



For IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday November 2, 2009

Contact: Jean M. Garratt
jeangarratt@livingstonesa.org

Budget cuts threaten to close preschool door on Livingston County children

*State lawmakers hand parents tough choice:
Pay for private pre-K, go without or stop working*

Howell, Mich. – Livingston County parents are scrambling to find alternatives for their children, now that LESA Great Start Readiness Program is among a number of high-quality, licensed preschool programs statewide to have their funding cut to the tune of \$476,000 by the Michigan Legislature.

Last week, the Michigan Department of Education released the list of not-for-profit preschools participating in the Great Start Readiness Competitive grant program lawmakers failed to fund in the 2010 state budget. Some 2,200 children and their families are affected statewide, including 140 children and their families in Livingston County.

“This is devastating news for families trying to make sure their children have the best possible start in school,” said Jean Garratt, Director of LESA Early Childhood Programs. “It’s difficult to imagine why state lawmakers would cut a

program providing a foundation children need to succeed not only in kindergarten, but right through middle school, high school and beyond. The cuts are short-sighted and a crushing blow to these children.”

Parents understand the value of a quality preschool experience and are struggling to find affordable learning opportunities to replace this program. “I signed my child up for the Hartland Great Start Readiness Program because I knew this was a quality preschool. Now, sadly because of the economy, I cannot afford to send my daughter to a preschool program and I feel she is really losing out on this educational experience”, said Agnes Bell. Another parent reported she had to drop out of her college classes because the preschool program closed. Her son was to attend the Readiness Program while she was in school.

The impact will be long term as one in three Michigan kindergarten students starts school unprepared according to 2009 research. Kindergarten teachers found “Not participating in a preschool program at age 4” to be a main factor in unpreparedness. Studies also show costs to the K-12 education system snowball when the state cuts funding for early education. “These 4-year-olds soon become kindergartners and their unreadiness costs districts millions of dollars more due to increased grade retention, special education, teacher turnover and remediation services,” said Jessica Gillard, a specialist in early education for the Early Childhood Investment Corp. in Lansing.