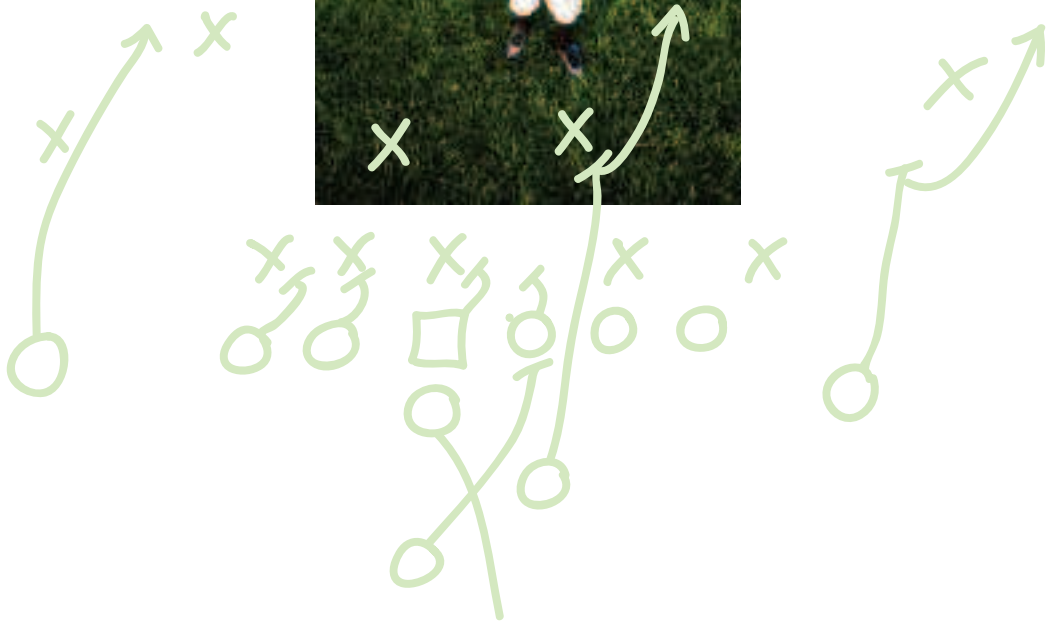


# The West Virginia Kids First Campaign: A Playbook for Early Childhood Policy Change



20 YEARS AND STILL COUNTING!



20 WEST VIRGINIA  
KIDS COUNT  
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## Our Vision

The West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund will create a culture that values, nurtures and realizes the potential of our youngest children.

## Our Mission

The West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund is the state's most trusted source of information about the well-being of children and a leader in the effort to educate parents, policy-makers and the public about what young children need to thrive and achieve.

## Part 1

### Our Rookie Lesson: If At First You Don't Succeed...

Try, try again. That's just what the staff of the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund did following our rookie attempt at early child development legislation in 2007. But, before we get to the 2007 post-game analysis and our successful second season of legislative advocacy, let's take a quick look back at how our rookie initiative came to be. Our first try for early child development (ECD) legislation had its origins in three important initiatives:

- the successful kick off of West Virginia's nationally-recognized Pre-K program in 2002;
- an Early Education/Economic Development Summit for West Virginia business leaders and policymakers in the fall of 2005;
- and KIDS COUNT's 2006 "Policy Matters" project that brought advocates, policymakers and community leaders together to establish consensus on West Virginia's ECD policy needs.

For the Policy Matters project, KIDS COUNT, in partnership with the Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System (PIECES) and *West Virginia: A Vision Shared*, engaged Columbia University's renowned ECD policy expert Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan to lead a year-long process to determine the state of West Virginia's ECD system. For each of 100+ ECD policies in eight domains, the Policy Matters team assessed the state's current policy level, gave it a numerical ranking and established desired policy levels. The findings of this audit helped bring clarity to areas in which improvement was urgently needed, as well as define areas in which the state was doing well by national standards. The results of the process were documented in the *2006 KIDS COUNT Data Book*.



The audit revealed that, from a policy standpoint, West Virginia was failing to assure high quality for the more than 60,000 West Virginia children zero to six who need childcare. Thus, the state was failing in its attempts to get a high return on investments in young children at risk. These critical ECD deficiencies led KIDS COUNT, in partnership with PIECES and *West Virginia: A Vision Shared*, to push for groundbreaking legislation in 2007 that would have created a comprehensive framework for a high-quality ECD system in West Virginia. The legislation, known as the *Kids First Act*, passed the West Virginia Senate unanimously, which was no small legislative feat, but the bill died in the House Education Committee before the end of the session. KIDS COUNT simply ran out of time to educate the members of the House, and ultimately the Governor and First Lady, on the bill's benefits for West Virginia's children and economy.

#### PIECES and West Virginia: A Vision Shared

The **Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System (PIECES)** is a voluntary advisory committee created by the West Virginia Departments of Education and Health and Human Resources to guide the implementation of West Virginia's pre-K program and guide the development of a high-quality early child development system.

**West Virginia: A Vision Shared** is a private, non-profit organization working to improve West Virginia's economy through widespread involvement and grassroots leadership in the state's economic development efforts.



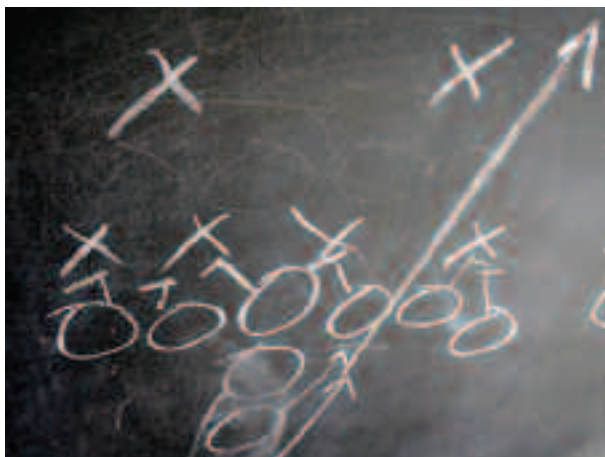
## Part 2: Our Second Season: Back to the Drawing Board

**K**IDS COUNT gained some positive yardage in our rookie attempt at ECD legislation. **Interest among the state’s policymakers and business leaders in improving childcare programs was elevated to a new and higher level**, and the Governor and First Lady immediately committed to making childcare quality part of their future legislative agenda. In October of 2007, **the Governor issued an Executive Order asking PIECES to study ECD quality, governance and financing and report back to him by June 30, 2008.**

Two more positive results were 1) the creation of **a new, informal coalition of advocates, policymakers and business leaders united in the effort to improve ECD quality** and 2) **the identification of a key legislative champion**, the Senate Education Chair, who took the lead in successfully quarterbacking the 2007 legislation through the West Virginia Senate.

KIDS COUNT’s **use of a mass e-mail campaign to keep supporters up-to-date on the legislation’s progress** was also a winning strategy. Our e-mail Action Alert Network gave the bill’s supporters immediate, concrete steps they could take to support the legislation: call or e-mail their legislators, write letters to their local newspaper editors, or spread the word to their neighbors about the importance of the ECD policy initiative. This powerful tool was something we would develop even more fully in our second season of legislative advocacy.

**Media coverage of ECD quality issues also improved** in the wake of the 2007 legislative session. The issue gained significant media attention including dozens of newspaper stories, several positive editorials, letters to the editor and op-ed pieces about the *2006 Data Book* and the need to improve ECD quality. For example, the managing partner of one of West Virginia’s largest and most prestigious law firms wrote an op-ed piece extolling the virtues of high-quality childcare programs and encouraging passage of the ECD legislation.



As heartening as these successful strategies were, the lessons we learned from the plays that didn’t work were even more valuable. They forced us to go back to the drawing board to refine and improve our game plan for getting ECD legislation through both houses of the legislature and signed by the governor. And, speaking of the governor, **one of the biggest lessons we learned was just how important it is to have the full support of the governor in any legislative initiative**, especially in what the Policy Matters project had identified as a “strong governor” state like West Virginia. The 2007 experience showed us that getting the Governor on board early would be critical to our success the next go-round.

We also learned **how difficult it is to build consensus among a wide-ranging group of interests and to hold the coalition together throughout the inevitable bumps in the policymaking process.** We learned that careful, direct communication with key supporters is critical when the legislative process gets under way. So, for our second season, we recommitted ourselves to keeping the lines of communication strong between the diverse, informal coalition we had forged.

We also realized that the 2007 legislation was too broad in its scope. It called for a complete overhaul of the governance and financing of the state’s ECD programs. The comprehensive nature of the bill made it difficult for policymakers to understand, and the sweeping changes were scary to the ECD professionals who would ultimately be responsible for implementing them. So, for season

two, we crafted a more focused game plan built around one of the three policy priorities identified during the 2006 Policy Matters process: the need for a childcare quality rating and improvement system. We reasoned that a more concrete focus would make the bill easier for policymakers to understand and be an easier sell to parents, childcare providers and community leaders.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we saw **the value of building strong grassroots support for change**. During the 2007 effort, the state’s ECD advocates, or “grasstops,” were on board and fully mobilized for change thanks to the Policy Matters process. But broader public support for the bill among parents, childcare providers and community leaders was conspicuously absent. To be successful going forward, we knew that policymakers would need to see that 1) childcare quality issues profoundly affect the daily lives of their constituents and 2) there is broad public support for improving childcare quality. We set out to show them just that.

### A New Game Plan

With the lessons of 2007 as our guide, KIDS COUNT’s staff completely re-evaluated our approach to ECD advocacy and identified three key objectives for achieving our ECD policy goals:

- Objective 1: Narrow the policy focus to the need for a childcare (QRIS).
- Objective 2: Secure the strong support of the Governor, First Lady and key legislators for a QRIS.
- Objective 3: Develop a strong, grassroots coalition of parents, providers and community leaders to demonstrate broad public support for a QRIS.

Achieving the first two objectives required 1) the active participation of the KIDS COUNT Executive Director in a year-long process to study ECD financing, quality and governance and 2) the initiation of regular meetings with key legislative leaders to educate them about the need for a QRIS and cultivate their support. (See page 14, “Crossing the Goal Line”,

for a detailed description of how these two objectives were achieved.)

Achieving the third objective required something neither KIDS COUNT nor the early childhood advocacy community had ever before attempted: an organized, statewide, grassroots policy campaign. Undaunted and armed with a long list of lessons learned, loads of enthusiasm and the generous support of the Annie E. Casey and Claude Worthington Benedum Foundations, in March of 2008, KIDS COUNT kicked off the Kids First Communities Campaign. The campaign was West Virginia’s first statewide, grassroots effort to gain broad public support for better childcare.



### Part 3

## Re-Building the Team: The Kids First Coalitions

**S**ome policy issues, including early child development, are so large and complex that a single group does not have the resources to tackle them alone. In those cases, a coalition of groups and individuals working together as a team may be the only way to secure a policy victory. But coalitions can only form when the opportunity, in the form of mutual trust and a perceived need, exists.

In the summer of 2007, KIDS COUNT set out to determine whether the trust and need for a network of ECD advocacy coalitions existed in West Virginia. Through a series of focus groups conducted in three West Virginia cities, we learned that parents, childcare providers and community leaders were very concerned about the lack high-quality childcare, and they were supportive of our idea to create a network of regional coalitions to advocate for better childcare. Knowing there was a solid base of support for our approach was important. It gave us the confidence we needed to move forward with a statewide, grassroots campaign.

**“Community leaders and government officials need to be reminded of the situations they faced when searching for childcare many years ago and then be told that the same problems still exist today. It’s not just a crisis for low-income families but for families of every economic level.”**

**Fairmont childcare provider who participated in a 2007 KIDS COUNT focus group**



The Kids First Communities Campaign was a success because KIDS COUNT realized the importance of reaching outside the capital city and establishing six regional coalitions throughout the state. Using a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process, local organizations submitted proposals to KIDS COUNT explaining why they would be the ideal outreach partner. In turn, KIDS COUNT provided seed money and technical assistance to six nonprofit organizations charged with mobilizing parents, childcare providers and community leaders in support of a QRIS. The six organizations, located in Beckley, Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown, Parkersburg and Wheeling, were designated as “Kids First Communities” and given three goals:

- Convene a regional coalition of parents, providers and community leaders to advocate for new state dollars to improve the quality of childcare.
- Educate parents, providers and community leaders about the importance of high-quality childcare and more effective ways to

#### Kids First Communities’ Regional Leaders

Kids First South	Margaret Younce, Roma Lester and Jennifer Thacker	304-682-8271
Kids First Boone-Clay-Kanawha-Putnam	Michele Baranaskas, Diane Hughes and Lisa Ertl	304-414-4470
Kids First Cabell-Wayne	Jeanette Barker and Shirley Topeka	304-429-6167
Kids First Mid-Ohio Valley	Steve Tuck	304-485-0650
Kids First North Central	Lisa Maxey and Brandi Potock	304-284-8400
Kids First Northern Panhandle	Linda Edwards and Jill Eddy	304-232-8712

express their expectations for better child-care; and

- Advocate for a childcare quality rating and improvement system with tiered reimbursement for providers who care for at-risk children.

The Kids First Communities designated local points of contact, or “Kids First Leaders,” who assisted in the development, implementation and management of the coalition activities. With the Kids First Leaders in place, KIDS COUNT’s next goal was to establish strong relationships and two-way communication with the Kids First Leaders to keep each of the coalitions working toward the same goal. On March 19, 2008, we launched the campaign by hosting a day-long training for the regional leaders in Flatwoods, West Virginia. This high-energy day included rolling out the statewide outreach plan, sharing resources and promotional materials, providing opportunities for regional representatives to network with each other and building a feeling that we were all in the game together, and that, together, we would accomplish our policy goal. We wanted the Kids First Leaders to leave the training session knowing it was a new day for championing the needs of young children in West Virginia.

KIDS COUNT gave the leaders six key tasks carefully designed to help them achieve their goals and bring about the legislative success that had eluded us in 2007. Their tasks were to:

- Recruit at least 400 parents and childcare providers to join the Kids First Communities Campaign;
- Obtain the endorsement of 25 community leaders;
- Meet with local legislators to advocate for new public investments to improve childcare;
- Organize a “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” in their region;
- Organize a letter-writing campaign to the Governor in support of a QRIS; and
- Attend a Kids First legislative reception organized by KIDS COUNT.

To help ensure the communities’ success in achieving their goals and tasks, KIDS COUNT

provided the following supports:

- \$5,000 cash grants to each organization;
- Training in project planning, legislative outreach, media relations and coalition building;
- A toolkit of Kids First communications materials (see page 10 for a detailed discussion of the toolkit’s contents);
- Access to our e-mail “Action Alert” System and interactive website; and
- Ongoing technical support from KIDS COUNT’s coalition-building expert.

Funded, trained and armed for a policy battle, KIDS COUNT and the Kids First Leaders set out on a year-long advocacy journey that would end with new legislation creating West Virginia’s first childcare QRIS.

### Key Tasks and Accomplishments

KIDS COUNT provided leadership for the Kids First Communities by coordinating efforts statewide; however, communities were encouraged to put their personal stamp on local outreach activities. The Kids First Communities would have a team meeting one month and then host an event or coordinate an outreach activity the next month. An overview of each of the key outreach activities and highlights of particularly successful regional activities follows.

*“It is just one day after our kick-off meeting, and we are excited! As a result of our news release, I received our first call from a childcare provider today who wants to participate in the project!”*

**Steve Tuck, Kids First Mid-Ohio Valley, March 20, 2008**



## Task 1: Signing up 400 parents and providers

The communities' first task was to reach out to parents and providers to sign up 400 people in each region who support the need to improve the quality and accountability of West Virginia's childcare system.

KIDS COUNT provided the Kids First Communities with a supply of 'sign-up' postcards that allowed them to gather contact information, specifically e-mail addresses, so we could build our database of supporters. The new supporters subsequently received regular e-mail updates about the Kids First Campaign. Some outstanding sign-up activities included:

- Kids First South hosting a booth at the West Virginia State Fair;
- Kids First Cabell-Wayne participating in "Celebrating Families Day" at Camden Park;
- Kids First Mid-Ohio Valley attending a "Pretty Baby Contest" at the Wood County Fair; and
- KIDS COUNT displaying at a mandatory Department of Health and Human Resources meeting for all of the state's childcare providers.

## Task 2: Getting the endorsement of community leaders

The Kids First Leaders next turned their attention to educating and securing the support of community leaders, especially the business community, by scheduling one-on-



one meetings, making presentations for organizations like Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce, and hosting Kids First community leader events. In addition to engaging regional community leaders by asking them to 'sign on' to the campaign, KIDS COUNT secured the support of official project endorsers, most at the state level, with 43 organizations, including the West Virginia American Academy of Pediatrics, West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, West Virginia Childcare Centers United to name a few, and 35 key individuals. *(See back inside cover for a complete list of campaign endorsers.)*

The most successful community leader outreach activity took place in Parkersburg. The Kids First Mid-Ohio Valley coalition hosted a breakfast at the Parkersburg Country Club on August 28, 2008. Knowing that community and business leaders have busy schedules, inviting them to an early morning breakfast seemed like the best way not to interfere in their day. This early morning strategy resulted in a diverse group of community leaders and childcare providers that came together in one room to talk about the status of young children in the region.





Representatives from West Virginia University-Parkersburg, United Bank, Pickering Electric, Volunteer Action Center, Boys and Girls Club, United Way and various childcare centers first heard a presentation about the Kids First Campaign. Next, the group engaged in an open dialogue about the lack of good childcare and its effect on productivity; the need for a well-trained workforce for the future; and the importance of accountability for the public dollars invested in children. The Kids First Mid-Ohio Valley coalition's outreach efforts were strengthened by this dialogue between childcare providers and area businesses. It was a first step toward changing the state's culture to one that supports a childcare-friendly workplace.

### **Task 3: Meeting with local legislators**

For their second task, the Kids First Communities met with "key legislators" in each region to ask for their support for a childcare QRIS. Our goal was for them to meet with as many legislators as possible in each region and ask for their support. We asked the coalitions to specifically target Education, Health and Human Resources, and Finance Committee chairs and members.

Because 2008 was an election year, panel discussions or legislative receptions seemed tailor-made for completing this task. However, we also knew that many of the Kids First Communities encompassed large regions that included many counties and legislative districts. We understood that getting legislators to travel outside their own county or region to participate in an event would be challenging, if not impossible. We, therefore, recommended that the Kids First Communities meet one-on-one with legislators in each region.

They prioritized their lists by meeting with those who served as chair or members of the Education, Health and Human Resources, and Finance Committees. Many of the coalitions made these visits in pairs as a way to provide support for each other. We worked hard, at the state level, to show our partners just how important this activity was to the campaign. They knew that our ultimate success would all be determined by the number of votes the bill received in the legislature.

**Giving legislators the opportunity to hear directly from their constituents, prior to the legislative session and in their own hometowns, allowed us to connect the voices of providers, parents and community leaders to our cause. And that was powerful. In fact, we believe these meetings were critical to our ultimate policy success.**

Our Kids First Boone-Clay-Kanawha-Putnam coalition hosted the most successful legislative outreach activity in October of 2008. They held a meeting attended by three State Senators and five members of the House of Delegates in their region. The Legislators were very engaged and asked good questions, and they also provided important suggestions for how we could best move forward with our efforts.

To monitor the impact of these outreach events, KIDS COUNT developed a chart that each region used to track progress and measure success of their legislative outreach activities. KIDS COUNT used this information to compile a statewide assessment of legislative support and further refine and target our outreach efforts leading up to the 2009 legislative session.



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#### **Task 4: Organize Local “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” Celebrations**

On October 21, 2008, KIDS COUNT honored the state’s childcare providers by sponsoring a statewide “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” The goal of this celebration was to raise awareness about the important role childcare providers play in the healthy development of young children, the stability of working families and the future of the state’s economy.



#### **Take a Flower to Childcare Day**

Taking part was easy. Parents, young children and community leaders simply presented their childcare providers with a single flower of their choice. Although the concept was simple, KIDS COUNT armed the Kids First Communities with a variety of tools to ensure their success. Those ready-made tools ranged from billboards, posters and flyers to press release templates, website copy and radio scripts for public service announcements.

The Kids First Communities were directly responsible for:

- Hanging “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” posters and distributing flyers wherever parents gathered;
- Issuing a localized event press release;
- Hosting a media event at a local childcare center;
- Ensuring media coverage the day of the event;
- Using their local contacts to secure free advertising;
- Developing other locally-relevant strategies for marketing the event; and
- Documenting all activities and news coverage by taking photos of the media event and having childcare providers submit photos, flower totals and “most unusual flower” for posting on the KIDS COUNT website.

By far the most important job each region had was planning and hosting a “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” media event. We suggested that they work with a childcare provider who was already engaged in the Kids First activities in their region. In addition, we suggested they consider a location that was easily accessible to local media. The regions issued media advisories, drafted by KIDS COUNT staff, promoting “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” and directing media to the feature childcare center for interviews and photo opportunities.



“Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” was easily the most successful outreach activity of the entire campaign. All six regions hosted successful media events, and there was overwhelming interest and participation in all aspects of the celebration. Here are just a few examples of the day’s many positive outcomes:

- The Governor issued a proclamation declaring October 21, 2008 as “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” in West Virginia;
- 2,400 “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” flyers and posters were distributed in communities throughout the state;
- Billboards were on display in Kanawha, Cabell and Putnam Counties;
- Special “Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” media events were held in Charleston, Cowan, Huntington, Parkersburg, Morgantown and Wheeling;

- 27 positive stories about the event ran in newspapers, on websites and in childcare newsletters;
- Childcare centers were visited by Congressman Nick Rahall in Cowan; Mayor David Felinton in Huntington; KIDS COUNT Board Members in Charleston and Morgantown; and DHHR childcare staff in every region;
- The Morgantown City Council recognized childcare providers during their October 21, 2008 meeting;
- Hundreds of flowers were given to childcare providers throughout West Virginia. The flower choices included mums, roses, lilies, carnations, sunflowers, chocolate flowers, fruit flowers, paper flowers, foam flowers, pen flowers and even blades of grass and flowers secretly snatched from a neighbor's yard;
- The event received widespread television coverage, including WOWK-TV (and its West Virginia Media affiliates statewide), WSAZ-TV, WTAP-TV, and WBOY-TV. WSAZ made the event their "Shot of the Day" and a 5-minute "Cover Story" on their 5:30 newscast. WOWK interviewed KIDS COUNT live on their noon show and featured the event on their evening news broadcast;
- A story about the importance of childcare quality was distributed by West Virginia News Service and broadcast on 42 radio stations throughout the state, and 33 of those stations ran the story at least twice;
- KIDS COUNT received dozens of positive comments and expressions of deep appreciation from childcare providers, all of which are posted on KIDS COUNT's website ([www.wvkidscountfund.org/take-flower.php](http://www.wvkidscountfund.org/take-flower.php)); and
- Traffic on the KIDS COUNT website increased significantly after "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!" was announced. And, the "Take a Flower" page became the most frequently visited page on the KIDS COUNT site.

**"I am so thankful that childcare is finally recognized.... I love my profession. I have been in childcare for 30 years. I think back but look forward to great things, great beginnings. Thank you."**

**West Virginia childcare provider's message of appreciation for "Take a Flower to Childcare Day" 2008.**

### **Task Five: Attending a legislative reception**

On February 25, 2009, KIDS COUNT hosted a legislative reception in Charleston honoring the legislators and childcare providers who "Put West Virginia's Kids First." We scheduled our reception to coincide with a major childcare conference being held in Charleston on the same day. We encouraged childcare providers to attend our reception by having a Kids First exhibit at the conference and hand-delivering a reception invitation to everyone who stopped by our booth. In all, we had over 40 legislators and a total of more than 150 people who attended our evening reception. Delegate Mary Polling, House Education Chair, was the featured speaker and, during her speech, she strongly encouraged her legislative colleagues to support the QRIS bill.



All six regional Kids First Communities were represented at the event, and their members served in a variety of volunteer roles. From decorators to greeters, every coalition member played a key role in the event. Our priority activity was to again bring legislators face-to-face with their local constituents for meaningful one-on-one conversations about the QRIS legislation. Watching our coalition members confidently talk with their legislators about the importance of a childcare QRIS was heartening and incredibly effective.

**Game Summary for Coalition-Building: A major policy campaign is almost always too big for one organization to tackle alone. In those cases, a coalition of grassroots organizations may be the only way to secure a policy victory. But for grassroots coalitions**

**to be effective, they need common goals, intensive training, ongoing technical support, clear-cut tasks and a user-friendly toolkit of tools and simple messages. A major asset of the grassroots approach is its ability to demonstrate the depth of local support for the issue and put a local face on an otherwise abstract policy discussion.**

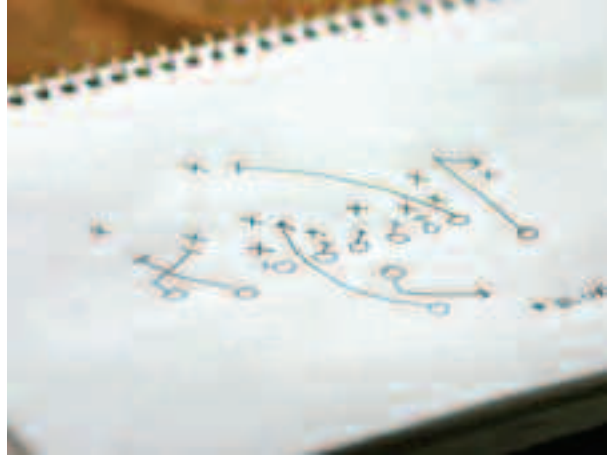
## Part 4

### The Playbook: Messages and Tools That Supported the Kids First Communities Campaign

For any team to be successful, the coach has to have a game plan that works. In the world of advocacy, that means having clear messages and effective communication tools. For 20 years, KIDS COUNT has placed a high value on the power of communication to improve children's lives. Yes, having solid data about the status of children is important, but having compelling messages to support that data is the real key to success. Nowhere is that belief more evident than in our annual *Data Book*, which marries indicators of child well-being with messages that are designed to influence public policy.

We knew messaging would be a critical component in the success of our advocacy work, but our initial attempt at policy change happened so quickly, there was little time to develop campaign messages and materials. In the short time we had, we did manage to influence the naming of the 2007 legislation. We convinced our legislative champion to call the bill the "West Virginia Kids First Act," rather than just its assigned generic number from the house of origin. KIDS COUNT settled on "West Virginia Kids First" as a theme, after consulting with a Charleston-based marketing firm and conducting focus groups with key opinion leaders. But for the 2007 effort, "West Virginia Kids First" was little more than the name of a bill and the title of an issue brief.

When the Kids First Act of 2007 failed to pass, one of our first re-building strategies was to enhance the Kids First brand by dramatically expanding our communications arsenal. We spent months developing, testing and implementing a comprehensive communications strategy that included printed materials for key audiences, media outreach, mass e-mails, an interactive website, strategic special events and grassroots outreach. What follows is a detailed description of the communications tools for the Kids First playbook and the role each of them played in our legislative success.



#### The Kids First Toolkit

If the Kids First Leaders were to be successful in their efforts to mobilize parents, childcare providers and community leaders in support of a QRIS, they were going to have to be armed with the right communications tools. So, before our initial training session with them, we developed a Kids First Toolkit that would help them be successful in achieving their outreach goals. Their toolkit included Kids First sign-up cards, fact wheels, issue briefs, bumper stickers, buttons and a banner.

The sign-up card was the primary tool for the leaders to gather the names and e-mail addresses of every parent, childcare provider and community leader that joined the Kids First team. Each Kids First leader was given 400 cards, which was their sign-up goal for the campaign. As an incentive to get parents and providers to sign-up, KIDS COUNT gave each leader early literacy toolkits from our



Every day, Every way! campaign. (Go to <http://www.wvkidscountfund.org/programs-every-day.php> to learn more about this project).



These sign-up gifts were given to the first 50 parents and providers who signed up for the campaign in each region. As the sign-up cards were collected, they were mailed to KIDS COUNT where the information was entered into our e-mail database, and a record was kept of the regional sign-up numbers.

Signups were critical to our grassroots success. Our goal was to increase our e-mail database from 1,000 to 3,000 names. To emphasize the importance of the sign-up activity, when the regions achieved their sign-up goals, they were given a \$100 gift from KIDS COUNT with which to celebrate their achievement. The tools and incentives worked. During the course of the campaign, the Kids First Communities helped us triple our e-mail database to nearly 3,100 names, and it is still growing.

The Kids First fact wheel cleverly used social math to highlight the importance of high-

quality childcare to children and the state's economy. The wheel also emphasized our key campaign message that a QRIS offered something for everyone: peace of mind for parents; support for providers; and accountability for communities. The audience for this piece was primarily parents, but feedback from legislators indicated that it was the most effective piece for that audience as well.



### What is Social Math?

According to the Frameworks Institute, social math blends stories and numbers by providing comparisons with familiar things. It connects the numbers to meaning, by visually painting pictures in our heads. To learn more about how to use social math in successful policy advocacy, go to [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org).



The issue brief was primarily intended for policy-makers and offered a more detailed case for a QRIS, including what we wanted for West Virginia's youngest children, why a high-quality ECD

system was important, why we were advocating for a QRIS, what the QRIS would look like, how KIDS COUNT was advocating for a QRIS and the definition of childcare quality. The back of the piece also incorporated some key ECD facts and a map showing the alarming ratio of children who need childcare to childcare capacity.

To round out the Kids First toolkit, we gave the Kids First Leaders bumper stickers, buttons and a banner to use at their local events. These tools were primarily used to build name recognition, credibility and excitement about the Kids First Communities. They also created the visual backdrop for media coverage of campaign activities.

Aside from the initial toolkit of materials, KIDS COUNT also developed outreach tools for key campaign activities such as "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!," the postcard campaign to the Governor and the Kids First legislative reception. For "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!," we prepared thousands of posters and flyers which the Kids First Leaders distributed statewide.

To make writing the Governor as easy as possible, we provided the Kids First Leaders with pre-printed postcards that asked parents, providers and community leaders to explain, in their own words, why a QRIS was important. And to support the success of the legislative reception, we developed a distinctive invitation and event backdrop with the theme "We Put Kids First. Do you?"



Each of these activities resulted in big success for the Kids First Communities Campaign.



“Take a Flower to Childcare Day!” got uniformly rave reviews from childcare providers. We gathered 300 personal testimonials about the need for a QRIS and shared them with the Governor. And, nearly 150 supporters attended our legislative reception, including 40 legislators!

**Game Summary for Communication Tools:** Good tools for communication are essential to the success of any grassroots advocacy campaign. To be truly effective, the tools must complement the campaign’s goals and be aimed at achieving specific campaign objectives. Different tools may be necessary for each target audience, and, whenever possible, those tools should have a clear call to action, whether it is asking people to sign up for e-mails, write a letter to the governor, call a legislator or vote for a bill.

### **E-mail/Internet Outreach**

In an overwhelmingly on-line society, printed materials are no longer enough. Grassroots advocacy requires a sophisticated on-line presence. To gear up for an on-line campaign, KIDS COUNT spent the summer and fall of 2007 re-designing our website for the launch of the Kids First Communities Campaign. Working with our graphic designer and a local web design firm, we developed a website that was a fully-interactive, integrated component of our grassroots campaign. Not only did we update the look, but we also completely overhauled the site’s functionality. We added interactive tools for

searching ECD facts, contacting legislators and locating media outlets by county. We also added a “Kids First Voices” component that featured more than a dozen parents, childcare providers and community leaders explaining, in their own words, why a high-quality childcare system was important to them. The upgraded site also accommodated on-line signups and offered downloadable versions of all campaign materials.

But the improved, interactive website did not exist in a vacuum. We used our e-mail database to drive parents, childcare providers and community leaders to our on-line content. For instance, each time we had a new Voices column, we would send out a mass e-mail to the entire Kids First team, giving them a preview of the column and a link to the full piece on our website. We saw significant spikes in our website traffic each time we sent an e-mail alert. We were able to track the spikes with excellent reporting tools provided by Google Analytics ([www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics)) and our e-mail marketing provider, Constant Contact® ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)).

The e-mail database was also a critical tool for distributing news about the campaign to media and supporters and for mobilizing our grassroots coalition. Throughout the course of the campaign, we issued 40 e-mail “Action Alerts,” an average of three alerts per month. During the legislative session the alerts were more frequent, often twice a week. These

legislative bulletins gave our supporters up-to-the-minute reports on the status of our bill and advised them when calls and e-mails to legislators were needed. In our hallway discussions with legislators, many of them told us they had heard directly from their constituents about the QRIS legislation and, as a result, they felt educated about the bill's benefits and were confident in voting for its passage.

**Game Summary for Internet Outreach: Building a strong on-line presence and an extensive e-mail database is an absolute necessity for grassroots advocacy. Websites must be interactive, dynamic and frequently updated. Internet-based e-mail marketing tools like Constant Contact® allow you to get instant feedback from supporters, mobilize them to act quickly or direct them to your website for more in-depth information, downloadable campaign materials and interactive advocacy tools.**

### Media Strategies

Good media coverage is important to any advocacy campaign. While the internet and e-mail have made traditional media coverage less crucial, it is still an important component in a comprehensive communication strategy. For the Kids First Communities Campaign, KIDS COUNT focused primarily on getting earned media coverage in local newspapers and television stations. Although our advertising budget was extremely limited, we supplemented the earned media outreach with a billboard campaign in the Charleston media market to promote "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!"

In terms of getting earned media coverage, our primary outreach tools were electronic press releases and media advisories highlighting key milestones in the campaign: our project launch, "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!," and the "We Put Kids First. Do You?" legislative reception. The Kids First Leaders supplemented our statewide media work with their own media outreach efforts on the local level, using template news releases and advisories supplied by KIDS COUNT. Often, the Kids First Communities and their roles in a statewide campaign were the perfect hooks for local media coverage.

As a result, we had great success with our earned media campaign. Between the project launch in March of 2008 and the end of

**Between the project launch in March of 2008 and the end of the legislative session in April of 2009, KIDS COUNT generated 154 news stories about the importance of high-quality childcare and the need for a childcare QRIS.**

the legislative session in April of 2009, KIDS COUNT generated 154 news stories about the importance of high-quality childcare and the need for a childcare QRIS. "Take a Flower to Childcare Day!" was a particularly successful media event. From our targeted local events, 36 positive stories ran in newspapers, on websites and in childcare newsletters statewide, and the event was widely covered on all of the state's major television news programs.

The release of our annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* in January is always a big media story. For the 2008 book, we decided to focus our annual essay and the accompanying press release on the need for a QRIS. Focusing the 2008 *Data Book* media coverage on our advocacy issue and making it part of our overall communications strategy proved successful. Nearly every one of the 42 stories about our 2008 *Data Book* focused on the need to improve childcare and the benefits of a QRIS.

**Game Summary for Media Coverage: In a grassroots campaign, generating media coverage is easier when you create an interesting special event with a good local hook. It's also important to use any of your organization's ongoing sources of media coverage to focus attention on the policy issue at hand.**



## Part 5

### Crossing the Goal Line: A Review of the 2009 Legislative Session

#### Cultivating Legislative Champions

Our primary legislative champions for the QRIS legislation were Senator Bob Plymale, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, and Delegate Mary Poling, Chair of the House Education Committee. Our relationship with both began in the 2004 legislative session when funding for West Virginia's pre-K program was threatened by legislation that would have ended its school-aid-formula funding. KIDS COUNT and other early child development advocates fought to keep the school aid funding for pre-K, and it was through that early pre-K advocacy that we established the foundational relationships that would build strong legislative champions for our QRIS legislation in 2009.

Following the 2004 fight to preserve pre-K, our work with Senator Plymale continued, as he took the lead in quarterbacking our next legislative priority: the Kids First Act of 2007. In late 2006 and early 2007, KIDS COUNT's Policy Matters project to identify ECD priorities was not yet complete. But Senator Plymale and other key opinion leaders advising KIDS COUNT felt the time was ripe for ECD legislation that would build on existing efforts and improve quality and accountability in all ECD program. The Kids First Act provided for a review of existing programs, the development of financial and program plans, and the

**Undeterred by the results of our 2007 attempt at legislation, we carried on with our advocacy mission, went back to the drawing board and worked even harder to solidify and expand our team of legislative champions.**

consideration of a coordinated governance structure. The Act was supported by a number of prominent business groups and passed by the West Virginia Senate, but it eventually died in the House before the end of the 2007 legislative session. The defeat



was disappointing for KIDS COUNT but not altogether unexpected. We knew that few pieces of legislation pass in the first attempt. In fact, the conventional wisdom is that it takes at least three tries before most legislation is passed.

Undeterred by the results of our 2007 attempt at legislation, we carried on with our advocacy mission, went back to the drawing board and worked even harder to solidify and expand our team of legislative champions. We did not attempt legislation in 2008. Instead, we spent the year carefully planning and implementing our grassroots advocacy campaign and meeting quietly with Senator Plymale, Delegate Poling and other key legislative leaders about our new legislative priority: a childcare QRIS.

When the time came to introduce QRIS legislation in 2009, KIDS COUNT had already spent a full year laying the groundwork for a successful policy campaign. We had recruited and mobilized serious grassroots support in every region of the state and solidified our relationships with key policymakers.



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At the start of the 2009 session, Senator Plymale assigned Senator Eric Wells to chair the subcommittee that would successfully usher the QRIS legislation through the Senate. The Senate bill arrived in the House of Delegates on April 1 and, by the time it arrived, the legislation already had the support of many key delegates. Delegate Bonnie Brown, a long-time champion of women and children's issues, invited KIDS COUNT to make a presentation at her Women's Caucus where we continued to strengthen our alliance with Caucus members Mary Poling and Barbara Fleischauer, long-time champions for children and the poor. Also, as a result of the Caucus presentation, Delegate Virginia Mahan invited us to make a presentation to her subcommittee. That presentation served us well when Senate Bill 498 arrived in the House Finance Committee on April 7 with the support of Delegate Poling; Delegate Tom Campbell, Vice Chair of House Finance and former KIDS COUNT board member; Delegate Mahan; and current KIDS COUNT board member, Delegate Doug Reynolds.

With ongoing support from the Senate and greatly-expanded support from the House, the QRIS legislation had little difficulty passing both houses of the legislature, albeit not until the final, nail-biting minutes of the 2009 legislative session. With strong legislative and grassroots support, the Governor readily signed the legislation during a formal ceremony with KIDS COUNT and other key supporters in his office on May 11, 2009. That was a monumental day for KIDS COUNT, but it was an even bigger day for families and children in West Virginia. Thanks to the Kids First Communities Campaign, West Virginia now has a strong legislative foundation to improve the quality of childcare and the future of our children and our state.

**Game Summary for Successful Legislative Advocacy: Cultivating legislative champions is not a short-term proposition. It often takes years and a few failed attempts to build the support necessary to get a bill through both houses of the legislature and across the goal line with the Governor's signature. The keys to successful legislative advocacy**

**are perseverance, strategic planning, relationship building and a healthy dose of patience.**

### **Expecting the Unexpected**

One important lesson for any legislative advocacy effort is to expect the unexpected. No matter how carefully you prepare your game plan, the legislative process is fraught with unexpected twists and turns. For instance, KIDS COUNT was quite surprised to discover the QRIS bill that was introduced in the Senate also contained language about local collaboration in the pre-K program, and that language had no real relationship to the language establishing a QRIS.

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The pre-K rules developed by the Department of Education required that 50 percent of the state's pre-K programs be community based, i.e. operated by childcare centers or Head Start programs. From the time the pre-K legislation was enacted, childcare directors had been concerned about the loss of four-year-olds from their rolls, and some believed that county boards of education were not making a strong enough effort to collaborate with local childcare centers. Directors also worried that the collaboration requirement would be dropped when the program reached full implementation. Thus, the pre-K section of Senate Bill 498 would have made the 50 percent rule part of state law.

Because the pre-K and QRIS language were combined in the same bill, some of our supporters in the education community mistakenly believed that KIDS COUNT had advocated for the pre-K language as well. Those supporters even considered pulling their support for the QRIS legislation because they could not support the pre-K language. As a result of this backlash, we asked Senate leaders to separate the pre-K section from the QRIS bill but were unsuccessful in getting the pre-K language removed from the Senate bill.

KIDS COUNT did not have an official position on the pre-K legislation because our sole focus was the passage of QRIS legislation. We were concerned that the coalition of support we had built for a QRIS would fall apart in the face of the additional pre-K language. We had to work very quickly behind the scenes to assure our supporters in both the childcare and education communities that KIDS COUNT's only focus was the passage of QRIS legislation.

We eventually discovered that most of the major decision makers in education and childcare, with the exception of KIDS COUNT, knew about and supported the pre-K provisions. However, the provisions did not have the support of many local education officials, and their concerns led the House-Senate conferees to remove the pre-K requirement for collaboration from the final version of the bill. This was definitely a case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing, but, in the end, the confusion did not affect the passage of a QRIS, as we feared it might when we first read the legislation.

**Game Summary for Expecting the Unexpected: When the unexpected happens, as it inevitably will, be prepared to adjust your strategy accordingly and communicate directly and honestly with the members of your coalition members who might suddenly find themselves at odds with others in the coalition. Preserving trust and keeping the lines of communication open are critical for both short- and long-term success in policy advocacy.**



### **Knowing When to Mobilize Your Base**

During the course of any policy campaign, there are times when it is important to vocally and publicly mobilize your base, and there are times when it is better to play a quiet, inside game. The early days of the 2009 legislative session were difficult for KIDS COUNT because it took an unusually long time to get the bill out of legislative services and formally introduced on the Senate floor. In fact, there were times when we wondered if we would have a bill at all.

The session began on January 10, and our bill was not introduced until March 6. During that time, there was little for our base of 3,000 QRIS supporters to do but watch and wait. Likewise, there was little we could do to mobilize our base on the final night of the legislative session when the bill passed just minutes before adjournment. And, in between, there were looming deadlines for bill introduction, readings and passage from one body to another.

Our legislative reception was a key, early milestone for mobilizing our base. The event, our first attempt at a legislative gathering, was tremendously successful with over 40 legislators and 100 supporters from every legislative region in attendance. The reception allowed legislators to make personal contact with constituents who supported the QRIS legislation and laid

## Knowing exactly when to mobilize the base in the midst of the legislative process is something a good lobbyist knows how to do... .

important groundwork for when things would heat up later in the session.

Knowing exactly when to mobilize the base in the midst of the legislative process is something a good lobbyist knows how to do, and we had the best in Steve Haid. Not only is Steve is a veteran, professional lobbyist with influential contacts in the executive and legislative branches of government, he also has a great passion for and understanding of our issue. Those two qualities were critical to the ultimate success of our effort. With timely and insightful cues from Steve, who followed the QRIS legislation on an hourly and often minute-by-minute basis, we successfully mobilized our base at every key point in the legislative process.

There were also pivotal points during which the process moved so quickly it was not possible to mobilize our supporters. A fiscal note was requested by the House Finance Committee during the last days of the session. The note, which estimated the cost of a QRIS pilot at \$12 million, arrived just as the House Finance Committee was meeting to take up the bill. The estimated price tag from the Department of Health and Human Resources sent some Finance Committee members into sticker shock, and many of our legislative supporters feared the bill would die in committee. KIDS COUNT's staff and lobbyist tensely watched the proceedings in the House Finance Committee for most of one day, as the committee kept adjourning and reconvening, and our bill kept moving to the back of the line as each new agenda was issued. When the 5:00 p.m. floor session approached, we were certain they would adjourn again and the bill would be lost. But the 5:00 p.m. bell did not ring. Our bill was finally up for consideration, and the Chairman's legal counsel concluded his summary of our legislation by saying there was no money in the budget for the bill and stimulus money could be used to fund the QRIS. With that assurance, lawmakers breathed a sigh of relief, and the bill passed out of committee

without comment or debate, and the path was cleared for the bill to move successfully to a vote on the House Floor.

**Game Summary for Knowing When to Mobilize Your Base: Grassroots support must be deployed prudently for maximum effect. There are key points in the legislative process during which a bill can easily die or be irretrievably broken. A good lobbyist, who is well-connected and passionate about your issue, can determine the best times to mobilize your base and the best times to lay low and simply play inside politics.**

### Recognizing the Key Roles of the Governor and First Lady

During KIDS COUNT's 2006 Policy Matters project, Dr. Lynn Kagan surveyed key opinion leaders in West Virginia to assess the political environment for new investment in early child development. The major findings were that securing new investments would require a) the support of the Governor (and the First Lady, the Governor's ECD point person) and b) require a strong communications strategy for other stakeholders. Kagan's study found that West Virginia has the most powerful governor in the nation in terms of both constitutional power and personal influence. She also found that the majority of other stakeholders, including business, legislators, labor, civic groups, or law enforcement, did not see ECD policy as a priority.

**In addition to cultivating the First Lady's support, KIDS COUNT devised a strategy to let the Governor know, in his constituents' own words, the depth of support for a QRIS.**

KIDS COUNT was very familiar with the First Lady's interest and influence in early child development, and we met with her many times in 2007 in an attempt to gain her support for the Kids First Act. Although the 2007 bill did not pass, we had laid the groundwork for the First Lady's support and continued to keep her informed of our work throughout 2008 and early 2009. In addition to cultivating the First Lady's support, KIDS COUNT devised a strategy to let the



Governor know, in his constituents' own words, the depth of support for a QRIS. With our Kids First postcard campaign, we amassed over 300 personalized postcards to the Governor and presented them to him at a photo opportunity in March of 2009. In follow-up to that presentation, we received a letter from the First Lady thanking us for the postcards and indicating the First Couple's ongoing support for improving childcare quality.

Although the final bill had no state funding and additional advocacy will be required to fund it, the QRIS legislative framework would not exist if the Governor and First Lady had not supported the bill. We believe our multi-year advocacy campaign was instrumental in securing their support.

**Game Summary for Getting Gubernatorial Support: Getting a bill through both houses of the legislature is a major achievement, but it does not represent a final victory. In a state like West Virginia, where the Governor holds tremendous personal and constitutional power, the chief executive's support (or the support of his or her spouse or gubernatorial point person) is crucial to getting a bill signed into law. Equal attention should be given to cultivating the support of the Governor. He or she can wield tremendous influence throughout the legislative process and ultimately veto a bill that appears to be out of alignment with the administration's priorities or values.**

## The Final Score and Next Season

Senate Bill 498 created the legislative framework for West Virginia's first childcare QRIS. The legislation calls for the development of a plan for phased implementation of a QRIS; the creation of an advisory council to provide advice on its development; statewide implementation effective July 1, 2011; development of a financial plan; implementation of a broad public awareness campaign; pilot projects in up to five counties beginning July 1, 2009; an independent third party evaluator; and annual reports on progress to the Legislature and suggests that American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 funds be used for its implementation.

West Virginia received \$13 million dollars for childcare in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. KIDS COUNT and PIECES recommended that the state

**Senate Bill 498 created the legislative framework for West Virginia's first Childcare Quality Rating and Improvement System.**

invest some of its ARRA allotment in the launch of the QRIS. The Governor approved ARRA funding for a variety of childcare-related projects but did not approve funding for QRIS pilot projects. However, the stimulus funding will do several things that should advance the implementation of the QRIS, including a web-based information system for the QRIS and a baseline assessment of the quality of the state's childcare programs using Environmental Rating Scales. The state's ARRA funding proposal also notes that, should DHHR be unable to obligate or expend funding before the 2010 obligation and 2011 liquidation periods, funding may be used for several things, including grants to programs that participate in the baseline assessment.

During 2010, KIDS COUNT hopes to collaborate with any groups working to develop a financial plan for implementing the QRIS. We will also encourage our KIDS COUNT regions to meet with their local legislators to

**During 2010, KIDS COUNT hopes to collaborate with any groups working to develop a financial plan for implementing the QRIS.**

discuss funding needs and costs, and we will collaborate with childcare provider organizations to encourage them to include QRIS funding in their policy agendas.

On the national level, Congress is considering a number of programs to support the healthy development of young children, including a \$750 million expansion of nurse and other evidence-based home visiting programs and significant funding for “Early Learning Challenge Grants.” The Early Learning Challenge Fund will provide up to \$1 billion a year in competitive grants to high-capacity states pursuing models of reform and excellence in early learning for children aged zero to five. West Virginia needs to make significant progress in getting its QRIS off the ground to be in a position to compete for the five year quality grants. Getting the QRIS off the ground would reflect significant progress toward establishing the elements needed to improve quality and a desire to take such improvements to scale. In addition, the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant is expected to be reauthorized, and we hope there will soon be more federal money to enhance state funding for improving the quality of childcare.

In the meantime, the state’s early childhood advisory council (PIECES) is preparing an application to secure federal dollars to staff a new council whose main function will be to make recommendations for improvements in the state’s early childhood education programs.

The lack of state funding for the QRIS is testament to the work that still needs to be done to build a high-quality childcare system. As noted earlier, when surveyed in 2007, major stakeholders did not see the need for new investments in childcare. We believe our grassroots movement has changed some of that thinking. However, the recession and its lingering effects on state budgets and the

growth of poverty and unemployment through 2011—as projected by the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities—do not bode well for new childcare funding in the near term.

Nonetheless, KIDS COUNT believes now is precisely the time to make investments in children and families, not the time to turn back. Apparently, the investment message is not taking root where it matters most: among the state’s key opinion leaders and policymakers. We have been lucky in that, so far, there have been no cuts in childcare funding in West Virginia. But, we have a lot of hard work to do to create support for the new funding that will be needed to significantly improve childcare. Perhaps the baseline assessment of quality that will be conducted with stimulus funds will help policymakers understand how important it is for West Virginia to invest in the first three years of life and to do it now. Stay tuned for more information about how KIDS COUNT plans to use the next legislative season to advocate for a fully-funded QRIS in 2011. We look forward to having you on the team!

**Nonetheless, KIDS COUNT believes now is precisely the time to make investments in children and families, not the time to turn back.**



## **Kids First Advisory Committee**

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Cabell County Family Resource Network  
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Cabell-Wayne Early Childhood Council  
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Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation Authority  
Jackson Gas Company  
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Marshall Community and Technical College (MCTC)  
Mineral County Family Resource Network  
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MountainHeart Child Care Services  
National Association of Social Workers - West Virginia Chapter  
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River Valley Child Development Services

Small World Child Care  
Southwestern District Labor Council AFL-CIO  
United Way of the River Cities  
Upper Kanawha Valley Starting Points  
Wayne Family Resource Network  
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West Virginia Conference, The United Methodist Church  
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