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Atlanta Leaders Announce New Early Education Initiative

ATLANTA (April 26, 2010) – After 18 months of study, the Early Education Commission (EEC) has issued strategic recommendations for improving access to quality early education for children ages zero to five across metro Atlanta, and ultimately the state.

The recommendations lay out a multi-year plan for assuring consistently high-quality early learning – with Georgia ultimately becoming a national leader in ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to learn and on a path to “read to learn” by third grade. “Read to learn” refers to a reading skill level necessary for a third-grader to learn at an age-appropriate pace and become a successful student.

Stephanie Blank, Trustee of the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, will chair the governing board of the Georgia Coalition for Early Education (GCEE), a new, independent successor group to the EEC that will offer strategic assistance to existing providers, funders and stakeholders in early learning and care. A national search is being launched for an executive director of the coalition.

“The key to Georgia’s future economic prosperity and social well-being lies in the care and education of our youngest children,” said Ms. Blank, who served on the EEC. “There is ongoing advocacy and quality improvement work in metro Atlanta and the state: our goal is to move early learning to the top of the public agenda and broaden the scope and reach of those efforts.”

Co-chaired by Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta CEO Dennis Lockhart and Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D., the EEC assembled in the fall of 2008 to investigate the impact of early learning on the short- and long-term economic health of metro Atlanta. The commission learned from nationally renowned experts in the early education field, studied research, assessed the state of early learning in the metro area and state, and identified opportunities for improvement.

“It is essential that children be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten – we know brain development in a child’s early years charts a course for success over a lifetime” said Dr. Tatum. “We also know that there is more to school readiness than being ready to read – social, emotional and other cognitive milestones are important, and the EEC’s recommendations address all of those.”

In addition to the neuroscience aspects of early childhood education, EEC members learned about the positive return on investment early intervention provides versus the exponential cost of remediation, and the importance quality centers and trained educators play in these outcomes.

Said Dennis Lockhart, “Beyond the intrinsic social value, investing in early education is just the smart thing to do. Research clearly shows that early interventions have better rates of return than do traditional economic development projects.”

Consistent with the commission’s recommendations, the GCEE will focus on four main areas:

- Improve Quality – for both center-based and home-based early care and education.
- Enhance Parental involvement – supporting families with the tools and resources needed to provide quality learning experiences.
- Increase Public Awareness – to raise awareness of how quality early learning experiences impact a child’s long-term success.
- Intensify Advocacy – for increased quality, accessibility and affordability of early childhood care and education.

“This commission has recommended vital next steps that will significantly support and enhance ongoing efforts in our state,” said Holly Robinson, Commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. “Helping parents identify and assure quality early education is critically important for their children and for Georgia. And Stephanie Blank is a brilliant choice as chair of the coalition; she is a greatly respected community leader who researches, understands and is devoted to this issue.”

About the Early Education Commission

Convened in the fall of 2008 by the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, the Early Education Commission brought together a group of 23 prominent Atlanta business and civic leaders representing diverse constituencies to conduct a thorough review of empirical evidence and expert opinion with regard to the case for cohesive action on Pre-K education, share a broad directional agenda for the metro Atlanta community, and offer concrete action recommendations for stakeholders in the early childhood community. Its focus was to investigate the impact of early learning on the short- and long-term economic development of metropolitan Atlanta with the overall goal to improve the availability and quality of early childhood education in metropolitan Atlanta, and ultimately throughout the state of Georgia. To find out more about the Early Education Commission, visit unitedwayatlanta.org and click on “Early Education” under the “Our Work” tab.

About United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta

For more than a century, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta has continued to mobilize people in our community to help tackle the issues that are too big for anyone to solve alone. What makes United Way unique is how it helps our community work together to make lasting impact on tough community problems that take all of us to solve. United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta invests in the areas of education, income, health and ending chronic homelessness. To find or give help, dial 2-1-1 or visit us online at unitedwayatlanta.org.

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