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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS LAUNCH CITYWIDE
SKILLED TRADES CAREER FAIR**

*Approximately 3,000 High Schoolers and Middle Schoolers Meet Labor Unions and 50
+ Skilled Trades Exhibitors*

CHICAGO – Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Pedro Martinez announced a three-day in-person Skilled Trades Career Fair. Over three days, approximately 3,000 CPS students will have the opportunity to learn about careers from more than 50 local employers, trade unions, and workforce agencies.

The Trades Career Fair kicks off at the McCormick Place Convention Center, Lakeside Center, on Tuesday, March 22, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and is open to only CPS students all three days of the event, ending on Thursday, March 24. The fair is only open to media on Tuesday, March 22. The event is co-hosted by the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and the Community Safety Coordination Center (CSCC). The goal of the Career Fair is to expose and connect students at risk of becoming disconnected from work and school after graduation with the necessary information and tools to explore a career in the skilled trades.

"Everywhere you look, you can see how the skilled trades and union labor has influenced and built our strong city," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Skilled trades and their unions are vital to keeping our communities running. Additionally, these are well-paying, sustainable careers that provide pathways to financial security and job satisfaction. I'm pleased to introduce our CPS students to these opportunities and all the career possibilities that this sector holds."

CPS currently offers [12 Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) construction trades programs](#) across the city. Eight programs are housed in high schools, and one program, [Chicago Builds](#), is a citywide program that provides carpentry, welding, HVAC, and electricity training to any CPS junior or senior. All programs offer two to three years of construction skill development, literacy and math skills, and integrated employability skills. Students can participate in work-based learning opportunities throughout the program, beginning with guest speakers and site visits



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and culminating in internships and potentially youth apprenticeships. CPS students in all 12 CTE programs will be showcasing their work at the Skilled Trades Fair.

“This fair is a great opportunity for our students to learn how to apply core educational skills to a skilled trade,” said Chicago Public Schools Chief Executive Officer Pedro Martinez. “We want students to learn not only how they can enter these fields but thrive and advance as experts and leaders, bringing that can-do Chicago outlook to these important and satisfying careers.”

The majority of students participating in the Career Fair are students who are traditionally underrepresented in the skilled trades. In its outreach, the City prioritized schools from the south and west sides to ensure that students living in communities with higher poverty and unemployment rates have access to trades opportunities. This includes students who have or are currently participating in the Chicago Public Schools’ program Choose to Change, students from Options Schools, and those who have experienced other risk factors.

“I’ve dedicated my career to helping the next generation of tradesmen BUILD their skillset and our futures. Events like the Skilled Trades Fair show me that the city is rallying around the same cause, and I love it,” said Othoniel (Tony) Negron, an instructor at Chicago Builds a city-wide construction program.”

According to [UChicago Urban Lab data](#), Options students face extraordinarily high rates of barriers to completing an education, including high rates of homelessness and violence victimization. Options School students are more likely than non-Options School students to live in low-income households (84% vs. 76%, as measured by their Free and Reduced Lunch status), experience homelessness (21% vs. 4%), have individualized education plans (IEPs) (21% vs. 16%), have experienced serious school disciplinary incidents in the past year (13% vs. 5%), have been previously victimized in a crime (38% vs. 12%), and have at least one prior arrest recorded in Chicago Police Department data (38% vs. 3%).

Young adults that remain engaged in education or have access to long-term employment opportunities have a reduced risk of being involved in violence. Furthermore, providing access to viable career pathways for those with criminal justice backgrounds, who have high truancy rates from school, or who have a history of group involvement, may reduce their risk of victimization of violence.

“Career development and exploration are critical for laying the path to success for our young people. This is a chance for our city’s youth to imagine those new possibilities,” said DFSS Commissioner Brandie Knazze. “The Skilled Trade Fair sets



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the groundwork for creating opportunity and will provide young people the space to identify how their knowledge, skills, and interests can be harnessed.”

This career fair is not just an opportunity for students to meet experts in various industries, but also an opportunity for students to learn how they can bring diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and experiences to strengthen the workforce. Regardless of where people live or the color of their skin, the skilled trades are a field in which anyone can excel, and we need more women and Black and Latinx young people in the trades industry to strengthen these fields and accelerate Chicago's economic growth.

Students will have the opportunity to provide their contact information to industries at the trades fair and CPS and Chicago Community Colleges staff will be on hand to help students create a post-secondary plan. Participating students will receive a digital and hardcopy event guidebook, complete with information about the trades.

“There are many pathways to successful careers. This event creates an opportunity for youth to navigate the various post-secondary possibilities our city has to offer through the trades and through good union jobs,” said Alderman Sophia King. “This initiative will help our youth see what they can achieve.”

There are more than 71,000 people currently working in the construction sector in Cook County alone. This sector includes welders, plumbers, carpenters, and more. Further, the skilled trades are a mobile group with the ability to apply entrepreneurial thinking, earn above-average wages and grow wages and income as skills build. Tradespeople are fundamental to an industry that helps cities like Chicago prosper.

“This event provides students with knowledge relating to the many different career paths within the union construction industry,” said Dan Allen, Construction Industry Service Corporation (CISCO). “The skilled trades allow you to “earn while you learn” graduate nearly or completely debt-free, receive excellent benefits, and secure a path to the middle class. Between the groundbreaking of mega construction projects within the Chicagoland area, and the industry’s increased demand for skilled workers, CPS students have a unique opportunity to pursue fulfilling careers within the union construction industry.”

Most careers in the skilled trades require an apprenticeship or may not require a college degree—of the 15,000 jobs currently listed in Cook County, half of them require less than a bachelor’s degree and 85% of them require less than 5 years of experience—representing an opportunity for students who choose not to go to



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college to have access to jobs that are well-paid. It's critical to ensure all Chicagoans have equal access to a career in the skilled trades.

“Building a strong and diverse talent pipeline is essential to the work we do at ComEd and will play a key role in powering cleaner and more resilient communities for the future,” said ComEd CEO Gil Quiniones. “Through our collaboration with CPS, the City of Chicago, and a number of local workforce agencies, ComEd is working to create pathways to well-paying careers, while ensuring that more minorities and women can be a part of the growth of our industry. We encourage Chicago’s students to attend this year’s career fair and learn about opportunities with our team where they’ll make an impact on their community and the environment for years to come.”

ComEd is presenting the largest employer booth during the three-day event. ComEd supports hundreds of students from across Chicago every year with education programs as part of its efforts to foster a strong and diverse workforce prepared to take on new jobs created by the transition to a clean energy economy. As part of its investments in workforce development, ComEd is proud to support [Chicago Builds](#), a unique 2-year off-campus program offering CPS juniors and seniors an opportunity to receive technical training in electricity and other skilled trades fields. For more on Chicago Builds, as well as its workforce training and scholarship programs, please visit [ComEd’s website](#).

“I’m so grateful to be able to be where I am today, not many high school students get opportunities like this so I want to take advantage of it. I strongly believe that the Skilled Trades Career Fair can be life-changing for students,” said Quintin Scott, a current CPS student and participant in the Chicago Builds Program, a city-wide construction program.

Today's tradespeople are innovators and entrepreneurs, creators, and dreamers. The trades are foundational to our economic prosperity and our everyday lives. For a complete list of exhibitors and to learn more about this event, please click [here](#).

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