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**MAYOR EMANUEL AND METROPOLITAN FAMILY SERVICES ANNOUNCE NEW EARLY
LEARNING CENTER TO SERVE CITY'S SOUTHWEST SIDE COMMUNITIES**

After Achieving Universal Kindergarten for All Chicago Children, Mayor Outlines Vision to Expand Pre-Kindergarten to All 4-Year Old Children in the City of Chicago

Mayor Emanuel joined the Metropolitan Family Services President and CEO Ric Estrada today to announce a new early learning center will be built in the Gage Park neighborhood, serving families in Gage Park, Brighton Park and the Chicago Lawn neighborhoods on Chicago's Southwest side. The facility will increase access to early childhood education and wrap-around and health services in neighborhoods with some of the greatest need. Building on his expansion of full-day kindergarten, today Mayor Emanuel also outlined his vision to expand pre-kindergarten to all 4-year old children in Chicago.

"The new Metropolitan Family Services early learning center will establish a solid educational foundation for our children on the Southwest side of Chicago," said Mayor Emanuel. "We must continue to invest in our children's future by providing them with the education and resources they will need for a successful future. That is why I have set a goal to expand pre-kindergarten education to all 4-year old children in the City of Chicago."

There is currently not enough capacity in quality programming to meet the demand in Southwest side communities. The facility will create an optimal learning environment by integrating early learning for children with a spectrum of family supports. It will serve 140 children ages 0 to 5 and create 29 new jobs for early childhood educators and support personnel. The State of Illinois provided a grant for this project. The City will continue to work with Speaker Michael Madigan in our Southwest side neighborhoods and at this center. Construction is expected to begin in 2015.

"The new center will serve and help children and families succeed in an area that has the greatest need for new facilities," said Metropolitan Family Services President & CEO Ric Estrada. "Virtually every elected official in the area has helped us move this project forward. We are grateful for Mayor Emanuel for his constant efforts to make early learning a pillar of his education strategy."

Early childhood education remains a priority for Mayor Emanuel and the City of Chicago. The Mayor has directed his administration to explore budget options to close the gap for 4-year old children from low-income families who currently have no access to pre-kindergarten education. Currently there are 1,500 4-year old children in Chicago who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program, but do not attend at least a half-day of pre-kindergarten. Since Mayor Emanuel took office in 2011, he has steadily expanded early learning programming through a \$36 million investment in the City's budget.

While early childhood service provision in Chicago is considered a national model, Mayor Emanuel has made closing the gap of service delivery in all neighborhoods and raising the bar of quality a top priority in his education agenda. To accomplish the goal of having every child in the City of Chicago ready to learn by kindergarten, the City has embarked on an ambitious effort to achieve three distinct goals:

1. Increase access: serve the most at-risk children in high-quality programs;
2. Raise the quality of early childhood programs in Chicago; and
3. Bolster transparency and accountability across the educational services spectrum

This will help ensure that every student graduates with a world-class education, ready to enter college or a career.

Parents interested in enrolling their children in early learning programs should visit www.chicagoearlylearning.com for more information.

Metropolitan Family Services is a 157-year-old, \$50 million not-for-profit agency that provides 63,000 people a year with education, emotional wellness, economic self-sufficiency and empowerment services. Metropolitan has provided high-quality early learning services since 1995, and currently serves over 900 children center- and community-based programs on Chicago's Southwest, South and Northwest sides, and through school- and community-based programs across suburban DuPage County.

Parents interested in enrolling their children in early learning programs should visit www.chicagoearlylearning.org for more information, text a zip code to 773-886-1819, or call the *Chicago: Ready to Learn!* hotline at 312-229.1690.

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