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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE QUAD CITIES WOULD BENEFIT  
FROM GOVERNOR'S "PRESCHOOL FOR ALL" PLAN**

***Bold Initiative Would Provide Voluntary Access to All 3- and 4-Year-Olds***

ROCK ISLAND (Feb. 22, 2006) – Gov. Rod Blagojevich's "Preschool for All" proposal to improve and expand quality early learning will help thousands more 3- and 4-year-olds in the Quad Cities succeed in school and in life.

Business and community leaders, educators, early childhood teachers and advocates visited the Trinity Employee Child Care Center (managed by Skip-A-Long Child Development Services) on Wednesday to discuss the benefits that "Preschool for All" could bring to the area's young children.

"Preschool can make a difference that will last a lifetime for children and for our community as a whole," said Bill Leaver, president and CEO of Trinity Regional Health System. "Children who go to preschool tend to stay in school, and employers benefit from a better-educated workforce."

"We see first hand the impact that high-quality preschool has on our 3- and 4-year-olds: They are ready to learn, and they have the tools to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. 'Preschool for All' will further enhance these results," said Laurel Walker, CEO of Skip-A-Long Child Development Services. "'Preschool for All' will serve children in a variety of settings. Quality child care providers are a critical part of the preschool foundation and are opening their doors to collaboration. The genuine dedication of child care staff, the increased market rate and the funding for quality enhancements will make this initiative work."

"My 3-year-old son has really blossomed in a group setting with other children and with his teachers at Trinity," parent Cara Banks said. "Preschool at a young age is important because it prepares children for kindergarten, and it will help ensure my son greater success in school. The staff at Trinity reinforces the lessons I'm teaching him at home."

The Governor has requested increasing early childhood education funding by \$45 million a year for the next three years so that 32,000 more 3- and 4-year-olds can attend high-quality,  
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voluntary preschool programs. The proposal, based on the recommendations of the Illinois Early Learning Council, would allow communities to provide preschool in a variety of settings, such as schools, child care centers, licensed family child care homes and community-based organizations.

“The Early Childhood Coalition truly embodies the spirit of our motto: together we’re better,” said Martha Owens, president of the Early Childhood Coalition. “Together, coalition members have been able to accomplish amazing things that would not have been possible alone. Increasing accessibility of quality preschool services is one of our accomplishments that we hope to expand with ‘Preschool for All.’”

“This initiative will give the children of today a better tomorrow by starting their formal education at a time when their minds are ready to expand,” said Joe Vermiere, superintendent of the Regional Office of Education.

The proposal builds on a \$90 million funding increase for early childhood programs since 2003 that has provided an additional \$1 million for programs in the Quad Cities area. But there is still a need for more quality preschool, community leaders said.

The “Preschool for All” program would require preschools be staffed by experienced teachers with bachelor’s degrees and early education training, and provide at least 2½ hours a day of programming that builds children’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills.

The Early Learning Illinois campaign praised Governor Blagojevich for continuing his commitment to improving the lives of young children and their families. The “Preschool for All” proposal will bring voluntary preschool to many middle-income families who often earn too much to qualify for state-funded programs but too little to afford the cost of private programs. Early Learning Illinois is a statewide advocacy and public awareness campaign led by Action for Children, Ounce of Prevention Fund and Voices for Illinois Children.

Illinois has been recognized as a national leader in the preschool movement for the recent funding increases made by the Governor and Legislature during difficult budget times. Three other states – Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma – provide preschool to all 4-year-olds, but Illinois will be the only state to also provide voluntary access to all 3-year-olds.

“Children and families for generations to come will enjoy the benefits of Governor Blagojevich’s far-sighted vision for Illinois,” said Libby Doggett, Ph.D., executive director of national organization Pre-K Now. “His leadership will ensure the success of the Pre-K-through-12 system in this state.”

“Preschool for All” envisions a five-year rollout that would enroll the remaining at-risk 3-year-olds and all 4-year-olds whose parents want them to participate by 2008. Another two-year expansion starting in 2009 would aim to enroll the remaining 3-year-olds. “Preschool  
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for All” also continues to provide 11 percent of the early childhood funding increase for birth-to-3 programs that support parents. The proposal also will help preschool programs meet higher standards, increase the availability of certified teachers and ensure accountability through monitoring and technical assistance.

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*Early Learning Illinois aims to ensure that all children are healthy and happy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten. The campaign is led by Action for Children, Ounce of Prevention Fund and Voices for Illinois Children, with strong support from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois and Chicago Metropolis 2020 and more than 125 other local, regional and statewide organizations throughout Illinois.*

*Skip-A-Long Child Development Services is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1970 and serving approximately 800 children daily in Rock Island, Scott, Henry and Mercer counties with four campus locations and a home network division. For 36 years, our mission has been to provide quality care that is accessible to all families.*