

# Lock Haven University

## Official Release

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### *LHU Department of Early Childhood Education gets two grants: Projects focus on childcare and early childhood education*

LOCK HAVEN, Pa. - “The early years of a child’s life are the building blocks to success.” This statement by Senator Kit Bond (R-MO) sums up the importance of quality childcare and early childhood education. At Lock Haven University, the Department of Early Childhood Education is at the center of efforts to improve access to, and the quality of, Pre-K educational experiences for the children of Pennsylvania.

One of the leaders in this endeavor is Elizabeth Manlove, assistant professor of early childhood education. She is currently overseeing two grants designed to improve learning and long-term educational success of children throughout the Commonwealth.

Starting July 1, Manlove will be overseeing a grant designed to increase the availability of quality programs for children prior to kindergarten by helping teachers in these programs increase their qualifications for the work they do.

The LHU Department of Early Childhood Education has received a grant for \$15,200 to implement their Gate Opener Project. The project targets teachers in Pre-K Counts, Keystone STARS, and Head Start programs. Because these teachers work full-time, accessing higher education programs can be a challenge. The project will “open gates” for these teachers to pursue



**Assistant Professor Elizabeth Manlove is overseeing two grant projects aimed at helping children to succeed.**

additional education. The LHU Gate Opener Project will create on-line course offerings which can be used in either of two LHU masters programs.

Pennsylvania has increased education requirements for those in the Keystone STARS program, the Pennsylvania child care quality improvement program, and in publicly funded PreK Counts programs. In addition, qualifications for Head Start teachers have increased. All of the lead teachers in PreK Counts classrooms must be certified in early childhood education by 2011. Half of all Head Start teachers nationwide must have bachelor's degrees by 2013. Manlove explained that there is now a backlog of people who need to be certified, or who need additional courses to maintain their certification. "That has never before been the case in any pre-K setting," she said. "The expectation is that raising teacher qualifications will lead to better quality pre-k for children. We know that children in high quality pre-K programs enter kindergarten better prepared and ready to learn."

Collaborating on the project will be Dr. Susan R. Ashley, Dr. Christine Remley and Dr. Denise Tyson of the Early Childhood Education Department as well as Masters in Education faculty led by Associate Professor Nate Hosley, Director of Master of Education Programs. Manlove said, "We will be developing an early childhood education option within the Masters in Alternative Education and within the Masters in Teaching and Learning. Within these programs, students take 9 elective credits and we will be developing courses specific to early childhood education courses which will meet those 9 elective credits."

Manlove wrote the grant and will be overseeing the project. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning has funded the project for one year, with the possibility of renewal for two additional years.

The second grant which Manlove is overseeing was funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Its purpose is to serve as a resource to help legislators formulate policies that will better serve Pennsylvania's 3.4 million rural residents. The Board of Directors is chaired by Senator John R. Gordner (R, S.D. 127). LHU President Keith T. Miller and Senator John Wozniak also serve on the board.

Working with Manlove on this grant are scholars from Penn State Harrisburg and Penn State Altoona. Their project, entitled "Who's Minding the Children in Rural Pennsylvania? A Profile of Regulated Child Care and the Parents Who Use It," will examine the accessibility of quality regulated child care, both center-based and family child care, in rural counties. Manlove pointed out, "We know about what is available statewide, but don't know how that plays out in rural vs. urban counties."

For the Lock Haven portion of the grant, Manlove will be looking at data on T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood®, a state and privately funded program which provides scholarships for teachers in childcare settings to further their education. LHU serves T.E.A.C.H. students at both the Clearfield and main campuses. Manlove will examine participation in T.E.A.C.H. statewide to determine if provider participation rates differ in urban vs. rural counties.

Manlove explained that in rural areas, childcare providers and families seeking childcare face similar kinds of challenges. One challenge is the need to drive longer distances to get to work and to needed services. In rural areas, families have to travel a long way to use a childcare center. For example, the only child care centers in Clinton County are in the Lock Haven-Mill Hall area. In addition, more families in rural areas may be working non-traditional hours. This can be a real challenge for parents seeking childcare for their children.

Similarly, childcare providers may find real barriers to accessing educational opportunities if they can't get to a college or university campus, or if they can't get there when courses are traditionally offered. Manlove is interested in whether there are differences in these rural counties where providers may have to travel a long way for course work, as opposed to urban areas where colleges or universities may be nearby and more likely to offer night courses.

Manlove cited the abundant research that supports the value of a quality pre-K experience for young children in getting them ready for school entry. "We know that the pre-K experience is particularly effective for children who are at-risk for school failure," she said. Manlove also pointed out that the Office of Child Development and Early Learning puts out a county risk assessment. The OCDE uses a number of factors to rate the risk level for children in a county, including the percentage of children who are low income or poor, households headed by a single female, families on temporary assistance for needy families, and children born to a mother with less than a high school education. Twelve of the 15 counties in Pennsylvania which are classified "at high risk for poor outcomes for children" are rural counties. Clinton County is among those ranked as high risk.

"That's a pretty strong argument for putting resources into making sure that these children have access to quality pre-K experiences—and there are some real challenges to doing that because of geography," said Manlove.

"Who's Minding the Children?" is a one-year project and has been funded at \$49,994.

Dr. Thomas C. Ormond, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, commented, "Dr. Betsy Manlove's efforts build on LHU's long history of preparing highly qualified early childhood educators."

Manlove has been in childcare and early childhood education for 30 years, 20 of them in Pennsylvania. She and her colleagues are excited about the project. "We've all been in the pre-K world for a long time, and we're feeling like finally we've made some headway. For years we've all been saying 'This is important; we need to invest in this,' and now it's happening. It's very exciting to us to see the policy makers using the research to affect the policies that we know in the long run are going to be good for children and for all of us."

Manlove also had high praise for all her colleagues in the LHU Department of Early Childhood Education. "We are working to improve the quality of care—by meeting the needs of the T.E.A.C.H. early childhood students, by expanding our programs and by doing the research that's going to help

inform state policies to serve the children in our state.”

Lock Haven University is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), the largest provider of higher education in the commonwealth. Its 14 universities offer more than 250 degree and certificate programs in more than 120 areas of study. Nearly 405,000 system alumni live and work in Pennsylvania.

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