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GEORGIA Pre-K POLICY BRIEF # 1

Expand Pre-K to Meet Demand

Keep Resources for Low Income Children

Governor Purdue’s proposed 2011 budget for lottery-funded Pre-K fails to meet the current need for additional Pre-K slots and guts a vital Pre-K support service for low income children. At the same time, the Governor proposes to use the lottery’s current revenues and reserve funds to meet all expected demand for HOPE scholarships. There are enough lottery monies to do both.

PRE-K DEMAND EXCEEDS CURRENT SUPPLY

8,300 children on a waitlist for lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K

Georgia’s lottery-funded Pre-K is not reaching all children whose parents want it. At the end of 2009, there were more than 8,300 children on a waitlist for Georgia Pre-K. Geographically, they are spread out across nearly every county statewide. Only 58% of Georgia’s 4-year-olds are currently served by Pre-K.

The Governor’s budget also would virtually eliminate Georgia Pre-K’s Resource Coordinators (RC) and re-direct RC funding to add 2,000 Pre-K slots.

CUTTING RESOURCE COORDINATORS WILL ENDANGER PRE-K QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Cut would affect 60% of Georgia Pre-K children

A 75% cut to the RC program would eliminate vital support services from nearly 47,000 low income children in over 130 Georgia counties. It would remove an essential component of providing a high-quality Pre-K experience to 60% of Georgia Pre-K students.

Resource Coordinators directly contribute to creating high-quality Pre-K experiences by increasing parental involvement and supporting families in their children’s development and learning. (See SEF’s Georgia Policy Brief #2, “Resource Coordinators Vital to High-Quality Pre-K in Georgia: All Authorities Agree Program Needed”) The program is being improved. Gutting it will hurt low income children and endanger Georgia Pre-K’s national ranking for high-quality.

GEORGIA PRE-K DESERVES SAME LOTTERY SUPPORT AS HOPE

State should meet increased need of “Pre-K scholars” no less than HOPE scholars

Governor Purdue proposes to keep Pre-K funding flat in 2011 –leaving thousands of Pre-K children on waiting lists and eliminating a vital Pre-K support program. In contrast, the Governor would increase lottery-funding for HOPE scholarships by 24% to meet all expected increases in need. This would include a 46% increase in funding of scholarships for private colleges.

Even without the increase in private college scholarships, the proposed budget would increase HOPE funding in 2011 by more than \$150 million. In effect, the Governor proposes to use lottery funds to meet all of the need for more HOPE and little of the Pre-K need, while denying important services to over half of the state Pre-K children. If the state meets the need to support additional HOPE scholars, it should meet the need to support additional “Pre-K scholars” in a high-quality program.

LOTTERY FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR HOPE AND PRE-K

State has \$872 million in annual lottery revenue and almost \$1 billion in lottery reserve

Lottery-generated funding is available to support the increased demand for both. At the end of 2009, the lottery supplied the state budget \$872 million in revenue from the last year’s lottery sales. The state also has currently almost \$1 billion in reserve lottery funds to support both Pre-K and HOPE.

INCREASE FUNDING TO MEET ADDED DEMAND FOR PRE-K AND KEEP RESOURCE COORDINATORS

Georgia Pre-K has a significant and positive effect on school readiness. Poor and minority children experience the most gains —performing above national norms after a year of Pre-K. It is essential that Georgia both meet demand and preserve the quality of lottery-funded Pre-K.

Georgia should stay a national leader in state-funded pre-kindergarten by continuing to invest in our greatest resource, our youngest children. It will benefit all Georgians. That is the promise of Pre-K.

“Today we become the first state in the country, in fact the first state in nation’s history, to offer Pre-K for every four-year-old who wants it... The benefits of Pre-K now belong to every Georgia four-year-old ... to every Georgia parent who has a four-year-old.” - Governor Zell Miller, 1995



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GEORGIA Pre-K POLICY BRIEF # 2

Resource Coordinators Vital to High-Quality Pre-K in Georgia: All Authorities Agree Program Needed

The Governor’s 2011 Budget proposes to effectively remove the Resource Coordinators (RC) from Georgia Pre-K by cutting the RC program by 75%. The proposal endangers the state’s capacity to deliver essential services for an effective high-quality Pre-K program. It also jeopardizes the state’s national ranking as one of the best Pre-K programs at a time when Georgia lottery funds are available to continue and improve the program.

The RC Program prepares Pre-K children for school by providing support services in health and wellness, child development, community resources, and kindergarten readiness. The program costs \$18.5 million – just over 5% of the Pre-K budget. In 2009, 484 RCs served approximately 47,000 Pre-K children and their families across the state.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH VOUCHES FOR RC PROGRAM’S IMPORTANCE

- **A 2006 Georgia State University study found that RCs advance the performance, health, and well-being of the low income children in Georgia Pre-K.** For example, RC services helped children to transition to kindergarten and significantly improved parent involvement among low income children.¹
- National studies also find that Pre-K support services like Georgia’s RC program produce long-term improvements in school success, including higher test scores, lower non-promotion rates, and higher attainment, especially for at-risk children.²
- A State Auditor Report in May 2009 found the overall effectiveness of the RC program in Georgia Pre-K had not been evaluated in recent years. **The Auditor report did not recommend ending the RC program.** In fact, the report acknowledged the importance of the support services RCs provide low income students and recommended identifying “needed and useful activities” in the RC program – not ending the program.³

GEORGIA PRE-K IS MAKING IMPROVEMENTS TO RC PROGRAM

In response to the State Auditor’s report, Georgia Pre-K is already implementing several changes, such as collecting additional data to identify specific impacts, and will fully assess the program.

LOTTERY FUNDS AVAILABLE TO CONTINUE AND IMPROVE RC PROGRAM

Georgia has adequate lottery funds to continue and improve the Pre-K’s RC program. The state lottery generated enough annual revenue to include RC costs in the 2011 lottery-funded budget. In addition, the total lottery reserve funds are now almost \$1 billion.

IMPROVING RC PROGRAM WILL HELP CHILDREN AND KEEP GEORGIA PRE-K A NATIONAL LEADER

Georgia's Pre-K is still ranked by enrollment and quality as one of the nation's best, but other states are beginning to match or exceed Georgia, especially on high-quality benchmarks. Gutting the RC Program will endanger the state's national rankings and, more importantly, jeopardize the educational and economic benefits of Georgia Pre-K.

Georgia Pre-K needs to evaluate fully the RC program. It needs to improve the RC program. But, both Georgia and Georgia Pre-K need the RC program in order to be successful.

¹ Rickman, Dana, et. al. (June 2006). *Report of the Findings from the Resource Coordinator Study: Family Support Services Evaluation*. Georgia State University, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.

² Barnett, W. S. (2008). *Preschool education and its lasting effects: Research and policy implications*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved Feb. 5, 2010 from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/preschooleducation>.

³ Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Operations (May 2009), *The Resource Coordinator Program*.