

# VOICES

Vol. 15, #2 Fall 2003

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## FOR ILLINOIS CHILDREN

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**NEWS UPDATE:** The Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago, the co-founders of Chicago Cares, Peoples Energy and Easter Seals Children's Development Center of Rockford were honored at the 2003 Kids Count Awards dinner. The dinner was chaired by National City Bank and KPMG. For more information, visit [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org).



*From Our President*

## Fixing Education Funding and Illinois' Tax System

By Jerry Stermer



**W**e know – both by intuition and from research – that babies grow and thrive in environments that provide a lot of interaction. Playing peek-a-boo and singing songs are simple activities that help children develop skills and learn about the world. We also know

this happens early; most brain development takes place long before children start kindergarten.

Yet Illinois spends only 3 percent of its education budget on encouraging the learning skills of preschool-aged children. This contrasts with what we know about how quality early learning environments help children succeed in school. It also fails to reflect our passion for learning and our desire to make sure public education is adequately and fairly funded.

Illinois needs to fix both its method of funding education and the structure of its tax system, which is inherently unfair to low-income residents. As the article on page 07 explains, Illinois' tax system is one of the most regressive in the nation because it takes a larger share of income from low- and middle-income earners than from the wealthy.

Voices for Illinois Children is happy to be part of an exciting, dynamic coalition that is mounting a campaign to better support Illinois children and their families by improving education funding and funding for community programs that support families. The diverse coalition includes representatives from business, education, advocacy, faith communities and local government. This effort will only succeed if all of us who care about our state's future raise our voices in support of a better life for children. If you would like to be involved or if you have ideas about how we can be successful, drop me a line at [jsstermer@voices4kids.org](mailto:jsstermer@voices4kids.org).

***Our newsletter has a new look!*** We combined Voices' newsletter with two specialty publications, the *Start Early: Learning Begins at Birth* Partners newsletter and the Budget & Tax Policy Initiative newsletter. "Partners in Action" – stories of the good work being done by *Start Early* partners – will appear in this newsletter, along with articles on budget and tax policy and some new features, such as guest columns on pressing issues. I invite you to share your thoughts by writing letters to the editor and sending them to Voices Editor, 208 S. LaSalle St., Suite 1490, Chicago, IL 60604 or [bortega@voices4kids.org](mailto:bortega@voices4kids.org).

### OUR MISSION

*Voices for Illinois Children champions the full development of every child in Illinois to assure the future well-being of the people of the state. We work with families, communities and policymakers to ensure that all children grow up healthy, nurtured, safe and well-educated.*



*The Voices newsletter is written and edited by Belia Ortega and Julie Parente, designed by Childers Communications, Inc. and printed by Kokopelli Communications Group, Inc.*

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## TESTING CHILDREN IN HEAD START

This fall marks the beginning of a new “national reporting system” for Head Start that calls for preschoolers nationwide to be given twice-yearly achievement tests.

Designed to supplement the “outcomes

framework” implemented two years ago, the system will require more than 500,000 hours to implement, at a cost in excess of \$16 million. Its purpose is to improve program monitoring and guide technical-assistance efforts and transitions to school.

These goals, initiated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are laudable. The question is whether the means the department has chosen to reach them—an achievement test for very young children—will succeed. If not, I fear the system may end up harming Head Start rather than improving it.

Plans for the reporting system call for individual assessments of each of the half-million 4- and 5-year-olds in Head Start in the fall and spring by their more than 35,000 teachers. The teachers received a brief training in administering the test this summer. The tests are drawn from existing instruments that assess children on a number of performance measures, including vocabulary, identifying letters of the alphabet and early math



*By Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D.  
president, Erikson Institute*



concepts. The test indicators were among those incorporated into Congress’ reauthorization of Head Start in 1998.

All of this sounds reasonable enough. Head Start, staffed primarily by teachers who are poorly paid and not uniformly well trained, has had an uneven record of quality since its inception in 1965. Hardly anyone can argue with the need for public programs to be held accountable, and testing today is the coin of the educational realm. So, what’s wrong with testing Head Start children?

Here’s what’s wrong: Though not labeled “high stakes,” the plan has all of the characteristics and potential dangers of a high-stakes test. Research demonstrates, for example, that the labeling that accompanies high-stakes tests can have a long-term impact on teachers’ perceptions of children’s ability to learn; can result in stigmatizing children and tracking them into low-achieving groups; and can make a long-lasting impression on children’s self-perceptions, estimates of their own abilities, and motivation and achievement. These consequences are very real for young children.

*continued on page 15*



# A “Q & A” WITH DR. ALVIN POUSSAINT

By Lisa Daly

*Dr. Poussaint, one of our nation’s preeminent psychiatrists, is a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the director of the Media Center at the Judge Baker Children’s Center in Boston.*

**Q. What are the key ways in which the media impacts young children? What are the implications for their development?**

A. The main media children see is television; they are also exposed to computers and movies, although not as much. Television has a great deal of influence, and children see too much of it, much too early. They watch as much as three to four hours a day, and some shows are targeted to children as young as 1. Even too much “educational” television is not good for young children, because developing a habit of watching TV has serious consequences, including:

- **Obesity** – More and more children are overweight, and become so as young as age 3 and 4. This is due to inactivity, as well as a diet high in fat and sugar – which is what is being marketed to children and their families during the commercials.
- **Television keeps children from play** – Television gives children too much that is scripted, and it requires little interaction. Active play is a much better way for children to learn and use their imaginations. When they watch television, they model their behavior after characters and some of those characters are not age-appropriate.

*In advance of his keynote presentation at the Start Early: Learning Begins at Birth Conference on September 19th, Dr. Poussaint talked about the impact of media on children.*

- **Television replaces sensory experiences** – Kids learn better by doing and using all their senses: smell and touch, as well as seeing and hearing. By doing things that require the use of all their senses, children develop their hand-eye coordination, physical abilities and a rich experience of their world. Unless parents intentionally use TV as an educational tool, it's not interactive. They would have to make a specific effort to engage in activities like singing and clapping hands together along with the song on TV. Most don't do that. Furthermore, watching people sing songs is not the same as learning the songs and having the educational experience of experimenting with language.
- **Children expect to be constantly entertained** – If children begin to feel that watching entertainment is the way to learn, they expect "edutainment" from life. Learning requires active participation, and if children are not in situations that seem as entertaining as television, they will tend to think these things are "boring." Real life is not paced like entertainment. It is not good for children to think it is normal for things to be that fast paced. Movies and computers are exciting, and various media compete for a child's attention. But play should be at

the child's own pace, not at the pace of television, so that their experiences are more like the real world.

- **Television is a heavy marketing vehicle for toys, food, etc.** –

Marketing starts early, even on educational shows. TV puts ideas in children's heads about food and candy and it prompts them to push parents to buy things. This sets up tensions among families. Even one-and-a-half-year-olds know that there is a toy tie-in to certain food purchases. Marketers target kids early to build brand loyalty, and young children cannot distinguish advertisements from programming. Because they haven't developed critical-thinking skills yet, they believe what they see. They don't understand when parents don't want to buy the things they see on TV. This marketing also results in an overemphasis on the notion that one must have possessions to be happy. Instead, children should learn to rely on their own resources – such as play and engaging in games – instead of seeking out things to buy.

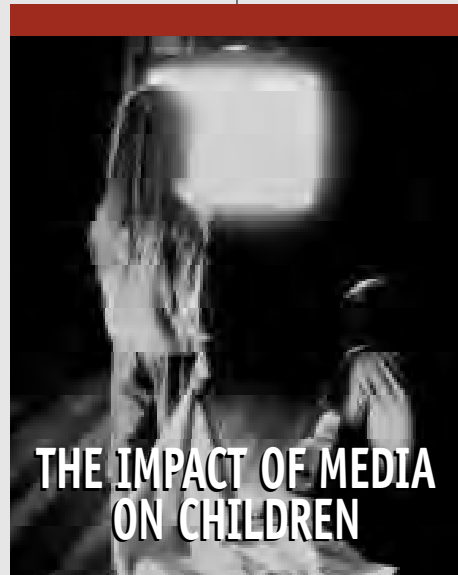
In the face of these concerns, parents should seriously limit television exposure and be knowledgeable about its effects.

They must not give in to the "nag" factor to buy unneeded items or unhealthy food. And they should encourage their children to engage in interactive play with others.

**Q. Please describe your thoughts regarding other influences that may impact young children. Are there some that exert a greater influence than others?**

A. Young children encounter various influences in day care and at preschool. These may be harder to control than those within the home. In homes, 26 percent of 2- to 4-year-olds have their own television. These very young kids use the remote themselves! What comes across through television is violence, guns, fire and sex. And that's just on the news. TV sends a bad message that violence and guns are fun. Kids can also become frightened by the disturbing images

*continued on page 06*



**A "Q & A" WITH DR. POUSSAINT** continued from page 05

they see. When young children saw repeated viewings of the events of 9-11, they thought that these events were happening repeatedly; as a result, they were additionally traumatized.

**Q. In a climate full of world events and societal issues, how can parents, early childhood professionals and supporters of young children help them to positively navigate the influences they encounter?**

A. Many world events are simply horrible. If children see them on television, they are going to have questions and fears. Parents need to address them. Ask children what they know and provide reassurance. In these difficult times, children need to spend more time with parents and other adults talking about their concerns.

**Q. What can parents, professionals and supporters do from an advocacy standpoint to improve the lives and early development of young children?**

A. Parents and others can support child-friendly public policies.

They can also write to corporations about making their marketing more child-responsi-

ble. Corporations try to dominate children's lives, even at the preschool level, through books and branded toys. Don't accept that. When children are older, be involved in deciding what the policies of their schools should be. Parents and others can campaign for good nutrition and more physical education/gym classes in the schools. Make sure children aren't given access to soda in schools. Preschool-age children are drinking soda regularly. It's bad for their teeth and the caffeine is harmful for young children. Work with schools to encourage parents to support their children in leading healthier lifestyles.



*(l-r) Joan Vitale, Start Early campaign director; Jim Mitchell, Voices board president; Luz Maria B. Solis, board member, Dr. Poussaint, Bonnie Wheeler, board vice-chair and Jerry Stermer, Voices president*

**Q. What additional thoughts would you like to share with Voices for Illinois Children's audience of parents, early childhood professionals and supporters of young children?**

TV puts ideas in children's heads about food and candy and it prompts them to push parents to buy things . . . Even one-and-a-half-year-olds know that there is a toy tie-in to certain food purchases.

A. Most importantly, have healthy babies. This means proper prenatal care. It's important to not take drugs before pregnancy, and to get appropriate prenatal care once pregnant to avoid potential health problems. I also advocate the elimination of corporal punishment. There is often a thin line between spanking and child abuse; disciplining a child in anger can lead to child abuse. Violent discipline creates risks to a child's psychological well-being and long term damage can occur. It also sets up an atmosphere that approves of the use of violence to obtain compliance and resolve conflict. There is already too much violence in society. In addition, so many parents don't understand the basics of normal child development. Parenting education is very important; I believe it should be required at the high school level for all. n



# IMPROVED STATE EITC HELPS OFFSET TAX BURDEN FOR LOW-INCOME ILLINOISANS

By Maneesha Date

Established in 2000, the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was designed to piggyback on the much larger and refundable federal EITC to provide a credit to low- and middle-income working families. This important legislation was set to expire this year, but lawmakers and the governor reauthorized the state EITC, making it both permanent and refundable.

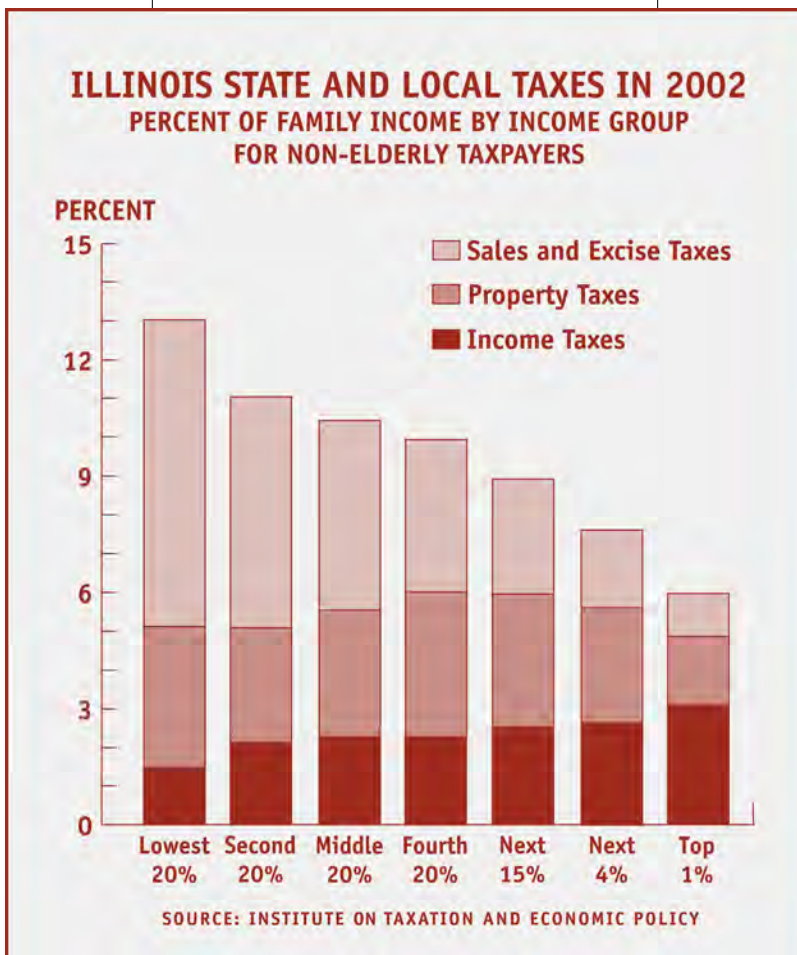
“Refundability” allows a family to get the full value of the credit even if their income tax liability is less than the amount of the credit. This critical work support will be extended to another 150,000 to 200,000 families.

“This is an important step for Illinois’ hard-working but low-income families,” said Illinois House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, chief sponsor of the measure. “We could not have done this without a strong, bipartisan effort and without the vision and the initiative of Voices for Illinois Children and the Make Work Pay coalition.”

It is important to note that the refundable EITC is not a giveaway. Although a family

may not earn enough to owe state income taxes, a low-income family still faces a dis-

Policy report “Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States.”



The change in the state EITC helps offset the disproportionate burden Illinois places on its lowest-income taxpayers by reducing their overall tax rate from 13.1 percent of their income to 12.7 percent. But more needs to be done. Even after taking into account the refundability of the EITC, the poor in Illinois, with an average annual income of \$8,900, pay more than twice as much of their income in taxes as the wealthiest one percent, whose average annual income is more than \$1.3 million. At 5 percent of the federal credit, the Illinois

proportionate burden in property and sales taxes. This credit helps offset that unequal burden. In fact, while the flat-rate state income tax is very slightly progressive, the overall tax system in Illinois is one of the 10 most regressive in the nation. It takes a much larger share of income from low- and middle-income earners than from the wealthy, according to the latest edition of the Institute on Taxation and Economic

EITC is among the smallest offered by states. Increasing the amount of the credit would allow for a greater offset of the tax burden imposed on the poorest working families in Illinois.

For more information, contact Maneesha Date at 312-516-5568 or [mdate@voices4kids.org](mailto:mdate@voices4kids.org).

*Voices for Illinois Children is a tax-exempt corporation under Internal Revenue Service code section 501(c)(3) and is not classified as a private foundation. We wish to acknowledge the following individuals, organizations, foundations and corporations for their gifts made during the period between January 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003.*

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# DOULAS: SUPPORTING YOUNG "IT'S NOT HIGH-TECH,"

**W**hile births to teen mothers continues to fall in Illinois, these young mothers are more likely to be poor, not finish high school and lack adequate resources or knowledge to provide their children with proper prenatal and after-birth health care. Programs in which nurses and other trained professionals interact with teen mothers before and after birth have been tailored to help educate teen mothers about the importance of providing a healthy social and emotional life for their child and also have reduced subsequent births.

Chicago Health Connection is one of these programs. The organization has trained hundreds of women to become doulas – trained professionals who help women through labor and after childbirth – with a focus on teen mothers. Doulas encourage pregnant mothers by giving them the emotional support and comfort that they need while strengthening bonds between the mother and her child. They also encourage breastfeeding and have been shown to lower Cesarean rates. A doula serves for up to 12 weeks after birth and is followed by a home visitor. Services can continue for years.

Chicago Health Connection Executive Director Rachel Abramson said there are lots of levels on which these programs make a difference, including getting young mothers the support they need at the time of childbirth.

"The models focus attention on the time around birth and figure out how to incorpo-

The Chicago Health Connection has received several awards for its doula program. This past May, the Harris Doula Institute of Chicago Health Connection was honored by the National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition and received the 2003 State Impact Award for its work to improve the health of families. And in September,

Abramson received an award at Voices for Illinois Children's *Start Early: Learning Begins at Birth* conference for her leadership in helping to make a difference in the lives of very young children and their families.

Abramson said there has to be a long-term, trusting relationship at the center of the doula program.

"Doulas are women who have similar experiences as the moms they serve," said Abramson. "They were teen moms and faced

the same problems. The doulas are role models because they've succeeded. A mom who has a doula feels she can succeed. She can be a mom, help other moms and do other good things."

Other benefits of using a doula include bridging language and cultural barriers; assisting families in getting health needs met; provid-



Photo: Julie Kaplan Photography

**Rachel Abramson, recipient of the Start Early: Learning Begins at Birth award shown here with (l-r) Voices' Jim Mitchell, Jerry Stermer and Joan Vitale.**

rate consistent relationship based support into the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting," said Abramson. "It's different than a lot of programs that come out of our American culture. We like things that are easy, quick and sometimes superficial and shrink-wrapped. This is just the opposite. It's very human and very powerful."

# MOTHERS THROUGH CHILDBIRTH IT'S HIGH-TOUCH™

By Belia Ortega

ing additional support for medical providers by keeping clients in care longer, showing greater compliance and having more positive outcomes; and increasing maternal and family attachment, ultimately improving a child's school readiness.

Chicago Health Connection works with 11 sites in Illinois and has 14 programs in the United States, which include Albuquerque, Minneapolis and Atlanta. The services are usually provided through social service agencies, health care providers, child care centers and family support programs. All of the models share the same principles.

The program's success is being measured by client interviews and feedback, parent/infant interaction, and how kids who have been part of the program do when they are in school. Agencies have described progress in the way parents hold babies, more fathers being involved and a higher percentage of breastfeeding.

Chicago Health Connection and other agencies that have incorporated doula models are talking about sharing data, getting state funding, and getting older programs to support newer models.

"I think it's a very hopeful thing that there is so much support and excitement

around for this model," said Abramson. "It's not high-tech, it's high touch and uses resources that are in the communities. It uses natural leaders who already live in those communities."

The Chicago-based Ounce of Prevention Fund supports the doula model and has partnered with Chicago Health Connection in providing about 15 doula programs statewide.

The Ounce completed a four-year evaluation of the Chicago Doula Project pilot program that was completed in June 2001 and found an increase in breastfeeding and a reduced rate of Cesarean sections. The study also found that "more than half of the participants who completed the screening instrument for depression had scores indicative of depression. The prevalence of depressive symptoms found among mothers in the study is on the low end of the range found in other surveys studying these symptoms among young and low-income mothers."

"The doula program is the single most promising intervention that we have seen in a long time. For 30 years, society has struggled

## THE BENEFITS OF DOULAS

Teen mothers who used doulas had the following outcomes when compared with those who did not use doulas:

- Better use of prenatal care
- Decreased pre-term births
- Fewer medical interventions
- Fewer Cesarean sections
- Decreased epidural use
- More reports of positive feelings about the infant after birth
- Delay of subsequent pregnancy
- More positive birth experiences
- Better use of follow-up care

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund

to reach young low-income moms and their children," said Mike Burke, director of communications for the Ounce of Prevention Fund. "The doula works because the doula is present at the birth and being present at the birth is something a mom will never forget. It really builds a strong relationship between a doula and a mom."

For more information, contact  
Chicago Health Connection  
at 312-243-4772 or  
[www.chicagohealthconnection.org](http://www.chicagohealthconnection.org).



# HELPING ILLINOIS' POOREST COMMUNITIES

By Julie Parente

In Kankakee County's rural Pembroke Township, one-third of the population and nearly half of its children live in poverty. There is no gas station, no grocery station, no bank. It is one of Illinois' poorest com-

munities, and it is being targeted by Team Illinois, a new initiative that concentrates state resources and partners with local stakeholders to improve the infrastructure and economy. southern Alexander County. All share common characteristics: a lack of economic development, high levels of poverty and unemployment, low median incomes. Team Illinois made its initial visit to each community by early October.

Some Team Illinois improvements were immediate, like the park's playground equipment painted in cheerful colors. Future improvements include creating a consortium of area employers to develop job training to meet their hiring needs and opening a local Credit Union One branch that will both serve and hire residents.

"First we meet with the community stakeholders and they tell us what they need," Adams said. "We all pitch in. This isn't just for one week. They'll be doing long-range planning."

Hopkins Park Mayor Jon Dyson said the most pressing needs are for a local state office that provides access to the entire range of social services. The township's infrastructure – roads, sewers, water, natural gas – needs to be improved to attract industry and jobs. Programs for youth and for new parents also are needed.

"The mere fact that there is a hope and there is some statewide attention being dedicated to this community naturally changes the whole thought process," Dyson said. "In order to build a strong community, we have to have strong families."

For more information, visit [www.dhs.state.il.us/](http://www.dhs.state.il.us/) or contact Julie Parente at 312-516-5551 or [jparente@voices4kids.org](mailto:jparente@voices4kids.org).



Young children play along with the musicians entertaining the crowd at Team Illinois' four-day festival in Pembroke Township in July.

munities, and it is being targeted by Team Illinois, a new initiative that concentrates state resources and partners with local stakeholders to improve the infrastructure and economy.

"What will change things for people in communities that have been neglected? What if all agencies came together? Change can happen immediately," said Carol Adams, secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services.

In addition to Pembroke Township, Team Illinois is targeting Aurora's East Side neighborhood and the towns of Savanna in northwestern Carroll County and Cairo in

Pembroke Township. Some of the streets aren't paved. Some of the homes don't have running water, working plumbing or telephones and rely on propane for heat.

On a hot week in late July, there were workshops on topics like job search techniques, grandparents raising grandchildren and managing money. Residents signed up for assistance programs like health insurance and testing the water quality of wells.

Resident Lily Davis visited the fair with four of her five children. "(Pembroke Township) needs just what we're getting now – support from others, financial assistance, things for the children," she said. "I want them to grow up where there will be jobs and they can have a good life."



**POLICY UPDATE**

# Illinois Children, Families to Benefit from New Initiatives

By Sean Noble

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**Y**oung children throughout Illinois have greater learning opportunities this fall, thanks to significant improvements in the Early Childhood Block Grant.

Many child care providers and other community-based programs were among the 130 recipients of new block grant funding to support preKindergarten services. This preK expansion hinged on two developments:

state policymakers' decision to increase the grant by nearly \$30 million, and the Illinois State Board of Education's move to allow non-school service providers to apply directly for the funding – a first in Illinois. Children's advocates, through the Early Learning Illinois cam-

campaign and other efforts, had sought these changes to ensure that more children can have early learning experiences in whatever settings their parents choose.

"This moves our state a little further down the long road toward 'universal' preschool access for all children whose parents want it," said Jerry Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children. "The key is to provide a variety of high-quality options that fit the range of parents' and children's needs – from preK to Head Start classrooms to child care centers and still other settings."

Gov. Rod Blagojevich has pledged three annual increases in the Early Childhood Block Grant, growing it by \$90 million between FY2004 and FY2006. This growth also will benefit important developmental services for children birth to age 3. But the governor also recently signed into law three substantial pieces of legislation that bolster young children's learning in still other ways:



*Gov. Rod Blagojevich signs two early childhood education bills at a July ceremony packed with children, families and advocates.*

- Updating income eligibility for state-assisted child care, helping 14,000 more children to obtain care this year and to retain it for longer periods of time.

- Convening an Illinois Early Learn-

ing Council to help guide the coordination, improvement and expansion of existing programs serving children from birth to age 5.

- Taking a variety of approaches to better support children's healthy social and emotional development. The Children's Mental Health Act of 2004 also will benefit older children, up to age 18.

For more information, contact Sean Noble at 312-516-5566 or [snoble@voices4kids.org](mailto:snoble@voices4kids.org).

**Did the articles you read move you? Do you want to know how you can make a difference for children and families?**

Visit [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org) to find out how to:

- Sign up for email Action Alerts.
- Contact your legislator.
- Make a donation.

**GET INVOLVED TODAY!**

# FOLIC ACID: GET THE “B” ATTITUDE

By Janine Hill Lewis, MPH  
Folic Acid Coordinator for the March of Dimes

## *Did you know that a simple vitamin may help prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord?*

Folic acid, a B vitamin, can help prevent neural tube defects if taken prior to pregnancy. Studies have shown that if all women of childbearing age take the daily recommended amount of folic acid, 400 micrograms, up to 70 percent of neural tube defects could be prevented. Neural tube defects include spina bifida (open spine) and anencephaly, a fatal condition in which a child is born with a severely underdeveloped brain. Each year, 2,500 babies are born in the United States with a neural tube defect.

Folic acid is found in most multivitamins, as well as some fortified breakfast cereals and enriched grain products. Its natural form (folate) can be found in oranges, leafy green vegetables, beans, broccoli, and whole-grain products.

In recent years, doctors have come to realize that folic acid is very important for

maintaining health in all males and females. Current studies show that folic acid may help prevent certain types of cancer, such as colon and cervical; heart disease and stroke; and may also help to decrease cognitive decline in the elderly.

More than 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned. Taking a multivitamin is a good habit to start, for healthy bodies now and in the future.

The March of Dimes Illinois Chapter, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Human Services, created the Illinois Folic Acid Council in 1999 to promote awareness of the benefits of folic acid among Illinois citizens.

Some great resources to help spread the word about folic acid are:

- A folic acid brochure, “Get the ‘B’ Attitude,” developed by the March of Dimes and the Illinois Department of Human Services.
- A limited quantity of folic acid posters, available from the March of Dimes.

For more information, contact Janine Hill Lewis at 312-596-4717 or [jnhill@marchofdimes.com](mailto:jnhill@marchofdimes.com). n

## Voices Welcomes...



**Rob Johnson** to Voices’ Board of Directors. Johnson is a co-anchor at ABC-7 news in Chicago. During his career, Johnson has covered such assignments as Hurricane Andrew, the Atlanta Olympics, and the Florida vote recount. He began his career covering the unusual world of Louisiana politics. Johnson’s work has earned him numerous journalism awards including an Emmy Award for his series “Hope in Honduras.” Johnson is a 1990 graduate of DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. He and his wife live in Chicago.



**and... Maneesha Date** to Voices’ staff. Date is program associate for the Budget & Tax Policy Initiative, where she analyzes state policy issues through research and reports and collaborates with a broad range of state-level advocacy organizations. Date previously worked at the Metropolitan Planning Council as a research assistant. She holds a master’s degree from the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy and two bachelors degrees in psychology and statistics from the University of Michigan. n

## HEAD START TESTING

*continued from page 03*

Another danger of the reporting system lies in the narrowness of its content. It covers congressionally mandated indicators, but it omits a huge portion of what is taught and learned in high-quality Head Start programs and other preschools. The reason content is important is that high-stakes tests, by means of "measurement-driven instruction," have a powerful impact on what is taught and what is learned.

To have an effective national reporting system, it must be built around a matrix sampling plan. This type of design is used in the National Assessment of Educational Progress and other large-scale assessments. It involves giving parts of tests to individual children, but giving no single child all of the items on the test. Statistically, it is then possible to construct composites that tell us precisely how well children in specific sampling units are doing.

Unfortunately, the government chose not to move ahead on adopting a matrix sampling design for the reporting system. It also did not ensure that the system is composed of subtests that are reliable, valid, and fair. Further, inadequate time was left to learn how to mount this historically largest-ever effort to test young children. What I fear is chaos and confusion at worst and wastes of time, money, and energy at best. Hopefully, Congress will enact a moratorium on the test before it is readministered next spring so that the test can be changed and the goal of learning more about how children are learning can be achieved without harming the very subjects we are trying to help.

For more information, visit [www.erikson.edu](http://www.erikson.edu) or contact Dr. Meisels at [smeisels@erikson.edu](mailto:smeisels@erikson.edu). n

# Partners in Action

By Brenda Baker and Amy Hume

**ALL OUR KIDS NETWORK  
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Stephenson County is one of 10 sites for the All Our Kids (AOK) Early Childhood Networks, an effort between local health departments, the Illinois Department of Human Services, Ounce of Prevention Fund, families of young children and local agencies. The AOK Networks are committed to making sure families have access to prenatal care, well-baby checkups, parent education and specialized services.

AOK Networks' goals include increasing access to services; increasing the capacity of the local service system; increasing coordination and collaboration among service providers and family members; increasing family satisfaction with the system of service; and engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the work of the network.

"Stephenson County has a long history of collaboration. With the AOK Network we work together to make sure our children and families have the services they need and eliminate duplicate services," said Dana Kuhlmeier, director of the Stephenson County AOK Network. "We started with a community assessment three years ago.

We found two organizations providing home-visiting services to new moms. The organizations joined their home-visiting programs and now provide more consistent services."

The AOK Network in Stephenson County is proud of its new Web site, [www.encompasscentral.com](http://www.encompasscentral.com), which combines a community service directory, client referrals, coordinated service plan and tracking as well as community data collection.

AOK work groups look at issues related to young children and their families and work collaboratively to come up with solutions. For example, birthday cards are sent to each child in the county to remind parents of the importance of developmental screenings and dates of assessments. Child care providers are educated about screenings, including how to talk with parents and how to make referrals. The AOK Network has trained 116 in-home and center-based child care providers and distributes the "Begin with Love" and "It Feels Good to Help Your Baby Learn" videos. The group also dedicates time at a monthly meeting to discuss advocacy issues and take action.

Through the AOK Network, Stephenson County is providing more consistent and coordinated care to young children and their families. "We continually do needs assessments and tons of surveys. We use parent input to tailor what we do in our community," Kuhlmeier said. n



**DEVELOPMENT NEWS**

# BE A VOICE FOR ILLINOIS CHILDREN

By Jim Perry

**V**oices for Illinois Children is calling on people around the state to help support the work of child advocacy with a personal gift in support of this year's Annual Campaign. Monetary contributions combined with donated time and talent support our capacity to bring about change and our ability to provide a powerful, collective voice for children in Illinois.

Voices' Annual Campaign is challenged to raise \$100,000 in gifts from individuals across the state by the end of the year. To

make a contribution, fill out the enclosed contribution envelope, make a charitable gift online at [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org) or call the Development Office at 312-516-5560.

Contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Financial support can be made at various levels including: Contributor \$35-\$49; Patron \$50-\$99; Benefactor \$100-\$249; Defender \$250-\$499; Champion \$500-\$999; and Founder's Council \$1,000 or more. Gifts may be made in honor or memory of a person or occasion. Voices also has introduced

the Keeping the Promise Monthly Pledge Program – a project open to those who are com-

mitted to sustaining Voices' mission by providing continuing and urgently needed support through monthly donations.

Donors are reminded to ask if your company or your spouse's company has a matching gifts program to augment your contribution. Inquiries can usually be made at the company's benefits office.

Please be a voice for Illinois children and respond to the Annual Campaign today. Your gift is an important investment in a brighter future for children, our communities and our state.

For more information, contact Jim Perry at 312-516-5552 or [jperry@voices4kids.org](mailto:jperry@voices4kids.org). n



*Folk trio Peter, Paul & Mary perform at the Kids Count awards dinner.*

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