

Biz, civic leaders working to improve early ed

One early sign of success of the Early Education Commission will be when people start saying "Pre-K through 12" rather than "K through 12."

That's according to **Dennis Lockhart**, chairman of the Early Education Commission and president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

With support from the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, Lockhart and commission co-chair **Beverly Daniel Tatum**, president of Spelman College, have been convening a group of nearly 30 top business and civic leaders for about 18 months to improve metro Atlanta's and Georgia's early education offerings.

The commission, which will be coming out with its recommendations within the next few weeks, recognizes the importance of quality education from birth to kindergarten. "Our goal is to move Atlanta to a clear leadership position to a time when all children in Atlanta are ready to succeed in kindergarten from day one," Lockhart told the Atlanta Kiwanis Club on Feb. 16. "There's no silver bullet for all our social problems, but I believe high-quality childhood education is one of the few remaining areas that can make a difference to our community over the long term."

Lockhart said that while it is too early to identify the commission's recommendations, he has some personal thoughts.

He believes investing in early education will require public and private support. There will need to be an intense awareness campaign targeted on parents and

the general public. There will need to be a "formal leadership entity" in metro Atlanta and the state to step up advocacy for early education.

Lockhart said there's an economic development case for early education with a tangible return on investment. The more prepared children are when they enter kindergarten, the less public support they will need.

Because Georgia allocates part of its lottery funds to educating 4-year-olds, it actually ranks well nationally in its outreach to children in need. But Lockhart said there is still a financial gap in what the state

can afford and what it cost to provide quality early-education programs.

"The gap we are looking at is in the thousands of dollars," Lockhart said.

Currently, there are 76,000 pre-K slots statewide, but the number of 4-year-olds in Georgia who could potentially use the service is nearly double that number, according to **Sharen Hausmann**, vice president of early learning and Smart Start for Atlanta's United Way.

Georgia also has relatively low standards when it comes to early education. Georgia's licensing standards are far below the standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which sets a maximum of six 2-year-olds per one staff member. Georgia allows 10 2-year-olds for one staff member.

Part of the disparity can be traced to income. Children from higher income groups have a vocabulary that's more than twice as large as those from lower income

families. Hausmann said that average 4-year-olds with parents who are professionals are exposed to 32 million more words than their counterparts whose parents receive public assistance.

"The long-term vision is to have a very high percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds in high-quality early-education programs," Lockhart said. "It's a long-term effort. It could take 10 years or more."

Within the next several weeks, there will be a focus on early education.

On Feb. 23, Voices for Georgia's Children will hold its annual legislative breakfast with guest speaker **Phil Peterson**, a senior vice president of Aon Consulting in Philadelphia, who has been closely involved in a pre-K initiative in Pennsylvania.

STATE'S CUTS HIT PARKS. Georgia Conservation Voters shared its legislative agenda — water conservation, transit funding and environmental sustainability — at its breakfast Feb. 16, attended by a couple of dozen legislators.

Chris Clark, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the keynote speaker at the breakfast, told the conservation voters how his department is trying to weather the loss of federal and state dollars for its operations.

"The parks division has taken the biggest cut — a 40 percent budget cut," Clark said.

But Clark said that eco-tourism is vitally important to the state's economy, accounting for a direct economic impact of about \$7 billion a year. By comparison, the Kia plant in the western part of the state represented a \$1.5 billion investment with an annual direct economic impact of \$1 billion, according to Clark, who used to work in the Georgia

Department of Economic Development.

Clark also said the state is moving toward a "culture of conservation," adding that Gov. **Sonny Perdue's** water stewardship proposal is a good start.

LEEDING AT WINTER. Atlanta-based Winter Construction has just earned a LEED Gold rating for its relatively new home at the One Ninety One building.

The gold designation by the U.S. Green Building Council is for Winter's interior design. The firm's initiatives included reducing water consumption, diverting construction waste from landfills, and reducing energy consumption.

Brent Reid, Winter Construction's president and CEO, said the move downtown also made it much more convenient for employees to ride MARTA to work. The firm moved from Spring Street in Midtown less than a year ago.

"I'm bullish about downtown long term," Reid said.

NEW LOOK FOR SWIFT SCHOOL.

The Swift School, a private, not-for-profit school for children with dyslexia, is unveiling a new brand and marketing look on Feb. 20, thanks to a pro-bono campaign called "On the House."

Atlanta-based Matchstic, a brand identity house, chose the Swift School to receive \$100,000 for an "extreme brand makeover."

The new brand identity will be launched at the same time as the International Dyslexia Association-Gorgia's "Dimensions of Dyslexia" conference on Feb. 20 at the Loudermilk Conference Center.

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