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***Smart Investing* Initiative Asks: What do North Carolinians Want for Their Children and the State?**

DURHAM, N.C. — Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, together with the **North Carolina Partnership for Children** announced plans to hold a public engagement forum with key Durham leaders to obtain input on investments and issues affecting our state's youngest children.

The Regional Forum, to be held Dec. 1 in Rocky Mount, is part of a new statewide public engagement initiative titled ***Smart Investing: Communities Thrive When Children Thrive*** to establish what North Carolina communities want for their youngest children and the future of the state. Funded by the **Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation** and with participation from **Lt. Governor Walter Dalton** and **Smart Start**, ***Smart Investing*** brings together a diverse mix of residents to begin a new dialogue about early education and children's health in North Carolina.

Smart Start's 77 partnerships—which includes **Durham's Partnership for Children**—are leveraging their networks to assemble local parents, business leaders, health care providers, education professionals and policy makers representing every county in the state. In Durham County, more than 10 leaders from the business community, higher education, city and county government, Durham Public Schools and the faith community will participate in the Smart Investing Regional Forum on Dec. 1. In March, Durham will host a Regional Summit as part of this effort to determine children's needs in every region and the state as a whole.

"I know times are tough, but it's critical that we invest in our children because they are the future of this state," said Lt. Governor Walter Dalton. "This initiative represents a wonderful opportunity to get North Carolina citizens more engaged and involved in issues affecting young children and to strengthen our communities at the same time."

Marsha Basloe, Executive Director of the Partnership, said the Durham delegation encompasses a range of engaged civic and business leaders across various sectors, some who are new to the issues affecting early childhood. "It was important for this initiative to tap the involvement of a wide cross-section of county leadership that could look at the myriad of issues affecting young children and their families with fresh eyes," Basloe said. "Durham is known as a diverse and civically-involved community and I think our delegation's involvement in this initiative will be a critical component to establishing policy for young children and their families across the state."

About Smart Start Investing

Smart Start Investing is North Carolina's early childhood leadership network dedicated to assuring that every child reaches his or her potential and is prepared for success in a global community. For more information, visit www.ncsmartstart.org and www.smartinvestingnc.org

About Durham's Partnership for Children

Durham's Partnership for Children celebrates 15 years making young children a priority. Founded in 1994 and first funded in 1995 to administer the Smart Start grant in Durham County, the Partnership works as an independent, local nonprofit that serves young children birth to age 5 and their families under North Carolina's nationally recognized initiative to ensure all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. For 15 years, the Partnership has helped working parents pay for child care, improve the quality of child care and provided health and family support services to thousands of Durham County families with young children. The Partnership works to achieve its mission: *To mobilize and unify the Durham community to create and support innovative and successful approaches to serving the needs of children birth to age 5 and their families*, by working with funded partners and mobilizing groups and organizations in Durham County to support and coordinate efforts impacting young children and their families. The Partnership also administers the More at Four Program in Durham County serving more than 400 children. For more information about Durham's Partnership for Children, visit www.dpfc.net or call 919-403-6960 x221.