



HOW ADVOCACY PROTECTS OUR MOST VULNERABLE KID . . PAGE 2



SIGHT DAY, AND OUR DREAM FOR ALL CHILDREN . . . . . PAGE 2

# PCCY's Childwatch

Spring-Summer 2020

Improving the lives of children and families in Southeastern PA

## RACISM IS A DISEASE THAT HARMS ALL CHILDREN

Only last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics found that racism is a “socially transmitted disease: It’s taught, it’s passed down, and the impacts on children and families are significant from a health perspective.”

It’s a disease that takes a terrible toll on black children, many of whom fear their lives will end well before adulthood. Yet, children of every race are affected when this sickness is left untreated, growing up learning to oppress or being the target of oppression and dealing with its toxic effects.

Demonstrations, like those that spread across the country and around the world in late spring, are an appropriate response to the anguish carried by black parents who fear that their sons may be killed at the hands, or the knee, of racist police officers or others who are charged with protecting our communities. The sheer diversity of the protesters, as well as the determination they demonstrate, despite the inherent dangers of increasingly militarized city streets and shocking occurrences of brutalization by police, is extraordinary.

Led by scores of the next generation of inspiring American leaders, the overdue groundswell demonstrates a genuine willingness to confront the disease and stop making excuses for the hatred visited upon black, brown, indigenous, and Asian Americans, and it gives us hope that white supremacy will wither under the light of justice and decency.



But, while we who abhor racism may be winning the message war, we must also win the substance war. As we rage against the death of George Floyd and other injustices that must be accounted for today, we must also fight for the reforms that will shape the future we seek.

That’s where our energy at PCCY is focused. We are demanding an end the educational apartheid propagated by the way Pennsylvania funds its schools, so that every child in cash-strapped school districts can expect an education as high in quality as their peers in wealthy communities.

We are fighting to reform the early childhood education system so that all children, regardless of their race, ethnicity or socio-economic status, can benefit from the same high-quality early education that currently paves the way for privileged children to start school years ahead.

We are working to stop the injustice of a criminal justice system that fills youth detention facilities with black and brown boys, while their white peers are sentenced to community service for the same offenses.

In memory of the countless victims of racial violence, from Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin to Tamir Rice, we at PCCY rededicate ourselves to advocacy and activism to help heal ourselves, our communities, and our country from the disease of racism.

Black lives matter.

## HOW CERTAIN DISASTER WAS AVERTED FOR OUR STUDENTS

When it was clear that Pennsylvania legislators could be on the verge of a cut far worse for public schools than those experienced under Governor Corbett during the Great Recession, we knew a parallel crisis in education was in the offing.



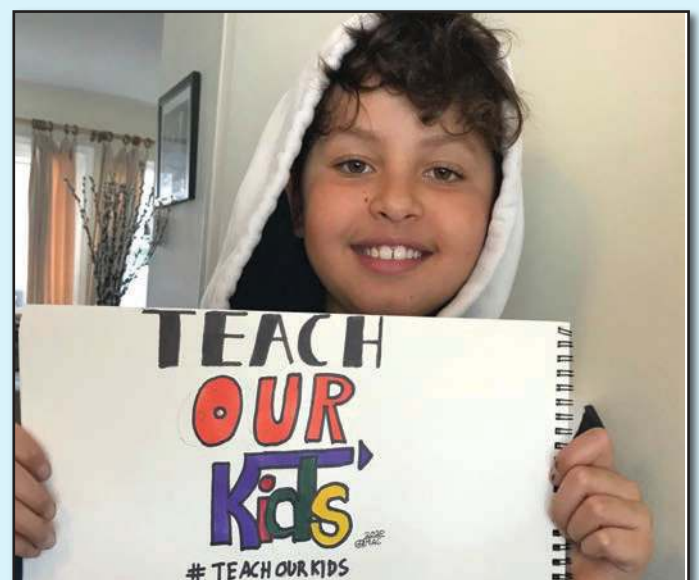
Delaware County Teen Town Hall, with Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon and PA lawmakers, and, of course, student advocates.

As our regularly scheduled visits with state legislators were not possible with social distancing protocols, we shifted to video conferences

featuring parents and education leaders who joined us in our call for extraordinary leadership to protect kids and their futures. Speaking directly to lawmakers is a fundamental advocacy strategy for PCCY and has been throughout our 40-year history, and this year was certainly no exception.

But this spring we began a powerful new chapter with our first ever series of Teen Town Halls, ‘visiting’ four counties.

When Mawa Lewis addressed Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick and state legislators during our inaugural Teen Town Hall for Bucks County,



After 37 districts in the region gave out laptops so that their students could continue their studies while they sheltered at home, PCCY asked the School District of Philadelphia to do the same. We launched the #TEACHOURKIDS social media campaign to restart learning for Philadelphia’s public school students, asking parents, students, advocates, and all Philadelphia residents to post photos on social media.

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she spoke with candor and clarity, fighting for her fellow students at Morrisville High School in Bucks County. Dismissing helplessness for hopefulness, Mawa seized the moment, demanding that the half-dozen lawmakers acknowledge her undeniable truth: if the looming threat of COVID-19-blamed cuts to PA school districts materialize, students at already under-resourced schools will be the most devastated.

“70% of our students are on free and reduced lunch,” Mawa, a senior at Morrisville, said, adding that even though online learning is mandated, there are still more than a dozen families at her school without internet access or even basic computer access. Lacking connectivity and computers is endemic among students in poorer communities across the Commonwealth.

Lawmakers pushing for cuts, she said, would be “taking a lot of opportunities from students, setting them back even further.”

“There’s nothing there for you guys to cut,” she said. “We’re already struggling!”

By the end of May, state lawmakers passed a short-term budget bill that would maintain state funding for public schools that was swiftly signed by Governor Wolf, an impressive sea change that could inspire a new generation of advocates. We’ll be ready for them.

## TEEN TOWN HALL

*Thanks to our lawmakers who took the time to listen:*

### Delaware County:

Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon, PA Senators Tim Kearney, Anthony Williams, Tom Killion, and Daylin Leach; PA Representatives Maria Donatucci, Steve Barrar, Leanne Krueger, Dave Dellosa, Mike Zabel, Margo Davidson and Jennifer O’Mara

### Montgomery County:

Congresswoman Madeleine Dean, PA Senators Katie Muth, Maria Collett, Art Haywood, Vincent Hughes and Daylin Leach; PA Representatives Joe Webster, Tim Briggs, MaryJo Daley, Pam DeLissio, Steve Malagari, Liz Hanbidge, Joe Ciresi, Steve McCarter and Ben Sanchez

### Bucks County:

Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, PA Senators Steve Santarsiero, Maria Collett, and Robert “Tommy” Tomlinson; PA Representatives Tina Davis, Frank Farry, John Galloway, Craig Staats, Wendy Ullman, KC Tomlinson and Perry Warren

### Philadelphia:

Congressman Dwight Evans, Donna Bullock, Elizabeth Fiedler and Maria Donatucci; Philadelphia Councilmembers Cherelle Parker

## OUR DREAM FOR ALL PA CHILDREN

This year, over 400 volunteers registered nearly 1,200 children in just four hours of operation, besting last year’s total. More than half received two pairs of free glasses.



*All are welcome at Sight Day, where every child receives free vision care and, if needed, two pairs of glasses.*

While Pennsylvania boasts that it “covers all kids” under its pioneering CHIP program (one of PCCY’s defining and most consequential achievements), the legislation callously cuts out a cohort of an estimated 24,000 vulnerable children who, through no fault of their own, are undocumented and, as a result, are not permitted to access public insurance in Pennsylvania.

COVID-19 makes plain that state lawmakers going out of their way to rule out these children not only harms children by depriving them of their basic right to healthcare, but robs all Pennsylvanians of an effective public health approach and saddles the healthcare system with extraordinary and entirely avoidable costs.

When uninsured children get sick, often their lack of health care access means minor issues develop into serious issues and they head to hospital emergency rooms, which must be paid for by the hospital or health care system.

“Lawmakers need to understand that when children get sick, they’re less likely to get care if they’re uninsured, like the thousands of undocumented children in Pennsylvania,” Dr. Karen Wang, a pediatrician at the Berks Community Health Center and district physician for the Reading School District, told PCCY. “But with COVID-19, the stakes are higher and the need to extend CHIP coverage to all children has never been greater.”

## ADVOCACY PROTECTS OUR MOST VULNERABLE KIDS

The 2016 death of David Hess, a teen in custody at the now shuttered Glen Mills facility, outraged the city. Disturbing video footage of a child being manhandled by facility staff silenced City Council. And the Council testimonies of those who had been let down by a system meant to help them were heartbreaking.

Responding, in part, to our efforts to see long overdue reforms of Philadelphia’s child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems that place youth in residential facilities, City Council established a Youth Residential Placement Task Force in June of 2018, which included PCCY Executive Director Donna Cooper as well as Task Force co-chair, former Secretary of the PA Department of Human Services, and Vice President of the PCCY Board of Directors, Estelle Richman.

Late last fall, the Task Force released their report to reduce Philadelphia’s reliance on residential placements and improve the safety

and quality of these facilities, including ensuring the quality of education provided.

Thanks to the generous support and consideration of the Otto Haas

Charitable Trust, Rosemarie Greco and Anne Morrissey, PCCY launched its new Stop the Harm/Start the Healing policy office and hired Laurie Dow, a seasoned litigator and former compliance officer for a children and youth residential care provider. Laurie has navigated the courts as a member of Philadelphia’s Child Welfare Unit, rising through the ranks to become Divisional Deputy City Solicitor, specializing in aggravated abuse and neglect cases.youth residential care provider.



*Advocating for change, young women testify at City Council on their own harrowing experiences in residential facilities.*

This new office will be a strong voice in the implementation of the Task Force recommendations and will pay a particular focus on a key player that was largely absent thus far: the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

# LEADING THE CHARGE TO SUPPORT CHILD CARE

With close to 80% of parents with young children in the workforce, the importance of child care to the economy and hopes of a post-COVID recovery cannot be overstated. But while the future of child care faces challenges, even as many counties re-open for business, thousands of child care centers were for a time facing imminent collapse in the early days of the pandemic.

Approximately one-third of surveyed childcare agencies in PA reported that they would not be able to remain open if the state-mandated shutdown last longer than a month.

PCCY put an emergency response plan into effect mere weeks into the shutdown, assessing the needs of child care centers in our five-county region as described in a series of emergency conference calls with providers who had few supports and dwindling hopes.

The plan also included a one-of-a-kind pop-up technical assistance program, providing expert advice on matters such as the myriad of changes to federal requirements on Family/Medical leave, unemployment compensation, as well as applying for state and federal COVID-19-related grants and loans made available for small businesses.

All told, PCCY connected with 1,400 child care providers, mostly from Southeast Pennsylvania but some from as far as Erie. But our work was only just beginning. In the long term, the prognosis remained bleak for the child care sector without desperately needed support from Harrisburg.

In May, we hosted a virtual town hall called Child Care on the Brink, engaging education policy makers and journalists in and out of the child



care sector, in partnership with First Up and United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, hoping to convince lawmakers to prioritize aid to shore up the Commonwealth's child care infrastructure. Featuring national child care experts and information relevant to their broad, statewide audience, the Pennsylvania Cable Network requested permission to broadcast the town hall to households across the Commonwealth.



In addition, we spoke to every Republican member in the Southeast and testified before the House Democratic

policy committee twice.

Simultaneously, as a leading organization in both statewide coalitions, Start Strong PA (child care) and Pre-K for PA, we formulated a strategy to sustain early childhood education infrastructure with the goals of enabling parents to return to work post-crisis, prevent higher costs for public schools that would result from learning losses, prevent steep tuition increases, and reduce the chances of child care-based COVID-19 outbreaks with mandated training and safety policies for all providers.

Much to the relief of parents of young children and PA child care providers, state lawmakers ultimately delivered on these urgent needs through the short-term budget, providing a \$222 million boost for the sector.

The work continues, as we press on to advocate for the federal funds needed to protect the best of our early child care providers.

## COVID-19 TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS & PROVIDERS

When schools first shut down in March, it was a wakeup call about how non-normal things were going to be. But the shock wore off quickly and the implications for parents started to mount. What will happen to the school year and student grades? How am I supposed to get anything done (like work or make sure my family gets through this pandemic) if my child is unsupervised? How are kids going to be learning from home? How am I supposed to teach my children?

Enter: PCCY's COVID Toolkit To Help Kids During The Coronavirus Shutdown, the region's first family-focused resource.

We made sure to include practical education resources and tips for parents, as well as important health insurance information, WIC updates, food pantry locations, and as many resources as we could find to help support parents and children, including our celebrated #ArtsEdAtHome module.



The Toolkit also houses several flyers translated in up to 10 languages so that immigrant families for whom English is not their first language could avail themselves of assistance as English speakers can easily do. Our multi-lingual information also includes an extensive list of safe healthcare providers, eviction support, and gig worker unemployment assistance.

## THE NATURAL EVOLUTION OF OUR MINECRAFT EXTRAVAGANZA

With Philly's finest dinosaur collection looming overhead, some 6,000 children from our region and beyond spent the last weekend before New Years steeped in a massive celebration of their favorite video game and a few of their favorite subjects, namely Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.



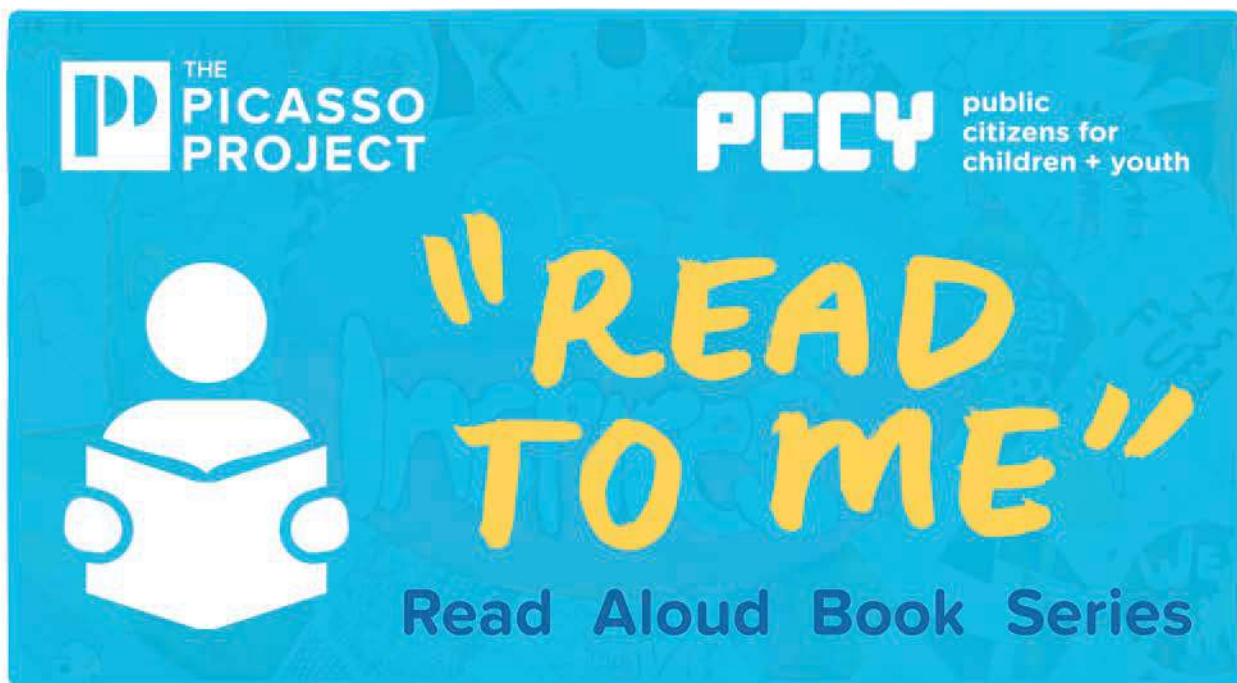
Thanks to a generous donation from longtime PCCY supporter and board member Pat West and her husband Tom Vernon, Gompers Elementary 5th grade students received free passes to take in the sights and sounds of Minefaire.

In response to the dearth of engaging STEM events for young learners, we formed a partnership with event producers Open World and event host the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University (made possible by the visionary leadership of their Board Chair David E. Griffith) to create a special experience in Philadelphia over the holidays, our third annual Minecraft event.

We would like to thank our amazing event sponsors who helped make Minefaire, which also raised funds to support PCCY, possible: IBEW 98, Microsoft, PECO, FAN GURU, and Keystone First.

# PICASSO PROJECT RISES TO EXCEED NEW CHALLENGES

“The creative arts aren’t just lessons and talents, they’re tools,” Masterman eighth grader Noah Eggerts told Philadelphia City Council in his eloquent testimony about the importance of arts education funding for himself and his peers.



Thanks to Picasso Project committee members, we launched our Read To Me YouTube series of, at last count, 30 read along videos by devoted members of the PCCY extended family, including board members, Councilperson Helen Gym, and Teddy, our youngest reader.

That’s because the role of the arts remains woefully misunderstood, despite mounds of hard data that demonstrate the impact arts education has on every student. So when the threat of COVID cuts to education drew near, PCCY was data-bound to fight to hold arts education harmless for the sake of Philadelphia students.

“Arts programming at school introduces students to themselves, their passions and careers,” Eggerts explained. “School is where we grow – where we find friends, well-being and purpose. That isn’t possible without the arts funding we need.”

“Arts are the glue that attach students to learning at school,” Picasso Project director Tim Gibbon testified before City Council. The sentiment had particular resonance during the shutdown of schools and the protracted rollout of the shift to online instruction as arts education was largely neglected.

PCCY’s Picasso Project produced an online arts education guide that takes a measured, practical approach to help parents and educators support creative learning while schools remain closed during the COVID shutdown. Made possible through the generous support of Wells Fargo Foundation, the guide was called #ArtsEdAtHome.

#ArtsEdAtHome, a curated selection of free arts education resources is organized by artistic discipline: general art/virtual field trips, visual arts, music, dance/movement, and theater/poetry. It is available for download now and some eager parents and teachers are already starting to post works from their young artists.

“Access to arts education is critical, especially in this time of social distancing and disruption of normalcy,” says Tim. “Through the arts, kids can stay connected, use their imaginations to access a more positive reality, and process any stress and anxiety that they may be experiencing.”

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WITH A NEW APPROACH TO HOLDING ELECTED  
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[Childrenmatteractionfund.org](http://Childrenmatteractionfund.org)