

Press Release

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11-15-2009

State Financial Crisis Affects Local Programs for Young Children

Schools around the state and in our area are considering closing Pre-K classrooms because of proposed budget cuts and slow payment of vouchers from the state comptroller's office.

Early childhood services including Pre-kindergarten classrooms are currently proposed to be funded at a 40% decrease for the next school year. A 37% reduction was proposed in July but an outcry from the public reversed that proposal in four days. The legislators used one time stimulus funds from the federal government to restore funding up to a 10% decrease. The currently proposed 40% cuts will close at least half of the Pre-K classrooms around the state. Some districts are deciding to close Pre-K classrooms all together in their districts.

Janice Cain, Virden Early Childhood Coordinator recently testified at the Illinois State Board of Education budget hearing in Springfield. She shared with the Board new research that shows every dollar spent in early childhood education saves many dollars down the road in mandatory special education and social service spending. The savings realized when high quality early childhood programs are in place are dramatic. One dollar spent in high quality Pre-K can save as much as \$12 to \$16 dollars later. One dollar spent in Pre-K can save \$10 by fourth grade in reading interventions.

Statistics Cain shared at the Illinois State Board Budget Hearings came from information she learned while attending the Illinois Summit on Early Childhood and Healthy Beginnings hosted at the University of Illinois with leaders from around the state. They reviewed recent research on how high quality early childhood services like Pre-K and Birth to Three programs save money on special education, school support services, child abuse and crime. Savings are realized because of decreases in school drop out rates, reduced teen pregnancy, mental health and health care costs. Cain learned how strong early services build strong neighborhoods, towns and communities

Two presentations were provided to the public at the Budget Hearings before the testimonies. The Illinois Economic and Revenue Forecast (Commission on Government Forecasting) showed an \$11 billion deficit for the upcoming state budget with declining revenues. The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability presented information on how Illinois school funding creates educational inequities for most students in the state. Illinois ranked fifth nationally with a gross state product over \$633 billion (BEA, 2008). That means Illinois is equal to the 27th largest economy in any nation in the world. Yet,

Illinois ranks 49th out of 50 states in the proportion of education funding covered by the state.

These grim statistics were sobering for the public who presented funding requests to the State Board. Support was requested from such diverse groups as Text Book for the Blind, Golden Apple Awards, PTA, Alternative Schools and Sexual Abstinence Programs. But, very few requests showed effects over time in so many outcomes as the continued level funding of the Early Childhood Block Grant that provides money for Pre-K classrooms and Birth to Three programs.

There are currently two state funded “Pre-K At Risk” classrooms in the Virden school district and two in the Girard district. Care-O-sel Child Care and Education has four state funded Pre-K classes serving children from any district. Three of the classes are for children at risk and one is a “Pre-K for All” classroom. If Pre-K funding remains at a 40% reduction Care-O-sel plans to maintain two classrooms with state funds for children at risk and open a “For-Pay Pre-K” for those that need Preschool and can’t get into existing programs.

Care-O-sel will be working with legislators to increase understanding of the importance of early childhood education in an effort to keep Pre-K classes open. Senator Deanna Demuzio dropped in for a visit last month to view the programs and discuss future funding. Care-O-sel will conduct a phone bank, letter writing campaign and personal visits to key policy makers to spread the message that “Kids go farther when they start earlier”.