



For Immediate Release
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Early Learning Left Behind in Mississippi
Low-Level of State Investment in Health and Human Services Increases Cost of Public Education

JACKSON – While Mississippi spends a higher percentage of State funds on education than other states, a new multi-site study shows State spending on health and human services is half that of the other sites with spending on the early learning of children under three lags behind as well.

Mississippi's combined spending on the education of the State's population 23 years of age and younger accounted for 60.9 percent of general fund expenditures while the multi-site average was 44.9 percent. State spending on health and human services, on the other hand, accounted for 15.1 percent of general fund expenditures in Mississippi compared to the 29.2 percent average of all sites.

The average percentage of general fund expenditures for the public education of children six-to-eighteen years of age was 30.5 percent – virtually identical to the multi-site average of 29.2 percent of general funds expended on health and human services. This near equal average commitment of general funds is a sharp contrast to the 63 percent

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spending gap in Mississippi where 41.1 percent of general funds expenditures are for public education, a full 26 percent higher than the 30.5 percent multi-site average.

“Mississippi’s commitment to public education needs to reflect an understanding of the important role a child’s physical health and social-emotional development plays in school readiness and school success in addition to the critical early learning period from birth to age three,” said Jane Boykin, President of the Mississippi Forum on Children and Families, the State organization releasing the study in conjunction with the Child and Family Policy Center and Voices for America’s Children.

On a dollar-for-dollar basis, Mississippi’s total spending of local, state, and federal funds on public education, \$5,965.12, is lower than the multi-site average expenditure of \$7,889 cited in the report. However, on a per child basis, Mississippi spends more on the education of college-age youth 19-23 years of age and preschool-age children 3-5 years of age.

For every dollar invested in the education of a school-age child, the State invests 76.6 cents on the education of a college-age youth; 37.3 cents on the education of a preschool-age child; but invests only seven cents in the early learning of an infant or toddler. The multi-site average expenditures are significantly lower at 52.1 cents for a college-age youth and 21.3 cents for a preschool-age child.

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The State's 7.2 cent investment in the early learning infants and toddlers falls below the 8.9 cent site average. "The importance of the learning that takes place before a child's third birthday is hardly news," she said, "yet, Mississippi is relying on federal funds for all but \$16 of the \$429 the State spending on the early learning of children under three years of age. In fact," she continued, "the State depends heavily on federal funds for the education of our preschool-age children, three – to- five years old, and college-age youth, although not nearly to the extent that we're sticking our hands in our pockets when it comes to early learning."

According to Boykin, early learning does not mean early formal schooling. Her point is backed up by Nobel Prize winning economist James J. Heckman, Ph.D., the Henry Schultz Professor of Economics on the faculty of the University of Chicago. Heckman, noting the importance of the skills formation that takes place in infancy and the very early childhood years, said, "Significantly, this is a time when human ability and motivation are shaped by families and non-institutional environments...Formal or institutional education is only one aspect of the learning process." Heckman's recommendation for the wise use of available funds in an era of tight budgets is investment in the very young to improve basic learning and socialization skills.

Mississippi stands to gain more than most other states from an investment in the very young, Boykin said, because she considers so many of the State's problems are home-

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grown problems. “I’m convinced we are spending money on alternative schools, special and remedial education that would not be necessary if Mississippi invested heavily in families and the early learning of children during the very early childhood years,” she said.

“Make no mistake about it, change must come if we are ever going to realize the full return possible from any dollar spent on public education,” she continued, “however, the needed change in State spending can not happen over night. The shift should be a planned process that takes place over time,” she said, “but slicing the pie should start now- the size of the pie is a matter for others to decide.”

For additional information and complete report visit:

http://www.mfcf.org/early_learning

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Voices for America's Children is a national organization committed to speaking out for the well-being of children at the federal, state and local levels. Since 1984, Voices has supported child advocates in almost every state who have achieved public policy victories for children in the areas of early education, health, juvenile justice, child welfare and tax and budget, to name a few. Voices has 57 member organizations in 44 states.

The Child and Family Policy Center was established in 1989 by former Iowa legislator Charles Bruner, Ph.D. to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families, and to advocate for outcome-based policies to improve child well-being. The Center is active both statewide and nationally. In Iowa, the Child and Family Policy Center assists the state and communities in developing integrated, community-based, family-focused and results-accountable services, particularly for vulnerable children. CFPC also produces a variety of reports, case studies, concept papers, and technical assistance tools on systems reform and community building that are widely used across the United States.

The Forum on Children and Families is a Jackson based non-profit organization providing community resource development through education, information and training. For more information, contact the Forum office at 601-355-4911.