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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 15, 2010

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**REP. JANET LONG APPLAUDS BUSINESS LEADERS' SUPPORT
FOR STRONGER EARLY-EDUCATION STANDARDS**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. --- In the wake of a new report from the business community about Florida's workforce, State Rep. Janet Long (D-Seminole) today called on legislative leaders to embrace her plan to improve Florida's pre-kindergarten program.

"Florida's business leaders agree that an important step toward building a workforce capable of meeting the high-tech demands of the 21st Century is to ensure that today's pre-kindergarten teachers hold at least a four-year college degree.

"For the third consecutive year, I have filed a bill in the Florida House of Representatives to require teachers in the state-sponsored pre-kindergarten program hold a bachelor's degree. Today, I am inviting legislative leaders to join me and the state's business community in embracing this bold initiative.

"Under House Bill 383, pre-kindergarten teachers in the public program would be required to meet the new standard by July 1, 2013. Currently, pre-kindergarten teachers in private schools who participate in the program only have to be credentialed by an approved social services agency."

Representative Long filed a similar bill last year that was cosponsored by House Education Policy Council Chair Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel) and supported by the Florida House Democratic Caucus. Though the legislation did not pass, Representative Long said she is hopeful that the business community's backing will bring a more favorable outcome in the upcoming 2010 legislative session.

In its "Closing the Gap" report this week, The Florida Council of 100 endorsed the concept of requiring all teachers who participate in the public pre-kindergarten program to be required to have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development.

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