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NEW MONEY DEDICATED TO YOUNG CHILDREN IN STATE BUDGET

Columbus (March 15, 2007)—Gov. Ted Strickland’s budget proposals expanding educational opportunities for Ohio’s youngest children were praised by the non-partisan groundWork™ Ohio Campaign, a statewide association of parents, business leaders, pediatricians, behavioral health care professionals, educators, and child care providers advocating improved education and wellness for children from birth through age six.

Gov. Strickland’s proposed budget would:

- Expand all-day, every day kindergarten by \$10 million for 10 more districts;
- Make public pre-kindergarten available to an additional 2500 children by adding nearly \$23 million in state funding and offering it in 61 new districts;
- Provide \$13 million for school readiness enrichment that will help children enter kindergarten ready to learn;
- Increase access for thousands more children to get the necessary health care they need by expanding children’s health care access and behavioral health treatment;
- Expand eligibility in Child Care and the Early Learning Initiative, and by removing some enrollment barriers to the Early Learning Initiative;
- Increasing the quality of care given to infants and toddlers by providing specialists who can address specific needs of our youngest children; and
- Giving parents the information to choose quality care for their children by expanding Step up to Quality statewide.

In conjunction, the governor already has removed additional state barriers that have limited the use of federal grants for early care and education programs.

“The Governor deserves credit for keeping his campaign promise to help children get a fair start on education in Ohio,” said Lori McClung, groundWork™ Campaign director. “We have every reason to believe that the legislature is eager to do the same.”

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McClung pointed to the current programs of early care and education as a series of good ideas largely initiated and led to adoption by individual legislators, but said it will take both the bipartisan support from the Ohio General Assembly and the governor's leadership to create a real system.

"Given the past legislative leadership supporting Ohio's families and youngest children, we do not see the Governor's proposals as political battleground issues," she said.

McClung pointed to Ohio's competition as an increasing number of states, including neighboring states, are developing systems to meet the need of children at a time when their brain is growing faster than at any other time in their life. "In his budget proposal, Gov. Strickland has signaled that he wants to work with the legislature to create a true system giving parents choices and children a fair start when they enroll in school."

She said a systematic state approach to early care and education can be justified one child at a time, and by the positive impact it can have on the state's economy. A report of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland identified the impact of committing to children's learning and wellness in areas of employment, taxes, and school budget savings.

The Federal Reserve Bank report and other early learning and health reports are available on the campaign's web site at www.groundworkohio.org.

"No matter whether you measure early care and education as a parent or as a physician or as an economist, it produces good results for the quality of life of all Ohioans," McClung said.

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