

Minneapolis (Jan. 20, 2009) – With the Minnesota state legislature back in session and facing a significant deficit, community organizers are working to ensure that budget cuts do not adversely affect families most in need. A projected state budget shortfall of more than \$4 billion means that many in the nonprofit sector are bracing for funding cuts that help provide essential services to Minnesota families from child care support and early education to housing subsidies.

Over the last decade, state budget cuts have dramatically impacted early childhood education funding. Today, many children and families are unable to access education that builds the foundation for future learning. To help raise awareness, the YWCA of Minneapolis organized more than 200 children, teachers and advocates to march in support of high-quality early childhood education on Friday, Jan. 16. Cold temperatures brought the march indoors, but the message of “Early Start, Strong Finish” was chanted loud and clear by the children.

“The YWCA of Minneapolis believes in access to early childhood education for all children in Minnesota,” says Becky Roloff, CEO of the YWCA of Minneapolis. “Early childhood education is linked to success in school and ensures that parents who depend on child care to work can stay employed. Early education is a critical piece of the foundation for a strong Minnesota economy.”

Roloff was joined by Todd Otis, president of Ready 4 K, and Susie Brown, executive director of Child Care Works. Together, the organizations are committed to making early childhood education a priority and hope to avoid budget cuts to the state childcare assistance program.

“The early care and education program at the YWCA of Minneapolis is among the very best in our state. The children who get to experience that kind of quality early learning are on a path toward success in school and in life,” shared Otis. “Quality early learning is the best stock in Minnesota’s portfolio of publicly supported programs. We need to fight cuts to this kind of quality programming.” Added Brown, “We’re working hard to ensure that all families have access to affordable, quality early care and education.”

The YWCA of Minneapolis is hosting a panel discussion on early childhood education and women’s rights on Jan. 28 at noon at the Downtown YWCA. The Twin Cities community is encouraged to show its support by asking legislators to make early childhood education a priority.

“We hope the legislature hears the voices of these children and families so they know how important quality early learning is for Minnesota,” said Roloff. “In today’s tough economic times, the smartest investment the people of Minnesota can make is in the education of our children.”

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Photo caption: Preschool-age children at the YWCA Downtown Children’s Center stand with (L. to R.) Susie Brown, Child Care Works; Becky Roloff, YWCA of Minneapolis; and Todd Otis, Ready 4 K as they recognized Early Childhood Education Awareness Month at the YWCA of Minneapolis.