

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Robert R. McCormick Foundation Invests Nearly \$5 Million in Early Education**

*Grants focus on building a system of quality early care and education in Illinois*

**CHICAGO, June 29, 2011**—The Robert R. McCormick Foundation Board of Directors has approved nearly \$5 million in grants over two years to 17 organizations as part of its goal to help build a system of quality early care and education for children ages birth through eight in Illinois. The approved grants address public policy issues, such as adequate funding and quality standards for early education, and issues supporting a quality infrastructure, including principal preparation and early math.

“Illinois is a leader in early care and education and these grants will help Illinois sustain that work,” said Sara Slaughter, the Foundation’s education program director. “These grants focus on principal preparation programs as Illinois moves to become the first state to have a Pre-K–12 certification for principals. The grants also continue to improve state policy and move us closer to achieving a system of quality early care and education for children from birth to third grade in the state of Illinois.”

Priorities in this grant cycle included:

**Building a Quality Workforce by Increasing Well-Trained Leaders**

Many principals are not well-prepared and lack early education knowledge. According to a study commissioned by the Foundation for Child Development, principals alone account for 25 percent of a school’s total impact on learning. In the spring of 2010, legislation was passed that changed the principal certification from a K-12 certificate to a Pre-K-12 certificate, making Illinois the first in the nation to certify principals from the span of Pre-K to grade 12. As part of the new requirement, by 2014 all principal preparation programs will be required to incorporate new content and field experiences that integrate early childhood education and other content areas such as special education and English Language Learners.

- To support implementation of this new legislation, the Foundation has awarded grants to **New Leaders for New Schools** (\$300,000) supporting the addition of high quality early education components to their alternative certification principal preparation program and to **Illinois State University** (\$330,000) to provide technical assistance to other key higher education institutions to ensure quality as their programs are redesigned to conform to the new legislation.

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### **Building a Quality Workforce by Increasing Well-Trained Teachers and Quality Programming**

Teacher instruction needs to be improved, especially in the area of early math. In November 2006, Erikson Institute and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) surveyed CPS Pre-K and kindergarten teachers' math knowledge, attitudes and practices. Of the 340 teachers surveyed, 66% did not feel confident about teaching math and reported limited knowledge of basic math concepts.

- The Foundation has awarded grants to **Erikson Institute** (\$450,000) to adapt its early math professional development program to a curriculum that community colleges can apply to early childhood teaching candidates and **University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC)** (\$107,000) to develop teaching strategies tied to early math assessments so teachers can draw on different teaching strategies when they discover students have not mastered early math concepts. Grants designed to increase the skills of teachers in areas other than early math include: **Big Shoulders Fund** (\$240,000), **Teach for America** (\$115,000), and **Kohl Children's Museum** (\$150,000).

### **Supporting Early Care and Education Programs and Professionals that Develop Tools to Help At-Risk Children and Families Succeed**

Children of military families experience many mental health challenges that teachers and others in early education are not trained to address. In Illinois, there are more than 800 children under the age of five who have a parent in the National Guard or Army Reserve. Research shows that the stresses of military service extend to the well-being of very young children and that many of the stresses, such as death or injury of a parent, are not limited to children in military families.

- The Foundation has awarded grants to **Zero to Three** (\$90,000) to support the completion and distribution of a set of training materials for childcare providers who serve military children and their families experiencing stress and to **Sesame Workshop** (\$180,000), supporting the development and implementation of a child resiliency initiative – a multimedia educational outreach project designed to help children ages two to eight-years-old, in both military and civilian families, cope with stress and trauma.

### **Maintaining Funding and Policy Supports for a System of Quality Early Care and Education**

While Illinois has long been a leader in early education, the economic crisis threatens the funding and programs upon which that leadership is built. In 2011, an estimated 87,242 children will receive Preschool for All services, a reduction of 4,668 from the previous year. The child poverty rate in Illinois reached 18.9% in 2009, the highest level since 1993. Therefore, while the child poverty rates rise, early care and education services are on the decline.

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- The Foundation has awarded four public policy grants: **Latino Policy Forum** (\$320,000), which will focus on the needs of the growing Latino population; **Shriver Center on Poverty Law** (\$160,000), which will focus on policies and programs affecting lower-income, working families; **Advance Illinois** (\$125,000), which will focus on a birth to age 20 educational continuum; and **Council for a Strong America** (\$220,000), which will bring the voices of law enforcement officials to bear on early education policy issues.
- The Foundation also awarded \$850,000 over two years to the **Ounce of Prevention Fund**. This grant supports the Ounce's Educare program and University of Chicago's charter schools to develop a birth-to-eight model for education that will have public policy ramifications in the years ahead. Those two organizations will launch a coordinated, high-quality birth to eight model with expectations for children's development and learning, as well as for curriculum, instruction and family supports between both Educare and the two charter schools.

To date, the McCormick Foundation has invested more than \$96 million to help build a system of quality early care and education in Illinois for all children ages birth through eight.

#### **Robert R. McCormick Foundation**

The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is committed to fostering communities of educated, informed and engaged citizens. Through philanthropic programs, Cantigny Park and museums, the Foundation helps develop citizen leaders and works to make life better in our communities. The Foundation was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest foundations, with more than \$1 billion in assets. For more information, please visit [www.McCormickFoundation.org](http://www.McCormickFoundation.org).

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