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

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

QUINCY (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 Quincy succeed in school and in life.

Community leaders, early childhood teachers, parents and advocates visited the Walter Hammond Day Care Center on Wednesday to discuss the benefits that "Preschool for All" could bring to the area's young children.

"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," said Lisa Sams, director of Walter Hammond Day Care Center. "One of the benefits of 'Preschool for All' is that it serves children in a variety of settings, including community-based child care programs."

"In most of what we do, it makes common sense to start at the beginning and build a foundation. In education, we haven't done that yet and it's high time we did," said John Roope, director of the Chaddock Training Institute. "It makes no sense to start six years into the learning process."

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, 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 proposal builds on a \$90 million funding increase for early childhood programs since 2003 that has provided an additional \$400,000 for Adams County programs. But there is still a need for more quality preschool, community leaders said.

(more)

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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.

“Preschool will make a difference that will last a lifetime,” said Kelley Giesing, organizing associate for Illinois Action for Children. “The Governor builds on successes in Illinois that have given our children options, opportunities and access through early care and education. This is further evidence that he understands the value of making children and their future a priority.”

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 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.