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New Baltimore School CEO Joins Health Commissioner to Announce Results of Baltimore Public Health Challenge

July 18, 2007 – New Baltimore School CEO Dr. Andres Alonso and Commissioner of Health Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein today announced the results of a year-long Public Health Challenge in which the Baltimore medical community rallied to provide more than 23,000 books to Baltimore parents to read to their children. They were joined by early childhood development expert Dr. Barry Zuckerman in calling on all Baltimore parents to take the next step and use these books to read to their young children everyday.

“Parents are their children’s first teacher. They can prepare their young children to succeed in school by reading to them each day,” said Dr. Alonso. “I thank our medical community for mobilizing to support reading in Baltimore.”

Experts consider daily reading aloud to children to be the most important activity associated with improved language skills, early reading, and school success.

In June 2006, Dr. Sharfstein called on all Baltimore doctors and nurses taking care of low-income children to give out advice on reading and free books along with vaccine shots.

To meet this challenge, the state worked with Reach Out and Read, a national non-profit organization that promotes early literacy by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud in pediatric exam rooms across the nation. Participation in the program is associated with a fourfold increase in parents’ reading to children and improvements in the language development of participating children of three to six months.

As the result of the Challenge, at least 24 more Baltimore pediatric clinics will participate in Reach Out and Read, distributing at least 23,000 more books to children in the city each year.

“Baltimore has made more progress on doctors and nurses promoting reading in primary care in the last year than any city in the country,” said Dr. Zuckerman, Reach Out and Read board chair and co-founder. “This is an investment in the potential of young children that will pay off for years to come.”

“The results of this challenge show that Baltimore is the city that reads,” said Dr. Sharfstein.

“I thank all of the doctors and nurses participating in this important initiative,” said Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon. “I join Dr. Alonso and Dr. Sharfstein in urging parents to read to their children every night.”

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