

The Big Thing: A Summit To Change Young Lives



"Think big."

More than 200 child advocates came together over two days to think big about how to change young lives in Pennsylvania. Children First built this Summit with the sage guidance of an amazing Steering Committee of students, parents, and child-serving leaders.

It was a transformational experience for the participants – academics, social workers, nonprofit leaders, high school students, philanthropists, civil servants – as they collectively envisioned a better future for children and teens.

Enthusiastic participants tackled the three most important issues: teacher diversity, career readiness in public schools, and children's mental health. The dynamic interaction of people of such diverse backgrounds spurred visionary thinking that could elevate future public conversation and action. To put it mildly, it was groundbreaking. The relationships formed and commitments made at the Summit are the foundation of a long-term movement that is about to get underway.

Already 50 Summit participants said "count me in" to keep the momentum going and change young lives for the better.



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Policy Victory: Historic Investment

Under the dark cloud of COVID, PA children and families celebrated a silver lining with **historic funding increases in the 2022-23 state budget**. Through our relentless coalition efforts – Pre-K for PA, Level Up, Start Strong PA, and PA Schools Work – the legislature committed unprecedented dollars to improve child care and education.

- A whopping \$1.1 billion for K-12 schools, nearly \$300 million coming to southeastern PA
- \$79 million to grow access to high-quality early learning programs like pre-k, Head Start, and child care
- \$90 million in one-time funds to help child care programs attract and retain staff
- \$25 million in continued child care subsidies to help low-income families
- \$16 million to increase access to home visiting programs

School closures and remote learning resulted in extensive K-12 learning loss, so this funding boost is essential to getting students back on track. On top of the massive funding increases, we secured a \$10 million investment to stem childhood lead poisoning in the Commonwealth and passed a new state tax credit to help families afford the cost of child care.

For more information contact Mai Miksic at maim@childrenfirstpa.org.



Child care providers are forced to shut down because they haven't been able to afford to hire qualified employees. This policy victory will help give child care workers the pay they deserve.

Winning Strategy: Child Care Voters



The **Children First Action Fund** launched last campaign season with great success in getting candidates on the record. This year, the Action Fund upped its game with **Child Care Voters**, an ambitious project to make child care the #1 issue for voters and candidates.

Child Care Voters took the early childhood education message on the campaign trail with 18 candidate conversations across the Commonwealth. Candidates from 20 legislative districts discussed child care funding, the economy, and teacher shortages in what were the only “debates” in their districts.

On top of that, 14 Republicans and 79 Democrats went on the record by answering the Children First Action Fund questionnaire. In an election season when so many candidates – notably high-profile races – shied away from debates and questionnaires, Child Care Voters delivered important information so voters could cast their ballot knowing where their candidates stood.

Learn more at childcarevoters.org or contact Kyle McMillen at kylem@childrenfirstpa.org.



Legislative candidates in the Montgomery County Candidate Conversation

Giving Voice to Young People of Color

We want to amplify the voices of youth and families of color in greater Philadelphia whose life stories and challenges don't get “front page” visibility. Since the launch of our **disParities Media Project**, five front page stories focused on the lives of Black and Hispanic families in Norristown and Pottstown ran in all the major Montgomery County newspapers.

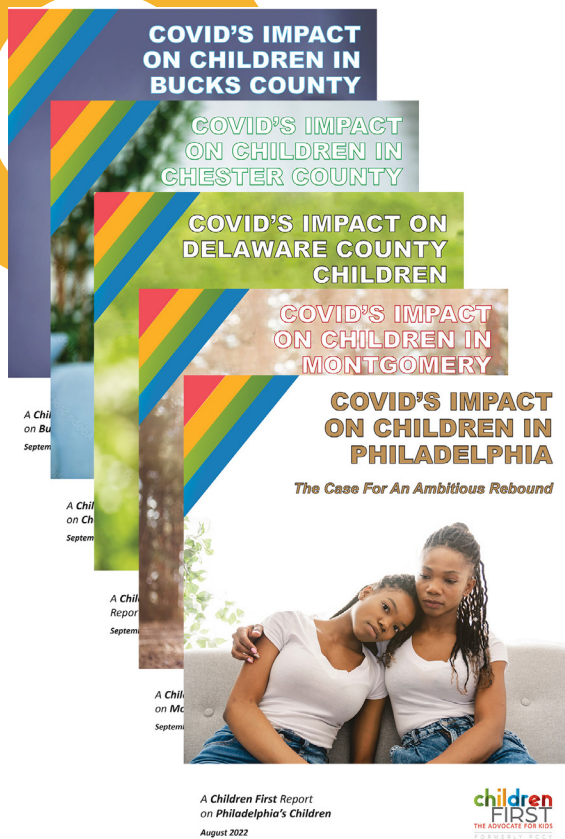
Critical topics like school funding, access to higher education, teacher diversity, and lead paint poisoning are being told from the perspective people of color, notably youth.

Each of these articles, researched and written by Emma Restrepo from DosPuntos media, was built from the firsthand experiences of Black and Hispanic youth and activists who are demanding change.

Check out the articles and learn more about this innovative project at childrenfirstpa.org/disparitiesmedia.



COVID's Impact on Children



The effects of the COVID pandemic were felt far and wide, and our latest reports, "**COVID's Impact on Children: A Case for An Ambitious Rebound**," document how kids in the region fared.

The good news is that, in spite of the economic turmoil, 14% fewer children in the region are in poverty, a result of strong congressional action that amped up the child tax credit.

In contrast, the emotional well-being of kids took a hit as evidenced by an 18% spike in youth calls to the statewide mental health hotline. Children in our region sought out help in record numbers. For instance, Montgomery County calls to the hotline spiked by 103% during the pandemic.

The pandemic also hollowed out the early childhood sector. Twenty percent of child care staff left the field because they could earn substantially more almost anywhere else. In Bucks County alone, retail and fast food workers were making 31% more than the people entrusted to teach our youngest children.

Our data finds that children in low-wealth school districts like Philadelphia and Norristown were already far behind academically before COVID. National and statewide testing shows extensive learning loss as a result of the pandemic, making the learning challenges for these students even more pronounced.

Policymakers and citizens are already discussing our findings and recommendations in K-12 and other areas to jumpstart the recovery so our children and families can heal and thrive. Find your county report at childrenfirstpa.org/covidimpact. Email info@childrenfirstpa.org for a hard copy of the report for your county.

Parents Empowered for Change

PARENTS



EMPOWERED FOR CHANGE

We launched **Parents Empowered for Change (PEC)** to train parents how to fight for what their children and all children need. PEC unites parents to advocate for children in ways that benefit them and our communities – by supporting parents to be powerful change agents. Every person raising a child is welcome and needed to unite for real change for kids!

To build the ranks of powerful child advocates, PEC is delivering outside the one-size-fits-all box. Drop-in Workshops are available on timely issues where parents can engage and make a difference. Through the 20-hour The Action Lab, parents learn how to build local power to advance change. And in the months-long Empowerment Fellowship, parents take the baton to lead a project in their own community. Eighteen parents are already enrolled in the Action Lab, honing their skills to influence lawmakers in time for the next legislative session.

Parenting is the hardest job out there. Too many programs and decisions that are intended to help parents and children are simply failing. And far too often parents aren't at the table to decide what's best for their kids. That needs to change! Check out childrenfirstpa.org/pec or contact Inella Ray at inellar@childrenfirstpa.org learn more.

Donor Salute

Jude Bornstein-Chau and Vinh Chau are passionate about social justice and advocacy, which is how they first came to know Children First. Careful donors who believe their investment in a nonprofit should yield measurable results, they followed our work for a year before making a major gift to support our Justice in Education program and Parents Empowered for Change.

Jude is an internist specializing in Integrative Medicine with an interest in mind-body healing and the root causes of disease. Vinh is a highly successful entrepreneur who previously started two technology companies and now leads product management for a digital healthcare company. In addition to their demanding careers, they are loving parents to their middle school son, Kien.

Thank you, Jude and Vinh, for your support and decision to give at a significant level – we are glad to have such generous and creative problem-solvers on our team!

If you are also passionate about social justice and advocacy, support our work by reaching out to Caroline King at carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org or simply make a donation at childrenfirstpa.org/donate.



Take Action Tuesday

Take Action Tuesday makes contacting your legislators and flexing your constituent power effortless.

Each week, you'll receive a link to send a message to your lawmakers about legislation that impacts kids – sometimes good, sometimes bad.

You will literally have the power to influence your elected leaders at your fingertips so be sure to check your email and take action.

You can take action too!

Visit childrenfirstpa.org/takeactiontuesday to take action on recent developments and/or sign up for future Tuesday emails.

For more information, contact our Take Action Tuesday team: Dan O'Brien at dano@childrenfirstpa.org or Shirlee Howe at shirleeh@childrenfirstpa.org.

Your Generosity

Twice a year, Childwatch shows you how Children First makes the lives of children better, at scale, every day. Support our work to make sure that every child benefits from good early learning programs, great schools, quality health care, enriching after school and summer opportunities, and the extra supports they need to overcome neglect or abuse.

We create opportunity for children and you can too by donating to support our work at childrenfirstpa.org/donate.



Breaking News

Lead paint was banned decades ago, but thousands of children are still being poisoned by the legacy of toxic lead paint in their homes. More children will be saved from lead paint poisoning thanks to Children First and the passage of Childhood Blood Lead Test Act. This new state law finally requires private insurance companies to cover a lead test for children under two years old and directs the PA Department of Health to mount a statewide public awareness campaign.

Our **Lead-Free Promise Project** is also working with counties and municipalities to make kids safe. In Norristown, more than 1,000 properties have been certified lead safe this year since passing a law requiring lead paint inspections for all rental properties, child care centers, condemned buildings, and properties for sale (for buildings built before 1978).

In Philadelphia, 95% of older, licensed rental properties – or 82,000 properties – have been certified as lead free or lead safe, a 1,700% increase in the number of certified properties compared to just four years ago.

On October 25th, we released our **"Action Plan to Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning in Delaware County by 2027"** with the support of the new county health department. Among other recommendations, the Action Plan prioritizes testing homes and removing the lead so kids never get poisoned in the first place.

For more information contact Colleen McCauley at colleenm@childrenfirstpa.org.

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