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World Bank program plans to educate kids

Children in poor nations would take part

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WASHINGTON — Calling education crucial to the reduction of global poverty, international finance ministers approved a World Bank plan yesterday aimed at enrolling all young children in elementary school.

The plan, called "Education for All," still lacks firm financial commitments from many major donors, most notably the United States. That is a source of concern to aid advocates, who warned that the initiative would most likely fail unless the Bush administration provided enthusiastic leadership in the form of a sizable contribution.

At a news conference that capped the weekend meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, however, World Bank President James Wolfensohn said he was "extremely heartened by the support" for the plan shown by members of a policy-setting committee that represented the bank's 183 member nations, including Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, who represented the United States.

"What I hoped to get today on education ... I got," Wolfensohn said. "It was a wholehearted endorsement."

Protesters who contend globalization works for the wealthy but not the poor staged sporadic demonstrations outside the meetings yesterday. Standing watch were hundreds of police with riot gear at the ready.

The crowd, estimated at about 1,000 people, was mostly peaceful, and there were no arrests. During a rally at the Washington Monument, police moved into the crowd at one point to stamp out a



James Wolfensohn, World Bank President, has said ending poverty is key to defeating terrorism.

small fire after an American flag was set aflame.

About 125 million primary-school-age children in developing countries, the majority of them girls, do not attend school. Getting nearly all of those children to attend class and complete five years of primary education is widely regarded by development experts as one of the most achievable and important of the "millennium development goals" set two years ago by the world's governments for 2015.

The bank said it would cost \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion annually to help the 47 poorest countries meet the goal, and the cost of achieving the goal in all developing countries is projected at perhaps triple that amount.

The World Bank plan is based on the idea that the poor countries, rather than the donors, should play the main role in devising blueprints for improving their education systems, and that any country with a sensible plan can count on receiving sufficient foreign assistance for it. Ten countries will be selected for "fast track" funding to demonstrate effective approaches for increasing enrollments.

The next major hurdle for the plan looms when President Bush and other leaders of the Group of Seven major industrial nations meet in June.