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**EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF MIAMI-DADE/MONROE REPORTS CHILD ENROLLMENT IN
VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN UP IN 2009, AIMS FOR 20,000 ENROLLED IN 2010**

***In the Wake of Recent State Budget Cuts, Coalition Reports Unprecedented Numbers of Children
Benefitting from School Readiness Programs, Yet Thousands More Still In Need***

MIAMI, February 16, 2010 - The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, dedicated to ensuring quality early education and lifelong success for every child, marks the start of 2010 with a renewed focus and commitment to increasing the number of children it serves. Specifically, the Coalition seeks to increase awareness and enrollment in the voluntary pre-kindergarten programs among four-year-olds throughout the county this year to 20,000.

Statistics show that nearly 90% of children enrolled in Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) programs are better prepared to enter school. Since 2005-2006, the Coalition has made great strides in increasing VPK enrollment among four-year-olds throughout the county. In addition to steadily increasing the number of approved and certified VPK providers to close to 900, up from 750 in 2005-2006, the Coalition has enrolled more than 72,000 four-year-olds in VPK between 2005 and 2009.

A challenged economy, however, has put added pressure on families and the Miami population – already the third poorest major city in the U.S. In addition, VPK funding at the state level has also been reduced.

“It’s been proven, the early years are the learning years,” said Evelio C. Torres, president/CEO, Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe. “The Coalition is here to make sure children are set up to succeed by getting them ready to enter school.

In 2010, the Coalition’s goals are to continue to prepare children to enter school, promote children’s literacy and maximize the number of children served by early learning providers. To achieve those goals for 2010, The Coalition seeks to reach more parents and families on the importance of early learning and the resources

available, while it educates and informs the community at large about the positive short- and long-term returns gained by quality care and early education for children. These returns include*:

- **Increased Self-sufficiency of Families.** Access to child care programs helps families become self-sufficient through employment and education
- **Economic Returns.** Every \$1 invested in early learning programs returns \$16
- **Decreases in Crime.** For every child that participates in a quality preschool program, a community saves more than \$70,000 in reduced future youth crime
- **Decreases in Employee Absences.** For businesses, employee absences due to lack of available child care costs U.S. business \$3 billion a year.

With the support of its providers, partners and the community, the Early Learning Coalition is confident in its ability to further its mission in 2010. The Coalition has already achieved a marked impact in early childhood learning in Miami-Dade/Monroe counties by increasing the number of high-performing early learning center providers, introducing a five-star rating system for early education programs, providing quality materials and curricula to providers, and implementing a partnership model that has enhanced the Coalition's services to children, families and providers by aligning with other agencies and the public school system to leverage resources and expertise, and extend the Coalition's reach, quality and efficiency.

About the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe

The mission of the Early Learning Coalition is to promote high-quality school readiness, voluntary pre-kindergarten and after school programs, thus increasing all children's chances of achieving future educational success and becoming productive members of society. The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe is one of 31 similar organizations in the state of Florida. It is the state's largest and most diverse, serving more than 50,000 children from birth to age 12. The Coalition's programs consist of School Readiness, Voluntary Pre-kindergarten, Child Care Resource and Referral Services, Assessment and Inclusion programs, and Quality Initiatives. Across all of its programs, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe has served more than 142,000 children between 2005 and 2009.

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*Statistics noted throughout were referenced from the following sources:

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