



# Education Advocate

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## Families vs. Government *Who should raise the children?*

Government control over daycare and preschool grows

Education News

Upcoming CEO Events

Commonwealth Education Organization

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**“There is increasing academic pressure in Pre-K – almost a high stakes Pre-K. We know that the most powerful intervention is the parent’s role, and we are overselling Pre-K when we need to oversell parenting. We need to remember that Pre-K as an intervention has a modest impact on a child’s cognitive development, but that parenting has a huge impact.”<sup>1</sup>**

*Susan B. Neuman  
former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education*

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania’s Legislators and Governor did not heed these words when they included **Pre-K Counts** in the Pennsylvania 2007-2008 budget, thereby marking not only the beginning of taxpayer-funded preschool, but also a huge advancement toward universal preschool and daycare for millions of the state’s children.

### What is **Pre-K Counts**?

- It is a “free” (taxpayer-funded) preschool program for children across the state.
- It targets “at-risk” children. However, the “at-risk” definition for this program has been greatly expanded beyond needy children living in dysfunctional families to include children living in families earning **300%** of the federal poverty level – which includes a family of four making \$62,000! Two-thirds of Pennsylvania’s 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for this program!
- All daycare centers, public schools, Head Start programs, and licensed pre-schools that apply for and receive **Pre-K Counts** money must implement the *Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards for Pre-kindergarten* and other stringent state requirements. (State-certified daycare centers are already basing their programs on the *Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards for Infants and Toddlers*.) By including daycare centers in the **Pre-K Counts** initiative, the door is wide open to create universal, taxpayer-funded daycare.

The *Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards for Pre-Kindergarten and for Infants and Toddlers* are especially problematic.

- Regardless of the content of the standards, it is dangerous to create one-size-fits-all criteria to evaluate the social, physical, emotional, and mental development of babies and young children who develop at vastly different rates. *“Benchmarks of brain development... are neither hard nor fast. The age range for some achievements can vary by months – even years. And, in some cases, even if a child falls outside the range of ‘normal,’ it is not necessarily cause for alarm. Speed of development naturally varies.”<sup>2</sup>* How many babies and children will be diagnosed with a “problem” that is really just a self-correcting developmental blip?
- The state standards ignore gender differences. Dr. Leonard Sax, international authority on the science of gender differences, states: *“The failure to recognize and respect sex differences in child development has done substantial harm [to both boys and girls] over the past thirty years.”<sup>3</sup>*
- Boys are already struggling in school. Bringing them into the government school system at an earlier age and holding them to gender-neutral standards could cause even more of them to be labeled and medicated before entering kindergarten.
- At the daycare level, the state *Infant Mental Health Consultation Project*, an offshoot of the state standard requiring mental services and intervention for infants and toddlers, causes special concern. Consultants will provide services to daycare staff for children who do not meet the standards. This will allow government intrusion into the family because it is impossible to “evaluate” and “treat” a 6-month-old baby without evaluating and treating the parents and family.<sup>4</sup>

**The mistaken premise for Pre-K Counts and universal daycare/preschool is that government can solve the problems of society through the children.** The Governor and other advocates have promised that **Pre-K Counts** will decrease crime, addiction, dropout rates, special education costs and more. However the failures of governmental social/educational programs over the past 50 years have lead to this most current attempt at government intervention that can negatively affect the Commonwealth's youngest and most vulnerable children.

Instead of replacing the family, the state should be *strengthening* families – mothers and fathers - by encouraging and enabling parents to raise and care for their children. A study from Rutgers University<sup>5</sup> found that children from intact, married-parent families are more likely to stay in school, have fewer behavioral or school attendance problems, avoid early sexual activity and unwed teen parenthood, and attain educational goals. *More positive parental involvement – not more government – is needed to better prepare children for school and life. ?*

1. Neuman, Susan B. "Reading Rockets Interview with Susan B. Neuman." April 2007. [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org).
2. Gabriel, Gerald. "Child and Brain: The Stages of Development." 5 July 2007. [www.brainconnection.com](http://www.brainconnection.com).
3. Sax, Leonard. *Why Gender Matters*. (New York: Doubleday, 2005.)
4. "Child Care and Development Fund Plan for Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." *State Plan for CCDF Services, 10/1/07-9/30/09*.
5. "The National Marriage Project." Whitehead Senate Testimony. 28 April 2004. <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>.
6. Belsky, Jay, et. al. "Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?" *The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network*. March/April 2007.
7. Olson, Darcey. *Policy Report: Assessing Proposals for Preschool and Kindergarten*. Goldwater Institute. 8 Feb 2005.

Other important **Pre-K Counts** ramifications for families, children, and taxpayers include:

- **Universal Pre-K:** With two-thirds of Pennsylvania's preschool children included in the "at-risk" category and therefore eligible for Pre-K Counts, it is clear that "free," taxpayer-funded preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds is next. Estimates place such costs at over \$1 billion annually. More importantly, the state has ignored significant research that reveals the negative effects of such programs on behavior <sup>6</sup> and questions their efficacy for middle-income children.<sup>7</sup>
- **Escalating preschool costs:** Right now, Pittsburgh-area parents can enroll their child in a small private and/or religious nursery school for under \$1,500 per year. The cost per child of **Pre-K Counts** explodes to almost \$7,000 per child! Why so much? To pay for higher salaries, development of curriculum to meet state standards, professional staff development, and other expensive mandates.
- **Closure of many small and/or religious preschools:** By rejecting government intrusion, these schools may not be able to compete for students.
- **Inclusion of daycare facilities into the public education system:** In 2004 the traditional line between the Departments of Welfare and Education was erased when they jointly formed *The Office of Child Development and Early Learning*. With the inclusion of daycare centers as possible Pre-K providers and with the expansion of early childhood services, it is likely that this Office will be orchestrating the move toward universal (taxpayer-funded) daycare and Pre-K. It is also likely that daycare facilities will become the entry point into the public education system for many children. ?

## Education News

### African-American boys and single-sex education

The recently released report from the *Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African-American Males* makes a bold recommendation: "Establish within African-American-majority schools some single-sex classes primarily enrolling students with academic, attendance, and discipline problems." The rationale: "Within the limits thus defined, single-sex schools and classes consistently show a positive effect on academic outcomes and have proved a viable alternative to the educational settings to which at-risk students – primarily African-American and Hispanic students – are overwhelmingly consigned."

Some significant report findings include:

- "On nearly every indicator - from birth to death - the Black male is at a disadvantage. By almost any stan-

dard, he is in trouble. He has the worst academic and attendance records and the most suspensions and expulsions. He is the most likely to drop out or fail out of school, the least likely to be employed, and the most likely to be incarcerated. He is sicker than anyone else in America and will die at a younger age... These conditions don't plague only poor Black males...Poverty merely exacerbates it."

- "Special education has become an ever-expanding warehouse for African-American males, an option of first resort for teachers..."
- "In 10 years, African-American women upped their college enrollment by 55 percent and are alone responsible for nearly half of Maryland's total enrollment growth. The bad news is every year they leave men further and further behind."

Public and non-public schools across the country are implementing single-gender groupings, classes and/or entire

programs. It is important to note that just separating boys and girls does not guarantee better education. For single-sex education to succeed, educators must understand gender differences and use gender-appropriate teaching techniques.

To read the report, go to <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org>

**CEO is hosting Dr. Leonard Sax,  
an authority on the science of gender differences  
and a proponent of single-sex education,  
on Friday, August 24th.  
Call 412.967.9691 for information.**

### PA earns another “D”

An extensive report by the National Council on Teacher Quality evaluated state policies on the preparation, certification, licensure, compensation, and effectiveness of teachers and concluded that Pennsylvania has earned a “D.” Of the 27 goals outlined in the study, Pennsylvania fully met only two while completely missing eight and partially meeting 17. The state’s overall performance was labeled—“Languishing.”

This is disturbing because educators, parents, and students know that the quality of a teacher overshadows many other variables in student learning. Every classroom needs a high-quality teacher who knows the subject matter and uses successful teaching techniques.

To improve teacher quality, the report recommends:

- ✓ Improving PA guidelines for mandated annual teacher evaluations
- ✓ Extending the period required for tenure beyond three years
- ✓ Requiring college students to pass a basic skills test prior to admission into schools of education
- ✓ Reducing the current excessive amounts of teacher education coursework so there is more time available for in-depth study of subject matter
- ✓ Requiring all teachers to know the science of reading instruction
- ✓ Providing a genuine alternate route into teaching for professionals who know a subject (especially math and science) but lack a teaching degree
- ✓ Better preparing special ed teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to know their subjects.

To read the *State Teacher Policy Yearbook 2007*, go to [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).

### Teacher accountability - the NEA way

In May the National Education Association (NEA) teacher union leadership created a list of recommended changes for the *No Child Left Behind* education law that is currently under review in Washington, DC. Number two

on the list: *Monitor the performance of individual students over time so their growth can be measured.*

Known as a “growth model” or “value-added assessment,” such monitoring tracks the progress of individual students as they move from grade to grade so educators know whether each student receives a full year of learning every year. Such tracking enables schools:

- to get credit for helping students who make good progress, but are not yet scoring at the “proficient” level
- to insure that even high-performing students are continuing to advance a full year and not stagnating
- to provide data on new programs used in schools
- to target needed professional development

One idea NEA educators do not like: using student test results to affect teacher salaries and/or employment. Tracking students’ academic growth annually may reveal which teachers consistently succeed in raising student achievement, and which do not. While these findings could be used to reward some teachers with merit raises or bonuses, the NEA fears they could also be used to target unsuccessful teachers. Therefore the NEA demands that growth model results not be used in teacher accountability. This is an unfortunate stance in a profession with so few objective measures of individual teacher accountability.

Source: “Don’t Be Left Behind.” *NEA Today*, May 2007. [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).

### Pre-K Counts goes to Washington!

PA Senator Robert Casey is sponsoring the “Prepare All Kids Act of 2007,” Senate Bill 1347, which parallels the *Pre-K Counts* initiative recently passed in the state budget. So far, Sen. Joseph Biden is the only co-sponsor.

The intent of this Act is to assist states in providing full-day pre-kindergarten programs for at least one year before kindergarten. Even though the Bill focuses on children from families earning up to 200% of the federal poverty level, middle-income children are also mentioned.

Some details include:

- Pre-K programs will be a minimum of six hours per day, which is much longer than the average nursery school program of 2.5 hours.
- 10% of the money will be earmarked for extended day and extended year programs, more like daycare.
- 10% of the funding will be set aside to include infants and toddlers, also more like daycare.

These three aspects could signal that national daycare and preschool are the ultimate goal.

Furthermore, appropriations for SB 1347 seem grossly inadequate, starting with \$5 billion in 2008 and growing to \$9 billion in 2012. Estimates for universal Pre-K in Pennsylvania alone top \$1 billion! Americans must realize that national daycare and preschool programs will cost much more than Senator Casey’s estimates.

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## Upcoming CEO Events

**Dr. Leonard Sax**  
**“Why Gender Matters”**  
**Friday, August 24th**  
(morning or afternoon)

Author of *Why Gender Matters* and *Boys Adrift: The five factors driving the growing epidemic of unmotivated boys and underachieving young men*. Dr. Sax will discuss gender differences and how they affect the ways both boys and girls learn and grow.

Dr. Sax’s presentation is designed for educators but applicable to parents also.

Call CEO at 412.967.9691 for more information.

***Women of Character Conference***  
**Tuesday, October 23, 2007**  
**7 p.m.**  
**Carnegie Museum of Art Auditorium**

**Wendy Shalit**, author of *A Return to Modesty* and *Girls Gone Mild*, will discuss why so many girls and young women are unhappy and depressed trying to follow the pop culture stereotypes of popular, ultra-thin, promiscuous, scantily-dressed females. Ms. Shalit offers a healthier alternative: encourage girls and young women to use natural, feminine “modesty” to protect themselves from making bad choices so they have time to develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

**Women of Character Awards** will be presented to several local women who embody the following characteristics: *a respected mind, a nurturing heart, a serving hand, and a faithful spirit.*