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MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES UNIVERSAL ENROLLMENT TOOL TO HELP FAMILIES ACCESS EXPANDED PRE-K AND EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THIS SCHOOL YEAR

City expands full-day pre-k opportunities to offer 1,000 additional full-day seats this year; full-day opportunities have expanded by 60 percent since 2011

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced a new universal online enrollment system designed to improve access and enrollment in early childhood programming available under Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and city-administered community-based sites citywide. This platform will connect children and families to the expanding full-day pre-k opportunities citywide, which include an additional 1,000 full-day prekindergarten opportunities for families of four-year olds citywide this fall.

“The single most important investment we can make in our future is in the children of Chicago and their education,” said Mayor Emanuel. “Every child in every neighborhood deserves a quality education and that must begin in their critical earliest years. This new tool will help our families to more easily enroll their child in a quality program, and most importantly, will ensure that both pre-kindergarten programming and kindergarten readiness are truly an option for every child.”

Since taking office, Mayor Emanuel has made in-demand and highly effective full-day pre-k opportunities a priority, investing to expand programming to serve 17,000 children across the city—an increase of 60 percent from 2011. This fall, CPS will offer an additional 1,000 full-day opportunities, increasing access to programs demonstrated to improve child outcomes and helping move the city closer to its goal of universal full-day pre-k for all four-year-olds from low-income families.

Through the new online enrollment system, parents will be able to find and more easily choose from the more than 35,000 opportunities available in over 600 school- and community-based program sites citywide. By creating this one-stop shop for preschool, parents can see all options open to them across the City. Moving the application process online allows parents to receive real-time information about program availability in their desired location that meets their child’s needs, eliminating the need to visit multiple sites to apply for preschool. Since the universal enrollment tool launched in May, the city has received an increase in applications by 10 percent over last year.

With this new tool, Chicago is the first city in the country to develop an online preschool application system so comprehensive that it spans all early learning program models and funding streams available to children ages 3-5. Today, Mayor Emanuel was joined by early childhood

experts from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund in announcing the landmark tool.

“Our children’s early years are critical in setting a foundation for a lifetime of success in school and in life,” said Diana Rauner, First Lady of the State of Illinois and President of the Ounce of Prevention Fund. “This is why we stand committed with Chicago and our partners statewide in building quality early learning opportunities that will ensure that all children are equipped to learn and thrive early on and when they enter kindergarten.”

In partnership with federal and state efforts, the City of Chicago has taken important steps in ensuring quality and consistency throughout the early childhood system, while expanding early learning programming throughout the city. Upon taking office, the Mayor directed a review of all early learning programming through the city, to ensure consistency in programming aligned to head start benchmarks and national best practices. The quality of citywide early learning programming was validated when Chicago was awarded a 5-year national Head Start grant.

“Chicago’s programs serve as a model for how large cities nationwide can focus efforts to meet the wide-ranging needs of families and communities, particularly for at-risk children, to access quality early learning,” said Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development at HHS. “By implementing new tools and programs aligned to Head Start and Early Head Start standards, Chicago will not only provide children new educational opportunities to succeed, but will empower families to make choices for their children that will support important early development.”

The new enrollment tool is a direct result of recommendations set forth by the Mayor’s Second Term Transition Committee. To meet another key recommendation by the Transition Committee, earlier this year the city announced a plan to restructure the administration of its early learning programs to eliminate redundancies and direct more dollars to be invested creating more full-day pre-k classrooms across the city.

The Mayor’s reforms have increased investment to provide the city’s youngest learners with high-quality educational programming, focusing on growing full-day capacity to serve children in highest need areas. Based on an analysis of kindergarten literacy scores from the 2014-15 school year, children who had a full-day preschool experience arrived at CPS kindergarten classrooms twice as likely to be reading at grade level as those who either had a half-day or no preschool at all.

Since taking office in 2011, Mayor Emanuel has been worked to ensure that the City’s youngest learners have the highest quality educational opportunities. In 2012, the City implemented a full review of quality programming by launching a citywide re-competition for funding. Over the last five years, the City has continued to expand full-day opportunities, improved quality initiatives through over \$45 million invested in early childhood, and launched the country’s second early childhood Social Impact Bond to scale effective preschool programs.

For more information on early learning and pre-k programming across the city and for access to the universal online application, please visit: <https://chicagoearlylearning.org/>

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