

# VOICES

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MAKING ILLINOIS A MUCH BETTER PLACE FOR KIDS

## FOR ILLINOIS CHILDREN



**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES  
BY BUILDING ASSETS – P.04**

*Children at Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago*

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# INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

By Jerry Stermer, President



Everyone deserves the chance to achieve the American dream, and being financially secure and able to meet your family's basic needs is a critical factor. But too many Illinois families face obstacles to reaching that goal. In our state, one out of every three children lives in a low-income family, four out of

every 10 households don't have savings accounts and two out of every three adults lack higher education.

The question is not whether families are struggling financially, but how can we improve outcomes for those families?

"Asset building" describes an approach to public policy and private sector efforts that enable people with limited financial resources to accumulate and preserve long-term assets such as savings, a home and post-secondary education. There are two kinds of policies that encourage asset building:

- financial, such as financial literacy programs and special savings accounts like "529" college savings plans and Individual Development Accounts; and
- life skills, which include assets like accessible preschool, affordable health care and quality education.

We need to aid families in building both kinds of assets in order to help them get ahead, reach the middle class and provide more opportunities for their children. Our new "Illinois Kids Count" report, highlighted on page 04, recommends that Illinois continue to improve and expand voluntary preschool so that all 3- and 4-year-olds can participate, reform the state tax structure to

provide better funding for public schools and ensure that all children and their working parents are covered by health insurance.

The guest columnists featured in this newsletter focus on two important aspects of asset building. Ricardo Estrada writes about quality education on page 05, and Dory Rand discusses the need for special children's savings accounts on page 06.

These efforts are investments in the future of Illinois. And your investment in Voices for Illinois Children allows us to make real progress in securing a better future for all of our state's children.

Let me share with you just one recent victory. When classes started this September, there were over 92,000 children in high-quality preschool programs, a 37 percent increase over just three years ago. That's 25,000 more 3- and 4-year-olds at risk of school failure who are now receiving the early education services they need to get a good start on their schooling.

You should be proud of what your support of our work has helped to accomplish. Yet so much remains to be done.

In the coming year, Voices will continue to champion the needs of all the kids in our state. Some of the issues we will tackle include:

- Improving and expanding early childhood education so that all 3- and 4-year olds can participate if their parents choose.
- Strengthening mental health supports for children.
- Preserving crucial intervention services for young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

By making a donation to Voices, we can continue working together to make Illinois a much better place for our children. ■

## OUR MISSION

*Voices for Illinois Children champions the full development of every child in Illinois to assure the future well-being of the people of the state. We work with families, communities and policymakers to ensure that all children grow up healthy, nurtured, safe and well-educated.*



**Correction:** The summer edition of the Voices for Illinois Children newsletter misspelled the names of Rep. Dan Beiser, Rep. Gary Hannig and Rep. Jay Hoffman. We regret this error.

*The Voices newsletter is edited by Julie Parente, designed by Childers Communications, Inc. and printed by Kokopelli Communications Group, Inc.*

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**POLICY UPDATE**

# JUVENILE JUSTICE, KIDS' HEALTH CARE TAKE IMPORTANT STEPS FORWARD

By Sean Noble

**T**wo major victories for children emerged from Illinois legislators' final two weeks of the 2005 session this fall.

The All Kids proposal passed with the promise of extending health insurance to every Illinois child who lacks it, regardless of household income. Over time, this initiative should provide affordable coverage for more than 250,000 uninsured kids, Gov. Rod Blagojevich has pledged.

About half of those children come from low-income families that already are eligible for – but not receiving – KidCare coverage, he said. All Kids will fuel better outreach efforts to help those youngsters get the health care they lack.

The other uninsured children are those from middle-class households whose incomes are too high to qualify for KidCare or Medicaid assistance, but often too low for parents to afford health insurance costs on their own. All Kids would change that, by making children's insurance affordable for their families. For example, a family of four earning \$40,000 to \$59,000 annually would pay a \$40 monthly premium per child and a \$10 co-pay for each doctor visit.

Perhaps nowhere is this more welcome news than in the fastest-growing population segment of Illinois, the Latino community. The Governor's Office has said All Kids coverage would extend even to undocumented children, who often come from Latino households that lack adequate health insurance.

"Research shows affordable, preventive care not only helps children to stay physically healthy, it boosts their school performance and their families' economic health," said state Sen. Miguel del Valle of Chicago. "We should be very proud.

Guaranteeing health care to every single child puts Illinois alone among the states."

All Kids' \$45 million cost should be covered by savings from switching Illinois' Medicaid patients to a managed-care system, pairing each of them with a primary-care physician to help guide most medical decisions, the Governor said. Much work remains to settle the details of All Kids implementation, as is the case with reforms of Illinois' juvenile-justice system.

During their "veto session," legislators also approved a plan to break the Juvenile Division away from the Department of Corrections and form a new state agency dedicated to rehabilitating young offenders. The development of new educational and treatment services should help more youths leave the system as future productive citizens who are better-equipped to avoid further criminal troubles.

"Today, nearly half of these youths wind up back in the juvenile system within three years, a recidivism rate we've got to improve for the sake of children and our entire future as a state," said Frank Kopecky of Springfield, a member of Voices' Board of Directors and chairman of the Board of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Initiative. "We need to do more than lock up young offenders; we've got to help them turn their lives around."

Illinois' adult prison population has swelled to about 44,000, overwhelming Department of Corrections programming decisions at the expense of the department's 1,600 juveniles. A fresh start should focus better attention on the specific needs of the younger group, making

*continued on page 08*

# ASSET BUILDING: A PATH TO ECONOMIC SECURITY

By Julie Parente

Children do well when their families do well, and families succeed when they are economically secure and able to provide for their needs. But thousands of Illinois families struggle financially, which can mean an unsure future for their children.

Asset building is a public policy and private sector strategy that aims to build economic security for current and future generations. By enabling people with limited financial resources to accumulate and preserve long-term assets such as savings, a home, post-secondary education and more, families can get ahead and have something to help them through tough financial times.

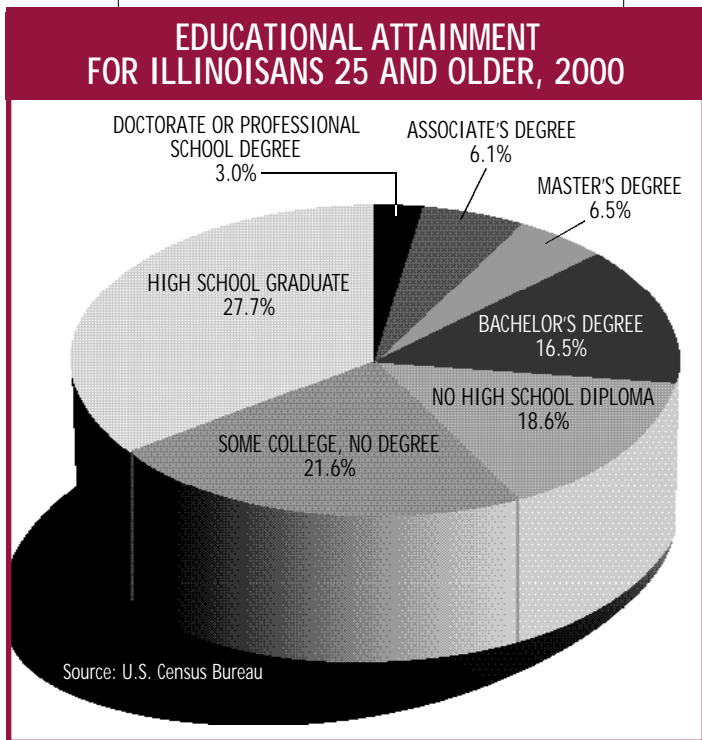
A new "Illinois Kids Count" report by Voices for Illinois Children, "Invest in Our Future: Strengthening Families by Building Assets," finds that more than 40 percent of Illinois households don't have a savings account, and almost 20 percent of American households owes more than it owns.

"People who have assets are more economically secure, have more options in life and can pass on opportunities to their children and future generations," said Douglas Whitley, president and CEO of the Illinois State Chamber of

Commerce. "Building assets helps people reach the middle class and achieve economic independence."

Much like the G.I. Bill of Rights that helped soldiers returning from World War II to get educations, jobs and homes,

- Ensure all 3- and 4-year-olds have access to voluntary, high-quality preschool experiences.
- Reform the tax structure to produce enough revenue to fund education and other critical health and human services.
  - Strengthen health insurance for low-income children and families.
  - Improve tax credits for low-income, working families.
  - Help families plan for the future with special savings accounts that help low-income families build assets.
  - Ensure working families have access to good child care by increasing the reimbursement rates paid to child care providers who accept state subsidies.
  - Give parents paid leave to address family matters.
  - Continue to improve Illinois' child support system.



asset building is an investment strategy that allows people to live out their own aspirations while creating greater social and economic benefits for all. Asset building does not apply to low-income families alone; it is wise for everyone to have savings for emergencies and a nest egg for the future.

Illinois can encourage more families to build assets by enacting the following public policy recommendations:

"Building individual wealth begins with education," said Jerry Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children. "Once people are educated about the power they have, they are better equipped to make choices that will secure their financial future." ■

Read the new  
Illinois Kids Count report at  
[www.voices4kids.org/illinoiskidscount.htm](http://www.voices4kids.org/illinoiskidscount.htm).

# OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: OUR GREATEST INVESTMENT

By Ricardo Estrada, President and CEO, Erie Elementary Charter School

Here in Chicago's Humboldt Park community, we have at least 24,197 opportunities to invest in the lives of children. That's the number of children under 18 who reside in our diverse community. Proud as we are of our



community, it still suffers from widespread poverty, too much violence, low educational attainment among parents, and a low level of English literacy among immigrant families.

Erie Neighborhood House is a community-based, comprehensive social services organization whose programs assist low-income families and immigrant residents in reaching their full potential. Top-quality educational opportunities for the community's youngest residents are essential for achieving that mission. After two years of planning and a rigorous application process, Erie Elementary Charter School opened its doors on Sept. 6, 2005 to 80 kindergarten and first-grade students.

Erie Neighborhood House's nationally accredited child care program has helped children succeed for many years. The Charter School grew out of our desire to have even more impact on young lives. Evidence clearly demonstrates that children who receive a

quality preschool experience are more likely to do well in school, stay out of trouble, and find good jobs. Helping more children attend quality preschool and early education programs today means they will be better prepared

tomorrow for the responsibilities of citizenship, community leadership, and the workplace.

The opening of Erie Elementary Charter School fulfills the dreams of many individuals and honors their hard, dedicated work. A new grade will be added each year until the goal of 240 kindergarten through fifth-grade students is reached in fall 2009. Erie House's after-school program, featuring a choice-based curriculum including homework time, technology access, sports, arts, and literacy, will also be available at the school.

Erie Elementary Charter School is one of just eight organizations citywide awarded funding from New Schools for Chicago, a non-profit organization partnering with Chicago Public Schools and the city's business community to champion the creation of new, high-performing schools.

"We are honored to be entrusted our society's greatest privilege – the education of

our community's children. Our children's success will be a testament to this important public partnership we call the Erie Elementary Charter School," Principal Linda Ponce de Leon said.

The 80 children who enter Erie Elementary Charter School this year constitute just a small part of those 24,197 young lives in our community. Erie Neighborhood House serves many of the others in many ways, but we see this year's kindergartners and first-graders as some of the future leaders of our community, our city, and our country. Making a difference with them is one primary way that everything else can start changing, too.

*Ricardo Estrada is executive director of Erie Neighborhood House and president and CEO of Erie Elementary Charter School in Chicago. He previously worked to strengthen Chicago's Latino communities as director, consultant and administrator for Latino Youth, Inc, Orphanlink International, the University of Chicago's Gang Violence Reduction Program, United Charities and Chicago Commons. He is an advisory council member for many organizations including the Illinois Department of Human Services Child Care and Development Advisory Council, Mayor's Council of Technology Advisors and The Donor's Forum. ■*



# UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS: AN INVESTMENT IN OUR FUTURE

By Dory Rand, Supervising Attorney, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

What difference would it make if every child were born with an account that he or she could use at maturity to go to college, buy a home, start a business, or save for retirement? A number of state and federal initiatives and privately funded programs have been launched in the belief that an investment in universal children's accounts, like investments in early childhood education and health care, will produce huge long-term returns for children and for society.

Voices for Illinois Children and the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law are working with CFED (a nonprofit dedicated to expanding economic opportunity) and partners in three other states to explore the development of universal, progressive children's accounts. These accounts would be opened at birth, endowed with an initial deposit, and structured so that lower-income families receive greater incentives to build savings.

In the United States, the concept first appeared in print in 1991 in the seminal book "Assets and the Poor: A New American Welfare Policy," by Professor Michael Sherraden of Washington University in St.



Louis. The book explained how government policy promoting assets (in addition to income) could provide "hope in concrete form" for poor families.

Sherraden's asset-building theories have now been widely tested in

the field of matched savings accounts, often called individual development accounts or IDAs, with adults. The American Dream Demonstration proved that low-income adults can and will save and build assets, given the opportunity, financial education, and incentives. Nationwide, over 20,000 low-income adults have successfully completed financial education programs and used IDAs for college, homeownership, small business, and other assets through programs supported by federal, state, and private funds. Building on this track record, the United Kingdom already passed national child trust fund legislation under which the British government opens an account for every child at birth and endows it with an initial deposit.

People in the United States are becoming increasingly interested in asset building for children and youth, too. In 2003, CFED launched Savings for Education, Entrepreneurship, and Downpayment (SEED), a

multi-year policy and practice initiative to develop, test, and impel universal children's accounts at 12 sites throughout the country, including a Chicago site administered by the Shriver Center. Even before the SEED results could be established, the kids' accounts concept caught fire and a bipartisan group in Congress launched the Americans Saving for Personal Investment, Retirement, and Education Act, first introduced in 2004 and reintroduced in 2005.

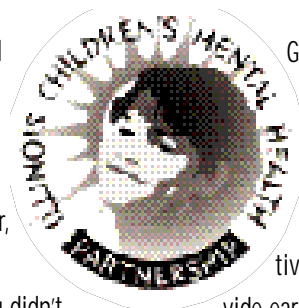
Meanwhile, at least five states have added a matched savings component to their 529 college savings plans. Under section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code, earnings may be withdrawn tax-free for qualified higher education expenses. These 529 plans, like most provisions of the tax code that primarily benefit the wealthy, are underutilized by lower-income families. By providing an initial deposit and matched savings incentive through the existing infrastructure of 529 plans, states could expand college opportunities and change the expectations and outcomes for generations to come.

*Dory Rand is supervising attorney for community investment at the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, a Chicago-based organization that champions law and policy promoting equal opportunity and support for low-income individuals, families, and communities so that they can escape poverty permanently. ■*



# CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT FOCUSES ON FAMILIES AND CULTURE

By Kimberly Siske



Imagine as a parent that your child needed your help, but you didn't have the resources available to provide that help. You looked, you asked, but could not find the answer, and you were desperate. Your child's condition was deteriorating, but you didn't know what it was or how to make it better.

This is the reality for many parents of children with mental illness. In communities throughout Illinois, parents are alone and struggling to find the help they need for their children. But with a lack of funding and resources, many communities do not have providers who can give children and their parents the treatment and supports they need.

On Nov. 1 in Springfield, some 200 participants from diverse backgrounds and experience including family members, practitioners, and state agency representatives came together to discuss building upon the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership's strategic plan. The plan was the result of a collaboration of over 200 individuals representing the entire children's mental health system, including family members. The plan outlines a series of recommendations to build a comprehensive and coordinated approach to prevention, early intervention, and treatment for Illinois children ages birth to 18. The plan was finalized in June and sent to Gov. Rod Blagojevich for his approval.

"All children deserve to grow up healthy, and that includes mental health as well as social and emotional well-being," said Gaylord

Gieseke, vice president of Voices for Illinois Children and executive committee member of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership. "Investing in initiatives that identify problems and provide early intervention and treatment supports will pay off by giving more children a solid foundation for success."

The theme of the summit, "Transforming Our Children's Mental Health: Valuing Family, Honoring Culture," was reflected in the plenary session, workshops, and discussion groups. Topics ranged from families as partners in planning, policy and service delivery, culturally competent service models, to engaging families and diverse audiences in public awareness activities. But in the moments between speakers, or on an elevator ride up to a workshop, parents would take the opportunity to talk about their children. One mother described how she struggled for years to get the proper diagnosis for her son, a mix of urgency and relief washing over her face as she told of the battle for information and the victory in receiving treatment.

Kim Miller, one of the main speakers, is a family resource developer for Children's Home Association of Illinois in Peoria and has an extensive career in advocating for improved mental health services. But she spoke not as a provider, but as a parent of a child who needed help.

Prior to joining Children's Home, Miller was a stay-at-home mom. Her daughter showed signs

of mental illness at a very early age. After going to doctor after doctor and receiving a diagnosis of "brain disorder," Miller came to the realization that she had to become an advocate on behalf of her daughter and was propelled into action. Depression, anxiety, panic, and self-harm were just some of her daughter's symptoms. Miller eventually found the answers and treatment her daughter needed.

"I used to ask where she can go when she fails," Miller said of her daughter. "But this is a success story." Her daughter is now 15 and thriving as a young artist in high school. After a hard-won battle to receive the proper diagnosis and treatment, Miller's daughter could finally be just like any other teenager.

The Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, which sponsored the summit, provided a valuable opportunity for discussion about cultural competency and the critical role of families. Families play a key role in the Partnership's work, and the summit's spirit of collaboration between parents and providers served as a beginning, ensuring that thoughtful policy and practice will be put into play. The daylong summit was filled with many powerful stories and ideas, but what stood out most was standing in room with a group of true pioneers working to make children's mental health issues a priority in Illinois. ■

For more information about the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, please contact Laura Hurwitz at 312-516-5569 or [lhurwitz@voices4kids.org](mailto:lhurwitz@voices4kids.org).

# POLICY UPDATE: JUVENILE JUSTICE, KIDS' HEALTH CARE TAKE IMPORTANT STEPS FORWARD

*continued from page 03*

better use of its \$125 million in resources. These juvenile justice reform efforts were encompassed in Senate Bill 92, sponsored by Sen. John Cullerton and Rep. Annazette Collins, both of Chicago, and were led by a broad coalition that included Chicago Metropolis 2020 and the Juvenile Justice Initiative. Voices for Illinois Children strongly supported the juvenile-justice reforms and All Kids (House Bill 806) legislation, and is helping to shape further efforts at their implementation.

For more information, contact Sean Noble at 312-512-5566 or [snoble@voices4kids.org](mailto:snoble@voices4kids.org).

# MOVING TOWARD PRESCHOOL FOR ALL IN ILLINOIS

By Julie Parente

Over 400 civic and community leaders, early childhood providers and child advocates gathered in cities across the state recently to discuss how to provide voluntary, quality preschool for all Illinois children and to take part in a national satellite conference on the preschool movement.

The conference, called "Engaging Leaders in the Pre-K Movement," highlighted Illinois' preschool progress through interviews with Illinois State Board of Education Chairman Jesse Ruiz, state Sen. John Millner of St. Charles, Action for Children President Maria Whelan and Chicago Public Schools Early Childhood Officer Barbara Bowman.

The local meetings were co-sponsored by Early Learning Illinois, a statewide advocacy and public awareness campaign led by Voices for Illinois Children, Action for Children and Ounce of Prevention Fund. The satellite conference was hosted by Pre-K Now, a national advocacy organization, and broadcast to 90 sites in 25 states.

Participants discussed how Illinois has made great progress in getting policymakers to focus on early childhood education, but acknowledged much more work needs to be done.

"It's so important to make sure that all young children have the chance to participate in preschool," said Sarah Wolin, a member of the Springfield Voices Leadership Committee and director of communications and community impact at United Way of

Central Illinois. "Starting early in children's lives can give them the support and skills they need to succeed in school."

Bonnie Wheeler, a member of Voices for Illinois Children's Board of Directors and co-chair of the Southern Illinois Voices Leadership Committee, said the audience at the Carterville event included representatives from Head Start, child care centers and family day care providers.

"It was a good opportunity to come together and learn about how we can ensure that quality preschool options are available in all communities around the state," she said. "These options also must reflect the different needs of each community. A preschool system that works in Peoria might not be right for southern Illinois or Chicago."

Funding for early childhood education has increased \$90 million the past three years, reaching another 25,000 children in areas with the highest need, such as Latino communities. But demand for quality early learning still exists. An estimated 100,000 new or enhanced preschool slots are needed in order for all children to be able to access quality programs. Many working families also face an affordability gap – they earn too much to qualify for state-supported programs, but too little to afford private programs. ■

For more information, visit [www.earlylearningillinois.org](http://www.earlylearningillinois.org).

## SAVE THE DATE!

MARCH 04, 2006



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# ILLINOIS' PENSION FUNDING CRISIS MAY OVERWHELM EDUCATION, OTHER STATE PRIORITIES

By Ann Courter and Maneesha Date

Illinois' unfunded pension debt threatens to overwhelm other state priorities such as education and health care in the near future, according to a new issue brief by Voices for Illinois Children's Budget & Tax Policy Initiative.

The brief, called "Illinois' Pension Funding Crisis," finds that Illinois has the country's largest unfunded pension debt of \$35 billion, a shortfall that has become a major factor in state budget decision-making. State contributions to the pension funds represent less than 4 percent of total General Funds spending in FY2006, but this percentage could more than triple during a period of rapidly escalating pension payments through FY2010.

A Nov. 1 report by the legislative Advisory Commission on Pension Benefits suggests an agreed bill process for dealing with Illinois' pension funding problems. The commission's other recommendations include exploring new revenue sources dedicated to reducing the pension systems' debt and issuing pension obligation bonds.

"Illinois cannot continue its decades-long practice of underfunding the pension system

and pushing its debt into the future," Voices President Jerry Stermer said. "Without additional revenues, the state does not have the resources to meet its obligations to pensioners and continue to provide the public education, health care, safety and other human services Illinois children and families need to succeed."

The report discusses options for improving the fiscal health of the state pension system, including issuing more pension obligation bonds, creating an alternative to the period of rapidly escalating payments and raising sufficient new revenues to meet pension obligations.

"Sticking to the current funding schedule will be virtually impossible under our current revenue system," Stermer said. "Illinois has faced four years of budget deficits that have largely been filled with one-time revenue sources. Policymakers must act now and reform Illinois' revenue system to avert this impending crisis and meet citizens' needs." ■

Read the issue brief at [www.voices4kids.org/pensions.pdf](http://www.voices4kids.org/pensions.pdf).  
For more information, contact Ann Courter at [acourter@voices4kids.org](mailto:acourter@voices4kids.org) or Maneesha Date at [mdate@voices4kids.org](mailto:mdate@voices4kids.org).

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author of  
"The Shame of the Nation" and  
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For more information, please contact Shawn Gavin at 312-516-5552.



# ILLINOIS FLUNKS IN NATIONAL REPORT CARD

By Bindu Batchu  
A+ Illinois campaign manager

According to an analysis of the 2005 nation's report card, Illinois has the largest student achievement gaps in America.

The A+ Illinois campaign report, "The Gap Persists: Closing Illinois' Achievement Divide," analyzed the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress published by the U.S. Department of Education and found that Illinois' achievement gaps parallel unprecedented spending gaps among school districts. The A+ Illinois campaign, which Voices for Illinois Children is helping to lead, is working to reform school funding so that all children have a quality education.

The nation's report card regularly tests a sample of fourth- and eighth-grade students in math and reading and tracks changes over time. The latest results show Illinois continues to have some of the worst achievement gaps in the country, including the largest disparity between poor students and non-poor students in fourth-grade math.

"Illinois' achievement gaps are a direct result of the state's school funding problems and over-reliance on property taxes," said MarySue Barrett, executive director of the Metropolitan Planning Council and a leader of the A+ Illinois campaign. "These unacceptable disparities threaten the state's economy, its future workforce, and its ability to compete in an increasingly global marketplace."

Other key findings indicate:

- Money does matter. The average low-poverty school district in Illinois spent almost \$2,500 more per pupil than the average high-poverty district, which is the second-worst funding gap in the nation. Meanwhile, Illinois' achievement gap in fourth-grade reading is the third worst in the nation and the gap in fourth-grade math is the worst.
- Illinois' over-reliance on property taxes exacerbates the achievement gap. Schools with the greatest academic difficulty (those on the state's academic watch list) have considerably higher rates of poverty and lower property wealth than the state average. They struggle to generate adequate revenues, resulting in an average operating expense per pupil that is lower than the state average. Thus, the school districts with the greatest academic needs and highest poverty lack the resources to invest in programs that can help close the achievement gap.

"Some schools in wealthy communities spend almost five times more per student than their counterparts in less affluent communities in Cook County's southern suburbs and downstate," said Cook County Assessor Jim Houlihan. "Children should not be denied a proper education simply because of where they live."

Read the entire analysis online at [www.aplusillinois.org](http://www.aplusillinois.org). For more information, contact Bindu Batchu at 312-863-6014 or [bbatchu@metroplanning.org](mailto:bbatchu@metroplanning.org).

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# 2005 KIDS COUNT AWARDS DINNER

Thanks to everyone who attended and contributed

**V**oices for Illinois Children's annual Kids Count Awards Dinner celebrated our accomplishments and shined a spotlight on people who are making Illinois a much better place for our children. Awards were presented to Dr. Sokoni Karanja of Centers for New Horizons, the Child Abuse Council of Moline and the Children's Advocacy Center of North & Northwest Cook County.



The dinner's co-chairs were Frederick H. Waddell of Northern Trust Corp. (left) and Russ M. Strobel of Nicor, Inc.



The evening featured remarks by Cornelia Grumman, Pulitzer-Prize winning member of the Chicago Tribune editorial board and U.S. Senator Dick Durbin.



(From left) Voices President Jerry Stermer, Loretta Durbin, Senator Durbin, Voices Board Chair Jim Mitchell and Linda Mitchell.



Senator Durbin poses with the award recipients. From left, National City Bank Children's Champion Award winner Mark Parr of the Children's Advocacy Center of North & Northwest Cook County, Sue Swisher of the Child Abuse Council of Moline and Jan Stepto Millet (accepting for Dr. Sokoni Karanja).



State Senator Don Harmon (center) and his wife, Terri, talk with Jerry Stermer.

## DEVELOPMENT NEWS

# GIVE VOICES THE FLEXIBILITY TO SEIZE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

By Shawn Gavin

It's hard not to be inspired by the outpouring of generosity that we witnessed this year. Multiple disasters, both at home and abroad, gave Americans all too many opportunities to demonstrate the compassion and the impulse to charity that seem to be a part of our national character.

As the year draws to a close, we hope that you will remember the need – and the possibility – right here in Illinois. Voices for Illinois Children is 100 percent funded by private donations. Contributions from individual donors are critical because they give Jerry Stermer and his team the flexibility to respond to an ever-changing political landscape and the resources to seize new opportunities as they arise.

As you review your year-end philanthropy,

we ask that you consider making an investment in Voices for Illinois Children's Annual Fund. By making a contribution, you will become part of another wave of generosity: those who believe that meaningful and lasting change for all the kids in our state is possible. Together, we can make Illinois a much better place for children.

To make a gift, please fill out the enclosed donation envelope or call the Development Office at 312-516-5552.

Voices also would like to thank the many people who supported the 14th annual Kids Count Awards Dinner. Over 300 people gathered to raise over \$250,000 to support Voices' work. The guests enjoyed entertainment by the Chicago Children's

Choir along with remarks by U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin and Cornelia Grumman, Pulitzer Prize-winning member of the Chicago Tribune's editorial board. The 2005 Kids Count Awards honored the work of Dr. Sokoni T. Karanja of Centers for New Horizons and the Child Abuse Council of Moline, and the National City Bank Children's Champion Award was presented to the Children's Advocacy Center of North & Northwest Cook County. Many dedicated people made the event a success, but we especially want to thank our dinner chairs, Russ Strobel of Nicor and Rick Waddell of Northern Trust, and the 2005 Dinner Committee chairs Craig Culbertson and Lorna Brett Howard and committee members Michael Beacham, Dianne Meeks, Lynn Montei and Eva Serrano. ■

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