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**MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES NEW TOOL TO ASSIST PARENTS IN FINDING EARLY
LEARNING PROGRAMS**

Web-Based "Early Learning Finder" Will Further Enhance the City's Outreach Campaign for Summer Enrollment

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced the launch the Early Learning Finder (cityofchicago.org/finder), a web-based tool designed to help families determine which early learning programs their child may be eligible for in their communities based on specific criteria.

The Early Learning Finder will help families find programs available to them just by asking a few simple questions. This tool is part of a broader initiative by the City of Chicago, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and others to enroll children into early learning opportunities for the coming school year, particularly the new universal pre-kindergarten program established by Mayor Emanuel last spring.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that every child has a quality education that allows them to succeed, regardless of where they live, and that begins at the very start with early learning programs," said Mayor Emanuel. "As we improve equity and access to quality programs in every neighborhood, efforts like the Early Learning Finder assure all families that no matter which neighborhood they live in, that their child will be as prepared as any other student when they arrive at kindergarten."

The Early Learning Finder will help Chicago families navigate more than 700 early learning opportunities available at both school- and community-based sites, and helps each parent or guardian with program referrals based on: eligibility factors, program preferences, and quality ratings. The tool is also accessible to families without Internet access just by texting (773) 377-8946 or calling the Chicago: Ready to Learn! Hotline at (312) 229-1690.

The early learning screening tool was developed in collaboration with Chicago-based mRelief, an all-woman software development team. The company is modernizing public benefits through web tools and an unprecedented use of text messaging in social services that empowers people with information on which benefits they qualify for and how to ask them. Just last year, mRelief launched a tool that assists low-income Chicago residents in learning of eligibility for public assistance and benefits.

In addition to the Finder, DFSS and CPS are expanding their outreach to parents this summer, with focused outreach to families in high need areas. Strategies include:

- On the ground outreach teams targeting under enrolled communities to coordinate resources, marketing and information sharing;
- Web and radio-based advertising to help families navigate the enrollment process; and
- Targeted messaging to increase awareness of opportunities that can be accessed today.

The summer outreach strategy builds on other efforts improve accessibility for parents, including the Early Learning Portal, which serves as a one-stop-shop to help parents find programs, assess program quality, and understand their child's eligibility for programs.

The Mayor is committed to investing in early education programming, as studies show that a high-quality early learning experience can be the precursor to later success in school. In Chicago, for example, students who attend high-quality early childhood education programs are 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not.

Informing parents of their options is particularly important as the Mayor continues to expand high-quality opportunities to reach families in every corner of the city. In 2013, Mayor Emanuel launched Chicago: Ready to Learn! by bringing CPS and DFSS together to manage all resources under one early education system, while ensuring program consistency and quality. Combined with the Mayor's continuing investments in early childhood education, Ready to Learn! prepares children for success in kindergarten, and guarantees all Chicago families can offer their child a high quality early learning experience.

The Early Learning Finder was conceived by the Mayor's Innovation Team. Chicago was one of the first five cities to receive an Innovation Team grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies. Since launching in November 2011, the Mayor's Innovation Team has made Chicago the first city in the nation to include energy costs in home listings, launched the Chicago Neighborhood Energy Challenge pilot competition, and helped design the Small Business Center to serve as a one-stop-shop for small businesses. Bloomberg Philanthropies' Innovation Teams program aims to improve the capacity of City Halls to effectively design and implement new approaches that improve citizens' lives – relying on data, open innovation, and strong project and performance management to help mayors address pressing urban challenges.

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