

Corbett touts proposed investment in early childhood

He proposed additional funds to promote access to high-quality child care.

By **ANGIE MASON**

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After children in a Pre-K Counts classroom at Crispus Attucks Early Learning Center in York showed off their knowledge of numbers to Gov. Tom Corbett on Friday, he touted bigger numbers, namely his proposed investment in high-quality child care.

In his proposed 2013-14 budget, Corbett has included an additional \$3 million to fund the Rising STARS initiative, which promotes greater access to high-quality child care for

at-risk children, according to a news release.

The Keystone STARS program, started in 2002, issues ratings from STAR 1 to STAR 4 to child care and Head Start programs for meeting standards related to teacher quality, classroom environment, family partnerships and solid business practices, according to the Department of Public Welfare.



York City Police Chief Wes Kahley, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett Lt. General (Ret.) Dennis Bencoff, U.S. Army and ELIC Commissioner Mike Smeltzer, Manufacturer's Association of South Central PA

The Rising STARS initiative offers incentives to providers through tiered reimbursements for adopting quality practices and would target resources to STAR 1 child care providers to help them move to a higher level, according to the release.

Corbett said every child should have an equal start in life. Keystone STARS helps track how well children are being served, he said, and Rising STARS takes that one step further.

"What they learn the years before kindergarten, we understand, can make the difference in whether their first years in school will mark the beginning of a lifetime of success," he said.

Representatives of law enforcement, business and military agencies were on hand Friday to show support for enhancing early childhood programs.

York City Police Chief Wes Kahley, who is a member of the law enforcement group Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, said he spent much of his time as an officer chasing street gang members and violent criminals.

What it taught him was "arresting people will not solve our problems. We have to invest in preventative measures," he said. "Any comprehensive approach to reducing crime must include high-quality early childhood education and family support programs that are shown to keep at-risk kids out of the pipeline that funnels them into the lives of juvenile and adult crime."

Mike Smeltzer, executive director of the Manufacturers' Association of South Central Pennsylvania, talked about the importance of education in fueling the workforce. In the 1980s, manufacturing was 80 percent brawn and 20 percent brains. Now it's 10 percent brawn and 90 percent brains.

But there's a disconnect when it comes to public funding, he said.

"We invest the least amount during the most critical years, where greatest positive impact can take place," he said.

He likes to use the phrase "better quality in, better quality out," he said. Investing in early learning will help provide the workforce that the area needs, he said.

Crispus Attucks has been a part of the Keystone STARS program since its infancy, said Carol Heagy, director of the Early Learning Center, and it is rated as a four-star site.

"We take this seriously," she said.