



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

CHICAGO CONNECTED LAUNCHES PARTNERSHIP WITH COURSERA, OFFERING FREE CERTIFICATIONS, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, AND COURSES FOR TO UP TO 1,000 FAMILIES

Families participating in Chicago Connected can now access 5,000+ courses and 30+ professional certificates on-demand at no cost

CHICAGO – Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announced the launch of a partnership between “Chicago Connected” and Coursera, one of the largest online learning platforms, which delivers world-class content taught by instructors from over 200 of the world’s leading universities and organizations in multiple languages.

Chicago Connected, launched in June 2020, provides no-cost, high-speed internet service to eligible Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students and their families. With approximately 64,000 students across 42,000 households being served by the program at its one-year anniversary, Chicago Connected has cut the City’s digital divide by nearly two-thirds. Now, Chicago Connected is acting on the City’s commitment to digital inclusion: The program engaged thousands of families to understand their digital learning needs, and as a result, is offering free access to Coursera for approximately 1,000 families as they expand their skills and bolster their professional and personal credentials.

“Chicago Connected was always about more than expanding internet access. From the start, we recognized the potential of the program to provide a platform for digital learning and workforce development,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Over the last year, we heard time and time again from our community members about the need for these critical services. Today, with the launch of the Chicago Connected-Coursera partnership, I am thrilled to announce this significant next step in our mission to bridge the digital divide and provide upskilling opportunities for our residents to take advantage of.”

At the one-year anniversary of the program, Chicago Connected launched a partnership with the digital learning platform Northstar Digital Literacy, with Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC) serving as program administrator. Digital literacy trainings offered through Northstar are designed to help learners



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expand their digital skills and know-how at their own pace. Learners can also test their knowledge by completing assessments and earning badges and certificates that demonstrate their computer skills to current and future employers.

To date, 20 community-based organizations (CBOs) have signed up to serve as training sites to host digital learning workshops and proctor Northstar assessments. Additionally, CBOs have hosted 200 digital learning workshops, with over 1,500 learning hours completed by Chicago Connected families over the past six months.

Now, with the launch of the Chicago Connected-Coursera partnership, learners will have an opportunity to take advantage of their growing digital skills and level up in their careers and personal lives.

“Chicago Connected has been instrumental in connecting residents in my West Side community to broadband in their homes,” said 24th Ward Alderman Michael Scott, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Education and Child Development. “This partnership with Coursera will allow community members to use their internet access for skill-building and life-long learning, supporting their economic mobility and fulfillment.”

According to a [survey](#) of nearly 5,000 Chicago Connected participants administered by Kids First Chicago, nearly 70 percent of respondents are interested in technology trainings, close to 40 percent desire access to software training and online college courses, and half prefer self-paced online modules as a desired mode of learning. Additionally, 53 percent of respondents hope to get a new job or get promoted in their current job in the next five years, and 68 percent want to earn a new degree or certifications that will allow them to advance in their career.

“We’re excited to partner with the City of Chicago on its digital inclusion and workforce development initiative,” said Jeff Maggioncalda, Coursera CEO. “Through the Chicago Connected program, we’re looking forward to providing many families across the city with access to job-relevant learning and credentials in high-demand digital fields.”

Coursera will offer learners a range of educational opportunities at no cost to them – from job-ready professional certificates and hands-on projects to courses on improving personal well-being and building resilience. These programs include entry-level Professional Certificates designed by industry leaders like Google, IBM, and Facebook, which prepare learners without a degree or technology experience for roles in high-demand fields such as IT support, data analytics, and social media marketing.



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"I have long been vocal about the need to secure quality broadband access for each and every resident of the 37th Ward. Mayor Lightfoot's Chicago Connected initiative helped bring that vision to life. But we must do even more to ensure program participants have the tools to leverage this critical resource for personal and professional development," said 37th Ward Alderman Emma Mitts, Chairman of the Committee on License and Consumer Protection. "This investment in Coursera marks a step forward in equipping all Chicagoans with the resources to level up in their careers and personal endeavors."

Chicago Connected users will have access to a customized landing page that is tailored to their interests in English, Spanish, and more. The landing page will also recommend trainings to equip learners with in-demand skills for high-growth industries and roles in Chicago, informed by data and expertise from The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and World Business Chicago. The CPS Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team will serve as the program administrator.

"A key component to our city's economic recovery and future success includes empowering residents with access to opportunity," said Michael Fassnacht, CEO & President, World Business Chicago, and Chief Marketing Officer, City of Chicago. "I hope everyone shares news of Chicago Connected as a great way to lift-up anyone struggling with employment, or contemplating a new job, a first job, or a whole other career. Businesses in Chicago are expanding and growing because of our exceptional pool of diverse, talent and workforce. Today's news is a win for us all."

A critical aspect of Chicago Connected has been its close partnership with CBOs, who serve as the program's "ears on the ground" and represent the diverse needs and preferences of Chicago's neighborhoods. Partner CBOs will support the Coursera rollout and license distribution, spreading awareness among community members, and supporting license management and assignment. Licenses will also be managed and distributed through CPS' 13 Parent Universities.

"Parent Universities have helped Chicago Public Schools families gain critical skills to close the achievement gap," said CPS Interim Chief of Family and Community Engagement Adrian Segura. "They have enabled parents and caretakers to build community, expand their knowledge base, and receive training and certificates to support their communities. Now, I am excited to partner with Coursera to expand our offerings and help families gain skills that will support them in advancing their careers, developing new learnings, and taking those learnings to empower their communities."

"Ongoing engagement and input from the very same communities and families served by Chicago Connected led to the launch of this new partnership with



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Coursera,” said Daniel Anello, CEO of Kids First Chicago. “The insights that our community-based partners continue to elevate from Chicago families have allowed Chicago Connected to evolve to serve Chicagoans’ needs in new and different ways.”

Invitations to request a Coursera license will be disseminated to Chicago Connected participants through CPS Parent Universities and Chicago Connected community partners. If granted a license, learners will have access for four months, with the opportunity to renew.

To learn more about Chicago Connected’s free digital learning offerings, please visit cps.edu/digitallearning.

To check if you are eligible for Chicago Connected’s no-cost broadband service, please visit cps.edu/getconnected.

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