

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS CHILD CARE CENTERS AWARDED FOUR-STARS**

### *First Centers in Area to Receive This Rating Level from Virginia's QRIS Initiative*

**NORFOLK, VA – March XX, 2010** – Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads, a non-profit organization created by business and community leaders to address the issue of school readiness in the region, proudly announced that Simonsdale Presbyterian Preschool in Portsmouth, Va. and JCOC Oceanfront Head Start in Virginia Beach, Va. received four-star ratings from Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

“We are beyond excited and proud to receive the four-star QRIS rating,” said Carol Wilson, director of Simonsdale Presbyterian Preschool. “Our staff and teachers work tirelessly to ensure that students receive high quality and consistent early childhood education.”

Lawanna Dowden, director of the STOP Organization of South Hampton Roads Head Start Program, shared the same sentiments about the achievement saying, “This rating validates and rewards the persistent efforts and dedication the staff provides to this bright, curious group of children.”

Launched in 2007, Virginia's QRIS was created to identify, communicate and improve the level of quality in local child care centers. The system assigns up to five stars to a child care center based on four areas: staff education, qualifications and training; interactions between children and staff members; class size and staff-to-child ratios; and learning environment and instructional practices. Centers' participation in the rating system is voluntary.

“For parents, QRIS serves as the *Consumer Reports* of child care centers,” said Lisa Howard, President and CEO of Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads. “With one out of eight children in our region arriving at kindergarten unprepared, parents can use this rating program to make an informed choice about child care. QRIS is a very rigorous

process, so the fact that these centers got four stars is quite an accomplishment. We are so proud of Simonsdale Presbyterian Preschool and JCOC Oceanfront Head Start, and all of the other centers that have made high quality early education a priority through their participation in this initiative.”

Simonsdale Presbyterian Preschool has 62 children enrolled, ranging from 30 months to 4 years old, and is affiliated with the church. JCOC Oceanfront Head Start has 14 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled, and is run in partnership between The STOP Organization of South Hampton Roads and JCOC Preschool, which focuses on services and activities that impact the root causes of poverty.

Simonsdale Presbyterian Preschool and JCOC Oceanfront Head Start were voluntary participants in the QRIS pilot program in 2007, helping pioneer and develop this rating tool. Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads supports their continued participation in quality improvement efforts with funding from the Hampton Roads Community Foundation and corporate sponsorships. To access the complete listing of QRIS scores in Virginia, visit [smartbeginnings.org](http://smartbeginnings.org).

#### **About Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads**

Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads is a non-profit organization created by business and community leaders to address the issue of school readiness in Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach. Since 2004, the organization has worked to raise awareness about the importance of the early years, advocate for greater public-private investment in young children, encourage regional collaboration around children’s issues and support communities in improving their early childhood systems. For additional information on Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads, visit [smartbeginningsshr.org](http://smartbeginningsshr.org).