

## United Way of Westmoreland County School Readiness

United Way of Westmoreland County began the School Readiness Initiative in 2001 with the goal to demonstrate support for quality early care and education by:

- Enhancing the quality of early childhood care and education in Westmoreland County through the support of grants to providers.
- Helping parents and the community better understand the importance and benefits of investing in early education by providing information and resources.
- Supporting successful transition to kindergarten by providing opportunities and funding for collaborations between early care and education practitioners, school districts and the community.

*"Children are born ready to grow, ready to be valued, ready to learn."*

- Fred Rogers



This Community Engagement Group report card provides an opportunity to communicate clearly on current levels the performance and progress United Way of Westmoreland County School Readiness is making. If you would like more information or would like to find out how you can become involved, please contact United Way School Readiness.

### Contact Information

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United Way  
of Westmoreland County



## United Way of Westmoreland County School Readiness

### Report Card 2008-2009



Promoting high quality early care and education so that all children will enter school ready to learn



### April - Month of the Young Child

The month of April has been designated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as the *Month of the Young Child*.



*Story time at "The Westmoreland" Museum*

Florence Minor was read by volunteers and each child in attendance was provided with their own copy of this wonderful selection.

Also, as part of the Month of the Young Child, 18 libraries displayed children's artwork provided by their community's early child care centers. UWWC School Readiness encouraged child care centers to connect with their local library to stimulate early literacy and as a family activity.

United Way School Readiness partnered with the Westmoreland Museum of American Art to host "*Communities Celebrating Children*" at the Museum on Saturday, April 4, 2009. Children and families were able to participate in a scavenger hunt, art project and tour of the Museum. The Pennsylvania One Book, Every Young Child reading initiative book, *If You Were a Penguin*, by Wendell and

### In Westmoreland County

- 30.1% of children under age 5 participate in publicly-funded quality early education programs
- 14.3% are served by centers participating in Keystone Stars
- 34.6% of children under age 5 live in low-income families
- 13.2% of third graders scored below proficient on the 2008 PSSA reading test



## Early Childhood Legislative Breakfast

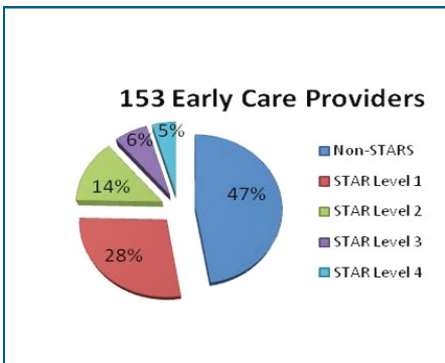
On March 27, 2009, United Way of Westmoreland County and the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children sponsored the second annual Legislative Breakfast at the Greensburg Country Club. Hosted by Rep. Deberah Kula, 52nd District, this year's breakfast reviewed the federal stimulus package. Guest speaker, David Callahan, Executive



*Dave Callahan speaks on federal stimulus effects on Early Education.*

Vice President, Public Policy and Legislative Relations for Pennsylvania Partnership

for Children described the federal stimulus package and the proposed state budget focusing on the funding targeted to young children and families.



## School Readiness Transition

School Readiness sponsors an annual retreat bringing together school districts, early childcare providers and parents to work as teams on their district's plan for transitioning children into kindergarten.

The 2009 Retreat was held in the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning at St. Vincent College. All seventeen school districts from Westmoreland and one from both Greene and Fayette Counties attended to strategize and plan activities to best meet the needs of incoming kindergartners in their district.

School Readiness provides funds to assist districts carry out these activities to familiarize children with the public school they will attend. Some of these activities include field trips by preschoolers to the school they will attend, visits by kindergarten teachers to the preschools.



*Storywalk at Derry's Grandview Elementary August 2009*

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storybook walks, meet the teacher nights and kindergarten orientations.

Coinciding with this year's retreat was a luncheon for all school district superintendents. Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Dr. Gerald Zahorchak spoke on "Linking Ready Kids to Ready Schools." He praised United Way's School Readiness program for the outstanding job being done on behalf of children.



*Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Dr. Gerald Zahorchak addressing superintendents*

## High Quality Improvement Grants

School Readiness supports early care and education providers in their effort to improve the quality of their programs by making funds available for professional development, curriculum and literacy enrichment. School Readiness encourages centers to advance in the Keystone STARS levels to achieve a STAR 3 or higher.

The STARS program provides parents with a means to assess the quality of the center. It also provides centers with training, support and assistance to improve their overall quality.

More than \$47,800 was awarded to 25 centers in 08-09 to move them toward that goal.

## Advocating for Early Child Care

Part of School Readiness' responsibility as the Community Engagement Group is to educate the community on how to keep our legislators informed about the importance of quality early education.

In the fall, early care providers were requested to have children color leaves as part of the "Tree of Thankfulness" that would be presented to legislators in Harrisburg. With outstanding support from county centers, 402 leaves were submitted for the tree.

School Readiness also distributed the PA Promise for Children Declaration that provides an opportunity for parents, school districts, early care providers and other community partners to proclaim their support for quality early learning. More than 450 Declarations have been delivered to legislators in 2008—2009.

**Head Start in Westmoreland County serves 806 children and Early Head Start benefits 118 infants and toddlers.**