



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Historic Kindergarten Registration Agreement Among Ten Regional School Systems Announced Today**

RICHMOND, VA [January 20, 2011] – For the first time in history, the counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent and Powhatan and the cities of Colonial Heights, Petersburg and Richmond will have a common date for kindergarten registration: April 7, 2011.

Every year children who will be 5 years old by September 30 are eligible to enter kindergarten in the fall. However, until now there was no consistent channel of communication to let the parents know when to register and no common date for the mass media to broadcast. Today marks the launch of a joint communication campaign involving the region's school systems and Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond to increase awareness that on-time kindergarten registration helps the school systems plan for attendance, but more importantly helps the child enter school ready to succeed.

Among the localities included in this agreement, it is estimated that in excess of 4,000 kindergarteners did not register on time in the 2010/2011 school year. Registering late sometimes causes attendance delays for the child, who then misses important orientation during the first few weeks of school. On-time registration also gives the school a chance to give the parent important information about events and activities that will help their child feel comfortable when school starts. A health exam is required in order to attend school and sometimes this exam identifies developmental delays or the need for vision or hearing correction. Early identification of special needs and making sure a child is healthy can prevent the child from experiencing problems in the classroom.

“We believe that by acting together throughout the region, rather than separately, we can create greater awareness of school readiness as well as the need for on-time registration,” said Thomas N. Chewning, Chairman of Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond. “If parents wait until the summer before school starts to begin planning for their child's first day in kindergarten, then it's a scramble – both to gather the paperwork and to make sure the child has the necessary skills to be successful in school.”

In addition, parents and caregivers need to know that school readiness is more than just registering children for school. One in 7 children in the Richmond region enters kindergarten already behind in language and literacy skills. School readiness is about children being prepared academically, emotionally, physically and socially to enter kindergarten ready to succeed. This preparation needs to begin long before a child reaches a classroom. In fact, children begin acquiring cognitive, motor and social skills rapidly from the moment of birth.

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“Parents, including expectant parents, need to know they are the first and most important teachers for their children,” said Barbara Couto Sipe, Director of Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond and Vice President of Community Impact for the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg. “Research tells us that much of the brain’s structure and function are developed by the time a child reaches the age of 3.”

The 10 school systems involved in the joint kindergarten registration day came together under Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond to plan and advertise the April 7 registration date. Promoting the enrollment of the region’s nearly 12,000 incoming kindergartners and developing a regional definition of school readiness are among the priority strategies in Smart Beginnings’ *Regional Plan for Children’s School Readiness*.

Published in May 2010, the *Regional Plan* represents the community’s consensus on what it will take to achieve school readiness for all of the region’s young children. Through Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond, more than 100 public and private organizations, agencies and businesses are putting the plan in motion.

For more information about kindergarten registration go to [www.readychildren.net](http://www.readychildren.net) or dial 2-1-1. When you call 2-1-1 you will be connected to a trained professional who can provide information and referrals.

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*Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond, facilitated by the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg and the Greater Richmond Chamber, is a coalition of public and private organizations, businesses, and citizens working together to ensure that the region’s children enter school healthy, well-cared for, and ready to succeed in school and in life. It operates on the premise that when children have quality early childhood experiences, the whole community benefits.*