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Governor Patrick Signs Landmark Early Education Bill into Law**Law Formally Establishes Universal Pre-Kindergarten, Encourages Professional Development**

BOSTON - Thursday, July 31, 2008 - Surrounded by partners in the Legislature and early education and care officials and advocates, Governor Deval Patrick today signed into law An Act Relative to Early Education and Care, which will keep Massachusetts at the leading edge of preparing young children with a solid foundation to enter school, so that they can succeed in the 21st Century global economy.

"I am very proud to be here to celebrate this bill that takes us one very important step closer to providing every child in Massachusetts with the lifelong benefits of strong educational beginnings," said Governor Patrick.

The early education bill, which passed early last week with unanimous votes in both the House and Senate, supports a number of key initiatives underway at the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), including formally establishing the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program, which seeks to provide voluntary, universally accessible, high-quality early education and care for preschool-aged children in Massachusetts. Future expansion of this program is a key recommendation of the Governor's Education Action Agenda, released in June (www.mass.gov/governor/education).

The bill also supports strategies to encourage education and care providers to further their education, and a comprehensive overhaul of regulations setting health, safety and quality standards for all licensed programs.

A previous version of the bill was passed in 2006 but it was vetoed by former Governor Romney. It was refiled in January 2007 by Senator Robert Antonioni and Representative Patricia Haddad, co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Education Committee.

"With this bill, early education and care is firmly established as the foundation for a lifelong education journey," said Education Secretary Paul Reville. "The Governor and I are eager to work with our colleagues in the Legislature and with practitioners and providers in the field to ensure that from this foundation, we build a 21st century education system that helps every student to achieve academic, career and life success."

"We are thrilled that this bill, after many years of hard work and dedication by early education leaders across the state and inside the State House, will become law," said Amy Kershaw, Acting Commissioner of Early Education and Care. "EEC, along with our diverse field of providers, looks forward to continuing to work towards the ambitious goals contained in the bill and realizing its expansive vision for children and families."

"Over the past few years, we have laid the groundwork for the Commonwealth to provide voluntary, high-quality, universal preschool," said Representative Patricia A. Haddad (D-Somerset), House Chair of the Joint Committee on Education. "This legislation emphasizes our continuing commitment to that goal and to children throughout the state and I am pleased to see it come to fruition today."

"Today is an important step in providing a high quality early education system for children across the Commonwealth" said Senator Robert A. Antonioni (D-Leominster). "This legislation is a thoughtful, thorough and visionary plan that lays out the essential elements of the Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program, eventually making voluntary high-quality early education programs available to all preschool-aged children through a mix of private and public programs."

"This is a bill that the entire field can take great pride in having shaped and improved over the last several years," said State Board of Early Education and Care Chair Sharon Scott-Chandler. "It represents a real milestone in our effort together to build a truly comprehensive, coordinated system of education and care that meets the needs of families, and prepares children for success in school and life."

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