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ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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Illinois chosen to receive National Governors Association Grant for Early Childhood Summit

***Grants awarded to seven states that demonstrated strong
gubernatorial commitment to closing the persistent
achievement gap in America***

Summit will promote need for Early Childhood Education

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois has been chosen by the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices as one of seven states selected to receive grants of \$10,000 to support Governors' Early Childhood Summits. The Summits are an effort to encourage state and local leaders to advance a comprehensive "birth-to-five" state policy agenda.

Governor Rod Blagojevich has offered his vision for Preschool for All, which would allow every three and four-year-old in Illinois to attend high-quality preschool. Preschool for All would guarantee that nearly 190,000 children in Illinois have the chance to attend preschool, and would make Illinois the only state in the nation to offer preschool to every three and four year old child.

"All the experts agree that children who have a chance to go to preschool and start their educations early do better both academically and socially in the long term. It's our responsibility to make sure every child has the same chance to learn and succeed. I'm honored that the National Governor's Association recognizes our efforts on early childhood education and is eager to help us move forward by bringing leaders and experts together for this summit," said Governor Blagojevich.

The proposed one-day summit will take place in October and bring together a cross-section of early childhood, community, education, government, business, union, and foundation leaders together to develop action plans that address four key challenges in implementing Preschool For All over the next 3-5 years:

- expanding space capacity in communities,
- using best practices to meet the needs of bilingual and bicultural children and families;
- enrolling new children through effective outreach strategies; and

- helping communities to develop plans for birth to three services.

Since the beginning of his administration in 2003, Governor Blagojevich has made early childhood education a key priority for the State of Illinois. Despite a \$5 billion budget deficit, the Governor and state lawmakers have expanded funding for preschool by 50% in three years. That has given 25,000 more 3- and 4-year-olds opportunities to benefit from preschool programs designed to foster the full spectrum of skills—social, emotional, physical, and cognitive—that young children need to achieve success in school and later life.

Under the Governor’s leadership, funding for the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Childhood Block Grant has grown by \$90 million, making a total of \$274 million available to support prekindergarten services for 75,000 children who are at risk of school failure in close to 1,000 schools and community-based settings statewide, as well as child development and family support services to thousands of at-risk infants and toddlers and their families.

Governor Blagojevich was named a “Pre-K Budget Hero” by Pre-K Now, a national organization working to ensure access to high-quality early childhood education across the country.

In addition to Illinois, states selected for the grants include Arizona, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, South Carolina and Washington.

After a thorough evaluation process, an independent selection committee comprised of national policy organization representatives and early childhood experts selected grantees that demonstrated strong gubernatorial commitment to closing the persistent achievement gap in America, according to the NGA. The grantees also exhibited clear goals, objectives and measures for using the summit to advance a state policy agenda while guaranteeing a strong commitment to turning momentum from the summit into tangible action, according to the NGA.

The NGA Center will work with the selected states in advancing policies that expand and enhance school readiness. Winning proposals outlined goals for performance, including:

- developing a vision and strategic plan for school readiness that considers the role of families, schools and communities and addresses the developmental needs of children beginning before birth to kindergarten and beyond;
- building a comprehensive and coordinated statewide system for school readiness; and
- ensuring accountability for results across agencies and between the state and local levels of government.

“We are proud to see Illinois chosen as a summit site for this important discussion. Our selection speaks to the national leadership in early childhood education shown by the Governor, State Board members and ISBE staff. Plus, we know how important preschool education is to virtually every community in the state. This summit will help further the discussion for growing and improving early childhood education,” said Illinois State School Superintendent Randy Dunn.

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