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MAYOR EMANUEL AND CPS CEO BYRD-BENNETT KICK OFF BACK TO SCHOOL CELEBRATION

Mayor and CPS Celebrate Upcoming First Day of School and Tour Newly Renovated Taft High School

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett kicked off the City of Chicago's back to school celebration today at William Howard Taft High School. Mayor Emanuel and CPS officials also toured Taft to view significant renovations. CPS recently launched its back to school campaign to remind students and parents that the first day of the 2014-2015 School Year (SY 14-15) is Tuesday, September 2.

"We are looking forward to another great school year," said Mayor Emanuel. "With graduation rates over 69 percent for the first time, Chicago Public School students continue to raise the standard of excellence. From a full day of kindergarten and expanded pre-k access to supporting our students as they enter college and career, the City of Chicago is making critical investments for our children to have a successful future."

Mayor Emanuel and CPS recently announced increases in attendance and graduation rates. As part of this increase, 181,306 students improved their attendance rates over the previous year. Test scores, particularly ACT scores are also steadily improving. This year CPS high school students recorded an ACT composite score of 18.0 in 2014, the highest on record, while outpacing the state in growth for both reading and math.

"It is crucial for students across the district to make it back to school on the first day," said CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett. "Our students continue to make gains in the graduation rate, test scores and attendance rate, and in order to build on these gains, students need to be in class and ready to learn on the first day."

As part of the back to school kick off, the CTA launched the fourth year of its "First Day, Free Rides" program, providing free transit to students and adults accompanying students on September 2. Parents and guardians should also take the opportunity to see if their students are eligible to receive student reduced fares of just 75 cents to ride CTA trains and buses on school days. Other sponsors of the back to school celebration include Peoples Gas, Comcast, Aramark, Museum of Science and Industry, and the Gary and Denise Gardner Family Foundation.

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The back to school kick off was held at Taft High School, which recently received significant repairs and renovations, including window replacement, masonry, roofing work, paint, new lockers, and upgrades to the science labs.

The Public Building Commission (PBC), which led the Taft renovations on behalf of CPS, is committed to a high level of economic sustainability. Contract provisions on these projects require that at least 50 percent of the labor force be City of Chicago residents and that residents of the community area also be hired to work on the project. The PBC is also committed to contract provisions that require minority and women-owned business participation.

The renovation of Taft is one of many investments Mayor Emanuel and CEO Byrd-Bennett are making across the City of Chicago for students and their families.

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