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NEWS RELEASE

JACK O'CONNELL
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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**State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Announces
Signing of Important Preschool Bills**

SACRAMENTO — State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today applauded Governor Schwarzenegger for signing two vital pieces of legislation that will improve the delivery of preschool services to California's children: Assembly Bill 2759 by Assembly Member Dave Jones and Senate Bill 1629 by Senator Darrell Steinberg.

These two measures, originally recommended by Superintendent O'Connell's P-16 Council as part of a comprehensive approach to closing the achievement gap, were co-sponsored by O'Connell and early education advocates including Children Now, Preschool California, and the California Child Development Administrators Association (CCDAA).

"Ensuring access for our children to the highest quality preschool experience possible is an absolutely imperative," O'Connell said. "The single most daunting challenge facing public education in our state today is the achievement gap. Providing high quality preschool is key to closing this gap and ensuring that all children learn at the high levels we know they can. I was so proud to co-sponsor these bills with true champions for children: Preschool California, Children Now, and the Child Development Administrators Association. I applaud Senator Steinberg and Assembly Member Jones for recognizing the critical importance of early childhood education and for their leadership on these bills. Finally, I want to thank my P-16 Council for their original vision and ongoing commitment to the belief that any effort to close the achievement gap in the state of California must begin with high quality preschool."

"Children deserve and need quality preschool and early education programs," Assembly Member Jones said. "Doctors, parents, child development specialists, and teachers agree that children benefit greatly from quality preschool and early education programs. AB 2759 helps to reduce administrative costs and burdens and allows funding to get to where it's most needed – to provide more quality preschool and early childhood education programs to children most in need."

"If we want all California children to have a chance to succeed in school, we need to make sure that the neediest children get high-quality preschool," Senator Steinberg said. "SB 1629 will create the roadmap for transforming our preschool programs into the high-quality experience our children deserve."

During his State of Education Address earlier this year, O'Connell laid out a comprehensive plan for closing the achievement gap that focuses on four major thematic areas: access, culture and climate, expectations, and strategies. The centerpiece of the access component – AB 2759 and SB 1629 – are designed to improve access to quality preschool for all children.

"The passage of SB 1629 and AB 2759 will establish a framework for a high quality, efficient early learning system," said Children Now President Ted Lempert. "Both of these bills are fiscally responsible efforts that will ensure state investments prepare our youngest children for success in kindergarten and beyond."

AB 2759 consolidates and reforms the existing five child development programs for preschool-aged children: State Preschool, Full-Day State Preschool, Prekindergarten and Family Literacy, Prekindergarten and Family Literacy Full-Day, and General Child Care and Development Programs to create the California State Preschool Program. This new law also streamlines the administration of programs providing services to three- and four-year-olds, combines statutory and regulatory requirements for the programs, and ensures that children receive either part-day or full-day child development services based on the needs of the family.

SB 1629 establishes a commission to create a state Early Learning Quality Improvement System, which will develop a framework for improving the quality of early education programs. This includes a quality rating scale to help parents make informed decisions about programs for their children, and a graduated funding model to help existing and future programs reach and maintain higher levels of quality.

"High-quality preschool is a first step in education reform," said Preschool California President Catherine Atkin. "These bills will lay the groundwork for a future when all of California's children, especially those who need it most, have access to high-quality preschool."

"The California Child Development Administrators Association hails the Governor's signature on AB 2759 and SB 1629 as a major step forward for the children of California," said CCDAA Executive Director Nina Buthee. "These bills will significantly assist local child development programs in helping children and parents."

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