

PHSA Advocacy Engagement Strategy

The PHSA Program Liaison Project



PHSA Vision Statement

The Pennsylvania Head Start Association creates ONE CLEAR, POWERFUL VOICE for children and families who are economically challenged. We embrace diversity and unify the early childhood community by being a responsive, thriving organization, leading the charge for training, information sharing, advocacy and comprehensive services.

PHSA Mission Statement

The Pennsylvania Head Start Association's purpose is to maximize the cumulative talents of Early Head Start/Head Start parents, staff, administrators and friends to collectively improve the future for economically challenged children, families and communities, by providing quality leadership, training, information and advocacy at the local, state, regional and national levels.

Development of the PHSA Advocacy Engagement Strategy

At the 2017 Annual PHSA Membership Meeting held during the PHSA Conference, PHSA Board President, Paula Margraf, presented the Association's broad strategic plan and reviewed the current environment that programs are operating in.

At the state level we continue to experience shortfalls in revenue collection. These shortfalls have created a significant budget gap that poses a direct threat to the ongoing support of Head Start and PA PreK Counts, which many Head Start grantees administer. In addition, they jeopardize the investments that the state has made across the entire early learning system in Pennsylvania, potentially undermining the foundation of a successful system (i.e., high quality child care, home visitation, early intervention, and other services to vulnerable children and families) .

While this less than optimal environment exists at the state level, there is even greater uncertainty at the federal level. The new administration has been slow to appoint Secretaries, leading to what we anticipate will be a longer than typical period without a Director of the Office of Head Start. Though the career staff at OHS are extremely capable and dedicated, the Head Start/Early Head Start community needs permanent leadership in place. New Head Start Program Performance Standards and subsequent new Monitoring System coupled with an unknown time frame for Head Start Reauthorization are all pressing issues that the field looks to the Office of Head Start to lead on. In the midst of these issues, concerns about what the new administration sees as the future of Head Start have surfaced. Though we continue to have unprecedented bipartisan support, others have recommended everything from block granting to the steady defunding of the program proposed in the

Heritage Blueprint. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that they co-exist with on-going questions about the health of our economy.

Given these issues, the board has chosen to focus on the engagement of its members to create public will for Head Start/Early Head Start and grow a vibrant community of advocates with the goal of projecting one clear, powerful voice for Head Start/Early Head Start in Pennsylvania. It is imperative to PHSA and to Head Start/Early Head Start programs in Pennsylvania that we develop a more systematic advocacy network that is able to respond quickly when issues arise. The PHSA Board and staff feel strongly that all programs must make a commitment to educating the general public and more specifically, legislators, about the positive impacts of their program on children, families and their community. **During the 2017 PHSA Membership Meeting, Board President, Paula Margraf, challenged all program directors to actively engage and commit to some basic actions including: Identifying an advocacy lead within your program and working with your advocacy lead to develop a plan to engage your program's staff and parents to join PHSA's email list, sign on as members of the PreK for PA Campaign and work with PHSA as advocates for Head Start/Early Head Start at the local, state and federal level.**

To that end, we have developed the following Advocacy Engagement Strategy/PHSA Program Liaison Project to identify program staff who will serve as PHSA Program Liaisons. With PHSA staff support and materials, these Liaisons **will become the advocacy lead within their program, help program staff and parents understand the vital role that advocacy plays for Head Start/Early Head Start, and be positioned to quickly mobilize staff and parents within their program when needed.**

The following FAQ provides the answers to some basic questions about the PHSA Program Liaison Project and how it fits into our larger Advocacy Engagement Strategy. If you have questions that are not addressed in the FAQ, please feel free to contact PHSA Associate Director, Karen Grimm-Thomas, at the PHSA office or via email at karen@paheadstart.org. Karen will be working with Michelle Smith, our new Outreach Manager, to schedule calls with directors to begin to identify staff within each program that will serve as Liaisons. Michelle, a former Head Start parent, staff member and PHSA Board Member has recently completed her MSW degree and will be working with the Association on implementing our Advocacy Engagement Strategy. You can reach Michelle via email at michelle@paheadstart.org.

As always, we thank you for your commitment to your program and the families that you serve and we know that with your participation, our new Advocacy Engagement Strategy will be successful.