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Education group awarded grant

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A local group that helps prepare children for school received a \$100,000 grant Tuesday.

"The die gets cast very early," said Mark Giles, member of the leadership council for Smart Beginnings, the grant recipient. "By the third, fourth or fifth grade, you can see who came into kindergarten ready or not. The data is that stark."

Smart Beginnings is the offspring of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Partnership for Children. It was originally funded by a grant from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and private and public contributors.

Tuesday, the foundation gave the group a two-year, \$100,000 grant. The group was one of two statewide to get \$100,000 contributions.

The money comes from a mix of philanthropic and state contributions, said Scott L. Hippert, foundation president.

Officials said the grant is designed to encourage dona-

tions of matching funds.

"We're doing it because so much good work in the area of school readiness of young children has been done in this area," Hippert said.

Hippert said the local Smart Beginnings program could be a model for other programs throughout the state.

Eric S. Johnson, also of the Smart Beginnings leadership council, said the group has worked to help children and parents.

It has created a star-based ranking system for nursery schools and daycares, and has given \$15,000 in grants to help improve such centers, he said.

The group has also surveyed local employees about the importance of childcare and helped hundreds of families in a variety of ways, he said.

Del. David Toscano, D-Charlottesville; Charlottesville Mayor Dave Norris; and Albemarle County schools Superintendent Pamela Moran also attended the grant announcement.