

Minneapolis (January 15, 2010) – On Friday, January 15th, nearly 300 children, teachers, parents and advocates marched in support of early childhood education awareness month at the YWCA of Minneapolis. Pre-school children, toddlers and babies in strollers were bundled up to march outside and enjoy unseasonably warm winter temperatures. Dressed in bright orange, children and teachers chanted “early start, strong finish” up and down Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis.

“Without quality early childhood education, Minnesota can never be what we all want – a state that prospers,” says Becky Roloff. “Parents just want a quality education for their children, and we don’t deny parents education for their children if their child is a fourth grader. But if that child is 3 or 4 years old, and their parent cannot afford it, they do not have access to quality early childhood education. We want this state to remain great, and for every child to have the opportunity to succeed with their education.”

At a press conference before the march, advocates spoke about the importance of the upcoming legislative session. “This is a hugely important election year, because we will be electing the whole legislature and a new governor. The resources and commitment we need to ensure all children get access to quality early childhood education are in play in 2010,” said Todd Otis, President of Ready 4 K. “I strongly encourage everyone to contact legislators and the candidates running for office this year and encourage them to act and support early childhood education.”

Otis was joined by James Carlson, Child Care WORKS Director of Public Policy. “We support a call to action for all parents, community members and folks in every community to let their legislators know the importance of early childhood education,” said James. “In spite of the budget challenges this year, it is crucial to fund early childhood education so that more children in Minnesota can have access to quality education.”

Children who access quality early education before starting school are more likely to do well in school and have greater opportunities in the future. Currently, state childcare subsidies are underfunded and many working families can not afford quality childcare for their children. As a state, we have the third most expensive childcare for preschool childcare in the country. Advocacy groups hope for more support for families most in need.

Marches took place at three YWCA Children’s Centers in Minneapolis. Other activities during the month include a YWCA family dinner and advocacy training that connects parents with their elected officials. The public is also invited to attend a panel discussion on January 20th addressing early childhood education and racial equality. The panel will include experts from the Institute on Race and Poverty.

Awareness month activities bring attention to an issue faced by many Minnesota parents. The voices of their marching children reminded us of the importance of an early start, so that we can help everyone in Minnesota finish strong.

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