

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Golden Apple Recommends Five Ways to Make the Most of Illinois' Education Stimulus Funds

CHICAGO (March 11, 2009) – Lawmakers in Illinois and across the country are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the first round of federal funding from the recently passed economic stimulus package, a significant portion of which is earmarked for education. As a leader in advancing the teaching profession in Illinois since 1985, Golden Apple Foundation offers the following recommendations for getting the biggest bang for Illinois' new education dollars:

- 1. Enhancing teacher professional development** – Helping new teachers is crucial, but equally important is equipping experienced teachers with the latest methods, strategies and best practices. President Obama has thrown down the gauntlet, urging schools to take a closer look at under-performing teachers, which Golden Apple applauds, but there needs to be a greater focus on continuing education and professional development for teachers in general. Practicing teachers need support, just as practicing physicians and lawyers do. And an area of critical importance for professional development is with technology, the Internet and digital media.
- 2. Increasing and improving the use of technology in schools** – Students are living in a digital world, but many schools are still stuck in the pencil-and-paper past. As we prepare our work force into the 21st century, it is incumbent upon schools to provide the resources and instruction for students to acquire these necessary digital skills. A critical component of increasing the use of technology in schools is providing teachers the necessary professional development to become more sophisticated users of technology themselves. Many teachers are not technologically literate, comfortable or up-to-date. This widens the digital divide that already exists and keeps children who lack technology opportunities in their homes from gaining the necessary skills at school to be ready for successful futures in a world where technological sophistication will be the expectation and the norm. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has set national education technology standards that are considered the roadmap for technology standards for students and teachers.
- 3. Level the playing field between resource-rich and resource-poor schools** – The gap between schools that “have” and those that “have not” is widening and has a tremendously negative impact on students who fall on the poorer end of the spectrum. Public school students deserve the same access to technology, college preparation and other resources as a private school that has the resources to offer labs and advisors. And inner-city and rural students deserve the same quality teachers as wealthier suburban areas. Basing school funding on the surrounding tax base and test scores has done too many children a disservice. Golden Apple feels strongly that everyone deserves a fighting chance. Unfortunately, too many students are, in fact, being left behind because of this resource gap. Using stimulus funds to help those who need it most is a step in the right direction.
- 4. Post-graduation support** – Whether preparing high school students for college or introducing them to other available options, there is much that can be done to help

Illinois students make the transition to the world beyond their local school. College-prep needs to extend beyond applications and testing, to include integrating secondary or post-secondary level curriculum into high schools and extending the length of the school day. In addition, there are many kids for whom college simply isn't an option, and those students need to understand the pathways and options available to them and be offered resources to help them make the best choices to ensure success.

- 5. Expanding teacher preparation** – Too often new teachers enter the classroom with only the minimum amount of experience required to earn their degree, but a recent study found that graduates of the Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program, which recruits, prepares and mentors prospective teachers for immediate and enduring success, consistently outperform traditionally prepared teachers in key areas of classroom management, professionalism and collaborative relations. Golden Apple Scholars receive three times more practical classroom experience and on-site mentoring than traditionally prepared teachers, and therein lies the difference. And with a significant focus on problem-solving approaches and recognizing and dealing with the forces at work in a student's life outside the school walls, teachers are better able to connect with their students and create a relevant, positive educational experience.

About Golden Apple

Golden Apple began in 1985 with founders Mike and Pat Koldyke and a shared inspiration — to offer outstanding school teachers the level of recognition enjoyed by actors at the Academy Awards. Golden Apple's successful track record now spans more than 20 years. Integrated, innovative Golden Apple programs and resources enhance the quality, resiliency, and creativity of classroom teachers and improve teaching and learning throughout Illinois. Qualified, passionate educators — including Golden Apple Award-winners and finalists — lead a small staff of dedicated employees with functional and program expertise. A connected and committed board of directors oversees Golden Apple's strategic direction. Together with a larger community of expert educators, the not-for-profit organization works to ensure that all Illinois children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

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