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MAYOR EMANUEL LAUNCHES IMPROVED UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL APPLICATION TO HELP FAMILIES ENROLL IN EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Full-day options available to more than 18,000 children across the city — an increase of 70 percent since 2011

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today launched the enhanced universal preschool application designed to improve access and help families to identify options that meet the needs of their early learners. This online site provides a single point of entry to access a comprehensive menu of over 600 programs for three- and four-year olds available under Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and city-administered community-based sites citywide. Since taking office, Mayor Emanuel has made full-day early learning opportunities a priority, expanding preschool programming to serve 18,000 children across the city—an increase of 70 percent since 2011. Over 10,000 preschool applications have been submitted for upcoming school year.

“The single most important investment we can make is in our children and their education,” said Mayor Emanuel. “Every child in every neighborhood across Chicago deserves a quality education and that must begin in their earliest years. The universal application helps all families—no matter their needs—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.”

In its second year online, the application at www.chicagoearlylearning.org has been redesigned following consultation with focus groups that included more than 150 parents. The improved site creates a streamlined process with comprehensive information on all programs available to families. Also new this year is a “Find and Compare” tool which helps families to choose the program that meets their child’s needs. There are more than 600 high-quality community-based and school-based preschool programs available, with both half-day and full-day options. By moving the application process online, the administration reduces barriers and allows parents to complete the application from any computer, tablet or smart phone.

“The universal preschool application meets the wide-ranging needs of families and communities across Chicago and empowers them with access to quality early learning opportunities,” said Department of Family & Support Services Commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler. “Family engagement is critical and this site provides comprehensive information to help families make the right choice to support important early development for their children.”

Families of children who will be three- or four-years old on September 1, 2017 can now submit applications online for enrollment in fall 2017 early learning programs. The online application process allows parents to receive real-time information about program availability in their desired location, eliminating the need to visit multiple sites to apply for preschool. Notifications for placement in programs for the upcoming school year will continue to be accepted on a rolling basis, prioritizing families based on need.

“High quality early childhood education provides our young learners with a strong foundation for future success,” said CPS Chief Education Officer Dr. Janice K. Jackson. “We are committed to expanding opportunities for early learners in every neighborhood so that all of our students have the tools they need to excel in school and life.”

Chicago is the first city in the country to develop an online preschool application system so comprehensive that it spans all early learning program programming available to children aged three to five, including many no- or low-cost options. Families can access support in the application process at one of twelve Neighborhood Resource Centers located in Chicago Public Library (CPL) branches and sites throughout the city. Branches include: Austin Library, Avalon Library, Bezazian Library, Budlong Woods Library, Humboldt Park Library, Legler Library, Little Village Library, McKinley Park Library, Portage-Cragin Library, Thurgood Marshall Library, West Lawn Library and Coleman Library.

“CPL branches are proud to serve as community resources in every neighborhood, helping to make early learning programming accessible to our youngest patrons and their families across Chicago,” said Chicago Public Library Commissioner and CEO Brian Bannon. “Whether it be our Rahm’s Little Readers summer program or our new early learning play spaces. CPL nurtures learning experiences that build 21st century leaders.”

Mayor Emanuel has significantly expanded early childhood programs and early learning initiatives at CPL’s 80 branch locations. Each year more than 35,000 children and families participate in early literacy workshops provided by branch libraries to support the basic building blocks for early literacy and success in school. CPL’s Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge and its component for early learners, Rahm’s Little Readers, engages more than 80,000 children in STEM learning throughout the summer months.

In the past six years, the City has invested more than \$75 million in early childhood programs, and launched the country's second early childhood Social Impact Bond to scale effective preschool programs. This fall, CPS will offer an additional 1,000 full-day opportunities moving the city closer to its goal of universally accessible, high quality, full-day preschool. 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.

Chicago Early Learning is a citywide opportunity for all families to enroll their children in no- or low-cost, safe, high-quality preschool programs during the 2017-18 school year. All preschool programs are run through a CPS school or a local, community-based organization. The Chicago Early Learning universal application system is designed to make applying to preschool even easier for families. Chicago families with children who will be three or four years-old by September 1, 2017 can apply online at www.chicagoearlylearning.com, by phone at 312-229-1690, in person at one of 12 Family Resource Centers at libraries across the city, or at their participating community-based site. **For more information please visit www.chicagoearlylearning.org.**