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Durham County Business Leader Meets with Legislators in Raleigh to Advocate for Smart Start

Joins More than 50 NC Business Leaders and Governor Jim Hunt to protect the early childhood initiative from elimination

[Durham] — Bill Bryant, president and founder of the Bryant Investment Management Group, LLC, will join former Governor Jim Hunt and business leaders from across the state to descend on the General Assembly on Wednesday, March 23 calling on legislators to preserve funding for Smart Start. Bankers, real estate agents, small business owners and farmers are among those joining the Governor to tell lawmakers that early childhood investments are vital to North Carolina's economy.

The event will include a press conference at 11:30 featuring Gov. Hunt; Robert A. Ingram, General Partner of Hatteras Venture Partners; and Dr. Olson Huff, Board Chair of The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., the organization that leads Smart Start.

Last week, an independent study from Duke University found that children in counties that received more funding for Smart Start and More at Four performed better on third grade end-of-year tests. The study showed that these early childhood programs created a "spillover" effect benefiting all children in the community, even those who never participated in Smart Start-funded programs.

In addition to improving educational outcomes, business leaders will explain to legislators that having high quality early education programs is essential to North Carolina's economic recovery. Early learning programs allow 380,000 North Carolina parents to work. In total, these families earn almost \$12.5 billion annually, money that goes back into the community through income tax and the purchase of goods and services.

"Our understanding of the impact of early childhood education on economic development has been growing for years," Bryant said. "As local business leaders, we have drawn the link between a strong education system and a robust economy, and we have worked with our early childhood and public education partners to connect and engage our community to support the investment in early childhood."

For more information about Smart Start, visit www.smartstart.org or contact your local Smart Start partnership.

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The earliest years of childhood are critical. Experiences during this time literally shape the structure of the brain. Because today's children are tomorrow's leaders, parents and workers, everyone has a stake in making sure all children have the experiences they need to thrive. Smart Start is the system that brings together all the people involved in a young child's life—families, teachers, doctors, caregivers, social workers, and many others—to ensure every child has all they need for healthy growth and development. For more information, visit www.smartstart.org.

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