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## ***PRESS RELEASE***

### **NEW KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT SCORES PROVE PROPOSED EARLY CHILDHOOD CUTS TO BE SHORTSIGHTED**

*After only one year, districts with public preschool show significant improvement*

Columbus, OH- In the midst of more sweeping cuts to Ohio's early education system proposed by Governor Strickland last week, the 2008 kindergarten assessment scores were released showing that 72 percent of the districts that started a Public Preschool program in the 2007-2008 school year saw an increase in the district's scores the following year when those children entered kindergarten. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy test, or KRA-L, is administered to every incoming kindergartener to test for literacy skills that are linked to reading and school success.

"This is solid proof that our early childhood programs are making a significant difference in improving our education system and reaching our most at-risk children," said Katie Kelly, director of the GroundWork initiative. "The damaging cuts proposed by the Governor and the legislature to Ohio's early childhood system would reverse much of the progress Ohio's school districts have made in preparing children to enter school ready to learn."

The proposed reduction in funding for Ohio's Public Preschool program is just one in a series of cuts that would eliminate services for approximately 118,000 young children during the upcoming biennium, and turn many more low-income children away due to proposed changes in income eligibility for Ohio's child care program. The proposed cuts over the biennium include:

- Elimination of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) program, \$145.2 million reduction
- \$49.8 million reduction in eligibility for child care from 200 to 150 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL)
- \$58.8 million reduction in the reimbursement rate for child care providers
- \$23 million reduction for Public Preschool
- \$57.6 million reduction of Help Me Grow program in the Executive and House proposed budgets; \$100.6 million reduction in GRF in Senate proposed budget
- \$1.3 million reduction of Early Childhood Mental Health Program

These cuts come at a time when many families are relying on child care assistance to maintain stable employment and provide a safe setting for their children while they are at work. Currently, there are approximately 94,000 children below age six in Ohio between 150 and 200 percent of poverty.

“With these recommendations, the Governor is not only reducing access to safe and affordable care for thousands of our most vulnerable families and children, he is also reducing the quality of the early education opportunities available to Ohio’s children,” said Margaret Hulbert, United Way of Greater Cincinnati. “Eliminating the Early Learning Initiative, reducing Public Preschool slots, and reducing access and quality within Ohio’s child care system will devastate the early childhood system we have built in our state.”

Faced with similar budget shortfalls, many other states across the country are increasing or at least flat-funding their early childhood investments. States such as Iowa, Georgia, and Virginia are looking to increase funding for their successful pre-kindergarten programs despite having budget shortfalls of 10 percent or more.

“If Governor Strickland and the Ohio legislature are serious about providing a world-class education for every child in Ohio and remaining a competitive state, cutting our high-quality early childhood programs will significantly undermine that effort. We are urging our leaders to rethink these proposals and create a budget that protects the needs of our youngest and most vulnerable children and the quality early childhood system we have created in Ohio” said Kelly.

GroundWork is a coalition early care and education leaders, parents, service professionals, business leaders, and organizations across the state who have come together to promote state investments and policies that will address the needs of Ohio’s youngest children, including voluntary access to high-quality early care and education programs, assessment, screening, and treatment for social and emotional problems, increased access to health services and supports, and voluntary access to full-day kindergarten.

To learn more about groundWork, please visit [www.groundworkohio.org](http://www.groundworkohio.org).

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