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\$16.5M FEDERAL GRANT TO FUND OHIO STATE-LED PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN

December 16, 2014, Columbus, Ohio – The Ohio State University was named the recipient of a \$16.5 million grant to establish an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership to ensure low-income children in Columbus receive a healthy and enriching start. The funding, announced at a press conference at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ push to expand the Head Start program by 25 percent nationwide. U.S. Representative Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio, and Dr. Michael V. Drake, President of The Ohio State University (OSU) were among those who spoke at the press conference.

The Ohio State University will lead a coalition of social-service agencies to provide early-education programs for infants through age three. The unique program is made possible by a \$16.5 million federal grant in which OSU will receive \$2.7 million in each of the next five years. Matching dollars from grant partners will elevate the funding to \$3.3 million annually. This initiative will support education, health, and community programming for children and families living in Franklinton, Hilltop, South Linden, Near East, Near South, Far South and University District neighborhoods throughout Columbus.

OSU’s Schoenbaum Family Center, located in Weinland Park, will add 160 children to the program each year, utilizing research-based practices to identify resources and collaborate with select organizations. This will improve the education and well-being of infants and toddlers in the targeted neighborhoods where the child poverty rate is higher than the Columbus average. Many of these households are single-parent families, earning an average income of less than \$800 per month.

“Ninety percent of a child’s brain is developed by age 3, so what happens in those first 1,000 days and hours is critical in terms of optimizing the potential of every child” said Jane Wiechel, Director of Community Services and Programs at the Schoenbaum Family Center. The Schoenbaum Center, part of OSU’s College of Education and Human Ecology, was instrumental in writing the grant proposal and compiling community resources to make the grant possible.

Children in the program will be assessed to see what additional services are needed to create family stability and have at-risk children prepared for kindergarten. Those in need will be provided assistance by an extensive network of program partners, including Nationwide Children’s Hospital, Columbus Public Health, Community Properties of Ohio (CPO Management), Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities and Children First, among others. Services will support the partnership, lending medical expertise, nutrition education, early intervention development and disability services, safe and affordable housing, adult education, job training, and behavioral support.

CPO Management provides subsidized and affordable housing throughout each of the neighborhoods served by the grant. CPO will hire four full-time Family Advocates who will recruit families and support them to meet their needs throughout their time in Early Head Start. CPO will also hire one Family Services Manager to oversee recruitment, enrollment, and retention.

Stable housing itself is a platform for improved education outcomes for children. Isabel Toth, President of CPO, spoke at the press conference joined by Shanice Bays and her daughter, current CPO residents who will benefit from this opportunity. "Everyone knows that families living in subsidized housing struggle to meet daily needs. What fewer people know is that many of these families really want to make their lives better – if not for themselves, then at least for their children," said Toth.

She explained that lack of childcare is one of the greatest barriers for CPO and other low-income parents trying to move forward in their lives. Public childcare subsidies are not available until parents actually become employed or when children start school. It is a reality that many low-income families go from one job to another or are between jobs and schools; therefore many parents may not qualify for childcare assistance even if quality childcare is available.

"Yes, low-income families truly care about quality. Like any parent, they want the best for their children" said Toth. "This opportunity means that babies and toddlers will have continuous early childhood learning as their parents take positive steps forward in their lives through employment and education. We are thrilled to be a partner in this game-changing program, which will improve the lives of our residents and potentially the lives of the next generation."

"My proudest days as a representative in Congress are when I get to come home and stand here and tell you that through your support and partnership, we can make a difference for children, for their families and for the future," said U.S. Representative Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio.

"This is all about us learning, learning to do better and be better together, and I can think of no higher purpose for the common good," said Ohio State President Michael V. Drake. "We vow to commit precious resources to give these families the advantages that some in other zip codes may take for granted. Ohio State is proud to be leading a vibrant coalition of partners to make this happen."

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