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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES \$9 MILLION FUND FOR THOUSANDS OF HIGH-NEED CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Eligible students and families will receive one-time \$500 microgrant in the form of a check to assist with educational and living expenses

CHICAGO – Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Interim Chicago Public Schools CEO Dr. José M. Torres announced the creation of the Chicago Families Forward Fund. Driven by Chicago families' high level of continued financial need, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Families Forward Fund will provide emergency assistance to eligible students and families. The Fund, aimed at supporting families with educational and living expenses, will distribute more than \$9 million in assistance before the end of the Fall 2021 semester.

"Throughout this pandemic, our students and their families have experienced a number of traumas including the loss of employment, housing and even loved ones," said Mayor Lightfoot. "The Chicago Families Forward Fund will serve as a meaningful next step in our citywide mission of addressing these traumas and further allow us to provide residents of all ages with the resources they need to thrive. After all, by nurturing the financial, physical and emotional wellbeing of our CPS families, we will be able to better set our students up for academic success— thus ensuring the future prosperity of our city."

The Chicago Families Forward Fund was created by and will be jointly administered as a partnership between the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and the Children First Fund (CFF), the Chicago Public Schools foundation. The emergency assistance program will draw funding from money the City of Chicago received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act – the \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill passed in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

In particular, the Chicago Families Forward Fund will support CPS students and families experiencing housing insecurity. Under this program, students in temporary living situations (STLS) eligible for STLS services for the 2021-22 school year are given a one-time \$500 microgrant in the form of a check which will be



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made available for pick-up in the main office of the student's school. Payments will be made on a per student basis, so families with multiple eligible students may receive an equal number of grants.

"STLS students and families were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and providing them with additional financial assistance will go a long way in helping them access the additional support they need," said Interim CPS CEO Dr. José M. Torres "We are grateful to Mayor Lightfoot and CFF for supporting our students through the Chicago Families Forward Fund - which will help ensure CPS families most in need are connected with critical resources."

Common reasons STLS students are absent from school include lack of school supplies, lack of clean or suitable clothing, and fear of bullying based on their family's living situation. By providing these grants to students and families as the school year begins, the City and CPS aim to better equip students and their families to tackle financial challenges and enable reengagement with their schools and communities.

"As is the case with far too many of the issues we face, under-engagement largely impacts our communities of color which tend to have the highest concentration of STLS students. In providing emergency grants to all STLS students and their families, the Chicago Families Forward Fund is providing crucial resources to those who need them the most," said 24th Ward Alderman Michael Scott, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Education and Child Development. "I am proud to stand by Mayor Lightfoot and Dr. Torres as they live up to their promise to keep equity as our North Star."

The majority of STLS students belong to Chicago's Black and Brown communities which have borne the brunt of the pandemic's health and economic impacts. The students experiencing homelessness are overwhelmingly children of color, at a total of 98 percent, whereas up to 76 percent are students in Black communities. This funding will provide targeted relief to these communities in the short-run and support the City and CPS' longer-term strategy for reengagement.

"As Chicago Public Schools' independent Foundation, the Children First Fund is excited to partner with the City and the District on this initiative," said Sadie Stockdale Jefferson, Executive Director of Children First Fund. "The challenges of the past year have highlighted the importance of providing flexible funding to our families who need it most, removing barriers to school and helping our students reengage with learning."



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Providing cash aid to families through their child's school as well as providing supports to STLS Liaisons in schools to help connect families to wrap-around supports makes this program among the first of its kind in the U.S. These wrap-around supports include additional mental health supports, tutoring, city services including housing supports as well as increasing awareness of general benefits provided to STLS students such as fee waivers, warm coats and educational supplies. The program's design and processes incorporate findings from rigorous research on direct cash transfer programs, chronic absence interventions, and roots of housing insecurity.

"Families and students experiencing homelessness have faced housing instability, job loss, loss of family members and serious health issues during the pandemic," said the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. "All Chicago families and students need housing and other resources to succeed in school. The direct payments to CPS families and students experiencing homelessness that are flexible will allow families and students to address a variety of unique and urgent needs."

Besides providing crucial aid to families, the structure and scope of the program provide a unique opportunity for the City, in partnership with leading academic centers, to gain new insights on how to better serve vulnerable families and youth in Chicago.

Eligible families may fill out a short registration form confirming eligibility at www.cps.edu/FamiliesForwardFund by Friday, October 1st, or pick up a paper registration form at their child's school.

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