

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statewide Early Childhood Coalition Launched

Oklahoma City, Okla. -- A new statewide early childhood coalition will work to raise Oklahoma's national position in key early childhood development metrics from the bottom states to the top 25 states by 2025. The coalition will elevate discussions, enhance awareness, and promote investment in proven early childhood programs.

The Potts Family Foundation organized the coalition that includes members from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

"We have a number of pressing challenges in Oklahoma, both short and long term. Our coalition contends that there is no more important long term issue than the improved development of human capital, especially in families with children from birth to age five," said Pat Potts, CEO of the Potts Family Foundation.

Leading neuroscientists have concluded that the most rapid growth period in the human brain occurs during the first three years of life. Brains appropriately stimulated through meaningful interactions with parents and caregivers develop enhanced character and cognitive capacities. Conversely, those not properly stimulated result in reduced capacity and performance, long before the child enters kindergarten.

"Evidence-based programs, most of which are already in Oklahoma, can help all parents of young children and can improve the interactions so critical to infant and toddler development," said Senator Stephanie Bice, an early supporter of the coalition.

"Strong and compelling economic reasons exist for greater investment in quality early childhood programs," according to Rep. Jason Dunnington. Leading economists, most notably Nobel prize-winner James Heckman, have demonstrated through peer-reviewed research that the returns on investment can be as much as \$7 to \$10 for each dollar invested in quality early childhood programs.

"We are convinced and excited by the scientific and economic benefits associated with targeted early childhood investments. The findings reveal benefits to both the child and society at large,"

said Steve Hendrickson, government relations director for The Boeing Company. As Heckman's research has shown, the most successful programs mirror what's going on in the most successful families.

In that vein, the coalition is supporting evidence-based literacy, numeracy and family support programs; improved access to preventive physical, mental and dental health services; and affordable high quality child care. The coalition has the support of over 60 civic and business professionals, called OKCEOs, who advocate and promote the early childhood message through presentations, opinion editorials, and interaction with their legislators.

"It may take us longer than 10 years to achieve these goals, but we are compelled to start now. As Helen Keller once opined 'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.' That is the importance of creating a coalition," Potts said.

She said 2016 will become the foundational year for the coalition, which is driven by accountability and transparency and has no cap on membership. It plans to develop and share an annual report each year, summarizing the effect of statewide efforts.

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