



[Return To Main Blog Page](#)

Tuesday, December 9, 2008

Organizers expand preschool access campaign citywide

Saturday was snowy, windy and cold, but that didn't stop 50 people—mostly African American and Latino moms and grandmas—from braving the blustery conditions to attend a town hall meeting to talk about early learning for young children.

The meeting, held in an office building near Ashland and Van Buren, was hosted by community organizers Power-Pac and COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues).

Both groups have recently experienced success in getting more children enrolled in preschools in Englewood, where seats had been empty, and they were looking to expand their efforts citywide to other communities where preschools were underutilized.

“There are still some major steps to take,” says COFI organizer Kellie Magnuson. “This was a beginning step.”

Though most of those attending the meeting were affiliated with Power-Pac's efforts in Englewood, a few newcomers were on the scene from Austin, Little Village, Humboldt Park, West Town, South Shore and Cabrini Green, a mixed bag of communities where preschool programs are either underutilized or overcrowded.

Organizers polled meeting participants about whether they thought the strategies used to enroll more children in Englewood preschools—such as home visits, free transportation to preschool centers, flexible preschool scheduling—could work in other communities. Transportation wound up the top priority.

Also on the agenda: Highlights on work coming out of the Illinois Early Learning Council, a group that was created two years ago to promote and expand the state's universal preschool program. Rashanda Perryman of the Ounce of Prevention Fund noted a few victories, particularly a \$1.8 million federal grant to the state to provide young children with early learning opportunities through home visits, a model that expands preschool access to hard-to-reach families.

Coming soon: Power-Pac's next citywide meeting on Jan. 30.