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Governor Ted Kulongoski

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Press Release

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Governor Kulongoski announces plan to fully fund Head Start

Ready for School initiative seeks to close the achievement gap, and reach a key goal of the Governor's Education Enterprise

Portland, Oregon—In remarks delivered at today's launch of the "Ready for School" campaign, Governor Ted Kulongoski announced his commitment to provide full funding for Oregon Head Start, which is a key feature of his Education Enterprise.

"Oregon Head Start Pre-kindergarten programs are some of the most important tools we have for closing the achievement gap and leveling the playing field for all children," the Governor said. "Young children are hard-wired to learn from birth. When we give them a high-quality pre-kindergarten experience, their chances of succeeding in school and life increase tremendously."

The Governor pledged to fight for an additional \$40-million investment in his next budget, which would fully fund Oregon Head Start pre-kindergarten over the coming biennium. The additional funding will allow 3,200 more students to enroll in the program over the next two years. The emphasis on pre-kindergarten is part of the Governor's initiative to bolster the quality of education at all levels in accordance with his Education Enterprise.

"The research is clear and compelling," said Dick Alexander, a business leader and chair of *Ready for School*. "Studies show that Head Start students are better prepared to learn in school and succeed in life. It's a smart investment for our state, and I appreciate the Governor's leadership on this issue."

In addition to fully funding Head Start, the Education Enterprise seeks to renew state investment in K-12, community colleges, job-training and the university system. Such investment would help the education system recover from massive budget cuts suffered during the past recession. The Enterprise would also coordinate administration of public education at all levels in order to improve efficiency, eliminate needless duplication and save taxpayers' money.

Before delivering his remarks, the Governor read to a group of three- and four-year-olds at Russellville Head Start in Portland. He noted that while the children were having fun, Head Start means much more than having fun.

"When these children succeed, we all benefit," the Governor said. "Our economy benefits when kids grow up to become productive citizens and income-earners. Our communities benefit because these kids are far less likely to need the social safety net, or require supervision by the criminal justice system."

For every dollar Oregon invests in high-quality pre-kindergarten for kids in poverty, it gets back an estimated \$17 in benefits, the Governor added. "That's why Head Start is such a smart investment—it means less money spent on holding kids back, less money spent on criminal justice, less money spent on public health care, jails and unemployment payments."

Perhaps the best benefit, he said, is enabling young people to overcome the disadvantage of living in low-income families—enabling them to begin school on an equal footing. "Thanks to this, they will have an opportunity to realize their dreams and make good lives for themselves," the Governor said.

A coalition of business, civic and philanthropic leaders, as well as non-profit organizations, organized the *Ready for School* event to ensure all children enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. The

Children's Institute provided staffing for the event. The Institute is a non-profit organization that works to promote the most effective private and public investments for children.

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