

Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

The Universities Children's Policy Collaborative (UCPC) served as the primary evaluator for PA BUILD from March 2004 and through November 2004. The evaluation covered activities from August 2003 to November 2004. The evaluation focused on identifying how participation in the national BUILD initiative impacted the development of a comprehensive early learning system in PA. Primary BUILD activities included for review in the evaluation included the Education Accountability Block Grant, child care rate policy changes, the creation of Early Learning Standards, amendments to the design of Community Planning Grants for early care and education, Head Start Supplemental Grants, amendments to the design of Keystone Stars, Professional Development Forums, changes to the PA Pathways training system, and several academies through the Governor's Institutes for Learning.

The evaluation methodology consisted of attendance at two Early Learning Team meetings, participation in community BUILD activities as a participant-observer, and completion of a set of telephone interviews with a diverse array of early care and education leaders (6 ECE providers, 3 school district personnel, 3 higher education faculty, 2 staff from intermediate units, 2 staff from government, 2 health care providers, 1 advocacy organization, 1 early intervention provider, 1 staff person from Head Start, and 2 staff from other organizations). Four of the interviewees had not participated in any of the PA BUILD activities, and 19 had been involved in at least one activity identified as being part of the BUILD Initiative. Twenty-three interviews were conducted, including a mix of individuals from urban, mixed, and rural communities. On average, the interviews lasted 28 minutes, ranging from 9 – 54 minutes, and focused on four areas - knowledge, governance structure, accomplishments, and next steps. The information gleaned in these interviews is used to illustrate key points in this report.

OVERVIEW

Pennsylvania officially began participating in the national BUILD initiative in August 2003 and **made substantial progress in key areas over the past 15 months**. To implement activities, Pennsylvania, at the urging of foundation supporters, adopted a strategy that significantly diverged from the other BUILD states in two major ways. First, PA adopted a governance structure by which the process would be led primarily by state government leaders and was viewed as a way to achieve Governor Rendell's and his administration's early care and education priorities. As such, BUILD and Administration activities were almost synonymous in nature. Whereas other states had chosen lead organizations external to government departments, PA selected to start within government and to then reach out to engage other stakeholders via a variety of extensive community outreach methods and use of consultants to government

departments. Also, as much as possible, BUILD leadership financed “BUILD” activities using state money, opting to save the BUILD funding for future, critical activities that could not be funded using government sources. Second, the PA BUILD team chose to move swiftly to a strong focus on implementation rather than on strategic planning and assessment of the issues. While other BUILD states invested significant time and effort in developing comprehensive strategic plans, the PA BUILD team chose to use its technical assistance funding to develop models and plans to which community participants could respond in a short timeframe and to initiate activities aimed at creating a model system. *Both of these structural decisions, along with strong gubernatorial leadership and support, led to the significant achievements within a short timeframe of existence.*

Although PA BUILD was designed to be led primarily by state government leaders, Harriet Dichter was chosen to serve as the primary lead staff person, initially as a consultant to the Department of Education (PDE) and to the Department of Public Welfare (DPW). She was empowered by the Secretaries of Education and Public Welfare and the Governor’s Office to quickly convene mostly state staff to form the Governor’s Early Learning Team to lead BUILD, coordinate efforts, and work on integrating services for young children across departments. Members of the Early Learning Team included policy and management staff from Head Start, the Governor’s Office, DPW, PDE, and the Department of Health (DOH). Participation by DOH staff was inconsistent due to significant staff turnover. The Early Learning Team has met at least seven times to date, and meetings initially focused on planning a community engagement process and later focused on reports and updates for various BUILD-related activities.

To develop the community engagement strategy, the Early Learning Team had two strategic planning sessions in July 2003 with technical assistance provided by nationally well-known consultants, Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney. These meetings led to holding two community stakeholder meetings in August 2003. Over 70 stakeholders from across the Commonwealth participated in this 2-day event, again facilitated by Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney, and funded with PDE operating funds, not Build funds. Participants represented early care and education providers, school district personnel, higher education faculty, child advocates, early intervention providers, physical health providers, and government leaders in early care and education. Via this consensus building process, the primary emphases for BUILD activities in PA were determined as follows:

1. Develop early learning standards to guide pre-kindergarten programming,
2. Strengthen the reimbursement rate framework used for child care subsidy,
3. Develop a pathway for early childhood professional careers, with an initial focus on child care, and
4. Improve the engagement of parents in support of early learning. As part of the process, the participants recommended that the activities be

addressed consecutively starting with developing early learning standards.

In addition to identifying the BUILD emphases, the group endorsed a model for the system of early care and education to be created in PA. The PA BUILD team, along with consultation services again provided by Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney, developed the model and used the meetings to test its usefulness with the community stakeholders.

Following these stakeholder meetings, Ms. Dichter led a subset of the team to outline and implement the strategy to create a comprehensive early learning system for PA, adopting an aggressive approach that sought to address the four PA BUILD areas in a sequence that permitted concurrent actions and that consistently engaged the various communities across PA. Early on, Ms. Dichter, state staff, and consultants participated in a series of regional meetings across the state to announce the BUILD initiative and what PA's participation in the effort meant for stakeholders and for young children. This activity helped community leaders feel included in the BUILD process and opened communication between education, advocates, and other early care and education leaders and government sectors.

To begin the implementation-focused aspect of the process, the Early Learning Team tackled the issue of developing standards for pre-kindergarten students. In October 2003, the first meeting of the Early Learning Standards Team, composed of at least 30 early care and education leaders across the state, was convened and facilitated by Ms. Dichter and Cathy Feldman and Lee Kappes, consultants from REACH Associates. BUILD funding was used to pay for meeting expenses, and PDE provided the funding for all staff and consultant time. The participants included practitioners and administrators with experience and expertise in public school, child care, Head Start, and Early Intervention settings, as well as nationally recognized researchers and higher education faculty such as Dr. Jerlean Daniel, former President of NAEYC. The goal of this group was to review research literature and the best of other states' standards to create a comprehensive set of pre-kindergarten standards for PA applicable to four-year-old children regardless of the setting in which they were served (e.g., Head Start, child care, home environments, etc). With remarkable speed, the Early Learning Standards were completed in January 2004, only three months later, and shared in multiple settings across the state for public comment, reaching hundreds of stakeholders from many different early childhood settings. These Standards were presented at both mainstream child care and educational forums around the state to solicit input, feedback, and acceptance. At least 20 groups provided feedback, which generally was positive and indicated much support for the Standards across the state, as well as recommendations for improvement. Currently, the Standards are being refined and a draft is available to the public on the state's PDE web-site in the "Early Childhood" section. The

Standards have not been formally adopted and adherence to the standards is not yet required for any programs.

While working through the public commentary process, exploring potential methods to codify the Standards via the regulatory process, and focusing on how to move the Standards from “concept” into “practice,” the Early Learning Team next began to address child care subsidy issues, focusing specifically on child care rate policy. In the fall of 2003, BUILD leadership convened a Rate Policy Task Force, a group representing early childhood programs and fund administrators of child care providers, to examine child care rates and to advise on the next steps. The Task Force recognized the necessity of gathering information from a much larger group of providers, consumers, and administrators; hence, the Early Learning Team sought an alliance with the Pennsylvania Association of Child Care Administrators (PACCA). PACCA was viewed as a natural leader to facilitate the study of PA rate policy and to make recommendations based on feedback from the field. PACCA staffed eight regional community forums at which 500 child care providers responded to questions about the use of the market rate survey and other methods to establish the subsidized child care rate schedule in PA. The costs of these forums were paid using state BUILD funds, including payments to PACCA and to Louise Stoney. Out of these events, an extensive report was completed, which detailed provider concerns and outlined recommendations to improve child care rates. Following publication of the report, the state sought to rectify some of the problems with child care rates, assuring that all infant, toddler, and preschool age children served in centers could access ceiling rates of between the 50th and 55th percentiles. Child care rates were adjusted for a number of counties to ensure that all providers across the state were receiving payments at least at the 55th percentile or above.

Having addressed early learning standards and rates, the next major BUILD focus was to gain an understanding of professional development needs. Again, the Early Learning Team used the tactic of partnering with respected community organizations, this time United Way early childhood programs, to facilitate a series of regional forums to gain an extensive understanding of professional development needs, primarily for child care providers, across the Commonwealth. These meetings were conducted in August and September 2004, and 700 early care and education providers, staff from training organizations, higher education faculty, and public school teachers and administrators participated. The meetings were identified as being sponsored by the BUILD Initiative and were funded using state BUILD money with some BUILD technical assistance funding used to support Anne Mitchell who wrote the cross sector paper. Recommendations gathered during these meetings contributed to the development of a revamped professional development and quality improvement system for the Commonwealth unveiled to the public in November 2004.

The Early Learning Team also created opportunities to address professional development needs regarding early learning among other types of early care and education teachers (e.g., preschool teachers), public school teachers, and Head Start staff in two primary ways. First, staff from these other early childhood environments were invited to network with one another by participating in joint professional development and training workshops in several Governor's Institutes for Learning. These Institutes included early literacy academies, full-day kindergarten program administration, and pre-kindergarten program administration, and some of the content was developed based on the Early Learning Standards. Via these mechanisms, PA BUILD impacted the learning of nearly 2000 early care and education staff, primary grade teachers, and elementary school administrators. The Institutes were not described as BUILD Initiative efforts and were not paid for by BUILD funds.

Second, BUILD efforts directly and indirectly helped shape new state government grant programs. A subset of the Early Learning Team, covering child care, education, and Head Start, consulted with community members to solicit their ideas for the grants and wrote the requirements for the early childhood education portion of the new state Education Accountability Block Grants (ABG), the Head Start Supplemental Grants (HS), and the revamped Community Planning Grants for Early Care and Education. Furthermore, the Team worked with nearly two dozen community partners to select the recipients of the ABG and HS grants. Additionally, a subset of the Team, consisting primarily of DPW staff, consulted with the Keystone Stars Advisory Committee on program revisions for Keystone STARS, the PA child care quality improvement program. The Advisory Committee enthusiastically supported the major changes, which were adopted for implementation starting July 1, 2004.

Although this latter set of activities did not directly emanate from the community planning process, they represented opportunities to rapidly enhance important aspects of the early learning system. Consequently, these activities were considered to be outgrowths of PA BUILD's approach to system development. Furthermore, each of the activities used a method that integrated government and community leadership to enhance early care and education services.

In summary, the PA BUILD covered a broad swath of issues impacting early care and education services. The leadership stayed true to strategies endorsed during the community strategic planning meetings, **making considerable progress in three of the four areas selected**. Furthermore, the community engagement and communication process resulted in all participants in the evaluation interviews being at least somewhat familiar with the BUILD Initiative. Rough estimates suggest that over 1000 individuals participated in some aspect of PA BUILD, and somewhere between 10,000 to 20,000 children directly benefited from the actions taken.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The leadership of Governor Ed Rendell and his administration was a primary reason why PA made such progress on BUILD initiative goals and activities. Over 80% (20) of interviewees reported that state government was highly involved in BUILD activities. At the same time, a primary reason for some of the significant challenges in making financial progress in particular was due to the unsupportive legislative environment. Thus, it was the best and worst of times for implementing BUILD in PA. Previously, PA was one of only nine states not to financially support early care and education.

Governor Rendell entered office in January 2003 on a platform that strongly embraced the importance of early childhood education. *He kept his pledge to early childhood* in February 2003 when he submitted his first budget that proposed appropriating \$1.5 billion for early childhood programming, including pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and reduced class size in the primary grades. Upon announcing this ambitious plan, he quickly encountered the staunch opposition of the PA General Assembly that refused to adopt his entire budget, including the early care and education proposals. Ultimately, the Rendell push for early childhood education was drastically changed through negotiation to a \$175 million block grant, the Education Accountability Block Grant that included 11 options of which three were the original early childhood elements of the Governor's education platform.

In spite of the breadth of choices offered, the Education Accountability Block Grant proved to be the largest mechanism that increased early childhood funding in Pennsylvania in FY 04-05. While legislative leaders agreed to \$175 million, Governor Rendell nonetheless demonstrated his leadership and commitment to early childhood education by requesting an increase to \$225 million and ultimately settled with the General Assembly for approval of \$200 million. Two-thirds of the \$175 million original allocation, or \$118.3 million, was spent on the early childhood options. **Forty school districts opted to invest in quality pre-kindergarten programs; 293 school districts chose full-day kindergarten; and 99 school districts used the funds to reduce class size in the primary grades.**

In addition to the Education Accountability Block Grant, investments in early childhood grew in multiple other areas of the state budget due to Governor Rendell and his administration's leadership. Funding for the child care subsidy and the child care quality improvement system (e.g., Keystone STARS) grew by \$32.8 million, reflecting the Governor's Office priorities of cutting the subsidy waiting list and improving child care program quality. Funding for supports to child care providers and parents (e.g., TEACH scholarship fund, community planning, Keystone Stars, etc.) grew by \$3.5 million. Finally, PA invested \$15 million in Head Start Supplemental grants – together with the Accountability Block Grants, this represented the first time in PA's history that the state invested

in preschool. The Head Start funding was the first time that there was dedicated state funding for early care and education area in Pennsylvania and an instance when legislative leadership (e.g., Senator James Rhoades) made a substantial difference. In total, **PA state investments in early childhood increased by \$169.6 million, directly attributable to Governor Rendell and his administration's willingness to place early childhood in the forefront as a major state policy initiative.**

In terms of promoting BUILD's progress, one of the major lessons learned was the necessity of building legislative will as well as gubernatorial leadership. While Governor Rendell led the charge for early childhood, the General Assembly did not follow and blocked many of the administration's proposals to substantially increase state investments. While foundation funding had been effective in galvanizing advocacy organizations (prior to BUILD) to work together to get a "children's" Governor elected, obviously additional steps needed to be taken to secure legislative leadership. In the end, *comprehensive efforts are also required to gain the buy-in of the legislative branch of state government and bi-partisan support.* It may take some time to sort out whether the bolder initiative was rejected in the exercise of political power to trim the new governor's sails or because there was staunch opposition to the concept of additional government programs for quality early childhood education, particularly for at-risk children.

While lack of legislative support clearly provided obstacles, one interviewee also noted concerns about how two new governmental bodies, the Governor's Early Learning Team and the Governor's Cabinet for Children and Families, related and/or shared responsibility for directing BUILD efforts, and this lack of understanding also was expressed in initial local conversations about BUILD leadership in one PA County. In particular, the interviewee was concerned that having the two entities with unclear boundaries might reflect a lack of true commitment to systems reform. In fact, the sweeping efforts to increase and improve early childhood education demonstrate that there is strong Administration commitment to systems reform efforts. Similarities in the two bodies existed such that both were derived from partnerships of the Governor's Office and key departments with some overlap of staffing. Over the past 15 months, the Early Learning Team clearly advanced BUILD Initiative priorities and made substantial progress. As the Children's Cabinet and the Commission become more active, it should become clear how the Cabinet and Commission are related in any way with PA Build. Currently, the Cabinet leadership points to BUILD and the Early Learning Team as examples of the type of collaboration and work that the Cabinet was designed to foster. Overall, the progress evident in PA BUILD implementation indicated that the key Department Secretaries are collaborating to advance early care and education via the Early Learning Team and the PA BUILD community activities.

Recognition of Need through Data. Pennsylvania entered as a BUILD state with significant amounts of background information and data to inform activities. PA

BUILD leadership generally understood the limitations of the current array of PA early care and education services in meeting young children's school readiness needs because many of the key staff had been long-standing advocates for improved services. In fact, some interviewees mentioned this as a very positive aspect of PA BUILD's leadership structure. Drawing from a wealth of experience and knowledge, the PA BUILD leadership team was well poised to quickly select appropriate strategies.

In particular, compilations of data collected during the previous administration (e.g., Governor Schweiker's Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force reports) revealed information about the use of child care and the quality of child care and thus, were used to inform BUILD strategies. This research revealed that the majority of young children were in some kind of out-of-home care and that only 20% of the early care and education sites were deemed to be of high quality. Although not successful, BUILD leadership used facts from these reports and endorsements by leadership of the previous (republican) administration's task force to communicate with the public about early care and education in press events and with legislative leadership. Also, the BUILD leadership used the facts to justify focusing primarily on activities to improve the child care system during the first year of BUILD implementation.

Although BUILD leadership used the data for communication and to support strategy selection, one interviewee expressed concerns that the data were not used as fully as they could have been. For instance, the interviewee shared that the reports provided an outline for how to engage business, which, to the public, did not appear to have been used. However, BUILD leadership had engaged business leaders when those leaders were available, a fact unknown to most interviewees. Further, another interviewee expressed concern that some of the other entities identified as providing important leadership for early care and education system development in the background reports (e.g., advocates and public education leaders) were not well engaged in the leadership structure of PA BUILD. The interviewee suggested that it would be valuable to have education, advocates, and other entities outside of government to participate in decision-making around vision and BUILD action plan development.

While the Administration often cited weak performance by elementary school students (e.g., literacy rates, etc.), there was a lack of prominent data specifically about children's school readiness in PA or about school district use of kindergarten readiness assessments. Similar to other states, PA had little data available to indicate Pennsylvania's children's general level of readiness for kindergarten – data that would be useful to make the case for the necessity of substantial investment in early care and education. Such information could be further developed and potentially would be helpful to communicate with parents and the general public regarding the value of high quality pre-kindergarten experiences and with legislators to develop champions if it were available at the legislative district level.

Although there was a lack of school readiness data available to demonstrate the need to invest in high quality early care and education services, PA BUILD leaders chose to work toward developing a master evaluation plan for BUILD activities as an alternative method to demonstrate the effectiveness of the systems-building efforts. The PA BUILD leaders commissioned a survey to identify all of the early care and education researchers in PA and the focus of their research to gather information about what should be tracked in the master evaluation plan. The results of this survey currently are listed on the Department of Education web site, and there are plans to keep the list updated over time. Next steps might include using the survey results to identify important niches where the local research could be used to raise public awareness and inform legislators of early learning best practices and of the benefits associated with these investments.

Shared Vision on What Constitutes an Effective Early Learning System. The PA BUILD model was founded with the vision that state government should bear primary responsibility for building an effective early learning system. As such, PA BUILD focused on connecting efforts primarily in the Departments of Education and Public Welfare to support quality early care and education services. Reflecting support for this government-focused approach, over 70% of interviewees felt that the **primary goal of BUILD in PA was to create one system by blending efforts across the Departments of Education, Public Welfare, and Health to better serve young children and families.** Over 83% of interviewees felt that government was “Very Involved” (14) or “Involved” (5) in BUILD activities with 87% (20) feeling that the Health, Education, and Public Welfare Department efforts had been at least somewhat integrated for the first time as a result of BUILD during the first year. All interviewees were pleased with this progress and desired additional progress in collaboration across the departments.

In addition to agreement about government leadership, there was broad support for the Early Learning System Model for PA that was endorsed during the strategic planning sessions. Over three-quarters of the interviewees were familiar with the model, and all felt that the model was helpful in defining the vision to some degree. In spite of this consensus, interviewees nonetheless lacked a clear sense of what particular strategies should receive emphasis to create the model system for PA. Interviewees expressed great diversity regarding the steps needed to actually create the model and the essential components of an effective early learning system for PA. There was no consensus on how to achieve the model early learning system.

Focusing on seven activities undertaken by PA BUILD leaders (e.g., Education Accountability Block Grant, child care rate policy changes, Early Learning Standards creation, amendments to the design of Community Planning Grants for early care and education, Head Start Supplemental Grants, amendments to

the design of Keystone Stars, Professional Development Forums and changes to the PA Pathways training system), the vast majority of interviewees endorsed the activities as being worthy of receiving primary emphasis as part of ensuring BUILD's progress. Nevertheless, when asked which activity should be the primary focus, there was no clear area of agreement. Six of the seven choices were endorsed by at least one interviewee, and three additional emphases were offered beyond the original seven choices. Perhaps best reflecting the need for a comprehensively understood and shared vision, two interviewees actually suggested that an important next step to build an early learning system in PA is to articulate a vision and develop a 10-year plan for achieving that vision. This great diversity of opinions suggests that it may be difficult to obtain consensus regarding specific action steps if a larger group of leaders outside of government were convened to help lead the BUILD process.

ACTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Over 90% (21) of the interviewees felt that they could identify accomplishments associated with BUILD and felt that the BUILD Initiative had changed the way that the state conducts early childhood activities. Of the 48 responses provided, the most often cited accomplishment (27% or 13) was drafting the Early Learning Standards. Next, participants cited achievements in obtaining rate increases, such that all child care centers serving young children now are being reimbursed at least at the 50th percentile, and improved collaboration across government and early care and education organizations. Additional achievements included changes to the statewide professional development training system to permit greater overlap with Department of Education training, improvements to the Keystone STARS program, and expansions in full-day kindergarten and preschool programs. Throughout the interviews, interviewees consistently cited the creation in September 2004 of the state Office of Child Development and Harriet Dichter's official dual appointments in PDE and DPW as significant steps for BUILD. Clearly, PA BUILD's implementation focus related to the common perception that, in spite of the "youth" of PA BUILD, significant actions and progress had been made.

More specifically, a majority of interviewees agreed that BUILD activities were helpful in improving child care (78%), expanding preschool (87%), and expanding full-day kindergarten (87%). The area in which there was the least sense of progress was in improving health, including mental health and nutrition services. It is likely that the lack of progress in this area relates to an initial emphasis on child care quality issues and a perceived lack of progress on health and mental health issues. These concerns point to the possibilities of greater integration with DOH, Mental Health, and Medicaid in the future.

Although interviewees could identify several activity and accomplishment highlights, it remained unclear to them how strategically the activity choices had been made. As mentioned previously, participants shared highly divergent views

on what should be adopted as a primary focus for next year when asked to only choose one option. When asked to identify important next steps to build an early learning system, participants offered 44 responses covering 21 types of activities. No clear sequence of activities was evident, and there was no communication from the leadership of BUILD regarding a prioritization of issues to be addressed beyond the original strategic planning. As BUILD leadership adapted to and capitalized on various opportunities to build a system, there was limited explanation provided to the stakeholders for how those events addressed system reform needs. For instance, several of the interviewees did not agree that the Education Accountability Block Grants and revisions to Keystone STARS could be interpreted as falling within the BUILD scope of activities. It may have been helpful to communicate publicly and explicitly about how these activities supported the development of the early learning system. Although the Administration purposefully downplayed the “BUILD” identity at first, it may be beneficial to continually communicate the BUILD priorities with the stakeholders to ensure they understand and value the connections of actions and achievements. Further, it may be helpful to view the stakeholders as important promoters to a broader audience of systems change and to provide a clear understanding of how the BUILD actions fit together to promote overall systemic development over time.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

PA BUILD led to several governmental changes that provided critical infrastructure to support building an early learning system in PA. First, the Office of Child Development was created as a new office within state government charged specifically with overseeing services for young children. Great care was taken to assume a name for the new office that symbolized its purpose of promoting positive child outcomes rather than more custodial forms of services. Additionally, the dual appointments of Harriet Dichter as Policy Director in PDE and as Deputy Secretary in DPW as head of the new Office of Child Development solidified the integration of activities focused on meeting the needs of young children across those Departments. Finally, the Early Learning Team provided a venue at which interdepartmental issues affecting young children could be addressed and collaborative solutions could be devised.

In addition to these government structures, the creation of the Early Learning Standards provided a common language and set of expectations for all programs serving 4-year-olds and their families. Anecdotal evidence suggested that stakeholders found the draft Standards (www.pde.state.pa.us) to be useful and were anticipating the release of standards for other ages, and in November 2004, the State began to convene a group to create Kindergarten Standards.

Interviewees provided substantial endorsement of the significance of these additions to the infrastructure needed to support developing an early learning system. Over half of the responses (19 of 33 total responses) provided by

interviewees cited Harriet Dichter's appointments, the Early Learning Team, and the Early Learning Standards as noteworthy developments. One interviewee cited that another example of the depth of collaboration between PDE and DPW was demonstrated when the Secretaries of Education and Public Welfare jointly signed and distributed letters regarding BUILD activities. Joint statements were noted as significant and might be a good practice to continue. Interviewees felt that the infrastructure changes made as part of BUILD resulted in considerable changes in how the state conducted early childhood activities.

A number of interviewees cited the lack of involvement by DOH and the private sector as concerns regarding BUILD. The interviewees from physical health organizations felt that health issues largely had been ignored in initial BUILD activities, and almost a quarter of responses made some mention of the lack of collaboration with DOH, particularly in light of DOH administering the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (SECCS) grant, a federal grant. Although Ms. Dichter serves as a member of the SECCS Steering Committee and a Committee Chair, the interviewees from the physical health sector generally were not aware of BUILD's integration with the SECCS grant. Regarding private sector (i.e., non-government groups such as child advocates, educational institutions, child care providers, but not referring to business) involvement, only two participants in the interviews felt that the private sector had been "very involved" in BUILD activities while over a quarter (6) was not aware of how involved the private sector had been in efforts. Although the Early Learning Team had conducted most of its activities via partnerships with community organizations (e.g., PACCA for the Rate Study and the United Way's for the Professional Development Forums), several interviewees felt that most of the strategic decisions were made within government with limited input from community leaders.

Although there were concerns about DOH and private sector involvement, most interviewees were confident in the BUILD leadership and that the leadership was interested in and responsive to their ideas. Most interviewees (70%) felt BUILD was governed by a multiple leadership team, and only a minority (10 interviewees) had suggestions for who else should be involved in BUILD leadership. Some of these suggestions included public education leaders, DOH, and business leaders. Additionally, over 80% (19) felt they had access to share their views with BUILD leadership, reflecting a deep sense that the BUILD process was open. This feeling may have been engendered by the PA BUILD community outreach and engagement method of selecting private sector leadership to facilitate public meetings on BUILD topics.

In summary, there was significant infrastructure development across PDE and DPW. Meanwhile, physical health entities were not sure of the BUILD vision and whether physical health needs would be addressed, and interviewees were least confident that BUILD activities had been helpful in improving health, mental health and nutrition services. Private advocacy organizations were not clear

regarding their role in promoting the development of an early learning system (i.e., particularly their decision-making power in leading activity selection) and exactly what that system will be. Hence, additional efforts may need to focus on strengthening the infrastructure to link with DOH and to clarify the roles of advocates and other private organizations.

POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND ADVOCACY

PA BUILD leadership chose to partner with community organizations to lead two of its highest profile community outreach and engagement strategies – a study of child care rate policy and professional development forums. Through these partnerships, the leadership enlisted the support of major organizations – the PA Child Care Administrators Association and United Way organizations – who then become champions for the recommendations developed via these processes. Additionally, Harriet Dichter attended a QUEST (Quality Early Education through Salaries and Training – a statewide, grassroots advocacy organization) meeting and outlined the plans of the Office of Child Development and responded to QUEST’s requests to DPW. Ms. Dichter also spoke at numerous community early care and education events in all regions before assuming the full-time positions with PDE and DPW to inform about BUILD and engage the public in the systems reform efforts. She continued this practice to introduce the new Office of Child Development to the public in September through October 2004.

However, other than requesting feedback and generating general recommendations to state government, *there was little systematic BUILD-initiated effort to mobilize other sectors of the community to promote state action for early learning system building efforts.* One of the interviewees particularly noted the lack of connections between BUILD efforts and other already-existing statewide systems reform initiatives, such as Family Service System Reform projects. While the State provides funding for community planning groups for early care and education and now requires explicit reports of linkages to support PA BUILD, there was no systematic effort to use these resources to advocate for various components needed to establish an effective early learning system, such as guidance in how to involve school districts in planning efforts. Several interviewees made particular mention of a lack of business and education sector involvement in BUILD’s systems-building efforts.

Although there was a limited systematic political mobilization effort by BUILD, the phenomenal advances by the Governor and by BUILD may not be sustained in future administrations without effective external advocates at the state level and without supporters informing their elected representatives that this is valuable within their districts. Prior to the Rendell Administration, there were major unsuccessful efforts by business and advocacy groups to advance early childhood education in the state. These sectors may have a reluctance for advocacy on this agenda based upon their prior experiences coupled with their lack of full success while backing Governor Rendell’s bold plan. However, in the

future, attention is needed to identify how to work effectively with community advocates, parents, education leaders, and business partners to build lasting political will to support sustaining and further developing an early learning system, particularly for outreach to members of the PA General Assembly.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

Public awareness was selected as the fourth focus for PA BUILD during strategic planning, and it was strategically decided that attention would not focus on addressing this need during the first year of implementation. Although the leadership recognized the importance of increasing public awareness and support, it was felt that the issue could not be addressed during the first year. Interviewees felt similarly, and all but one of the interviewees felt that it was necessary to build public will to support building an early learning system in PA. In particular, interviewees responded that there needed to be a campaign about the importance of early care and education with specific outreach to policymakers. While early care and education organizations recognized the role of early care and education in promoting school readiness, interviewees felt that the general public, public school leadership and legislators, lacked this awareness. This awareness campaign would build upon the Administration's various outreach strategies (e.g., legislative briefings by the Secretaries of PDE and DPW, presentations by researchers and advocates, appearances by the Governor) used to raise awareness among legislators.

Although PA BUILD did not specifically focus on creating general public awareness and support in this first year of implementation, PA BUILD engaged many early care and education stakeholders via its regional forum outreach strategy. Over 1000 individuals participated in some BUILD-related event. Over 700 individuals received periodic email communications, updates, and invitations to public events from BUILD leadership, and participants in the email distribution list were encouraged to forward the information to others whom they felt might be interested. This methodology created significant community awareness within the field and could be used as a model to engage others outside the field in relevant BUILD discussions. The challenge is how to strengthen the role of BUILD stakeholders as ambassadors to a broader public.

Focusing on the importance of participation in BUILD as contributing to the development of an early learning system, all of the interviewees cited benefits associated with being a BUILD state. Only four mentioned significant drawbacks associated with BUILD participation – mostly related to similar past efforts that raised expectations yet failed to make substantial improvements. While generally pleased that PA was a BUILD state, a number of participants expressed concerns that *PA's participation in BUILD was not being well communicated to the general public*. Almost half (16 out of 37 total responses) of the responses provided by interviewees suggested some kind of public awareness campaign about the importance of early care and education as a method to communicate

with the general public. Still, it was clear that interviewees saw BUILD work as an asset in PA's quest to develop an effective system for early care and education.

ALIGNMENT AND READINESS FOR BIG LEAP FORWARD

Pennsylvania took its "big leap forward" in four ways during the past year, partly due to BUILD efforts. Specifically, there were significant increases in school district involvement in early childhood programs (via the use of the Education Accountability Block Grants impacting over 75,000 students); there was state investment in early childhood programs for the first time in PA's history (via the Head Start Supplemental Grants and the Accountability Block Grants); there were comprehensive efforts to improve the quality of child care; and the Office of Child Development was created. Because BUILD activities were inextricably connected to the Administration's early care and education priorities, it was difficult to determine whether these advances may have occurred without PA's participation in BUILD. Although the BUILD leadership has described the Administration's activities as being part of the BUILD process to build a comprehensive early learning system for PA, interviewees did not have a clear understanding of this arrangement. In fact, a few interviewees disputed the recognition of several of the administration's activities (e.g., Education Accountability Block Grants, Head Start Supplemental Grants, revisions to Keystone STARS) as stemming from the BUILD process. Nonetheless, there clearly was alignment of activities that fostered significant advances, but it was not always obvious to the interviewees whether these specific advances were due to BUILD's presence. Although this may appear to diminish the value of BUILD in advancing PA systems-building efforts, it is important to note how strategically the Administration used the BUILD rubric to advance their commitment to and interest in early care and education.

The lack of a vocalized and publicly-shared vision and plan made it unclear how poised PA is to take additional significant leaps towards making significant changes to create a model early learning system, particularly given limited tax dollars and competing interests. Both interviewees and anecdotal evidence suggested that PA has many pieces in place to make significant changes, especially gubernatorial leadership, which had been lacking before Governor Rendell, but many feel that the next "big leap" is dependent on building public will for an early learning system. An alternative view is that strong legislative leadership or leadership from public education is needed to make the next "big leap." As is the case in most BUILD states, obtaining significant funding for an early care and education system is a primary need to help PA take the next "big leap" in developing an effective early learning system. However, in late November 2004, the DPW Office of Child Development announced a re-designed system for quality improvement and professional development, which may help more of the public understand how the BUILD leadership has developed an overall vision for an effective early learning system.

STEPS AHEAD AND ROLE OF BUILD

Virtually all of the interviewees identified significant benefits associated with PA's participation in the BUILD initiative. Primarily, interviewees felt that BUILD provides a comprehensive framework to guide systems reform efforts in early care and education services, resulting in better integration of state departments and improved services and supports for young children and their families. Additionally, a number of interviewees mentioned the benefits of accessing BUILD's technical assistance opportunities and the ability to learn from what other states have done. Furthermore, several interviewees mentioned that being a BUILD state has helped to focus attention on early care and education needs. Over 80% (19) of participants could not identify any drawbacks associated with PA's participation in BUILD. **Clearly, interviewees saw value in PA being a BUILD state and felt that it brought credibility to the work being done to develop an early learning system for the Commonwealth.**

Along with reporting significant worth associated with BUILD, interviewees expressed significant obstacles and challenges to overcome to achieve dramatic progress. *Diverse opinions and "turf" battles continued to be significant barriers to progress.* In fact, one respondent shared that a drawback associated with BUILD activities in PA was an over-emphasis on using the Head Start model to guide the design of early care and education providers. Anecdotal evidence from attempts to unite advocacy organizations to create single requests for departmental program revisions demonstrated the challenges associated with gaining consensus on the best way to provide quality services for young children and their families. As mentioned previously, interviewees did not identify a single, unique BUILD activity that could be the future focus for all activities if they could only choose one thing to do. There was little obvious agreement, a consensus-building challenge that PA BUILD must address to continue to make progress in the eyes of the community. Other obstacles reported by interviewees included: time required to travel to participate in collaborative meetings, funding, lack of public will, communication challenges, bureaucratic procedures, lack of legislative support, and aging of the workforce.

Continuing to participate in BUILD can aid the process of bringing together the multiple interests involved in early care and education in PA. Next steps might include some of the following:

- To continue to build momentum for creating a comprehensive early learning system, it will be important to continue to use the strategy of conducting regional and local forums to gather information for and to share information about the BUILD Initiative. This methodology appeared to support increasing the perception among interviewees that the BUILD process was open to non-government input and feedback.
- To increase the availability of funding for early care and education, it may be necessary to develop additional legislative outreach strategies. Although the BUILD leadership did attempt to inform the legislature, it may

be beneficial to partner with child advocate organizations to establish a systematic legislative outreach effort focused at impacting legislators by constituents in their districts.

- To raise champions for early care and education, it may be beneficial to collect data about children's state of school readiness (i.e., to demonstrate gaps in readiness) or to use the survey of early care and education researchers in PA to highlight successes associated with high quality pre-kindergarten experiences.
- To help the public better understand how the various aspects of PA BUILD contribute to developing an early learning system, the BUILD leadership may want to re-evaluate its tendency of downplaying "BUILD" relative to the Administration's steps to achieve its early care and education priorities. Additionally, it may be beneficial to specify the plan for achieving the PA BUILD early learning model.

To address concerns about non-government organizational involvement in BUILD decision-making, BUILD leadership may learn from other states how to better use public/private partnerships to set a long-term agenda for building an effective early learning system. Furthermore, it will be important to continue to capitalize on collaborative opportunities available through the DOH SECCS grant and with the mental health and Medicaid offices within DPW.