



# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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## OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE STATE'S PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

Led by state Rep. Hollis Downs, a group of Louisiana officials recently participated in the National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy at Harvard University.

The purpose of the symposium was to build leadership capacity in the states to develop and implement science-based policies that enhance children's learning, behavior, and health.

The symposium featured Harvard faculty members and other researchers who focused on the science of early childhood and its implications for state policies and practices. Through plenary and break-out sessions the participants shared ideas and learned the impact that early experiences such as stress, abuse, and alcohol and drugs during pregnancy have on brain development, as well as preventative measures and the positive benefits of childhood programs on development, learning and health.

Downs said after participating in the symposium it is obvious that Louisiana's early childhood education and childcare policy is on the right track.

"This symposium highlighted the importance of reaching children at a very early age. It stressed that 85 percent to 90 percent of all development takes place during pregnancy through five years of age. I am pleased that Louisiana is doing its part to see that our

**(more)**

## **add one - National Education Symposium**

young children receive the needed educational opportunities and health care to ensure proper development. We are definitely on the right track with our LA 4 program, LaChip, and the recent implementation of our Quality Start child care rating system. By providing our children with these necessary building blocks, they can look forward to a brighter future for themselves and our state."

Downs' team has compiled an executive summary, which immediately follows this news release, of Louisiana's next steps in providing quality childhood development for its children. Increased emphasis on pre-natal through age 4 based on new science-based research includes health living, health, health care, parental educational services, and focus on professional development of child care facilities and personnel.

Other team members include Senate Education Committee Chairman, Ben Nevers; House Education Committee Chairman, Don Trahan; Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) President Linda Johnson; Joe Salter, former House Speaker and current Director of Governmental Affairs for the Department of Education; Lincoln Parish School Superintendent Danny Bell; McGehee Professor of Early Childhood/Childhood Development Dr. Janie H. Humphries; and Governor Bobby Jindal's Education Policy Advisor, Erin Bendily.

The symposium is a bipartisan event sponsored by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, the National Governor's Association's Center for Best Practices, and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Louisiana was one of only 14 states invited to participate in the symposium.

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## **Executive Summary of Louisiana's Next Steps**

Louisiana already has a number of strengths in early childhood development. Our state agencies are coordinating to create a seamless pre-K through 16 educational system that improves the educational, health, and social outcomes for our youngest citizens, which also will help to advance Louisiana's workforce and economy.

- ▶ The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program is known as one of best pre-kindergarten programs in the nation, offering quality full-day, full-school year, research-based early childhood education to the state's most at-risk children.
- ▶ Quality Start, a new Louisiana child care rating system, is being implemented to build and support an increase in the quality child care options available to Louisiana families. The program serves as a guide for parents, a benchmark for program improvement, as well as an accountability measure for funding. Louisiana is the 15<sup>th</sup> state in the nation to implement a quality rating system.
- ▶ The State recently passed an unprecedented package of school readiness tax credits to support families, child care providers, child care teachers and directors, and businesses that support quality child care.

While Louisiana clearly is headed in the right direction by making quality child care and development a priority, areas still exist in which we can improve to better serve our children. Much attention has been devoted to the state's first priorities of improving the quality of child care and preparing at-risk four-year-olds for elementary school. With LA 4 and Quality Start in place, now is the time to focus on the full continuum that leads to school readiness and academic achievement. This begins with prenatal care through age 4. Research shows that what happens during pregnancy and in the first few years of children's lives will affect their health and cognitive development for the rest of their lives.

Very expensive, later interventions can be helpful in addressing the crises of the use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco during pregnancy. Malnutrition, abuse and neglect can also be addressed after the fact. However, studies demonstrate that children are not likely to realize the attainment of their full potential that can come from earlier, less costly and more evidence-based solutions. Louisiana can help to improve child well-being by providing prenatal health care, nutrition, and parental education services to expectant mothers and expanding mental health care for young children and mothers. Focusing on outcomes produced by child care facilities and pre-kindergarten programs should include rigorous professional development of all child care personnel, increased parental involvement, and partnerships with the private sector. With two-thirds of all children being in child care, this issue impacts “at-risk” and not “at-risk” children alike.

Achieving Louisiana’s Next Steps will require commitment from key state and local officials, the business community, and other stakeholders. The Governor’s support will be important in order to secure funds needed to support continued reforms. Legislators, private partners, and local leaders will all need to commit to making these initiatives a state, regional, and local priority. To solicit their support, we will bring these individuals together at an event scheduled for Spring 2009 and invite some of the Symposium presenters to share their scientific discoveries on early childhood development and recommended policy changes.

The three (3) Symposium-sponsoring organizations — Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the National Conference of State Legislatures — can help to support our work to achieve these goals. These partners can help by participating in our Spring 2009 meeting; providing technical and financial assistance; being available for testimony during the legislative session; and including Louisiana in its studies on early childhood development. We look forward to working with them and other Louisiana stakeholders to improve the future of

Louisiana's children.

Sincerely,

Hollis H Downs

Louisiana Team Coordinator

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*Team members who assisted in preparation and have endorsed this Executive Summary of Louisiana's Next Steps are Lincoln Parish Superintendent of Schools Danny Bell; Education Policy Advisor for the Office of the Governor, Erin Bendily; McGehee Professor of Early Childhood / Child Development, Dr Janie Humphries; President of Louisiana BESE, Linda Johnson; Louisiana State Senator and Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Ben Nevers; Louisiana Department of Education Director of Governmental Affairs, Joe Salter; Louisiana State Representative and Chairman of the House Education Committee, Don Trahan.*