ILLINOIS APPROVES PRESCHOOL FOR ALL PLANS – P.04

Young children attending preschool at the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood Center in East St. Louis.

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The success of our state and our nation is based upon the power of people working together. We all benefit when citizens work with the public sector to identify problems and come to consensus on a vision to address those problems.

Economists agree that what makes America so successful is the effectiveness of our public structures, such as laws, schools, highways and health and safety agencies. They are the machinery that produces American success and quality of life; without them, it would be difficult to improve the lives of children and families. Our quality of life now and into the future depends on citizens and public agencies working for the common good.

People across Illinois have been working together for the common good this year, as evidenced by the victories for children and their families this legislative session. Chief among them is Preschool for All, a plan to provide voluntary, high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds (read more on page 04).

Preschool for All had strong bipartisan support from legislators as well as active backing from a broad constituency of educators, business leaders, law enforcement officials, and parents. The plan is based on recommendations of more than 200 people involved in the work of the Illinois Early Learning Council. The success of Preschool for All demonstrates how citizens and public officials can work together to provide a better future for all of Illinois.

Members of our Voices Leadership Committees and civic leaders across the state played an important role in our legislative success this year. They participated in the democratic process by meeting and talking with their legislators, hosting press conferences and events, and writing letters to their local newspapers. They spoke out in favor of quality preschool, a better school-funding system and other supports for children. Some testified before the Legislature, like Kim Miller of Peoria, who discussed the need for a comprehensive children’s mental health system (see page 12). All of their efforts helped ensure that children remain a priority in state government.

What’s clear is that the involvement of citizens – working together, each in his or her own way – helps make Illinois a much better place for our children.

There are lots of ways to make a difference. We can discuss the needs of children with our elected officials. We can participate in community forums with candidates being organized this summer and fall by Voices Leadership Committees. We can vote. What’s important is that we are part of the process and don’t just sit on the sidelines.

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.
POLICY UPDATE

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN FY07 STATE BUDGET

By Sean Noble and Maneesha Date

The Governor and legislators approved a fiscal year 2007 state budget that includes significant victories for children and families. The operating budget of $45.8 billion represents a $1.5 billion increase over FY2006 after taking into account FY06 supplemental appropriations. General funds appropriations grew by nearly $1.3 billion, from $24.5 billion for FY2006 to $25.7 billion for FY2007.

Major advances in preschool and children’s mental health supports are among the highlights in the state budget and are detailed on page 04. However, children also will benefit from several other important victories, including:

- A $34.3 million net increase for state-supported child care for low-income, working families. These resources will help stabilize programs’ access and quality through a reimbursement rate increase for providers. During six years without such a boost, many providers were forced to limit the number of state-subsidized children they could serve, lay off teachers or let staff positions go unfilled.

- Cost-of-doing-business increases for providers of many important programs administered by the Departments of Human Services and Children and Family Services. Among them are Healthy Families Illinois home-visiting programs for at-risk infants and toddlers, Teen REACH after-school efforts for at-risk youths and several critical child-welfare initiatives.

- $3 million to help handle caseload growth in Early Intervention services for young children who have significant developmental delays or disabilities, or risks of such problems. Unfortunately, these vital services did not receive the cost-of-doing-business increases they need.

- A total of more than $400 million new investments in preK-12 education. This includes more funding for bilingual, after-school, anti-truancy and alternative-education programs in addition to a significant expansion of preschool. In addition, the “foundation level” for schools’ general state aid will grow by $170 per pupil.

While representing significant growth, the new foundation level still falls more than $1,000 shy of the mark recommended by school-funding experts as necessary just to ensure two-thirds of students can meet state learning standards. (Adjusted for inflation, Illinois remains about $1,300 short of that mark.) Schools’ continuing budget struggles underscore the need for more fundamental reforms of education-funding adequacy and fairness, as well as our state’s overall revenue structure.

On the revenue side, the budget relies heavily on economic growth and fund sweeps. Though the Illinois economy has experienced some recent growth, it appears to be slowing and lags the growth experienced in the rest of the country. Furthermore, sweeps from dedicated purpose funds into the General Revenue Fund are neither a growing source of revenue nor a stable way to fund important state priorities such as education going forward.

Please join Voices in thanking our Governor and legislators for support of these FY2007 successes – and in preparing to meet the policy challenges that remain for kids and families.

For more information, contact Sean Noble at 312-516-5556 or snoble@voices4kids.org or Maneesha Date at 312-516-5568 or mdate@voices4kids.org.

Check www.voices4kids.org for a more detailed analysis of the state budget.
Lawmakers have passed legislation to make Illinois the first state in the nation with the goal of offering voluntary, high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds. Young children who are at risk of school failure are the first priority as Preschool for All expansion begins this fall, followed by middle-income children and, finally, all other children whose parents want them to participate.

The fiscal year 2007 state budget includes $45 million in new funding for early childhood education, for total spending of $318 million. High-quality early learning helps children succeed in school and in life, and benefits the entire state by strengthening communities and the future workforce.

“This is a victory for children and families,” said Jerry Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children. “Preschool for All reflects the science that demonstrates success in education is dependent on what happens during children’s earliest years. We thank our elected leaders for their leadership in providing all young children the opportunity for quality early learning.”

Preschool for All passed with strong bipartisan support. Priority is given to serving all at-risk children before expanding to children whose families make less than four times the federal poverty level, or $80,000 for a family of four. Many of these middle-income families earn too much to qualify for state-funded programs but too little to afford the cost of high-quality private programs. Other children will be eligible once the first groups have been served.

“Until all Illinois children have access to preK, we’re not going to stop beating this drum,” said Rep. Roger Eddy (R-Hutsonville), who also is superintendent of Hutsonville School District 1. “Some things are more of an investment than an expense.”

“Illinois is a national leader in establishing a goal of ‘universal’ preschool access for all 3- as well as 4-year-old children, and a plan for achieving it,” said Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie (D-Chicago), House Majority Leader. “We should all be proud of that.”

Three other states – Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma – provide preschool to all 4-year-olds, but Illinois is the first and only state whose policy includes offering voluntary access to all 3-year-olds.

“We all want to see our children succeed. And study after study shows that one of the best ways to help kids do well in school is by starting early. That’s why we made preschool one of our top priorities in this budget and legislative session,” Gov. Rod Blagojevich said.
Preschool for All will provide preschool in a variety of settings, including child care centers, licensed family child care homes, community-based organizations and schools. Preschools will be staffed by experienced teachers with bachelor’s degrees and early education training, and provide at least 2 1/2 hours a day of programming that builds children’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills. Preschool for All is based on the recommendations of the Illinois Early Learning Council.

Preschool for All aims to ensure that, when fully implemented, 190,000 children in Illinois have access to voluntary, high-quality preschool. This estimate includes children who are already served in existing state PreKindergarten, Head Start and PreK Special Education programs.

“At-risk children will remain our top priority for preK services. And the Preschool for All approach will help us reach still other youngsters as resources become available, until all young children can benefit – immensely strengthening our state’s future,” said Sen. Kimberly Lightford (D-Maywood), chair of the Senate Education Committee.

“High-quality preschool helps to put more kids in graduation gowns and avoid handcuffs. Research repeatedly proves it, and I’ve seen the evidence firsthand,” said Sen. John Millner (R-St. Charles), former Elmhurst police chief.

In addition, Senate Bill 2202 will make it easier for teacher aides and other early childhood practitioners to become certified teachers. The measure will allow them to remain in their jobs while fulfilling student-teaching requirements required for an advanced degree. Previously, many aides in community-based settings such as child care programs had to quit their jobs in order to gain the same experience from school-based preschool programs.

Preschool for All builds upon the $90 million increase for early childhood education over the past three years, which was approved by the Governor and Legislature. Since that time, an additional 25,000 young children at risk of school failure have access to preschool. In his February Budget Address, the Governor called for increased funding totaling $135 million over the next three years to expand access and improve quality even more.

This FY07 funding increase will help preschool programs meet higher standards, increase the availability of certified teachers and ensure accountability through monitoring, technical assistance and program evaluation.

For more information, please visit www.earlylearningillinois.org.
I’m a former foster child who spent 15 years in foster care. I was at the recent kickoff for the “Don’t Write Me Off” statewide campaign to support children in foster care and I felt really moved and excited about the possibilities it presents. The campaign’s vital message is that any support can make a difference in the lives of children in foster care. It also aims to change many misconceptions about foster care.

This campaign really means something because many foster kids suffer the consequences from the negative misconceptions that people have about foster care. This campaign is a perfect way to challenge those barriers, and shows that foster kids are just like regular kids. This negative image is why this campaign is needed to change perceptions and to send a different message: that foster kids are our kids!

The creative campaign was produced by a collaboration of non-profit agencies spearheaded by Voices for Illinois Children and Family Support America. WGN-TV in Chicago is sponsoring the television ads and will air them for a year. Private foster care agencies in communities across the state are participating. A web site (www.fosterkidsareourkids.org) and a toll-free number (1-888-4RKIDS2) direct visitors and callers to local foster care agencies that are prepared to help people get involved in a variety of ways.

I think “Don’t Write Me Off” says it right because it speaks to everyone. This campaign brings awareness to those who feel like foster kids are not their problem. This view allows adults to escape responsibility for foster kids. This crusade strives to make Illinois a much better place for our children.

The most important message that I take from this campaign is that a single person can make a significant difference in a life of a child. Many people believe the only way to help a child in foster care is to be a foster parent. That’s a common fallacy, because the child welfare system embraces any supports that can make a difference in the life of a foster child, even if you can’t be a foster parent.

Some exciting ways to make a difference include being a tutor, volunteer, or even a mentor.

A small sacrifice of your time can mean the difference. My mentor started out by sending me a monthly college “care package” with cookies and stuff like that. We had never even met, but out of that commitment a positive relationship formed – and we both benefit from it.

Having a mentor to get over the rough spots really means a lot. I was lucky enough to have a mentor to encourage me and help me. With the constant support of my role model, now I’m in college studying social work and planning for a career working with foster kids. Without her, I’m not sure where I’d be.

Charmaine Gray is a sophomore at Olive-Harvey College in Chicago and will join Voices for Illinois Children as an intern this summer.

For more information about the “Don’t Write Me Off” campaign, visit www.fosterkidsareourkids.org.
SCHOOLS IN CRISIS: LACK OF PROPERTY TAX BASE HAMPERS EAST AURORA’S EFFORTS

By Jim McGowan for A+ Illinois

Editor's note: This is the first in a regular series of articles that illustrate how students and communities across Illinois are affected by the state’s school-funding system.

To the ancient Romans, Aurora was the goddess of the dawn; to the north, aurora borealis refers to the spectacular, atmospheric dance of the northern lights. How appropriate, then, that the differences between East Aurora School District 131 and its neighbors is like day and night.

East Aurora, an urban island in a sea of suburban sprawl, illustrates that where a child lives dramatically affects the quality of the education she gets. The district’s newest board member thinks that’s a problem the state should address.

Russell J. Pietrowiak, elected to the board in April 2005, came to East Aurora for a simple reason: “More house for the money,” he says. Pietrowiak, who grew up in Lake County, wasn’t fully aware of the differences between District 131 and its neighbors when he, his wife and two young children moved in, but he learned fast. A planner for the Chicago Area Transportation Study in Chicago, he decided to work to improve the schools his children will attend when they get older.

East Aurora is charged with educating more than 11,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. About 80 percent are Hispanic, more than half are low-income, and about a third have difficulty speaking English (the official term is Limited English Proficient). While Pietrowiak welcomes the diversity, he says it makes the task at hand more difficult.

State and federal sources don’t make up that imbalance, leaving District 131 to do a harder job with fewer resources.

While recent efforts to increase local taxes for education have failed, the people of East Aurora are not unsympathetic. A bond issue passed in 2004 will bring more than $40 million in additions and improvements to school buildings. But bricks and mortar alone do not provide a quality education.

“If we had more resources, we would focus on reading, smaller classes, things that we know work,” Pietrowiak says. “In classes that are too big, everyone gets short-changed.” He’d also like to see expanded art and music instruction and more staff development for the district’s teachers.

To Pietrowiak, the solution clearly lies with the state. “We can’t property tax our way out of our situation,” he says. He sees a state income tax increase, with proceeds earmarked for increased basic state aid and increased funding for mandated programs, as the only way out. “Government is supposed to be the great equalizer,” he says. “We don’t want to bring the high districts down, but there has to be a way to bring the bottom up.”

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**East Aurora and Its Neighbors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Assessed property value per pupil</th>
<th>Largest racial/ethnic group</th>
<th>Low-income rate</th>
<th>Limited English proficient rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Aurora</td>
<td>11,786</td>
<td>$52,896</td>
<td>Hispanic (79.8%)</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
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<td>West Aurora</td>
<td>11,957</td>
<td>$114,120</td>
<td>White (40.4%)</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian Prairie</td>
<td>27,057</td>
<td>$140,061</td>
<td>White (70.5%)</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>6,154</td>
<td>$140,634</td>
<td>White (86.9%)</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oswego</td>
<td>11,114</td>
<td>$100,368</td>
<td>White (71.1%)</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All districts are K-12. Data are from 2005 School Report Cards.
We wish to acknowledge the following individuals, organizations, foundations and corporations for their gifts made during the period between January 1, 2005 and December 30, 2005. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this listing. If your name has been omitted or is incorrect, please accept our apologies and contact Shawn Gavin, Director of Development at 312-516-5552. Corrections will appear in a subsequent publication.

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continued on page 12
Illinois has garnered national attention by addressing the mental health needs of children. State leaders recognize that childhood is a time of significant emotional, physical, cognitive and social development, and that mental health plays an important role in a child developing into a mature, healthy adult.

The fiscal year 2007 state budget allows the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership to begin building a foundation for a comprehensive children’s mental health system by allocating $5 million for programs aimed at prevention, early intervention and the social and emotional needs of children.

“This is a huge step in the improvement of the mental health system for the children of the State of Illinois,” said Kim Miller of Peoria, co-chair of the partnership’s Family Involvement Committee who testified before the Legislature this spring. “It validates all of our hard work. We asked and they listened.”

Most of the funding increase – $3 million – will support school-based activities focused on social and emotional learning standards and assist school districts in providing mental health services to students. Research has found a child’s health, well-being and academic success is dependent upon strong social and emotional supports.

“The social and emotional learning standards are critical not only for the academic success of children, but to give educators the support they need to meet the myriad social/emotional needs of children and youth in their care,” said Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-Vernon Hills). “We must continue to help our schools invest in the development of the whole child.”

The remaining $2 million will be used for a variety of initiatives including early intervention services, early childhood mental health consultation projects to aid preschool and child care staff dealing with children’s social and emotional needs, and services for youth transitioning out of public systems such as juvenile justice.

“Children with identified mental health problems and disorders – and their families – should be given access to community-based and culturally-sensitive mental health services,” Rep. Beth Coulson (R-Glenview) said. “The monies allocated to the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership will be the first step toward meeting those needs.”

“Our state leaders should be applauded for taking action on the pleas of families struggling with their child’s mental health needs and for investing in prevention and early intervention programs,” said Gaylord Gieseke, vice president of Voices for Illinois Children. “Prevention and early intervention programs are cost effective and can improve academic achievement and reduce the need for special education, grade retention, welfare dependence, and entry into the juvenile justice system.”

For more information, please contact Dawn Melchiorre at 312-516-5557 or dmelchiorre@voices4kids.org.
R

forming Illinois’ tax structure to better fund education and other critical supports for children and families continued to build momentum with a series of events in recent months.

Author and activist Jonathan Kozol called for sweeping, fundamental change at two events in March hosted by Voices for Illinois Children, Metropolitan Planning Council and A+ Illinois.

“Fiddling with the formula will make no difference at all,” he said, adding that the state’s over-reliance on property taxes leads to disparities in education quality.

Kozol, whose books include “Savage Inequalities” and “The Shame of the Nation,” described how schools across the country are failing to provide quality education to minority and low-income children. The proportion of black students in segregated schools is at its highest rate since 1968, and Illinois’ schools are the third most segregated in the nation, he said.

He illustrated how a child’s zip code determines the quality of her education with the story of Pineapple, a precocious kindergartner whose New York City school spends $11,000 a year on her education. Pineapple’s education would cost $19,000 if she lived 15 minutes away in predominantly white Bronxville, or $23,000 if she lived in affluent Long Island. “How can our country go along with this? How can we put up with this?” he asked.

Kozol commended Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s proposal to provide voluntary preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, but decried standardized testing without adequately preparing young children to learn. “It is outrageous to impose so many high-stakes tests on children in the early grades if we deny them a preschool education,” he said.

In other events, voters and state legislative candidates discussed ways to improve education quality and funding at forums in Peoria and Oak Park held prior to the March primary election. All candidates in Peoria – including incumbent Reps. Don Moffit, Aaron Schock and Mike Smith – and all but two candidates in Oak Park agreed they would not take a “no-new-tax pledge” if elected.

Most candidates said they would be open to alterations in the state’s tax revenue system in order to have more lucrative and creative ways to generate funding for schools. The overwhelming message from both forums was a charge for constituents to make their feelings heard on issues pertaining to children and families. Specifically, to let the governor know that a tax increase would be supported for education funding and that without it, Illinois children will suffer.

For more information about school-funding and tax reform efforts in Illinois, visit www.aplusillinois.org.

SAVE THE DATES

Sept. 11, 2006
Voices for Illinois Children GOLF OUTING
at Knollwood Club in Lake Forest

Oct. 6, 2006
Kids Count Awards Dinner in Chicago
Visit www.voices4kids.org this summer for details
REDUCE MERCURY POLLUTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND OUR ENVIRONMENT

By Howard Learner
Executive Director, Environmental Law & Policy Center

All children have a right to begin their lives healthy, safe and ready to learn. So it’s up to us to create the kind of environment in which every child has the chance to reach their full potential in life.

That’s why the proposed state initiative to reduce mercury pollution from the more than 20 coal plants in Illinois is so important. Currently before the Illinois Pollution Control Board, the plan would require coal plants to reduce their mercury pollution by 90 percent by June 30, 2009. Because much of mercury pollution falls locally, the initiative will go a long way toward reducing mercury levels in fish in Lake Michigan and Illinois’ inland waterways.

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that does irreversible harm to developing fetuses and young children. Exposure to mercury in the womb, through contaminated breast milk, or when kids eat contaminated fish themselves can compromise cognitive abilities, reduce IQ and cause other developmental problems.

While mercury poisoning has been linked to lower test scores and decreased performance in schoolchildren, its effects over a lifetime are even more devastating. One study by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York put the potential loss of earnings due to reductions in intelligence related to mercury pollution at $8.7 billion annually in the United States.

Illinois is one of many states with longstanding advisories warning everyone – but particularly children and women of childbearing age – to limit their consumption of fish caught in state waterways. Recent revelations suggest mercury contamination in Illinois rivers, lakes and streams may be even worse than we thought:

- According to an April 29 report by the Chicago Tribune, airborne levels of mercury in Illinois jumped by 28 percent between 1999 and 2002.
- An analysis of government fish testing data by Illinois PIRG found many fish caught in Illinois are so contaminated with mercury they’re unsafe to eat.
- And a study by the Sierra Club provides reason to believe the mercury blood levels of women in the Chicago area may be well above the national average.

It’s time to stop studying mercury pollution and start doing something about it. Fortunately we can. The plan before the Pollution Control Board would significantly lower the mercury exposure of more than 100,000 Illinois women of childbearing age and their children.

By investing now to reduce mercury pollution from coal plants, we can protect the health and well being of Illinois children and reduce the costs of mercury exposure that otherwise will burden our families and education and health systems for years to come. But more importantly, reducing the single largest source of mercury pollution by 90 percent will give Illinois kids a better shot at realizing their dreams and pursuing their ambitions in life.

STOP MERCURY POLLUTION.ORG

By Howard Learner
Executive Director, Environmental Law & Policy Center

Voices for Illinois Children
208 S. LaSalle Street • Suite 1490
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1120
Tel: 312-456-0600
Fax: 312-456-0088
Email: info@voices4kids.org

Did the articles you read move you? Do you want to know how you can make a difference for children and families?

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GET INVOLVED TODAY!
VOICES WELCOMES EIGHT NEW MEMBERS
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nina Amir-Mokri is a partner in the Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP law firm’s employee benefits and executive compensation practice, where she designs, negotiates and drafts employment and severance agreements and advises on a variety of transactional and compliance matters. She previously was an auditor for the U.S. Department of Labor – Employee Benefits Security Administration, where she worked on civil and criminal cases. Ms. Amir-Mokri, a graduate of the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Law, lives in River Forest.

Francesca Cooper is a longtime volunteer for a variety of organizations and efforts in the Metro East area. She serves on the Edwardsville Historic Preservation Association and volunteers with Children’s Home and Aid Society of Illinois in Granite City. Metro-East Montessori School, St. Cecelia’s Roman Catholic Church in Glen Carbon and the period home of Col. Benjamin Stephenson in Edwardsville. Ms. Cooper also fundraises for the Edwardsville YMCA, March of Dimes, Special Olympics and Easter Seals. She and her husband live in Edwardsville and have three young children.

Mary Crego is senior vice president at State Farm Insurance Co. in Bloomington. She began her career at State Farm in 1979 as an auto claim representative and has held numerous positions at the company, including vice president-operations in Char-lottesville, Virginia and operations vice president in Tempe, Arizona. Ms. Crego has a bachelor’s degree in English from Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington and has earned the Chartered Life Underwriter, Chartered Financial Consultant and Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter designations. She and her husband have two grown children.

Ray Hancock has spent his career in education – as a teacher, principal, coach, professor, dean and president of John A. Logan College in Carterville for 11 years. He currently is president of the Illinois Community College System Foundation, which provides financial resources and support to Illinois’ 48 community colleges. Mr. Hancock served in the U.S. Navy, traveled the world and has a lengthy list of civic involvement, including serving on the boards of the Heartland Regional Medical Center and Southern Illinois Schools Credit Union. Mr. Hancock and his wife live in Marion.

Susan J. Irion runs the national attorney training and career development programs at the law firm of DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary in Chicago. Ms. Irion previously taught at Northwestern University’s School of Law, Loyola University College of Law and the National Institute of Trial Advocacy. She practiced law for over 13 years, serving as a law clerk on the U.S. District Court in Chicago, working as a litigator at a major firm and serving as counsel for a major telecommunications company. Ms. Irion is a graduate of Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism and Loyola University College of Law.

Miriam Kelm has a long relationship with Voices for Illinois Children, which she came to know through her late husband, George Kelm, one of Voices’ founders. She serves as co-chair of the Voices Leadership Committee in the 29th Senate District north of Chicago. A native of Iowa, Ms. Kelm worked as an elementary school teacher and was director of the Family Museum in Bettendorf, Iowa, which she helped transform into a prominent children’s museum. She also was a program officer for the Carver Charitable Trust, Iowa’s largest foundation. Ms. Kelm lives in Highland Park and has two children and a granddaughter.

New Faces at Voices

Mary Hajek has joined Voices as administrative assistant. She spent the previous year teaching English in Madrid, Spain, and also worked at the Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison, Wis. Hajek, a native of Sioux Falls, S.D., graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and psychology.

Voices also welcomes six interns this summer. Jamie Bagliebter, a student at Northwestern University’s School of Social Policy, will work on education issues. Charmaine Gray, a student at Olive-Harvey College in Chicago, will work on the “Don’t Write Me Off” foster care campaign. Jaime Owen and Carla Pacce, graduate students in the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy Studies, will team up to work on the “Illinois Kids Count” project. Amanda Posner, a University of Chicago graduate student in the Irving Harris School of Public Policy Studies and the School of Social Service Administration, will focus on the state’s Early Intervention system. And Christina Wiley, a law student at Loyola University and a nurse at Children’s Memorial Hospital, will continue her work on health care policy and budget and tax issues.
As registration for the Wrigley Start Early Run and Walk began at 7:30 a.m. on April 22, the sun peeked through the clouds and the morning began to dry out. The pre-dawn rain disappeared and by race time, there wasn’t a cloud in the sky.

It was another great day for the ninth annual Wrigley Start Early Run and Walk. Participation was up 17 percent over last year, and the number of pledges raised on behalf of Voices for Illinois Children and Prevent Child Abuse America skyrocketed. Hats off to all of the runners and walkers who filled the day with great energy and enthusiasm!

This day would not have been possible without the support of the Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company, our title sponsor, and all of the other sponsors. We look forward to continuing to provide a family-friendly run that is a mainstay among runners and the greater Chicago community. Great job to all of the participants who stepped out against child abuse and walked or ran the 5K or 10K.

If you missed out on the run, there are other ways to support Voices for Illinois Children. Mark your calendars for two upcoming events: a new golf outing on September 11 at the Knollwood Club in Lake Forest, and the annual Kids Count Awards Dinner on October 6 in Chicago. Visit www.voices4kids.org this summer for details.

Did you know that by giving stocks, bonds or mutual fund shares to Voices for Illinois Children you can make a difference for kids in our state and dramatically reduce your tax bill? When you donate appreciated securities, you are entitled to a charitable income tax deduction equal to the value of those securities. You also avoid paying capital gains tax on the appreciation – a tax you would owe if you sold rather than donated the securities.

For more information or to make a donation, please contact Shawn Gavin at 312-516-5552 or sgavin@voices4kids.org.