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Contact: Scott Varner, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-6638 or 614/554-9089
or Hanna Greer, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-5848
or Kermit Whitfield, United Way of Central Ohio, 614/227-2726

County Commissioners and United Way Expand Free Learning Checkups to More Preschoolers in Franklin County

Striving to increase the early detection of developmental delays in children ages two-and-a-half to four years old - and give more of these children the skills to succeed in school and life - Franklin County Commissioners and the United Way of Central Ohio are expanding a groundbreaking program to offer free learning checkups to area preschoolers.

A first of its kind in the nation, the "Columbus Kids - Ready, Set, Learn" program offers parents easy tools to screen preschoolers for potential learning obstacles, such as speech, hearing and vision problems, prior to entering kindergarten.

With a new investment of \$250,000 this year from the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services, United Way is expanding the free program to the Hilltop and West side neighborhoods of Columbus, offering screening kits to more children and providing more parents with teaching resources.

Since its inception in 2010, Columbus Kids has given Learning Checkups to nearly 5,000 preschoolers in target areas of the Columbus City Schools system and helped families find health care and remedial services for their children.

"Franklin County's children are truly our hope for the future, and we want all of our children to be ready to learn from the first day of school," said Franklin County Commissioner President Paula Brooks. "This program brings together parents and early learning professionals to identify both the strengths and the potential developmental delays among preschoolers. Through this new investment, we can bring this innovative effort to more families and to our next generation of young residents."

"It's important to find and address learning issues and challenges when our children are only two or three years old," added Commissioner Marilyn Brown. "Doing so helps make certain that they are not starting kindergarten already behind their classmates. This tool helps more of our County's young residents enter school prepared and ready to learn."

"The success of this program comes from engaging parents in a very hands-on way to assess their child's development," said Commissioner John O'Grady. "Parents are given the tools to determine their children's skills and abilities. Counselors stay connected and serve as an ongoing resource, helping these parents track their children's progress and get them ready for kindergarten."

"The Franklin County Commissioners understand just how important ensuring our children receive a high quality early education is to the future of our community," said Janet E. Jackson, President and CEO, United Way of Central Ohio. "And their ongoing investments in Columbus Kids will help to keep this groundbreaking program going strong."

Franklin County Commissioners approved the investment of \$250,000 into the Columbus Kids program earlier this year. Outreach to the targeted areas of the Hilltop and West side is already underway.

Part of the grant from Franklin County is funding the distribution of fine motor development kits which build dexterity in children - essential for writing and keyboarding. These simple kits help children build the coordination necessary to successfully master these skills.

Columbus Kids is funded by Franklin County, the City of Columbus, Columbus City Schools, and a number of private-sector foundations and individual donors.

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