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For immediate release

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North Carolina steps out as the first-in-the-nation to professionalize the field of early care and education through individual certification of the workforce.

FLAT ROCK, NC – On Friday, February 27 at 11:30 AM the first Early Educator Certification (EEC) will be issued in the state. North Carolina is the first in the nation to increase its workforce professional development standards by certifying the education of those who work directly with, intend to work with, and/or work on the behalf of children ages birth to twelve.

School teachers have it, nurses have it, hair dressers have it -- even plumbers have it! Almost all occupations in the United States require their workforce to become certified or licensed to be part of the profession. As in other professions, early care and education requires a specialized body of knowledge and defined skills to implement high quality programs and services. EEC recognizes and validates educational accomplishments of Early Educators – benefitting individuals, children, programs, and society.

The goal of individual certification is to increase workforce education levels, linked to compensation, in order to ensure high quality care and education services for children and families. When fully implemented, the system will bring much needed efficiencies to workforce data collection.

The NC Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development (Institute) is the certifying body for Early Educators in North Carolina. After a multi-year development process, in collaboration with key partners including the NC Division of Child Development, NC Office of School Readiness, NC Partnership for Children, NC Head Start Collaboration Office and Child Care Services Association, the Institute launched a test run of the system. Over 4,000 Early Educators have been certified in nearly ¾ of the state's counties and will receive their certifications at no charge in the coming days. The number of certified Early Educators will continue to grow in 2009 as the Institute utilizes funding to certify up to 3,250 additional applicants at no charge.

Laurie Morin will be the first to receive North Carolina Early Educator Certification. Laurie's Child Care is a 5-star (www.ncchildcare.net) regulated family child care home in Flat Rock; Laurie is a 2008 North Carolina Professional Development Award winner. Debra Torrence, Director of the Institute, commented that "Laurie and her program exemplify the quality we strive for in early care and education programs across our state."

All Early Educators working in North Carolina with children ages birth to twelve, for at least 10 hours a week, may apply to become certified beginning March 1, 2009. Applicants may download the application and supporting materials at www.nceec.org. The cost for initial certification is \$50.

Mrs. Morin has been working with the Children & Family Resource Center of Henderson County - Child Care Resource & Referral staff for the past three years to accomplish her goals. She participated in the *Speak Out for Kids* community forum in 2007 and is on the Smart Start Board of Directors as an early childhood education advocate. Part of her professional development plan included receiving her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, which she attained from Blue Ridge Community College in 2008. Laurie Morin is a shining example of early childhood leadership and advocacy in Henderson County, in North Carolina, and in the United States.