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United Way
Thomas Jefferson Area

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subject: Smart Beginnings Initiative Releases Local Report on State of School Readiness

CHARLOTTESVILLE -- A child's readiness to start school greatly affects his or her later success in life. Smart Beginnings, an initiative of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Partnership for Children, has released the first report on the state of local school readiness in Charlottesville and Albemarle. *Ready for Kindergarten: The State of Local School Readiness in Charlottesville and Albemarle* provides new data on children's early learning experiences and impact on school performance. It addresses the impact of school readiness on the local economy, education, family, workforce and community. The report is the result of a 10 month effort of the Smart Beginnings Leadership Council work group, led by Mike Chinn, president of SNL Financial, in partnership with the Charlottesville and Albemarle public school districts.

Many children that start behind in school, stay behind. In 2007, 160 children – 19% in Charlottesville and 9% in Albemarle, - entered kindergarten in need of additional academic assistance. Smart Beginnings' initial analysis of local school readiness data and services has found that:

- Early learning program experiences prior to kindergarten correlated strongly with an increase in language and literacy readiness for economically disadvantaged children.
- For disadvantaged children living in Charlottesville's subsidized neighborhoods, the rate of public preschool program enrollment varies greatly, from 50 to 100%.
- High quality child care is limited. Only four local child care centers and preschools are nationally accredited.
- Child care issues have a significant impact on the workplace.

The work group's recommendations for our community include:

- Increasing the quality and accessibility of child care and family support services.
- Improving the community's ability to measure school readiness and increasing program accountability through enhanced data analysis and reporting.
- Strengthening collaborative partnerships among private and public entities, in order to enhance the efficiency of services and maximize resources.
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“This comprehensive school readiness report issued by the Smart Beginnings coalition serving Charlottesville and Albemarle County will provide a strong model for all of the Smart Beginnings initiatives throughout the Commonwealth,” said Scott L. Hippert, President of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. “We applaud this coalition’s impressive work to study and analyze early childhood education programs and services in Charlottesville and Albemarle County. The detailed results and recommendations have illuminated the long-term impact of school readiness on every aspect of the community. Thousands of young children around the state will ultimately benefit from this significant report, which has raised the bar on how to gather and share information about the importance of providing high-quality childcare and preschool education.”

The full report, *Ready for Kindergarten: The State of Local School Readiness in Charlottesville and Albemarle* is available at www.SmartBeginningsInfo.org.

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Smart Beginnings is an initiative of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Partnership for Children, and was funded through a major grant from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) and public and private contributions. The United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area serves as the grant manager and fiscal agent. Our local Smart Beginnings initiative is one of twenty public/private Smart Beginnings collaboratives working to increase school readiness in Virginia. For more information visit www.SmartBeginningsInfo.org or call Miriam Rushfinn, Smart Beginnings Director, at 434-972-1702.