



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2, 2014

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office
312.744.3334
press@cityofchicago.org

CPS Office of Communications
773.553.1620

MAYOR EMANUEL AND CPS CEO BYRD-BENNETT RING IN THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL
Walks Safe Passage Route with Students and Ring School Bell at Penn Elementary to Start the 2014-2015 School Year

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett today celebrated the first day of school at Penn Elementary School. The Mayor walked students to class on a Safe Passage route and joined students and staff at an assembly to ring the school bell and kick off the first day of the 2014-2015 school year. Mayor Emanuel and CEO Byrd-Bennett also made stops at CPS schools across the city to celebrate the start of the new school year.

"It all starts right here with the first day of school," said Mayor Emanuel. "We are thrilled to kick off another great year for students, teachers, principals and parents. This is another step on the journey to graduation, college and career. We must remain focused to ensure our students come to school each day ready to learn so they continue on the path towards a bright future."

From expanding early childhood education to providing a full school day and full school year, Mayor Emanuel and CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett continue to make key investments to ensure that students are prepared for college, career and life.

"We are excited for the start of another great school year," said CPS CEO Byrd-Bennett. "It is so important that our students come to school on the first day and every day to stay focus on academic success. Keeping students engaged and connected in class is critical in preparing them for college and career."

Mayor Emanuel and CPS recently announced that CPS students in School Year 2013-2014 (SY 13-14) set a record graduation rate of 69.4 percent. The graduation rate this past year marks an all-time high for the district, which graduated 65.4 percent of students in SY 12-13. The SY 13-14 graduation rate continues a consistent upward trend and represents the largest two-year increase in district history. Two years ago, 61.2 percent of CPS students graduated, and three years ago, 58 percent of CPS students graduated.

In addition to setting a record high graduation rate this year, the rate for freshmen on-track to graduate for School Year (SY) 2013-2014 is the highest measure on record at 84.1 percent, up 2.6

121 NORTH LASALLE STREET, ROOM 507, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

percentage points from 2013. Since Mayor Emanuel took office in 2011, the freshman on-track rate has increased 11.5 percent.

CPS students also achieved an all-time high ACT scores and an increase in attendance rates. In 2013, the average composite ACT score for CPS students was 18, outpacing the state in growth in both reading and math scores. The district's attendance rates from kindergarten through 12th grade also rose, reaching 93.2 percent, an increase of 0.7 percent from SY 12-13.

Additionally, CPS students in every grade from second through eighth showed gains in both math and reading and continue to make progress against their peers nationally, according to results from the recent Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessments. CPS 8th graders showed strong growth in math and reading for a second consecutive year, an indication that they will be ready for the rigors of a challenging high school curriculum.

Despite Chicago experiencing the coldest winter in years, CPS attendance rates from kindergarten through 12th grade rose to 93.2 percent in School Year 2013– 2014 (SY 13-14), an increase of 0.7 percent. As part of this increase, 181,306 students improved their attendance rates over the previous year. CPS piloted a comprehensive attendance plan in 2014, designed to increase student attendance and strategically address barriers that result in chronic absence and chronic truancy.

To further ensure our students arrive to school safely each day, Mayor Emanuel and Governor Pat Quinn announced last week that the CPS Safe Passage program will expand through \$10 million in support from Governor Quinn's office and the State of Illinois. The Safe Passage program will expand to 133 schools across the city – tripling the number of routes from when the Mayor took office. More than 69,000 students will be served under the overall expansion.

Prior to the start of the school year, Mayor Emanuel and CPS announced that the first phase of air conditioning installations at 57 schools was completed on time and under budget. This is the first phase of a multi-year plan to provide air conditioning in every CPS classroom. As a result of this efficiency, an additional 29 schools will receive by the end of October. With this investment, a total of 154 schools have received air conditioning in the past two years.

Since Mayor Emanuel took office in 2011, the City has established a full school day and full school year. The City has also established a full day of kindergarten for every student in Chicago and is currently working to increase access to 4-year old pre-k programs for children who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program.

Chicago Public Schools serves 400,000 students in 664 schools. It is the nation's third-largest school district.

###