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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 5, 2013

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**MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES NEW EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES
FOR STUDENTS ACROSS THE CITY**

*Over 2,300 More Children Will Have Access to New, High-Quality Early Learning Program
Opportunities Thanks to Reforms*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced that over 2,300 additional children across the city will have access to new, high-quality early learning program opportunities and wrap-around services associated with these programs starting in the fall. Studies have shown that a high-quality early start to learning is critical to future success and in Chicago, a student who attends a high-quality early learning program is 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school.

"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 with early learning programs," said Mayor Emanuel. "From early learning through college, we are working to make the smart, critical investments that support our students' futures."

Mayor Emanuel has made giving Chicago's students a high-quality education a priority, with a particular focus on the early years of a child's education. While many early learning programs across the nation are facing cuts based on tough budget decisions, last August, Mayor Emanuel announced an unprecedented three-year, \$36 million investment from the city to go directly towards the expansion of opportunities in high-quality early learning programs.

In addition to that investment, Mayor Emanuel unveiled an overhaul of the process for reviewing and allocating funding for these programs. The revised process was open to all schools and community-based organizations and included a streamlined, coordinated review by both the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to ensure that all programs being supported by city funding are high-quality and prepare students for kindergarten and continued learning. It also, for the first time, included a coordinated effort by both agencies to ensure that funding is strategically allocated across the city in a way that best serves the most children.

“Adding over 2,300 opportunities for much-needed quality early learning programs throughout the city is newsworthy in of itself, but simplifying and demystifying the application system is equally worthy of praise,” said Ric Estrada, President and CEO of Metropolitan Family Services. “This investment in our children will pay real dividends in the form of improved quality of life and opportunities for the participants as well as cost savings for all tax payers - bravo.”

As a result of this new process, 724 schools and community-based provider locations are funded to provide high-quality early learning programs starting this fall, serving approximately 44,600 children between the ages of 0-5. The vast majority of these locations are based in community organizations or schools; 95 of these locations are run by faith-based organizations and six will be in charter schools. And starting next year, families who are not eligible for free and reduced price lunch will be asked to contribute a co-payment on a sliding fee scale to participate in CPS school-based programs. All locations can be found on the City’s new easy-to-use, interactive online portal <http://www.chicagoeearlylearning.org/>.

“These are unprecedented steps to expand access to early childhood education in Chicago – not only in the additional number of seats available, but also through the City’s investments to improve quality and parent engagement,” said Maria Whelan, President of Illinois Action for Children. “More children and their families in Chicago will benefit from high-quality early childhood education because of this leadership and commitment to those who must, at the end of the day, matter most — our children.”

“Every child in every neighborhood across this city deserves a quality education that helps them succeed in life. We have made the commitment to ensure every child has access to a full day of kindergarten in our schools, and by partnering closely with DFSS we are ensuring that Chicago’s children have a quality start to their learning, even before they walk through our doors,” said CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Additionally, CPS and DFSS determined through their assessment of providers that there was a lack of high-quality early learning options in the Englewood community. Consequently, a portion of the funds coming directly from the City this year will go directly toward establishing an Early Learning Center in Englewood that will support over 370 children and families, offering full-day pre-K for 3-5-year-olds and full-day early learning and care for 0-3-year-olds as well as wraparound support for children and families in the community. Wraparound services typically include parent engagement and empowerment, outreach to engage hardest-to-reach families to enroll in programs and attend early learning programs on time, and social service support to connect children and their families to health and other social services.

“Mayor Emanuel has made a major investment in the children of Chicago which will allow us to increase access, increase quality and expand services to parents and children in some of our most

high need communities,” said DFSS Commissioner Evelyn Diaz. “It amounts to a triple win for families that will also benefit our communities for years to come.”

In addition to the City’s investment in early learning, starting next school year, every CPS student in Chicago will have access to a full day of kindergarten, a commitment made by Mayor Emanuel and CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett this past February.

The early learning reforms being implemented are based on recommendations made by the Mayor’s Early Childhood Task Force, which was launched in July 2011 and engaged over 60 early childhood experts across the city and state with the goal of transforming early childhood education in Chicago. The Task Force included members from city agencies, early learning advocacy groups, and direct service providers. In September 2011, Mayor Emanuel established an Early Learning Executive Council to work on implementing the Task Force’s recommendations and continue to engage community and education leaders on this important issue.

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