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$45 Million Investment to Expand and Improve Vital Education Services in Communities Across Illinois

CICERO – December 19, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today joined students, families and teachers to announce $45 million for vital improvements to early childhood education facilities in high-need communities across Illinois. The 14 Early Childhood Construction Grants (ECCG) are funded through Governor Quinn's Illinois Jobs Now! capital construction program and will expand access to early childhood education, which experts have noted is critical to a student's success.

Today's announcement is part of the governor's comprehensive plan to strengthen Illinois' education system by improving early childhood education, modernizing school facilities, expanding science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) instruction, and implementing bold reforms that put children first.

"The achievement gap begins before a child steps foot into kindergarten," Governor Quinn said. "We know that investing in early childhood education is the best way to ensure lifelong success for our students. By setting our youngest learners on the right track now, we can prepare them for a lifetime of growth and strengthen our economy for the future."

The ECCG is the first program in the nation of its kind, created by Governor Quinn and funded through his Illinois Jobs Now! to increase early childhood services in underserved areas across Illinois. Organizations receiving the awards went through a competitive grant process that included specifying how the funds will be spent to improve early childhood education in their communities. The awards may be used to acquire or construct a facility or expand an existing facility as well as to purchase equipment and make safety improvements. Early childhood providers in Cook, McHenry, Will, Winnebago, St. Clair, Kane and Kankakee counties were among the successful applicants (A full listing is attached).

Today's announcement was made at Cicero's "Through A Child's Eyes" pre-K program, which focuses on helping children deemed to be at-risk of academic failure. In the last school year, the program served 467 students, with 95 percent coming from families at or below the poverty level. By the end of the school year, approximately 90 percent of at-risk three and four-year-olds had met or exceeded expectations in literacy learning skills following their

participation in the program.

“Thanks to these funds, some of our most vulnerable children will get access to early childhood education and services that might not otherwise be available,” State Board of Education Chairman Gery J. Chico said. “Studies have proven time and time again that such programming changes lives and yields social, academic and economic benefits. This is especially important as we work to reduce the achievement gap in the coming years.”

The ECCG awards follow an announcement earlier this month that Illinois was awarded a $34.8 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The funds will support quality improvements to Illinois’ early learning system including the development of a unified system that enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of programs.

Since taking office, Governor Quinn has made strengthening Illinois’ education system a top priority. Earlier this year, the Governor announced $623 million in Illinois Jobs Now! capital funding to help dozens of school districts statewide make critical repairs, additions and technology updates to classrooms. Combined with local dollars, the funding will allow school districts to complete projects totaling more than $1.2 billion. The program also includes $1.5 billion for higher education, including $788 million for public universities and $400 million for community colleges that has been used to support many landmark projects including Lincoln Hall at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Cole Hall at Northern Illinois University, the Advanced Chemical Technology Building at the University of Illinois-Chicago, the Transportation Education Center at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, as well as Western Illinois University’s Riverfront campus expansion in Moline.

In addition to improving facilities, Governor Quinn has worked to enhance academic offerings in the state by supporting the Illinois Pathways Initiative, an innovative public-private partnership between public education institutions and the business community to foster STEM learning. The governor’s goal is for 60 percent of Illinois adults to earn a college degree or career certificate by 2025.

In 2011, Governor Quinn also helped pass and signed historic education reform laws that are a model for the nation. These laws improved school report cards so that parents have more information about the schools that educate their kids; set clear benchmarks for teacher evaluation and put performance above tenure; and laid the groundwork for a longer school day and a longer school year.

As part of his push to strengthen education, health care and public safety, Governor Quinn proposed a plan that would prevent skyrocketing pension costs from squeezing out core priorities while fully funding the pension system by 2042. If nothing is done, state spending on public pensions is projected to exceed education spending by 2016. For more information and to make your voice heard in support of pension reform, visit www.ThisisMyIllinois.com .

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