



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
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August 19, 2009 – Kindergarten Readiness

Deborah Berenson-Perkins of England served as Project Manager of Smart Start-Centre County this past year. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Remember your first day at Kindergarten? The big yellow school bus? The cafeteria? It's unlikely you remember the nervousness your parents felt as they sent you on your way that day.

Local non-profit organization Smart Start-Centre County is a key player in the readiness for Kindergarten initiative, working with families to prepare them for the transition to Kindergarten. As part of Smart Start-Centre County's endeavor to address parents' needs, a parent-survey was developed to determine the most vital areas of support. The survey was distributed to parents of current kindergarteners among Bald Eagle and State College Area School Districts, with over 240 responses.

SS-CC's Executive Director, Eileen Wise commented on the process; "We're grateful to all the parents that participated... We've got very useful feedback that we're sharing with schools and early childhood programs."

The driving force behind this survey was enabling parents to express concerns about their personal transition, aiming to draw on their experiences and improve the process within schools, preschools and support agencies.

Parents were asked about their child's preparation prior to entering kindergarten, including involvement in preschool, activities at home and support services. The cultural diversity in Centre County motivated data collection about children's spoken languages, enabling schools to better support the integration of children inexperienced with English.

Results found that families received preparatory information both from the programs their children already attended, and the schools they had enrolled in. This was combined with a variety of preparation-activities in the home.

The social and emotional readiness of children was the primary concern for parents, closely followed by their child's independence and security; regarding transportation, cafeteria and bathroom usage and adjustment to special events (such as delays and closings). Surprisingly, academic readiness was not a top concern.

Many schools offer families the opportunity to ride the school bus together, tour the school, meet teachers and review school policies. Previous attendees of such events expressed their gratitude, claiming that the process helped to alleviate concerns.

77% of parents noted the effectiveness of Kindergarten Camps and programs offered through preschools. Additionally, parents cited helpful activities: reading to your child, teaching them the basic shapes and colors, speaking positively about school and attending events together.

The survey was developed to facilitate the better support of parents during their transition. While there were few suggestions for improvement, several families were unaware of readily available services. All programs and events currently in effect received very positive feedback, making publicity and awareness a vital part of improving the process for the families of Centre County.

In a continual effort to simplify the process, Smart Start-Centre County has developed publications and events accessible to the public. When asked about key sources of information, 35% of parents cited the School District, just ahead of Smart Start-Centre County's *Countdown to Kindergarten* Event (34%). The value of the event speaks for itself in the figures, and SS-CC plans to continue its annual success. SS-CC also provides information about kindergarten registration dates and additional resources on their website,

www.smartstartcc.org.

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