



Start Early. Reach Higher.



# Creating a Comprehensive Community Early Learning System

## Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness



A collaboration that included Pottstown School District, community childcare providers and area funders began discussions in 2006 focused on improving the readiness of children entering kindergarten. Working together during a year-long planning process, the collaboration created the outline for the Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK) initiative with the ultimate goal of ensuring that **all children in Pottstown have access to early childhood learning opportunities that prepare them to be successful in kindergarten.**

Beginning with the original **five community partner sites which had 13 classes serving 204 three and four year old children**, PEAK started implementing the key strategy areas of community outreach, family engagement, quality improvement, health/wellness and kindergarten transition. With a goal of impacting all young children and families in the community, PEAK reached out to other settings serving children in the subsequent years. New partners were added by working with community agencies to emphasize the importance of quality early education to the local community.

Funding has increased through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts which now serves **160 community children in free full-day classrooms located at the community partner programs.** PEAK also receives funding from Pottstown Area Health &

Wellness Foundation, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, Foundation for Pottstown Education, PNC Foundation and W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

The PEAK initiative served as the **video case study for the Early Childhood Leadership Development** curriculum developed by the National Institute for School Leadership. The curriculum is used throughout the Commonwealth and other states to improve local collaboration and practices related to quality early education. The PEAK video case study is an integral part of the five-day institute and highlights PEAK as a model for other communities.

PEAK was also featured in a study by the McCormick Foundation looking at alignment between early education and school district programs. The researchers looked at three areas of North America: Pennsylvania, Hawaii, and Ontario, Canada. PEAK was selected to serve as the **study for Pennsylvania and featured in the report published in 2013: From Birth to Graduation and Beyond: Aligning Best Practices in Educational Systems to Improve Learning Outcomes.**

With a mission that **all children entering kindergarten will be ready to learn and achieve**, PEAK works to raise the quality of early education provided to all of the children in the community, whether in formal or informal settings and to provide support to the families to be the child's first teacher. PEAK continues to expand and deepen the impact of the initiative in Pottstown to revitalize the community through a comprehensive early learning system.

Pottstown School District began a strategic review of its current programs and services related to early childhood

## PEAK

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continued



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education in 2014. Funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation helped implement a community engagement and outreach process to identify key values and assess the current needs of Pottstown families. The six-month outreach process culminated in four community forums, led by Penn Project for Civic Engagement, in which parents with children from Pre-K through 3rd grade discussed what they needed to support their child's education. Pottstown was awarded the Early Childhood Education Community Innovation Zone grant which addresses many of the findings from the community outreach process. In addition, the district has recently submitted a three-year implementation grant to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to address the issues that families raised.

Pottstown School District and the community partners share a common vision of using education as a tool of community revitalization. **PEAK is having a positive impact on children which is sustained as the children move into the elementary grades.** PEAK is impacting not only the readiness of children entering kindergarten, but also supporting and providing resources to families with young children; helping to increase the instructional skills and credentials of teachers in community-based settings; providing early screenings, health/wellness activities and behavioral support; and smoothing the transition to kindergarten for children and families.

Strong community partnerships are essential to the continued success of PEAK and positive change in Pottstown. With the mission of **"All Pottstown children will enter kindergarten ready to learn and achieve,"** PEAK will continue to seek new partnerships to improve the readiness of all children and to impact families. By working together to build a comprehensive quality early learning system, the entire community reaps the benefits of a better educated work force, more successful students and families who are stable and engaged in the educational process.

**“ This is a splendid example of a community seeking to ensure that every 3 and 4-year-old has the maximum opportunity for real school readiness. How fortunate you are in Pottstown to have such leadership and commitment. ”**

**David Lawrence, Jr., Executive Director,  
Children's Movement of Florida**

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