



# Early Childhood Education in Rockford:

## Tri-Annual Progress Report 2008

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Continuing Success for Preschoolers:** Rockford has made substantial progress toward the goal of ensuring that every family who qualifies has the opportunity to send their child to preschool:

- An estimated 3,500 three and four year olds in Rockford can be considered at risk for early school difficulties due to low family income, English language learning status, early developmental delay or disability, and/or other risk factors.
- In May, 2007, just over 3,000 children were enrolled in Head Start or RPS Early Childhood programs, or about 85% of at-risk children.
- Child Find, Rockford's single-point-of-entry system for enrolling in RPS Early Childhood and Head Start, is acknowledged as a model collaboration.
- Both RPS Early Childhood and Head Start have demonstrated impressive success in preparing children for success as they enter school.
- Great strides have been made in developing programs that help local teachers obtain their Early Childhood teaching certification, ensuring that teachers will be available to provide high quality early care and education as the system continues to expand in Rockford.

**Critical Lack of Services for Infants and Toddlers:** Research has shown that the best way to ensure that children are well-prepared for school is to start very early, working with infants, toddlers and their families. Evidence-based program models including intensive home visiting programs and center-based programs coupled with strong family support services have been shown to place children on a positive trajectory toward success. Unfortunately, in Rockford, fewer than one in nine at-risk infants and toddlers can be served by existing programs. Significant expansion of these programs, and development of new programs such as Early Head Start, are desperately needed, as are quality enhancement initiatives for existing birth to three child care services.

**Focus for the Future:** The Rockford Early Learning Council will continue to work toward its goal of providing high-quality, comprehensive early childhood services to all children who qualify. Areas to be addressed include:

- Building capacity for serving infants and toddlers and their families by expanding existing evidence-based programs, creating new programs, and strengthening the quality of existing child care services.
- Continue to expand preschool services by applying for additional Preschool for All funds and securing appropriate facilities for additional preschool classes.
- Improving data systems for early care and education programs, so that the Rockford Early Learning Council can collect and analyze a common set of data across programs. This will allow for greater collaboration in program improvement efforts, such as staff training and curriculum development.
- Overcoming barriers to collaboration among Head Start, RPS, child care providers, and other providers of services to young children and their families, including regulatory barriers. Enhancing Communication by developing a web site that will provide information about all of the early childhood education and care programs in the community, as well as provide parents and community members with information about the importance of early learning. Focused communication strategies for reaching out to parents, public officials, and business leaders to let them know about early learning in Rockford will also be developed and implemented.

*"As we move toward our goal of providing high quality early learning services to all children and their families in Rockford, we need to maximize our resources by working together."*

Marcia Blascoe  
Director

Rockford Early Childhood Program