in their children's education.

All the best,



Mark S. Lewis, Ed.D.
PA PIRC Director



PA PIRC Team (l to r): Dr. Mark Lewis, Karen Martin, Karen Shanoski, Becky Blue, Becky Leiter.

Focus on Academic Socialization to Address Middle Level Parent Involvement Challenges

By Mark S. Lewis, Ed.D.,
PA PIRC Director

If you have a child in middle school, you know the challenge of staying involved in his or her education. Many circumstances combine at this stage to make it more difficult to do so. Some of them have to do with the more complex structure of the middle school. Parents must communicate with many more teachers at this level than they did in the elementary school. Some of the difficulty has to do with the children themselves. Adolescence is a time when children start to gain a sense of independence. Often when this occurs children try to distance themselves from their parents as they seek to create their own identity. As a result of these circumstances, some parents lower their involvement in their children's education once they reach middle school. They do this at a time when their children need their involvement more than ever.

So what should parents do? Instead of reducing their involvement, parents need to change how they are involved. Nancy Hill and Diana Tyson, Harvard researchers, emphasize that parent involvement at the middle level should focus on strengthening middle school children's decision-making skills. In addition, parents need to find every opportunity to communicate their expectations to their children regarding education and its value to their children's future prosperity and success. Hill and Tyson (2009) call this *academic socialization*¹.

Academic socialization, according to Hill and Tyson (2009), is the process directed at middle school students that enables them to understand the connection between their current school work and achievement of their future goals. Parents play an essential role in their children's academic socialization. In fact, there are four key parental behaviors that determine whether or not middle level students become academically socialized.

They are as follows:

1. Emphasize and communicate what you, as parents, expect from children in terms of success in the classroom:

Certainly every parent wants his/her child to do his/her best in school. However, parents need to be more precise in communicating their expectations to their children. In other words, if parents want their children to do well in school, they need to tell them that directly. A comment as simple as the following would be all that is needed, "I cannot emphasize greatly enough the connection between what you are doing in school and your achievement of your goals beyond graduation. I want you to do well in school; I expect you to do well. I will support you in every possible way." Statements incorporating these sentiments need to become a regular part of your communication with your child.

2. Link school work to current events:

Parents should find every opportunity to make connections between what their children are studying in school and events occurring in their world beyond the classroom. This helps students understand the relevance of their school work to their lives in general. Making school work relevant to a child's life increases his or her motivation to learn.

3. Foster educational and occupational aspirations:

Parents should discuss with their children what they would like to do once they graduate from high school. Parents can reinforce and strengthen their children's ability to reach their goals by providing supplemental educational experiences for them. Taking children on field trips, giving them books that interest them and enrolling them in supplemental classes whose subject matter interests them (not remedial classes) are three strategies to strengthen children's aspirations about their post graduation goals.



4. Discuss learning strategies with children:

Research indicates that helping children with their homework does not always improve their school performance. In fact, it can be a frustrating, negative venture for both the student and his/her parents. Instead of directly assisting children with their homework, parents could discuss learning strategies that equip the children with the ability to discover on their own the resources and strategies that they need to complete assigned tasks completely and accurately.

Parents, for example, might discuss with their child what additional resources they might access to help them in completing the work, what portion of the textbook they might need to review, and what questions they might list to discuss with their teachers during the next day's homework review. These three types of parent involvement are strong contributors to developing academic socialization within children. Parents should use these strategies on a regular basis. They are effective means of motivating their children to do their best in school. They also assist with their children's quest to become more independent—a naturally emerging phenomenon during the middle school years. They also increase children's motivation for school work. Academic socialization contributes to the overall chances for success for children both within the school setting and beyond.

¹ Hill, N. and Tyson, D. *Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies that Promote Achievement. Developmental Psychology* 45:3 (2009). Pp. 740-763.

Transition to Kindergarten

By Becky Blue
PA PIRC Early Childhood and Family
Development Program Manager

Do you remember your first day of school? Remember learning to spell your full name, memorizing your phone number and home address? Did Mom or Dad help you learn to tie, button and zip your clothing? Did someone walk you to school that first day or did you get on a school bus for the first time?

When my children were getting ready to enter school, I talked to friends and neighbors about the basic skills that they would be expected to have on the day they walked through the doors of the school. I read in the local paper the date and location for kindergarten registration, along with information about what I needed to bring such as birth certificate, shot record, proof of residence, etc. As my mother had done with me, I took my children shopping for new "first day of school" clothes.

Most of us have vivid memories, both positive and negative, about those first school experiences because it was a momentous day in our lives. In fact, transitioning from home or a preschool setting to the kindergarten classroom is a major event in the lives of most children and their families.

Sue Dockett and Bob Perry in their research note that "Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners vis-vis schools. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of the school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners."¹

So how do parents and professionals foster a climate in which children and families develop a positive view of school and children enter school feeling competent as learners? The National Center for Early Development & Learning states, "...the transition period involves not only how children adjust to kindergarten but also how families and schools interact and cooperate.

It is not just the child who makes a transition. Families are also involved in the transition, and to best use family resources for a child's education requires attention to how schools and families can form partnerships during this transition period. "...this transition period is a critical time for building partnerships between schools and families that can support children's progress."²

Clearly, families, schools and early care and education providers share the responsibility to ensure successful transition. While the following table is by no means complete, it offers ideas for families, school staff and community organization staff to try.

Families Can:

- Read to children every day, visit the library regularly and provide writing materials to children.
- Play "turn taking" games together so that children learn how to follow directions and share.
- Give children opportunities to play with other children their ages.
- Provide nutritious meals.
- Establish healthy sleep routines. Practice going to bed on time.
- Keep children healthy through regular checkups.
- Offer ample time for physical exercise and creative play.
- Limit television, computer, and other electronic media usage.
- Allow children to develop self-help skills through activities such as putting on and taking off outdoor clothing, bathrooming, and cleaning up after themselves.
- Be positive. Show excitement about what children will be learning and experiencing.
- Discuss children's concerns about school. Assure them that caring adults will be there to help them.
- Assure children that toys, friends, pets, and family will be waiting at the end of the day.
- Visit the school, classroom, lunchroom, playground, and bathroom before the school year starts.
- Take children to meet teachers, the principal and other school staff before the first day of school.
- Review how children will get to and from school, practicing the route if possible.

Schools Can:

- Offer parents information about school readiness, including cognitive, physical and social/emotional readiness and the important role of parents in children's school readiness.
- Communicate transition events and timelines with families well before the school year begins.
- Conduct family and early care and education provider group meetings and address transition concerns.
- Meet with families and early care and education staff regarding incoming students.
- Invite families and preschool classrooms to visit school and meet teachers and staff.
- Promote family participation in school events.
- Conduct summer programs for incoming kindergarten students.
- Provide home literacy activities.
- Offer school playground nights.
- Conduct kindergarten screenings.

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SPAC's Parent Resource Center Requests Skyrocket

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV houses a parent resource center that distributes information to Title I families about such topics as attitude and motivation, parent and community involvement, Title I program resources, child safety, parents in the military, and helping children learn. Title I parents can request a single copy of up to ten free booklets that might help them to discuss important issues with their kids.

Parents have two ways of accessing the resource center order forms. At least once each year, the Intermediate Unit sends a memo and order form to each Local Education Agency, or parents can download a form on the PA State Parent Advisory Council (SPAC) web site, www.spac.k12.pa.us.

During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, SPAC sent more than 50,000 booklets and brochures to Title I parents in Pennsylvania.



Transition to Kindergarten

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Early Care and Education Providers Can:

- Conduct regular developmental and health screenings; refer children as appropriate and encourage parents to follow up as needed.
- Meet with schools regarding children who will be entering kindergarten.
- Schedule family/child visits to schools.
- Offer family/child events such as playground nights, story times, make-it/take-it activities in school facilities.
- Share school calendar of events with families and encourage attendance.
- Notify families of kindergarten registration schedules.
- Take children on “field trips” that require walking or riding a bus to off-site locations.
- Host meetings with parents and school staff about transition.
- Provide families with information about what to expect in kindergarten and similarities and differences between kindergarten and early care and education.
- Encourage peer networking among parents.
- Listen to parent concerns and assure them that their anxiousness is normal.
- Develop a plan for transferring children’s records to the school district.

To find out more about the development of preschool-aged children, check out the Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood. These standards provide parents, schools and community organizations with a comprehensive set of guidelines for child development and school readiness and offer recommendations for supporting development. This document can be viewed on the PA Key web site at www.pakey.org. Information is provided on their web site for those interested in ordering the Learning Standards.

¹ Dockett, Sue and Perry, Bob. “Starting School: Effective Transitions.” *Early Childhood and Research Practice* Volume 3, Issue 2 (2001). University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Education. <<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/dockett.html>>.

² *Transition to Kindergarten*. Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs Volume 2, Number 2 (2002). National Institute on Early Childhood Development & Education. <<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/NCEDL/PDFS/TranBrief.pdf>>.

Resources to Assist You in Times of Stress

Parents who can cope with the stresses of everyday life, as well as an occasional crisis, have resilience; they have the flexibility and inner strength necessary to bounce back when things are not going well. Parents with resilience are generally able to cope on their own, but they also know how to seek help in times of trouble. Their ability to deal with life’s ups and downs serves as a model of coping behavior for their children.

Multiple life stressors, such as a family history of abuse or neglect, physical and mental health problems, marital conflict, substance abuse, and domestic or community violence—and financial stressors such as unemployment, financial insecurity, and homelessness—may reduce a parent’s capacity to cope effectively with the typical day-to-day stresses of raising children.

All parents have inner strengths or resources that can serve as a foundation for building their resilience. These may include faith, flexibility, humor, communication skills, problem-solving skills, mutually supportive caring relationships, or the ability to identify and access outside resources and services when needed. All of these strengthen the capacity to parent effectively, and they can be nurtured and developed through concrete skill-building activities or through supportive interactions with others. In addition, community services that help families in crisis include mental health programs, substance abuse treatment, family and marital counseling, and special education and treatment programs for children with special needs.

It is important to know where to turn when you do need supports. Often family members and neighbors, co-workers and/or your faith community provide the extra supports that help you “bounce back”. But occasionally we all might need to turn to other resources in our communities. For families with children in school, some of the most informed sources of help are school counselors, social workers and/or nurses. These professionals welcome



your request for assistance or direction. Following are some web sites that provide access to services that might be useful when finances are tight or in times of other stress.

Check the state web site to find a service near you:

http://www.heretohelp.pa.gov/portal/server.pt/community/here_to_help/5068

To find public agencies go to:

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/>

- Child Care Information Services
- County Assistance Office
- Employment and Training
- Office of Children Youth and Families

To learn about health services go to:

http://www.portal.health.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department_of_health_home/17457

Also the Community Action Agencies have a statewide web site that will help you find local resources:

<http://www.thecaap.org/>

Adapted from Strengthening Families and Communities 2009 Resource Guide
www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/

PSSA Testing on the Schedule this Spring

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the federal law also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It requires all states to establish challenging academic assessments based on academic standards also established by the state. In Pennsylvania, the assessment is called the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). It measures the degree to which students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 meet these standards.

- Every Pennsylvania student in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11 is assessed in reading and math.
- Every Pennsylvania student in grades 4, 8 and 11 is assessed in science.
- Every Pennsylvania student in grades 5, 8 and 11 is assessed in writing.

Standards are public statements about what students should know and be able to do at a certain grade level. Academic standards help schools select teaching materials such as text books, help teachers coordinate what is taught in different classrooms and serve as measures to determine if students are on target to graduate.

The law dictates that all students reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014. While all students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 are tested, accommodations are made for some students based on their learning needs and abilities. Parents may request testing accommodations for their children such as increasing the length of time to take the test or having them take the test in a less distracting environment.

Parents should follow up with their children's teachers to determine whether or not they qualify for accommodations. Parents may also request their children to be exempt from taking the test if it conflicts with their religious beliefs. Accommodations for English Language Learners (ELL) are determined by appropriate school personnel. Students with severe disabilities could be eligible to take the Pennsylvania Alternate School Assessment (PASA).

This year all PSSA Tests will take place between March 15th and April 15th. The reports will be received by the schools, and then made available to the students and parents, usually in the early fall. Check your school calendar to know what to expect for your child.

Schools must report to parents how well the students perform on these tests. It is important to review the results and if it appears that your child may need supports to master the basics (or require enrichment opportunities that deepen understanding and increase abilities if he or she performs well on the tests), don't hesitate to consult your child's teacher.

PA PIRC 2010 Training and Event Schedule

March

March 22-26
PAT P-3 Training
Doubletree
Monroeville, PA

April

April 7
PCHP Eastern Regional Meeting
Holiday Inn Conference Center
Allentown, PA

April 13
PCHP Western Regional Meeting
Four Points Sheraton
Cranberry, PA

May

May 20-21
PAT 3-K Training
Atherton Hotel
State College, PA

June

June 21-25
PAT P-3 Training
Location to be determined

11 Ways to Help Your Child Prepare for Tests

To help your child prepare adequately for tests (whether teacher-made or standardized), you can do several things to provide support and create a positive test-taking experience.

1. The best way to prepare for tests is to study, know the work, and take the right courses.
2. If your child is nervous at test time, ask his or her teacher for tips on helping him or her relax.
3. Make sure that your child is in school during the testing sessions. Do not plan any doctor or dental appointments on test dates.
4. Make sure that you are aware of your child's performance and that you can help interpret the results when they become available.
5. Remember to keep well-informed about your child's tests. Know how test results are used, and how they will affect your child's placement in school.
6. If there are major differences between standardized test scores and school grades, find out why.
7. Encourage your child to study over a period of time rather than "cram" the night before.
8. Encourage your child to listen carefully to all test-taking directions given by the teacher and to ask questions about any directions that are unclear.
9. See that your child is well rested and gets a good night's sleep the night before each test.
10. Make sure that your child eats a nutritional breakfast on the day of the test. Hunger can detract from a good test performance.
11. Encourage your child to do his/her best.

Adapted from the American School Counselor Association web site:
<http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-testing/teaching-methods/37499.html>

It's Census Time: America Counts its People

The US Census counts every resident of the United States. It is done every ten years as required by the US Constitution. This year, 2010, is a census year. In March, the Census Bureau will mail a short, ten-question form to every household in America. The law requires all who receive the form to complete it for every person living at that address. The deadline for completing the form is April 1, 2010. A prepaid envelope is included with the form to expedite the process. Every address that does not mail back the form will be visited by a census taker whose job it is to obtain the responses.

The questions on the census form are simple. They ask for information such as name, sex, age, date of birth, race, whether you own or rent your home, whether or not you are of Hispanic origin, and the relationship of those living at the address. The census does not ask about the legal status of those living at the address, nor does it ask for their Social Security numbers. Before your household receives a mailed form, phone call or visit from a census taker, you will be given a few days notice with a letter from the Census Bureau Director. If you do not have a permanent address, you should report where you live and sleep most of the time. Forms are available in six languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian and Vietnamese. English/Spanish bilingual forms will be mailed to areas with large numbers of Spanish-only households.

It is important that you fill in the form and mail it back promptly. Census information affects the number of seats our state occupies in the US House of Representatives. In addition, the information collected by the census helps to determine how \$400 billion federal dollars are spent each year. That's \$4 trillion between 2011 and 2020 (the year of the next census) to send to communities to build hospitals, schools, job training centers, senior centers and bridges, tunnels and other public works projects.

For more information, visit www.census.gov or call 800-923-8282.

Advocacy... Parents are the Most Powerful Voice for our Children

*By Michele Morrow, President
Pennsylvania PTA*

As citizens, it is our duty to elect individuals to represent us at various governing levels, including local school boards, city councils and township boards as well as in Harrisburg and in Washington. Our hope is that these elected officials make choices that are in our best interest – and in the best interest of our children. Decisions are made on budgets and policies that directly affect the education our children receive. But how many of these officials hear from us to know what it is we want them to support? Do we even know their names?

As parents, we are the most powerful voice the kids have. It is our right, and our duty, to be in contact with those we elect to office. Let us start at the beginning. We should be having conversations with

these individuals *before* they are elected to office. We should be asking those seeking election where they stand on issues that will affect our kids, and find out how high on the priority list public education ranks for them.

Pennsylvania is very fortunate to have a governor that has been at the forefront of education. Governor Rendell has made it very well known that public education is his priority. In the months ahead, exercise your right as a citizen, and especially as parents, by learning where the candidates stand. Let's make sure we all make educated decisions and elect educated and informed individuals — individuals that represent us, our children and public education, so that all children get the education they deserve.

PA PIRC Welcomes Caroline Allen

Caroline Allen, is the new PA PIRC Family-School-Community Partnerships Coordinator, replacing Karen Martin who relocated with her husband to Reno, Nevada. Caroline is the Immediate Past President of the Pennsylvania PTA and is a member of the National PTA's legislative committee. Her other affiliations include the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Girl Scouts. Caroline and her husband of 26 years have a son, 20, and a daughter, 16. Among her many PA PIRC responsibilities, Caroline will provide support for the Solid Foundation Action Teams and contribute to the development of the Working Together for Student Success series.

In other staff news, Becky Leiter, Early Childhood Coordinator, recently accepted the position of Juniata County Head Start Director.



*Caroline Allen
New PA PIRC
Staff Member*

Thinking about College? Visit www.college.gov

www.college.gov is being built by the United States Department of Education in collaboration with students. This site is intended to be the go-to source for information and resources about planning, preparing and paying for postsecondary education (such as 2- or 4-year colleges and universities, as well as vocational or career schools).

Most importantly, [college.gov](http://www.college.gov) is intended to provide inspiration and hope to all students, and encourage them to consider and pursue a postsecondary education.

In building this site, students were asked what information was most useful as they looked ahead toward college. Over time, this site will continue to evolve, and you can help influence that process by visiting the contact page to submit questions, suggestions and feedback.

college.gov Resources and Materials:

college.gov Promotional Videos

Watch or download these 3- or 7-minute student videos to learn more about college.gov.

<http://ifap.ed.gov/ifapMedia.jsp>

Watch “I’m Going” PSAs and Download Materials

Watch Public Service Announcements with real stories about students getting money for college, and download PSAs, posters and flyers.

<http://www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov/psa2009/index.html>

Ordering college.gov Materials

Please visit <http://fsapubs.org> to order college.gov materials. If you do not already have an Institution ID (OPE/ML) please call: 1-800-394-7084 or e-mail orders@FSAPubs.org for assistance.

Press Inquiries

Reporters and education writers may contact the U.S. Department of Education press office by phone at 202-401-1576 or by mail at: U.S. Department of Education Press Office, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, 7E-247 Washington, DC 20202

college.gov Teacher Toolkit

Download the college.gov Teacher Toolkit for ideas and activities to introduce students to college.gov and help them start believing they are college material.

For More Information

Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center (PA PIRC) helps parents take a leading role in their children’s learning. PA PIRC provides families with information about school readiness and student success, and helps schools welcome families and community members as active and effective partners in student achievement.

For more information on this and other educational topics, contact:

PA PIRC
275 Grandview Ave.
Suite 200
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717-763-1661
www.center-school.org/pa-pirc

Powerful Partnerships for Successful Students

Families, Schools & Communities Working Together

Solid Foundation Program® Working in 90 Pennsylvania Schools

Fruitful parent engagement is the destination. Navigating the way is the hard part. Solid Foundation provides a road map.

Solid Foundation® is an evidence-based process designed to:

- Strengthen family-school connections,
- Engage parents in children’s learning, and
- Improve student academic and social learning.

The Solid Foundation model enables the school to put in place a first-class parental involvement program, with all the

evidence-based components of a strong school community. A School Community Council, comprised of the principal, teachers, and parents, is responsible for implementing the model, meeting twice each month and following the field-tested, well-structured agendas in the Planning Guide.

The Solid Foundation computerized data and documentation system provides careful tracking of progress and generates progress reports useful in school improvement plans and proposals for funding. The ten steps of Solid Foundation’s Path 1 and Path 2 integrate

easily with other parent involvement frameworks.

PA PIRC has worked with 90 schools in Pennsylvania to introduce and implement Solid Foundation Path 2 within their school communities. This school year 30 school teams in Pennsylvania are in the process of completing the second survey and planning process, and nearly 40 school teams are actively implementing their action plans.

Solid Foundation® is designed by Academic Development Institute



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