

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Contact Information

Date

Organization Name: Stepping Stone Education Center Director: Melissa Shanaman
 Address: 400 Franklin Ave., Suite 250 E-mail: director@steppingstoneeducation.org
 Phoenixville, PA 19460 Board of Directors Chair: Lewis Osterhoudt
 Phone: 610-933-7710
 Website: www.SteppingStoneEducation.org
 Year Incorporated: 1985

Has your nonprofit ever applied to the Community Foundation? Yes ___ No X Not Sure ___
 Has your nonprofit ever received funding from the Community Foundation? Yes ___ No X Not Sure ___
 ___ Donor Advised Fund(s) ___ Fund for Chester County ___ Don't know/Not sure

Field/s of Interest:

___ Arts, Culture & Humanities ___ Environment/Animal Welfare X Education
 ___ Health ___ Human Services ___ Religion

Organization Information:

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):
 70% of students are from Phoenixville, 20% from Royersford and Spring City, and 10% are from Coatesville, Downingtown, and Boyertown

Describe Population Served and Annual Number of People Served:

Stepping Stone Education Center (SSEC) provides early childhood education services for children ages 6 weeks to 5. Current enrollment is 63 students. Students reflect diverse ethnicities: African American-22%, Hispanic-13%, Asian-2%, White-63%. Forty percent of students receive some form of tuition assistance, either from PA Child Care Information Services (CCIS) subsidies or through SSEC scholarships.

Mission: The SSEC mission is to provide affordable, quality, early childhood education that prepares children for successful academic experiences in a safe, loving, and nurturing environment. Programs are designed to help children develop emotionally, socially, intellectually, and physically while also providing support and stability for families.

Proposal Summary: The SSEC respectfully requests general operating funding to continue our 31-year commitment to diversity and equity as a provider of high quality early childhood education in the greater Phoenixville area, regardless of a family's social or economic status.

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is: N/A

___ Mission, Vision & Strategy ___ Governance & Leadership ___ Strategic Relationships
 ___ Fundraising & Development Other: _____

Annual Budget \$ <u>472,000</u>	<u>14</u>	# of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
<u>77</u> % of budget for program expenses	<u>7</u>	# of Board Volunteers
<u>19</u> % of budget for administrative expenses	<u>25</u>	# of Active Non-Board Volunteers
<u>4</u> % of budget for fundraising expenses	<u>500</u>	# of Volunteer Hours
<small>100 % total</small>		

Top 3-5 funding sources:

Tuition, Pennsylvania Keystone Stars, Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Phoenixville Community Education Foundation, United Way Success by Six

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$ 5,000

II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

1. Organization's history, goals, key achievements and distinctiveness

Stepping Stone Early Education Center (SSEC) began in 1985 as an afterschool program for Phoenixville students, renting space in the basement of a local church. In 1986 SSEC became an independent 501(c)(3) organization, providing a part-time preschool program until 2008 when it moved to its current location in Franklin Commons in Phoenixville. As a founding tenant of the newly renovated Franklin Commons complex, the school facilities were customized to fit SSEC's program requirements, and classroom space was doubled. Full-time child care was added to the existing part-time preschool classes, along with kindergarten enrichment classes.

Today SSEC provides a high-quality education for children ages six weeks to 10 years by helping them attain the skills and confidence to learn in a safe and loving environment. Full-time and part-time child care is offered for infants through five years old. Classes in Kindergarten readiness are offered half-day and full-time. SSEC also offers summer camps for preschoolers and school-age children. SSEC accepts all children regardless of their educational needs, and we strive to accommodate lower income families who do not qualify for state subsidies and yet cannot afford the full cost of tuition. Curriculum enhancements include reading skills, storytelling, science, math, music, computer enrichment, field trips, community involvement, and visits from special guests.

Goals: SSEC's primary goal is to fulfill our commitment to diversity and equity by offering an affordable, accessible educational experience for every child, regardless of socio-economic status. To do this, we are committed to building a revenue stream through grants and donations which will sustain SSEC's ability to provide scholarship assistance for those families who do not qualify for state or federal subsidies.

Secondary goals include the following:

- Increase the number and diversity of members on the Board of Directors;
- Increase the number of donor organizations and individuals supporting SSEC; and
- Continue to assess the needs of the community and adapt programming accordingly.

Key Achievements:

SSEC's key achievements pertain to the recognition it has received from prestigious local and state-wide organizations documenting the high quality of our early childhood education programs. These include:

- In 2016 we attained the Keystone Stars 4 rating, the highest rating available for Early Childhood Education providers in Pennsylvania;
- Accreditation by the United Way's "Success by Six" program;
- Licensing by the Chester County Health Department; and
- Licensing by the PA Dept. of Public Welfare.

Distinctiveness: SSEC's distinctiveness comes from its long-term, highly-regarded reputation as an excellent provider of preschool education in the Phoenixville area for all children, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. SSEC partners with the Phoenixville School District to align its curriculum with that of the Kindergarten Center so that students are well prepared to achieve and succeed as they enter formal education. We provide a rich roster of activities throughout the year to support strong family units and to connect families in need with local social service agencies. Active membership in the Phoenixville Chamber of Commerce enables the SSEC to stay connected to the community and new service providers.

2. Funding request

• Description of key initiatives

SSEC is seeking a \$5,000 grant for scholarship support to continue its mission of providing affordable early childhood education for all families in the greater Phoenixville area, regardless of their ability to pay. Many of SSEC's children come from low-income families who are struggling – sometimes to put food on the table or even clothing on their children. In fact, over 80% of our students receive tuition assistance through the Chester County Department of Human Services (CCIS) or through this scholarship program. However, funding from CCIS only covers 80% of the cost for each child, and the balance must be raised from donations.

- **Specific needs and issues to be addressed**

Of our current enrollment of 63 children:

- 16 live in single parent households
- 6 live with other family members because their parents are unable to care for them
- 2 had parents recently divorce, and one child's parents divorced due to marital abuse
- 3 children have an IEP.

Research shows that access to high-quality early education is a key factor in closing the achievement gap for children at risk due to social and economic factors. Professor James Heckman, a Nobel Prize winning economist, noted in a recent report that achievement gaps occur before most children enter school, and that family environment plays a large role in shaping a child's abilities. More importantly, he noted that disadvantaged households have negative influences on a child's social and cognitive development.

Early learning programs such as SSEC's have been shown to be effective interventions that can supplement family life and give vital support for children from disadvantaged families. In fact, they increase motivation and engagement among young children by providing more interactive environments that successfully engage children, making them more receptive to learning, thereby increasing achievement. Early learning programs like SSEC also build social and emotional skills which produce more engaged children with greater abilities to relate appropriately with adults and peers, and thus succeed in a more formal school environment and in life.

Research also shows that children who have valuable early learning experiences are 50% more likely to graduate from high school and more than twice as likely to go on to college, thus building far greater potential to end the cycle of poverty. Professor Heckman has also noted that "developing skills and abilities is the most effective way to overcome social and economic inequalities."

President Obama noted the far-reaching value of early childhood education in the following statement:

"Every dollar we invest in high-quality early childhood education can save more than seven dollars later on, by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime ... Studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, and form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let's give our kids that chance."

- **Organizational impact if initiative is undertaken**

Our overall goal is to ensure that the students who graduate from SSEC receive the strongest possible start to their education. Collaboration with the Phoenixville School District ensures that our programs adequately prepare the students for Kindergarten, intellectually, emotionally and physically. In addition SSEC strives to instill a love of learning in the students so they will be able to handle the challenges that lie ahead of them.

SSEC also works to support families who are having financial difficulty by providing help with food and clothing and by facilitating access to public services, in addition to offering tuition subsidies. The hope is that the students will have both their educational and their physical needs met through SSEC's efforts, to give them a solid foundation for future success.

- **Activities to implement the initiative.**

Goals and activities during the 12-month grant period include providing the following programs:

- Infant Care and Toddler Programs
- Preschool Classes, part-time and full time, using a curriculum-based learning environment consistent with the Phoenixville Area School District for Kindergarten readiness.
- Before and after school care for school-age children
- Summer Camp
- Family Events and Monthly "Nights Out"
- Special programs and holiday celebrations

- **Why it is important to fund this now**

Because SSEC is committed to serving children who come from families with limited incomes, fund raising will always be required to provide scholarship assistance for lower income families who don't qualify for the state

subsidies, yet cannot afford the full tuition cost. We are continuing to research new funding opportunities and are building our board and standing committees to increase SSEC's capacity to raise funds from individuals, local organizations and businesses.

3. How impact and results will be demonstrated

Written progress reports are performed twice yearly for each child and shared in Parent-Teacher conferences. Daily interactions with parents keep the staff and parents informed of the changing needs of the children and their families. A written parent survey is completed by parents or responsible family members following the end of the regular school year in June. These surveys are a part of the evaluation process of SSEC staff and programs. Our staff maintains ongoing contact with the Phoenixville Area Kindergarten Center to ensure that SSEC programs are providing the children with everything they need to succeed in Kindergarten and beyond. The SSEC board of directors reviews a report from the Education Director at every meeting, which covers every activity that happens in SSEC throughout the previous period.

The Education Director also directly oversees all classroom activities and parent teacher conferences, and reports to the board of directors when these conferences are held. Participation in the Keystone Stars program requires ongoing evaluation of the teachers and the student's progress, thereby providing an independent, ongoing evaluation of SSEC programs and teachers.

One parent described SSEC in the following way: ***“I love Stepping Stone because it’s a family center that has provided life-enriching lessons for my child. My son has learned so much since he’s been with Stepping Stone. Sure, there are other places providing child care in Phoenixville, but I wouldn’t even consider anywhere else.”***

III. ATTACHMENTS

E-mail or mail this support information

1. Copy of 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. List of Board of Directors, with their affiliations
3. Most recent annual report and financial statement, audited if available
4. Itemized organizational operating budget with actual results for prior fiscal year and current fiscal year to date
5. If capacity building initiative, itemized budget (including external consultant's proposal, if applicable)
6. Current strategic plan. If your nonprofit does not have a current strategic plan, explain why.

If Philanthropy Network of Greater Philadelphia's Common Grant Application is used, the Community Foundation's Summary Sheet MUST accompany application. Available at www.chescocf.org

E-mail completed proposals to grants@chescocf.org

Please contact Kevin Baffa or Beth Harper Briglia at (610) 696-8211 or grants@chescocf.org if you have any questions. Thank you.

Chester County
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
*Connecting people who care with causes that matter,
so their legacies make a difference.*