

# Invest in the next steps of ‘Preschool for All’

*Commit the resources necessary to help every young child succeed in school & life*

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**Investments in early childhood pay important dividends throughout a child’s school years and beyond. Improving and expanding early learning opportunities is critical to the success of our K-12 education system and ensuring all children enter school ready to learn. We must take the next crucial steps on the important journey we have begun toward ensuring “Preschool for All.”**

**REQUEST:** Continue our investments in young children’s learning with a \$68 million increase for Preschool for All – through the Illinois State Board of Education’s Early Childhood Block Grant – in FY2009. This amount would help us to keep on track with plans for preschool improvement and expansion, as well as begin to gradually increase the grant’s vastly underfunded, developmental services for at-risk infants and toddlers.

**BACKGROUND:** Illinois’ PreKindergarten program for at-risk, 3- and 4-year-old children began in 1985 and ISBE’s birth-to-3 programs were implemented a few years later. In 2006, Illinois made history by creating Preschool for All, the first program in the nation that aims to offer voluntary, high-quality preschool to all 3- as well as 4-year olds. This effort maintains our top commitment to children at risk of academic failure, while also expanding services for at-risk infants and toddlers and their families.

Our state’s investments in early education have helped thousands of young children begin school better-prepared for academic and social success. Despite difficult budget environments in recent years, the General Assembly and the Governor have wisely recognized the value of early education by steadily increasing funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant, which supports these programs. In the past two years alone, more than 180 programs received new Preschool for All resources. Yet tens of thousands more children still lack early learning opportunities.

**THE PLAN:** Preschool for All is drawn from a blueprint provided by the Illinois Early Learning Council, which was created with bipartisan support by the General Assembly and the Governor in 2003. More than 200 early childhood advocates, service providers, civic and law enforcement leaders, legislators and others provided input to the plan.

Preschool for All builds upon the successes of the longstanding state preK program, with expanded access and important investments in quality and accountability. It works through the Early Childhood Block Grant to ensure:

- Voluntary, high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents choose it
- Priority services for at-risk children, with gradual expansion to others
- Expanded support for at-risk infants and toddlers
- High standards and high-quality curricula and teaching staff in a variety of settings that parents choose (schools, child care, other community-based providers) – an approach that addresses a shortage of school-based classrooms as well as some families’ needs for full day/full year care.

Preschool for All was approved with the understanding that several years of further investments are required to help Illinois reach these goals.

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