

Testimony before the Education Committee
Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2007

We strongly support the Governor's proposals to expand school readiness programs over the next five years to accommodate the 13,000 low income children across the state who are not currently in programs. The \$ 62 million dollar investment in early education will address the longstanding Academic Achievement Gap which is not just an education problem, but the tragic consequence of our failure to address deep racial and economic disparities that divide our communities. Almost half of our low income children do not have any preschool experience before they enter kindergarten. We believe that the Governor's early education proposals will begin to address this inequity.

In addition to the social justice argument for support of the early education proposals in SB1114, we believe there is sufficient economic and scientific research to support the investment. National studies indicate that quality early education programs result in reduced grade retention, less need for special education services, and increased high school graduation rates.

Quality is key to successful outcomes. Highly trained teachers are an important component of quality. Workforce development and facility expansion are included in other parts of the budget.

The state needs to hold the program accountable for outcomes. Section 25 requires schools receiving funds to track and report student experience in preschool. This requirement, together with the new kindergarten assessment will provide the data needed to track outcomes, and to initiate adjustments where needed.

We believe that the portable scholarship opportunity in Section 16 will accelerate placement of children in programs by giving families more flexible options in placing their children in programs.

To successfully accommodate 13000 more children in school readiness programs will take time and thoughtful planning, as well as extraordinary coordination across agencies.

We urge this committee to seize the opportunity to make a significant contribution to closing the Achievement Gap, restoring equity to public education and doing it in bipartisan cooperation.

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