



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

# NEWS

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## **Gov. Blagojevich signs *Preschool for All* legislation; provides opportunity for early childhood education for thousands of Illinois kids**

*Illinois leads the nation in providing preschool access for all three- and four-year-olds*

CHICAGO – Surrounded by families, early childhood education advocates, elected officials and preschool students today at Reba Early Learning Center in Evanston, Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich signed legislation that continues the state’s historic early childhood program. House Bill 4705 immediately extends the nationally recognized initiative, *Preschool for All*, for two more years.

“The benefits children receive from early learning in preschool are limitless. *Preschool for All* provides those benefits,” said Governor Blagojevich. “Tools we can provide children today, to help them succeed tomorrow, are a step in the right direction. I am excited about the continued work we are doing with *Preschool for All* and serving as a national leader on this important issue.”

Sponsored by State Representative Barbara Flynn Currie (D-Chicago) and State Senator Kimberly Lightford (D-Westchester), the bill extends the nationally recognized *Preschool for All* program from June 30, 2008 to June 30, 2010. In 2006, Gov. Blagojevich signed the *Preschool for All* program into law, making Illinois the first state to make preschool available for all three and four-year-olds.

*Preschool for All* allows every community to offer high-quality preschool in a variety of settings, including public and private schools, child care centers, and licensed family child care homes, private preschools, park districts, faith-based organizations, and other community-based agencies. The program requires preschools to be staffed by experienced teachers who hold bachelor’s degrees and specialized training in early education, and provide at least two and a half hours per day of high-quality programming designed to foster all of the skills – social, emotional, physical, and cognitive – that all young children need to achieve success in school and later in life.

“I am a longtime supporter and advocate of early childhood education here in Illinois,” said Rep. Currie. “I am excited to see that our preschool program has benefited so many children, many of whom are at-risk. I am proud to be a sponsor of legislation that will continue to benefit children into the year 2010.”

In Fiscal Year 2007 alone, *Preschool for All* served 85,186 children ages 3 to 5 years – 55,860 in downstate Illinois and 29,326 in the city of Chicago. During Fiscal Year 2008, more than 90,000 children will have been served statewide.

Governor Blagojevich has made a multi-year commitment to early childhood education through *Preschool for All*, increasing funding by 90 percent, or \$164 million, over the past five years. The Fiscal Year 2009 budget includes additional funding to continue the expansion toward fully funding *Preschool for All*. The goal is to continue to increase funding until all children whose families want them in preschool have access to it.

Earlier this year, Illinois was singled out as a national leader for being the first state committed to serving all three-year olds with quality preschool, according to a report published by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) of Rutgers University.

*Preschool For All*, Illinois’ high-quality, state-funded pre-kindergarten program, was ranked first nationally for enrolling 19 percent of the state’s three-year-olds, according to *The State of Preschool 2007: State Preschool Yearbook*. Nationwide, enrollment of three-year-olds was up 10 percent, mostly due to increases here in Illinois, which became the first state to commit to serving all three-year-olds. Illinois was also ranked 12<sup>th</sup> for percentage of four-year-olds enrolled – 27 percent. The state’s pre-kindergarten initiatives also meet nine of ten quality benchmarks cited by the report.

“The heart of Preschool for All is very much in line with what the Ounce of Prevention Fund is all about. Both programs make sure that children living in poverty have access to the same opportunities as other children. We are making a profound impact on the next generation and we need to make sure that it is extended to 2010 and beyond,” said Harriet Meyer, Ounce of Prevention.

“Preschool for All is truly the blueprint for our state’s successful future,” said Jesse Ruiz, Chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education. “Under Governor Blagojevich we’ve been able to almost double the amount of funding for early childhood programs, giving literally ten of thousands of children a shot at success in school that they otherwise would not have had.”

Recently, an eight-member bipartisan team from Illinois, including Rep. Currie, attended the National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy at Harvard University. Illinois was one of 14 states selected to attend the two-day event at the Center on the Developing Child in Cambridge, Mass.

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