

SUPPORT HB5322 (Currie-Colvin-JMitchell-Eddy-Smith)
and **SB2594** (Lightford-Meeks-Harmon-Demuzio-Althoff)

Maintain ‘Preschool for All’ Progress

Protect young children’s access to Illinois’ nationally recognized program

THE CHALLENGE: The sunset date looms for Illinois’ landmark Preschool for All program – meaning more than 20,000 young children soon could lose access to high-quality preschool and critical developmental services, unless action is taken.

THE SOLUTION: Remove the June 30, 2010 sunset date from the Preschool for All law.

BACKGROUND: Illinois has a long history of supporting voluntary, early childhood education. In 2006, the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the Preschool for All plan, based on national research and the recommendations of the Illinois Early Learning Council.

Built upon the strengths of the state’s 25-year-old prekindergarten program for at-risk children, this plan called for improved program quality and established the statutory goal of extending access to high-quality preschool to every 3- and 4-year-old child whose parents choose it. Access to the program would grow as resources were made available, with at-risk children always remaining our top priority. Resources are prioritized first for qualified providers who primarily serve at-risk children (at least half of their enrollment). Current funding levels support only programs that fall into this category.

Unless the sunset date is removed this year, state-supported preschool would revert to its former, “at-risk only” status, jeopardizing the services provided to more than 20,000 young children through 260 preschool and 31 birth-to-three grants established or expanded since Preschool For All’s enactment.

Budget cuts of more than \$38 million and payment delays already are hurting the stability of a program designed to provide a high-quality learning environment for young children. Educators are left to wonder whether the state intends to someday end its preschool commitments. By making Preschool for All permanent, providers would benefit from a greater sense of security, better-able to focus on the needs of young children.

SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATIONS: Like other education grants, funding for Preschool for All is determined by the General Assembly on an annual basis, and removing its sunset date does not lock officials into any specific dollar amounts.

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