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U.S. Secretary of Education, Gov. Brad Henry dedicate Oklahoma City Educare

Inasmuch Foundation leads philanthropic effort to open early childhood education center

OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma is becoming a national leader in early education and is empowering low-income families and their children to succeed, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan told community leaders Thursday.

“What is happening in Oklahoma with early childhood education is truly remarkable and a story to be shared throughout the country,” Duncan said. “You have created public/private partnerships to ensure that every child in Oklahoma – regardless of background or financial situation – receives the education they deserve.”

Duncan was in Oklahoma City to dedicate Oklahoma City Educare. Located at Byers Avenue and Southeast Grand Boulevard, Oklahoma City Educare has the capacity for 200 disadvantaged children, birth to 5 years old. Its year-round programs, which emphasize learning and social-emotional development, help children overcome the deficits placing them at risk of starting kindergarten unhealthy and unready to learn.

“It’s incredibly gratifying to have the U.S. Secretary of Education visit Oklahoma to dedicate our Educare center and to recognize Oklahoma as a national leader in early childhood education,” said Bob Ross, president and CEO of Inasmuch Foundation and chairman of Oklahoma City Educare. “We are thrilled that leaders in Oklahoma and around the nation hear our message loud and clear that success in life for low-income children requires starting early, at birth if possible, so that the children are ready for kindergarten. We are so proud to have led the effort to bring Educare to Oklahoma City and we thank our partners and donors for making it all possible.”

Oklahoma City Educare is the seventh Educare center in the nation. Tulsa has one opened Educare center and another under construction. Oklahoma is currently the only state with two opened centers.

Partners contributing to Oklahoma City Educare’s \$3.5 million annual operating budget include Sunbeam Family Services Early Head Start, Community Action Agency Head Start, Oklahoma City Public Schools and United Way of Central Oklahoma.

Oklahoma’s dedication to early childhood education was recently expanded by Gov. Brad Henry’s commitment of \$15 million of economic stimulus money to fund three high-quality early childhood education centers in Tulsa. The stimulus funds in Tulsa were matched by the George Kaiser Family Foundation.

“Years down the road, when these children enter college or land their first professional job, we know that Educare will have played a major role in their achievements,” Henry said. “Oklahomans have

always been passionate about helping their neighbors, and Oklahoma City Educare is a perfect example. We are excited about the momentum Oklahoma has in leading early education efforts, and we will continue to push for high-quality childhood education. It's simply too important to the future of our state.”

Early findings from research conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina show children who spent three to five years in the program at the first five Educare centers scored better on measures of vocabulary and possess social and emotional skills which meet or exceed national averages. Educare supporters want to open more centers and create a robust national research sample of children and families.

“Children enter the world thirsty for knowledge, ready to learn and this center quenches their thirst,” said Daniel Pedersen, president of the Omaha, Neb.-based Buffett Early Childhood Fund. “Investing in these young children is an investment in the future. Investing in Educare is a sure bet for Oklahoma.”

Oklahoma City Educare is the first center in the network to provide mental health services, such as play therapy, a diagnostic nursery and parent-child interactive therapy. The school includes eight infant and toddler classrooms, each with a capacity for eight children, and eight preschool classrooms, each with a capacity of 17, totaling 200 children. There are three teachers in each classroom and a master-level teacher providing support.

Oklahoma City Educare board members include representatives from Inasmuch Foundation, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Kirkpatrick Family Fund, George Kaiser Family Foundation, Potts Family Foundation, Sunbeam Family Services, Oklahoma City Public Schools, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Santa Fe South Charter High School.

About Oklahoma City Educare

Founded by Ounce of Prevention Fund in Chicago in 2000, Educare Centers are committed to helping young children grow up safe, healthy and eager to learn. Through a consortium of partners, Educare supporters create, provide and promote the highest quality outcome-based learning environments for families and their children (birth to five years) who are at-risk for school failure. Educare principles and practices are based on continual research and implementation within the field of early childhood education. The success of the children who enter this program will demonstrate the societal and economic value of investing in the earliest years in order to prevent the need for costly interventions later. For more information, visit www.okceducare.org.

Contacts:

Chad Previch
Saxum Public Relations
405.608.0445 or 405.487.9249
cprevich@saxumpr.com

Justin Hamilton, U.S. Department of Education
Deputy Press Secretary
202.205.0584
justin.hamilton@ed.gov