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PCCY's Childwatch

Spring-Summer 2021

Improving the lives of children and families in Southeastern PA

CONNECTING CHILDREN TO HEALTH CARE

No surprise, PCCY's Child HealthLine jumped into double-duty enrolling children and families – and now single adults – into CHIP or Medical Assistance (Medicaid). More than 350 children and adults now have health insurance. Nicole, a stage 4 cancer survivor still undergoing treatment, learned that her youngest son's Medicaid coverage was cancelled because of an administrative error. After months of appeals and denials, Nicole turned to the HealthLine where their bureaucratic nightmare got solved and Jules, a child with lots of special needs, finally got the health care coverage he so desperately needed.

Give Kids Sight Day and Give Kids a Smile Week were rapidly redesigned to accommodate social distancing protocols so that children could still receive these critical health care services despite the shutdown. With a bit of string and a simple eye chart mailed to the home of each child, more than 100 volunteers from Wills Eye, Salus, and Penn School of Nursing and friends of PCCY partnered with parents via cellphones and computers to check their child's sight. There was plenty of laughter and tons of wonderment as families experienced the marriage of low tech and high tech all focused on ensuring their children could see. At the end of the day,



we were able to remotely screen 475 children for vision problems, and with these parents we found 255 children needed glasses or had much more serious eyecare needs, and all of them received exactly what they needed thanks to our amazing Give Kids Sight partnership.

When it comes to checking the teeth of children, remote examinations simply aren't possible. Through some ingenuity and support of dentists across the region, hundreds of dental appointments that typically would have happened in one week were spaced out over a month to restore these kids' smile in a COVID safe manner.

Throughout April, 439 children received much needed dental care, especially since nearly every little patient had gone more than six months without seeing a dentist. Lack of dental insurance continues to be a barrier for families – three out of four Give Kids Smile participants were uninsured.

Even families with private health insurance have little or no dental coverage for their children, and other families still struggle to find dentists willing to accept Medicaid or CHIP. There is still more work to be done to remove barriers to access these basic health care services for children.

Meanwhile, undocumented children account for most of the children relying on our free health care services. PCCY and our 100 Dream Care Coalition Partners continue to call on Pennsylvania lawmakers to amend state law and deliver on the state's promise to "Cover All Kids." To join us in this effort, visit the PCCY website (pccy.org) to sign on as a Dream Care supporter.



LET'S INSURE EVERY CHILD

It wasn't a moment too soon for four children seeing a dentist during "Give Kids a Smile" this year. Joshua (aged 9), Angelica (8), José (9), and Anderson (13), all needed substantial oral surgery to cure mouths full of tooth decay and end their chronic pain. Their parents were never able to afford to take them to the dentist and couldn't enroll them in CHIP because they don't have legal citizenship papers. With a simple change in the law, thousands of PA children like Joshua, Angelica, José, and Anderson could see a doctor without detrimental delay.

THE LINGERING THREAT OF LEAD PAINT POISONING

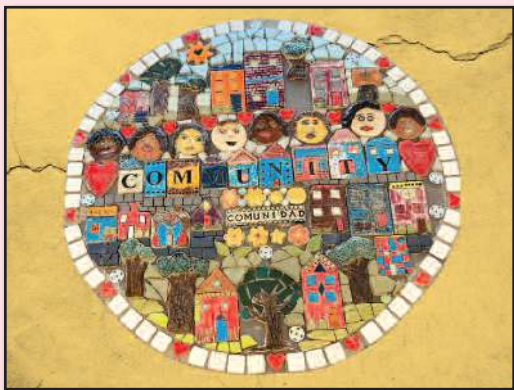
Lead poisoning from chipping paint continues to harm more than 8,000 children statewide every year. PCCY is leading the charge in Southeast Pennsylvania to eradicate this persistent problem. We formed the Delaware County Lead Poisoning Prevention Coalition which most recently partnered with Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon and her team to educate Delco municipal managers, homeowners, and landlords about free federal programs to test for lead and provide remediation. Working in Delaware County is a priority because 80% of homes and apartments there likely have lead paint, causing the equivalent of 17 kindergarten classrooms full of children

poisoned by lead in just that one county annually.



After paving the way for the pioneering new lead law in Philadelphia, we're ramping up efforts with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health to educate parents, tenants, and community groups to make sure everyone knows how to prevent children from being poisoned by chipping and flaking lead paint. Contact Colleen McCauley at 215-298-2027 or colleenm@pccy.org to schedule a free 30-minute training for your community development corporation, church group, civic organization, PTA, school committee, or neighborhood association.

ARTS CAN HEAL DURING TRYING TIMES



One of the five mosaics permanently installed on the front of Bayard Taylor School in North Philadelphia, created by students in partnership with Bella Mosaics.

Access to arts education is critical, especially in this time of social distancing and disruption of normalcy. Tim Gibbon, Picasso Project Director, makes the case, "Through the arts, kids can stay connected, use their imaginations to access a more positive reality, and process stress and anxiety that they may be experiencing."

When the pandemic

struck, our #ArtsEdAtHome created a vast collection of user-friendly virtual arts resources beloved by teachers and parents alike. Undeterred by the shutdown, the Picasso Project in March launched 20 arts projects tailored to online learning, including puppet making, singing, dancing, drumming, and papermaking.

Given the frightening impact on children of racial tension and social isolation, many projects are focusing on creative writing, journaling, songwriting, and poetry/spoken word to give kids a healthy, artistic outlet. "Spoken word is a confidence booster for young people. It gets them excited about writing and revision, making sure they get their point across effectively and creatively," said Sally O'Brien, Kensington Health Sciences Academy High School teacher and 2021 Picasso Project grant recipient. Some projects emphasize conversations on race and equity and encourage students to express their cultural background in their writings and designs.

PA CHARTER PERFORMANCE CENTER CUTS THROUGH CHARTER SCHOOL RHETORIC

Charter school enrollment, including cyber charters, has doubled over the past decade. Parents and lawmakers, barraged by charter school ads, confusing data about charter performance, and the influence of well-financed lobbyists, have a tough time knowing if charters are the right choice for students. PCCY launched the Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center to cut through the confusion and deliver the facts.

"Charter school education is a polarizing topic where both sides argue with much conviction, but typically very little data," said ML Wernecke, Director of the Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center. "Absent unbiased, accessible information, there can be no accountability to boost charter school performance or close poorly performing operators."

Across the commonwealth in charter schools, more than three quarters of 3rd through 8th graders failed their Math test, and 56% failed English Language Arts. High school students aren't faring much better; more than half of charter school 11th graders failed the Algebra Keystone Exam; 45% failed Literature.

Low-income and at-risk students are more likely to enroll in charters than other students. Only 16% of district schools but 58% of brick-and-mortar charters operate in high poverty areas. This raises significant equity issues about who attends charter schools and how they are doing.

Cyber charter schools have come under particular scrutiny during the pandemic. Every one of the 14 approved cyber charters in PA have a "needs improvement" grade from the state's accountability system but many parents of public, private, and parochial students transferred their kids into a cyber charter program.

Not only are performance questions being raised, but price tags are going up too. School districts are required to pay cyber charters regardless of whether that child was ever enrolled in the district. This year, for example, the Philadelphia School District is paying the cyber charter costs for thousands of children who, before the pandemic, were attending private or parochial schools.

The PA Charter Performance Center has testified several times this year against applications by poor-performing cyber charters to set up shop in Philadelphia and every time the cybers have been stopped in their tracks. The Center has not wasted a moment delivering unbiased information that families and lawmakers can use to make the best decisions, spreading the word about the cyber "high cost and low return" statewide. In a short time, it has quickly established itself as an authority on the quality, or lack thereof, of charter education.



STAND UP FOR KIDS IN LOCKDOWN

At least 300 accounts of staff abuse – ranging from assault to rape to prostituting residents at private parties – in four Southeastern Pennsylvania youth residential facilities have been reported over the last 20 years. Courageous young people who suffered at the hands of their caretakers are telling of their horrific experiences and their hopelessness of having nowhere to turn to stop the abuse. It is heartbreaking and maddening.

Helping these teens and ending the culture of abuse and cover-up demands a comprehensive approach. A wise first step is to stop putting so many young people in detention because jailing youth doesn't help them get back on track. Diversion and restorative programs are proven alternatives to detention – they teach kids how to understand their actions and make better choices. These tools give kids a new start at success and keep our communities safe.

Compelled by the horror stories of abuse at the Delaware County Juvenile Detention Center in Lima, we are leading a coalition in Delaware County to close the corrupt facility and develop youth-centered programs as detention alternatives. Local agencies are already in place that offer culturally relevant and restorative programs, so we heal rather than harm our children. We've also called on state leaders to hire a third party to conduct a full-scale investigation of Lima and publicly release the results.

Most of the youth in residential facilities are from Philadelphia, and Black and Brown youth are detained at alarming numbers. To keep them safe, PCCY has called on City Council to launch a Philadelphia Youth Services Ombudsperson Office that would be mandated to conduct investigations when youth or parents report abuse of any sort while children are forced to live in institutions.

What is best for youth in institutions is to have one place they can call when the protections in place fail them; one place to turn where they know they can get help. A dedicated, independent Ombudsperson's office will be a resource for victims when their cries for help go unanswered.



The killing of 17-year-old David Hess by staff at Wordsworth Academy has prompted calls for an independent office to respond to cries of abuse.

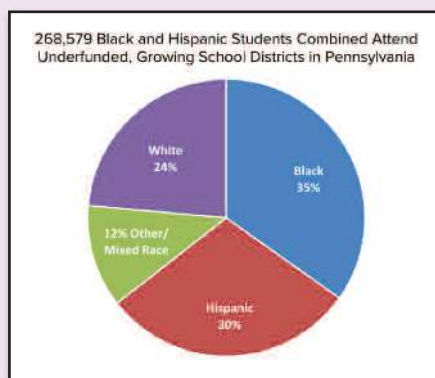
FOLLOWING THE MONEY ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Proper education funding is at the heart of the many problems facing Pennsylvania's education system, and the misguided "hold harmless" education policy is a major contributor. PCCY's report, Hold Harmless: A Quarter Century of Inequity at the Heart of Pennsylvania's School System, lays out how a decades-old education funding policy has had devastating consequences for the commonwealth's students.

Implemented in 1992, hold harmless dictates that school districts cannot receive less funding than they did the year prior, but fails to take into account how student enrollment has shifted dramatically across the state. Shrinking districts have lost a total of a fifth of their student body since 1991-92 but they haven't lost their funding. They now have \$590 million tied to students they no longer educate.

The growing districts have 204,000 more students today than in 1991-92, but they have not been given state funding to accommodate their larger enrollment levels. This puts districts in the untenable position of having to cut critical resources like technology, counselors, and tutors. In the end, it's the students who suffer.

Black and Hispanic students bear the brunt of the systemic underfunding because more than 80% of the state's Black and Hispanic students attend growing school districts. This underfunding perpetuates the chronic racial achievement gap long dismissed as an urban education phenomenon. PCCY's latest report, No More Dreams Deferred: Building An Education System That



Works for Black and Hispanic Students, shows that the lack of funding coupled with cash-strapped schools not able to offer student support services keep many students of color from achieving their potential.

At a PCCY press conference, Reading School District Superintendent Khalid Mumin shared that his students need more than just the ABCs. In addition to dealing with the normal challenges of adolescence, the teachers and staff see

how children are deeply affected by "poverty, lack of access to health care, healthy foods, and nutrition." But without the necessary funding, Reading has had to make tough budget choices such as cutting back on teacher professional development which would have helped teachers meet students' social and emotional needs.

To build an education system that works for the region's Black and Hispanic students, schools, districts, and lawmakers must address pervasive problems like poor school climate, lower enrollment of Black and Hispanic students in Advanced Placement or Honors classes, and racially and economically segregated classrooms. You can read the Hold Harmless report at <https://www.pccy.org/report/no-more-dreams-deferred/>.

Until the state funds the education system at an adequate level and distributes those funds equitably, it is contributing to the structural racism and economic inequality plaguing America. You can read the report at <https://www.pccy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PCCY-HoldHarmlessReport-2020-Final-2.pdf> to see what Pennsylvania must do to fix our broken education funding system.

A PROFILE IN LEADERSHIP AND GENEROSITY

The very generous support and volunteer leadership of community members like John and Ann Riggan make our work possible. "Over these many years, my wife Ann and I give proudly and always wish we could give more to PCCY for the valiant work they do and the children they serve. It is so important to support advocacy work because without it, we won't



have change."

John's career has been dedicated to children and youth, working in many roles to give children better lives and opportunities. When working for the City of Philadelphia, he helped create a variety of intervention programs for youth but realized that many children were still slipping through the cracks. He joined a passionate group of volunteers and professionals committed to research and advocacy. Out of those efforts, PCCY was born.

"In the early days, we focused on child welfare and juvenile justice with dedicated volunteers observing and documenting problems and advocating with public officials." Thanks to his leadership on the Board of Directors, PCCY has grown and is a powerful voice for children.

John is now an honorary director and continues to contribute in other ways. He brought his son Matt and daughter-in-law Erin into the fold. Matt served on the Board of Directors and chaired the Education Committee, and Matt and Erin are monthly donors. John has been instrumental in documenting PCCY's 40+ year history, contributing extensively to a dynamic, soon-to-be unveiled website that exhibits PCCY's growth and influence.

On behalf of Pennsylvania's children, we thank John, Ann, Matt, Erin, and all of our supporters who make PCCY's work possible.

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CHILD CARE IS TOO BIG TO FAIL

It seems like the world has finally caught on to what parents, advocates, and researchers have known for decades—child care and pre-K are essential. From frequent national news stories to presidential addresses, people have been talking about how important quality, affordable child care and early education programs are to children, parents, employers, and even our country’s global economic standing.

Child care providers – like so many businesses – had to temporarily close their doors as the pandemic posed serious health risks to children and staff. But it quickly emerged that parents who couldn’t work remotely, our essential workers, couldn’t work without having child care. Centers reopened and bore the brunt of sky-high costs of PPE and additional staff to maintain social distancing.

For parents who couldn’t find care, many women just left the workforce altogether. More than two million women nationwide dropped out of the labor force during the pandemic, with a third of them citing child care issues as the reason. This, of course, has long-term impacts on women, their career advancement, lifetime earning potential, and ability to provide financial stability for the family.

The major barrier is the sky-high cost of quality child care. The median cost of care in Southeast PA for an infant is north of \$12,820 and \$10,760 for a preschooler. Two children in child care would cost a family \$23,580—40% more than tuition at Temple University. Child care is a family’s single biggest expense after housing.

Not only are women leaving the workforce, but they’re also reconsidering motherhood, resulting in America’s birthrate falling by 19% since 2007. The top reasons are economic uncertainty and worry about affordable quality child care. A lower birthrate has serious implications for our national economy, as fewer workers can result in lower productivity. Child care is having a direct impact on our nation’s position as a global economic powerhouse.

The value of child care and pre-K are not just in freeing up parents to go to work, but in shaping children’s early learning. In March, the first independent study of Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts program by the prestigious University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) shows that children in the state’s early childhood education program are better at math and language—the building blocks to lifelong learning and job success—than kids who did not attend Pre-K Counts.



Pennsylvania is getting almost \$1.2 billion in federal funds for child care, double what we received from the first two federal stimulus packages combined. Parents and providers know firsthand how to best invest those dollars to boost quality and availability and reduce cost so PCCY solicited their input. In over a dozen virtual forums across the commonwealth, teacher pay ranked as a top problem. Several center owners said that they’re losing employees to Walmart because the pay is better as a cashier than an early childhood educator.

While the federal aid gives much-needed relief to the child care sector, Pennsylvania legislators must do their part to strengthen pre-K and Head Start. Governor Wolf has proposed an increase of \$25 million for Pre-K Counts and \$5 million for Head Start. As lawmakers in Harrisburg debate the state budget, there shouldn’t be any question about the value of child care and pre-K: it contributes to our economic and educational bottom line.

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