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***New Report Recommends Quality Incentives for South Carolina Preschool Providers and Consumers***

A new report is calling on South Carolina policymakers to create business and consumer tax incentives tied to early childhood quality standards. The proposal for a Quality Based Incentive System is designed to improve and sustain quality within the state's preschool settings. Issued by the South Carolina Task Force on Early Childhood Quality Standards, the report broadens the scope of recent discussions of a consumer rating system by proposing the supports necessary to fuel widespread improvement.

"We know that high-quality early childhood experiences can make a dramatic difference for our youngest children. We also know that high-quality care is costly for parents and providers alike," said Susan DeVenny, Task Force Co-Chair and Director of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness. "Improving quality and access for families isn't fixed by simply labeling our preschools. Instead, we've tried to ask more fundamental questions: What will it take to help providers, many of whom struggle to keep their doors open, to offer the enhanced learning experiences proven to prepare our children for success?"

The task force report recommends tools to help S.C. families access high quality care and suggests mechanisms to help centers make sustainable quality improvements. The proposed Quality Based Incentive System calls for:

- Enhanced quality standards for early childhood providers serving young children;
- Incentives for parents who choose high-quality services for their children;
- Incentives for teachers who further their education level and stay in the field; and
- Incentives for child care providers who enhance the quality of their programs

The group recommends tagging its proposed incentives to an expanded version of the S.C. Department of Social Services' ABC child care voucher program by extending the existing quality levels from three to five, and focusing new standards on the latest child development research.

"Quality standards based in emerging best practice from the field can help us build stronger programs for children," said Ida Thompson, Director of the Spartanburg Regional Child Development Center and a member of the Task Force. "Standards also help us target early childhood investments and recognize progress industry-wide."

Under the proposed Quality Based Incentive System, S.C. families would reap the largest rewards, according to Jim Hart, Sr. Vice-President of S.C. Blue Cross Blue Shield.

"Among other things, we're proposing a complete overhaul of the state's consumer tax credit for child care, making it larger and refundable so that it benefits the low-income families where early childhood intervention has demonstrated the greatest impact. The change will encourage all families to choose quality services by tying the size of the credit to the quality of service selected," said Hart, a Task Force member. "Right now, the state's best care is out of reach for too many families — and we pay for it later."

Seated by legislative proviso in 2006, the Task Force is comprised of parents, leaders from the early childhood, business, and legislative and education policy arenas. Rep. Shannon Erickson (R-Beaufort), a Task Force member and childcare owner, called the group's work cutting edge.

"I'm encouraged to see us finally engage in realistic discussion of what it's going to take to get there — for both families and providers," Rep. Erickson said. "We devote nearly a third of our state's budget to K-12 education. It's time we think proactively about this investment by making sure our children are ready from the start. I'm looking forward to exploring these recommendations further."

**To access the full report, visit <http://www.scfirststeps.org>**

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