Statement on the Massachusetts FY14 State Budget, signed by Governor Patrick

Carolyn Lyons, President and Chief Executive Officer of Strategies for Children, issued the following statement on the FY14 Massachusetts state budget:

“The FY14 budget signed on Friday by Governor Patrick includes more than $26.5 million in new line items for early education and care. This increased state investment moves us closer to a system that provides access to high-quality early education for the children of Massachusetts. We thank the Governor and Legislature for acting on the mounting research that shows that investing in early education produces positive results for individual children and society, while being one of the most cost-effective uses of the public dollar.

Children’s ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade strongly predicts their chances of success in school and beyond. Yet nearly 40% of Massachusetts third graders—including 60% from low-income families—read below grade level. This achievement gap is evident long before children enter school, and we will not succeed in closing it unless we target resources to early learning. Too many children show up for school already behind. Too many of them will never catch up. Experts agree that high-quality early education has a lifetime impact on young learners in terms of greater academic readiness and improved social skills.

New funding in the FY14 budget includes $15 million to decrease the waitlist for early education and care for children from income eligible families, and $11.5 million to provide a modest increase in salaries for early educators. Additionally, this year’s budget maintained funding for universal pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, scholarships for early childhood educators, services for infants and parents, and increased funding for Head Start.

We look to FY15 with the anticipation that state leaders will continue reversing the 28% in funding cuts that early education and care has sustained since 2001. In addition, strategic and significant new investments will be needed in next year’s budget in order to ensure all children in Massachusetts get the strong start they need to succeed in school and in life.”

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