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ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich announces Illinois team to take part in national conference on early childhood education

Illinois one of 14 states to be represented at two-day symposium at Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced today that a bipartisan team of Illinois educators, legislators and foundation leaders will be participating in a national conference on early childhood education at Harvard University this Thursday and Friday. Illinois' team is one of 14 state teams nationwide selected to participate in the unique two-day discussion on early childhood policies at the National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy at the Center on the Developing Child in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

“This symposium provides our state a great opportunity to learn about the recent advances in early childhood education in other states across the nation. It also gives us the opportunity to share our successes with the *Preschool for All* program,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “A high-quality preschool program can provide at an early age the necessary tools for children to be successful in life, and because of *Preschool for All* here in Illinois, every three and four-year-old has access to quality teaching and learning.”

This innovative educational event, jointly organized by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the National Conference of State Legislatures, brings together world-renowned researchers and Harvard faculty members with 14 state teams of policy advisors, legislators and business and civic leaders. Participants will learn about recent advances in neuroscience, molecular biology, medicine, and developmental psychology. The symposium is designed to help each state develop and implement science-based policies that can enhance children's well-being and long-term outcomes, as well as lay a solid foundation for economic prosperity, healthy lives and strong communities.

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 12th for percentage of four-year-olds enrolled: 27 percent. The state's pre-kindergarten initiatives also meet 9 of 10 quality benchmarks cited by the report.

The 14 teams attending the symposium include Illinois, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington. Other highlights of the symposium include state teams meeting in small group breakout sessions to engage in peer learning and focus more specifically on the needs in their states, or on specific relevant scientific, programmatic or policy issues. At the end of the day, all state teams will reconvene to share the content of their breakout work and discuss next steps.

“We are delighted with the high level of leadership, focus and policymaking expertise represented on these teams,” said Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., Director of the Center on the Developing Child. “We’re looking forward to working with these highly motivated civic leaders to help take their states to the next level of impact, from their early childhood policies and practices.”

Illinois' team members attending the National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy include: Dr. Christopher A. Koch, State Superintendent of Education; State Senator Don Harmon, D-Oak Park; State Representative Barbara Flynn Currie, D-Chicago; State Representative Jerry Mitchell, R-Sterling; Kelly King Dibble, senior vice president and director of Public Affairs and Government Relations at Northern Trust and board member for Ounce of Prevention; Maria Whelan, President/CEO of Action for Children; Jerome Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children; and Elliot M. Regenstein, Co-Chair, Illinois Early Learning Council.

“Governors' offices around the country embraced this opportunity to learn and work together with the legislative branch, early childhood experts and business leaders to improve the lives of children in their states,” said John Thomasian, director of the NGA Center for Best Practices. “Many governors have made early childhood issues a high priority, and that's reflected in the number and quality of teams coming to the symposium.”

Governor Blagojevich has made a multi-year commitment to early childhood education through *Preschool for All* by increasing funding by 90 percent, or \$164 million, during the past five years.