



## FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

**For Further Information Contact:**  
**Genny Nadler Thomas, Advocacy Director**  
**Children's Coalition of GBR**  
**225.610-7250 or [gnadler1@cox.net](mailto:gnadler1@cox.net)**

**October 17, 2010**

### **BESE Candidates Districts 6, 8 Discuss: Grant, Early Childhood, Poverty, & Mental Health**

All candidates running for BESE Districts 6 and 8 were hosted by the Children's Coalition of Greater Baton Rouge for a community forum to discuss issues on education. The Children's Coalition of GBR, a nonprofit organization, does not lobby or endorse, but advocates for children. Genny Nadler Thomas, Advocacy Director, said "The candidates were asked to participate in the forum so we can better inform our members and the public on important issues that may be addressed by BESE".

#### **Poverty**

Louisiana's high rate of poverty is directly linked to Louisiana's poor ranking on many indicators of child well being, including education. Twenty-four percent of Louisiana's children live in poverty. When asked about poverty and the effect on education, the candidates had varying solutions. Donald Songy, Russell Armstrong and Beth Meyers agreed that we need to get the best teachers in the low scoring schools. Songy said that, "Teachers need incentives to be in the low ranking school. They feel the affect of the grading system of a failing school. If they are good and can teach in an A rated school, why wouldn't they? It is hard to be in a low ranking school and receive an F when you are working so hard for those kids." Meyers added that, "We need to look at the Value Added Model for teachers to get the best in the schools. If businesses are willing to pay for the best, why don't we treat our teachers the same way?"

Chas Roemer agreed that the best teachers need to be teaching in the lower ranking schools, but felt that there is a need for more accountability for teachers. "We need to get rid of tenure and keep quality teachers. Class size is not the silver bullet. Last year only 4 teachers were removed from teaching for not meeting standards," said Roemer. Carolyn Hill said that "Before teachers teach they need to deal with the social issues (poverty). They need to go into the community where they teach and talk to students and parents and find out what their needs are." Jim Guillory said, "Having motivated teachers is important in schools that are primarily low performing. We need to look at how and what they (the best teachers) do to stay motivated and share how they do it with other teachers." Domoine Rutledge added that, "The impact of poverty can't be overstated. We need to figure how we meet those kids at their point of need. Systemic professional development needs to be available to empower that teacher to identify a child's need. Comprehensive assessment of data and professional development need to be added."

#### **Race to the Top Federal Aid**

Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration has opted against applying for up to \$60 million in federal aid to improve early childhood education in Louisiana, officials said Wednesday. However, a spokesman for Jindal said no final decision has been made. The application is due by Oct. 19, officials said. Several agencies have been working on the grant. The candidates were asked their opinion on not competing for the \$60 million federal grant. Every candidate expressed the need for more funds in early childhood education, but varied on how to fund it and if the state should apply for the grant.

Chas Roemer said, "Too many strings attached to the grant funds. We have the money we need. We just need to cut out the waste." Guillory said, "If we don't file for the grant then we need to look at how we are spending money, prioritize money and maximize effectiveness in instructional activities of our dollars."

Carolyn Hill added that, "Early child hood education is most important. We need to be putting money on front end rather than the back end, which has been proven to save money." Armstrong agreed with Hill and added that "We need to write grants and seek funding for targeted issues. Identify what we need to spend funds on. Early childhood education is important, but need to also address birth to age three years old."

Donald Songy felt that early childhood has too many programs; we need comprehensive programs -Universal Pre k throughout the state. "About the Race to the Top Grant-all grants have strings attached. You deal with the strings and do what is best for children." Beth Meyers expressed some reservation about the grant, stating that "Some strings attached can be like stimulus dollars. One time funds can hurt a program if you don't have money to continue it. We have to start collaborating. We are not prioritizing. We need to convince legislators and the business community of the importance of funding education. We need dedicated funds that are prioritized." Agreeing with other candidates, Rutledge said that, "Early intervention is important; we need a universal approach to early intervention and Pre K. The resources are not there. Why would we refuse this grant? You get no money from feds and or state without strings attached. We need the money."

The Children's Coalition of Greater Baton Rouge is a membership organization of more than 100 children's organizations and individuals. Founded in 1998, the coalition works to effect community change and to improve the lives of children and families through partnerships and advocacy. To get the facts on other issues discussed or for more information on interviews, visit our website at [www.ccofgbr.org](http://www.ccofgbr.org) or contact Genny Nadler Thomas, Advocacy Director [gnadler1@cox.net](mailto:gnadler1@cox.net).