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Contact: Sara McElmurry, Communications Coordinator
312-351-3890 ▪ smcelmurry@latinopolicyforum.org



phone 312-376-1766
fax 312-376-1760
web latinopolicyforum.org
20 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604

Early Childhood Education Advocates to Quinn: Thank you
Following \$1.4 billion in state budget cuts, early childhood education is maintained in Illinois, along with promise of new facilities and bilingual education for Illinois' youngest learners

CHICAGO – July 2, 2010 – Parents of preschool-age children – numbering in the hundreds of thousands across Illinois – breathed a collective sigh of relief yesterday as Gov. Quinn signed the FY 2011 budget bills, maintaining funding for early childhood education (ECE) across the state. Gov. Quinn's commitment to investment in Illinois youngest learners reflects research that overwhelmingly demonstrates the link between participation in preschool and early care programs and success in later years of schooling – and in life.

The need for ECE is particularly urgent in low-income and underserved communities, including Illinois' fast-growing Latino community. Research has shown that Latino children cognitively lag behind their peers before they even set foot in kindergarten – and that access to quality, linguistically-appropriate ECE can ameliorate that gap. Given that Illinois' Latino community has accounted for 90 percent of the state's population growth since 2000 and that one-in-four Illinois children under age five is Latino, significant cuts proposed earlier this year would have gone especially deep for already-struggling, Latino-serving preschool and early care programs.

"We commend Gov. Quinn's commitment to ECE," said Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum. "In this challenging economic climate, the governor had to make extremely difficult funding decisions. We understand that Illinois must tighten its fiscal belt, but had urged the governor not to make cuts at the expense of our state's youngest learners. There is absolutely no better place to invest in Illinois' economic future than in Illinois' preschool-age children."

Currently, ECE programs simply are not accessible in many predominately-Latino communities. Compounding the access issue, the limited number of available programs, particularly in areas of new suburban growth, must be enhanced to culturally reflect the needs of Latino youth.

In addition to Gov. Quinn's maintenance of ECE funding, there is more good news for Illinois' youngest learners: Spring saw the passage of an ECE capital bill, which lowers the match requirement to receive funds from a \$45 million program, putting construction of new ECE facilities within the reach of many school districts and non-profits. What's more, ISBE's recent approval of a bilingual pre-K mandate extends the bilingual instruction currently available in Illinois beginning in kindergarten to Illinois' youngest English-language learners (ELLs). This is particularly encouraging to local schools, as Metro Chicago boasts the third-largest population of ELLs in the country.¹

"In challenging times, astute, strategic, high-impact investments are critical," said Maria Esther Lopez, director of institutional advancement at El Valor and co-chair of the Latino Policy Forum's early childhood education work group. "Today's preschoolers are tomorrow's leaders. Gov. Quinn's investment in these students represents his belief and our belief that tomorrow's Illinois – our children's Illinois – will be stronger, smarter, and well-prepared to flourish."

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¹ *Perspectives on a Population: English Language Learners in American Schools* (2009)

Thank you, Gov. Quinn/2

About the Latino Policy Forum

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum conducts analysis to inform, influence and lead. Its goals are to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community, with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future. For more information, visit www.latinopolicyforum.org.

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