

Maintain 'Preschool for All' Progress

Invest in helping every young child succeed in school & life

Investments in early childhood pay important dividends throughout a child's school years and beyond. Improving and expanding early learning opportunities is critical to ensuring all children enter kindergarten ready to learn. We must take the next crucial steps on the important journey we have begun toward ensuring that all Illinois children have access to high-quality early childhood education.

REQUEST: Continue our investments in young children's learning with a \$45 million increase for the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Childhood Block Grant, which funds Preschool for All: prekindergarten for children 3 to 5 years old, as well as services for at-risk infants, toddlers and their families. This amount represents the FY2010 increase originally envisioned for the program in Preschool for All plans.

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. Then, 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 was approved with the understanding that several years of further investments are required to meet these goals. And Preschool for All 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 tens of thousands of young children begin school better-prepared for academic and social success. Despite difficult budget environments in recent years, the General Assembly has wisely recognized the value of early education by steadily increasing funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant, which supports these early learning programs. Yet:

- Tens of thousands more children still lack early learning opportunities
- Funding increases fell \$28 million short of the original plans for FY2008-09
- Birth-to-3 programs are in dire need of resources to help our youngest learners. New funding has been sufficient to help only 4 percent to 11 percent of applicants in recent years

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, to help 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). This is an approach that addresses a shortage of school-based classrooms as well as some families' needs for full-day/full-year care.

For more information:

Sean Noble,
**Voices for
Illinois
Children**
(312) 502-5566

Ireta Gasner,
**Ounce of
Prevention
Fund**
(312) 922-3863

Sessy Nyman,
**Illinois
Action for
Children**
(773) 315-1309

Tim Carpenter,
**Fight Crime:
Invest in Kids
Illinois**
(312) 339-0583

Sylvia Puente,
**Latino Policy
Forum**
(312) 376-1766
Ext. 224

February 2009

