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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 16, 2016

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MAYOR EMANUEL LAUNCHES CITY'S FIRST UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL APPLICATION TO HELP FAMILIES ENROLL IN EARLY LEARNING

New universal online application to improve ease of enrollment for parents and empower families in identifying options to meet the needs of their early learners

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today launched the city's first universal early childhood [online application site](#), providing parents and families across the city with a comprehensive menu of preschool opportunities available under Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS). Starting today, this new system will improve access for parents seeking a program for their 3- or 4-year old child by helping them identify opportunities open in their neighborhood.

"Every child in every neighborhood deserves a quality education and that must begin in their earliest years," said Mayor Emanuel. "These improvements to our early learning enrollment process will ensure that all of our families—no matter their needs—will be able to find and secure a quality early learning program for their child that will provide a foundation for the rest of his or her academic career."

The online system will create a streamlined process, providing comprehensive information on all programs available to families, making it easier to select a program among the City's more than 600 high-quality community-based and school-based preschool programs. By moving the application process online, the administration will reduce barriers and allow parents to complete the application from any computer, tablet or smart phone.

"Our new enrollment system will serve as the foundation for providing better access and reducing barriers for families to access an early learning program," said DFSS commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler. "Family engagement is critical from day one, and by empowering parents with information they need to select a program, we will engage more children with opportunities to succeed."

Families of children who will be 3 or 4-years old on September 1, 2016 can now submit applications online for enrollment in fall 2016 early learning programs, as well as for summer programming available at select community-based sites. Alternatively, parents may submit a paper copy of the application to designated application sites, found at chicagoearlylearning.org. Notifications for placement in programs for the upcoming school year will begin on June 13th, and applications will continue to be accepted on a rolling basis, prioritizing families based on need.

A series of administrative reforms enacted by the City, CPS and DFSS were designed to create new efficiencies and redirect savings to serving more children. As part of these reforms, the Emanuel administration has also taken into account feedback by the Mayor's Second Term Priorities Committee, which recommended restructuring the enrollment process to remove barriers families might encounter and to, ultimately, serve more children in early learning programs, which are demonstrated to improve children's long-term outcomes in school and in life.

"We know that the early years are perhaps the most effective way to ensure children start on the path to future success," said CPS Chief Education Officer Janice K. Jackson. "This is why we are committed to expanding opportunities for pre-kindergarten across the district to make sure that all of our children are equipped for 21st-Century learning when they enter kindergarten."

The Mayor's reforms in early education are focused on expanding access to full day prekindergarten because these programs are proven nationally to be significantly more effective than half-day offerings. Based on an analysis of kindergarten readiness 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 on grade-level as those who either had a half-day or no preschool at all.

Since taking office in 2011, Mayor Emanuel has 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 city-wide 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 increased the number of full-day prekindergarten slots by more than 50 percent - from 10,600 to more than 16,000, with plans to serve more than 17,000 children by the fall of 2017.

The goal of improving the application process is to ensure families are able to access the citywide early childhood programming, and provide an easy way for families to find a program that meet their needs. Paper applications will continue to be accepted at Family Resource Centers located at select library sites throughout the City. For any questions on the enrollment process, or to get assistance with an application, parents are encouraged to call the Chicago Early Learning Hotline at 312-229-1690.

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