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**WASHINGTON'S FIRST "THRIVE COMMUNITY" SET TO PROVIDE
EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN BIRTH TO 5**
**White Center Early Learning Initiative Kicks Off with \$11.7 Million in
Funding for Services and Capital**

SEATTLE – A first-of-its-kind community partnership will significantly expand early learning opportunities to children from birth to 5 in the south King County neighborhood of White Center. Funded by two grants—\$4.7 million from Thrive by Five Washington and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for expanded early learning options for families with young children, and \$7 million from the Gates Foundation for the construction of an early learning community center—the White Center Early Learning Initiative will provide parents and caregivers with education and support to help ensure that all children in the community begin school ready to succeed.

White Center and Yakima County are two communities selected more than a year ago to design comprehensive early learning networks for children ages birth to 5. Plans for Yakima will be announced later this spring. Created in 2006, Thrive by Five Washington is a champion for early learning improvement and is funded by a diverse group of public, private, and philanthropic partners.

"One of my priorities is to help ensure that children get the support they need to succeed in school and in life," said Gov. Chris Gregoire, co-chair of the Thrive by Five Washington board of directors. "This innovative partnership is helping to make best practices in early learning a reality."

The White Center Early Learning Initiative has spent more than 18 months convening local stakeholder groups and developing business plans to make positive early learning opportunities—whether at home or in child care centers—available to families in their community. These grants will fund the first phase of those plans beginning in 2008. Funding will be jointly administered by the Puget Sound Educational Service District, Child Care Resources of King County, and Public Health – Seattle & King County.

"I want to commend the hard work and dedication exhibited by the White Center community," said Graciela Italiano-Thomas, president and CEO of the public-private partnership Thrive by Five Washington. "The partnership between the community, public agencies, and private caregivers will be critical to meeting the unique needs of families in White Center and sustaining this groundbreaking model. Your efforts will enrich the lives of thousands of children and prepare them for success in school and life."

Funding for services will support the development of a continuum of programs aimed at children from birth to 5, their parents, and caregivers, including: outreach services to pregnant and post-partum women through the Community Doula program, which pairs new mothers with trained women who provide emotional support and guidance; nurse home visitation for expectant families through their children's first years; play and learn groups for toddlers; and literacy resources for parents. Existing Head Start centers will receive grants to improve teacher qualifications and program quality. In addition, grant funds will enhance the learning environments of licensed child

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care centers, preschools, and family child care homes in the White Center and Boulevard Park neighborhoods through professional development for staff and a quality rating and improvement system that will make better information available to parents.

“Providing engaging, positive early learning environments for young children is one of the smartest investments we can make in the future,” said Bill Gates Sr., co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Thrive by Five Washington board of directors. “We will be watching the White Center community as they show us what is possible when we help all children thrive.”

The planned Greenbridge Early Learning Center will serve as a headquarters for education and outreach services in the community. Funds for construction will come from Thrive by Five, federal tax credits, and other public and private sources, including \$2 million in state support proposed by Gov. Gregoire. Based on the Educare model first developed in Chicago, the center will include space for parenting classes and preschool programs taught by credentialed instructors. Construction on the Greenbridge Early Learning Center is expected to begin in mid-2008.

Located in unincorporated south King County between West Seattle and Burien, White Center is one of the most diverse communities in the state with 32,000 residents who collectively speak more than 70 languages. With an active network of civic and cultural organizations, the White Center community has strong social capital, yet one in five children below the age of 5 lives in poverty. In addition, just 17.2 percent of fourth grade students at White Center Heights Elementary passed all three sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in 2007.

The White Center Early Learning Initiative marks the next step in Thrive by Five Washington’s efforts to improve the state’s early learning infrastructure. Today, as many as half of kindergarteners in the state begin school without the basic skills they need, such as the ability to recognize shapes and colors. Researchers have found that gaps present at kindergarten grow wider as children advance and that kids who start out behind often stay behind. According to a 2006 survey by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University, Washington state ranks 28th in the nation in the percentage of 4-year-olds who have access to preschool.

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Thrive by Five Washington

Thrive by Five is a champion for early learning improvement whose goal is for every child, from birth to five, to experience positive, early learning environments. Thrive by Five partners with parents, communities, philanthropic organizations, business, and government to develop a sustainable system for statewide, early learning improvement—strengthening families and ensuring that children in Washington are ready to succeed in school and thrive in life.

www.thrivebyfivewa.org

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.