

helping schools excel | helping children learn

## BCIU Supports High Quality Early Childhood Education Statewide Through the Pennsylvania Key

The Pennsylvania Key works with the state's Office of Child Development & Early Learning (OCDEL) to provide leadership in the development of an integrated coordinated system of program quality improvements and professional development supports for early childhood education statewide.

Created by the BCIU in 2005, the PA Key is committed to providing quality learning opportunities for the state's children and their families by creating a system of outreach, support, and resources for early childhood and school-age educators and their programs. The PA Key reports to the BCIU's Office of Professional Development and Curriculum and often works closely with the departments of Human Resources, Business,

Information Technology, and Public Relations.

Fifty-five staff members work to fulfill the PA Key's mission, symbolized by the agency's motto of "Unlocking Excellence in Early Education." Together they focus primarily on supporting the OCDEL's early childhood education framework, especially in maintaining education standards and community engagement and outreach.

Many PA Key staff members work throughout the state from a home office, the better to serve programs and practitioners within their local communities. The rest of the team works in the PA Key's administrative office in Harrisburg, close to the Department of Education and OCDEL.

**Quality Early Education Benefits Children, Families and Communities**

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts | Keystone STARS | Child Care Works | Early Intervention | Head Start | Nurse-Family Partnership

**Benefits to communities**

**Increased tax base**  
Communities receive more tax revenues as citizens earn more

**Quality workforce**  
Businesses can hire skilled employees- new industries enter PA with quality jobs

**School savings**  
Schools save on special education costs

**School readiness**  
Children come to school with pre-academic and social skills for kindergarten

**Taxpayer savings**  
Every dollar invested in quality early education saves \$7 in public costs like public assistance and crime control


**Financial Stability**  
Children are more likely to have higher earnings and own a home as adults

**School success**  
Children are more likely to graduate high school, attend college or career training

**Quality of life**  
Children are less likely to commit crimes or need public assistance as adults

**Benefits to children**

*For a brighter future*



**Pennsylvania's Promise for Children | [www.papromiseforchildren.com](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com)**



### **PA Key Helps Early Care Centers Maintain Education Standards**

When parents look for an early childhood education program, many look for an early care center's Keystone STARS rating. STARS is an acronym for Standards, Training/professional development, Assistance, Resources, and Support. A center's STARS rating (from STAR 1 to STAR 4) shows parents that a center follows OCDEL research-based best practices.

PA Key staff members assist child care providers in meeting and maintaining STARS and other education standards of the Keystone STARS program, as well as the standards of two other nationally recognized PA early childhood education programs: PA Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. Local residents are fortunate that the BCIU has chosen to offer all three of these programs in Berks County. More than 5,000 child care and early care centers in the state participate in Keystone STARS, and 318 agencies and other partners are a part of PA Pre-K Counts. A total of 175,000 children in Pennsylvania are served by these programs.

### **PA Key: Team-Based Assistance**

PA Key staff members are divided into four teams. The 20-member Environment Rating Scales Assessment Team conducts approximately 1,800 assessments in STARS 3 and 4 and Pre-K Counts classrooms each year. Assessors also hold workshops on the use of the tools and have presented 338 workshops to 5,602 practitioners since July 1, 2008.

The Preschool Specialists Team works with PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Classrooms providing monitoring, professional development, and support to implement these programs' high standards. This 17-

member team also staffs the Head Start Collaboration office and works on developing partnerships and supports throughout the early childhood education system.

Thirteen PA Key staff members make up the Community Initiative Team and help manage the early childhood education professional development and technical assistance systems in collaboration with OCDEL and Early Intervention. This includes staffing the professional development calendar and helpline, which averages 800 calls a month.

This team also coordinates the certification of center directors and instructors who offer early childhood education professional development, as well as the tuition reimbursement voucher system that reimburses teachers for college courses. The BCIU's Office of Business Services coordinates the vouchers and already has approved 1,200 vouchers this fiscal year.

In addition to the systems support, the PA Key is responsible for the coordination of other programs or initiatives, including school-age professional development, Mind in the Making, Ages and Stages, and the Race Matters and early childhood mental health initiatives.

### **Engagement and Public Outreach**

Five PA Key staff members work to ensure that the public understands the benefits that result when children attend a high quality early education program. The Community Outreach Team coordinates PA's Promise for Children, a statewide campaign to increase public awareness and to convince residents that everyone shares responsibility for providing our youngest citizens with quality early learning opportunities.

In addition, the PA Key coordinates the Early Learning Investment Commission, a 25-member group of business leaders appointed by the governor, which works for increased public investment in early childhood education. PA Key staff members also provide technical assistance and support to 58 Community Engagement Groups that build support networks in each county for organizations and individuals interested in quality early childhood education.

The benefits of high-quality early care education to Pennsylvania's children, families, and communities are indisputable, and the PA Key is committed to making that education accessible to all of the commonwealth's children.

For more information on the PA Key program, contact Gail Nourse, director, at 717- 213-2065 or via e-mail at [gainou@berksiu.org](mailto:gainou@berksiu.org).