

Keynote Address to World Bank Symposium on Education

Thursday, November 7, 2013

Washington, D.C.

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. It's an honor to be here today, and to have the privilege of delivering this keynote address.

As most of you know, I spent many years here in Washington working, but for the past two and a half years, I have had the best job that I've ever had in public life – serving as mayor of the great City of Chicago.

It's the city that my father and grandparents came to as immigrants to this country. It's the city where I was born and, as President Obama has shown, a city where all things are possible.

From the very beginning, my parents instilled in me an appreciation for the importance of education. In fact, getting a good education wasn't just my business; it was everybody's business.

You may not agree with my parents' methods. I certainly didn't. But the fact is that they were ahead of their time.

Today, we live in a world where knowledge is power and what you learn is directly related to what you earn.

I have set a goal for Chicago's children of nothing less than 100 percent college-ready and 100 percent college-bound. That means we will not be satisfied until every single public school student in Chicago graduates from high school and goes on to a higher education, whether it's at a four-year college, a two-year college or a technical school.

This year, a record 65 and a half percent of Chicago public school students graduated from high school. Only a few years ago, our graduation rate was barely over 50 percent. So we have made significant progress. Still, one out of three schoolchildren in Chicago isn't making it through high school. We can -- we must -- do better than that.

The truth is that all of us are responsible and accountable for our children's academic success...parents, principals, pastors, public officials...all of us. And in Chicago today, we are stepping up to that challenge.

We have invested in a longer school day in our public schools, so Chicago's children will get more hours in the classroom.

A child entering kindergarten today will get two and a half more years of instructional time by the time they finish high school.

And, for the first time, we are offering a full day of kindergarten for every child.

And Chicago's parents are enjoying a greater variety of educational choices today – from International Baccalaureate to STEM, magnet to charter, selective enrollment to military schools to traditional neighborhood schools.

We are funding a teacher in every neighborhood library to provide after-school tutoring, and we just launched the largest homework help program in the nation. As long as you have a Chicago library card, you can get homework assistance in English and Spanish, 24-7, 365 days a year.

As a result of these investments, we are starting to see some real signs of progress. Our students' test scores have been climbing each year and I'm proud that, in the most recent round of school "report cards," the top four high schools in the State of Illinois are Chicago Public Schools.

But among all our education reforms so far, perhaps none has been as far-reaching as reinventing our community college system. With the help of a dynamic chancellor named Cheryl Hyman -- herself a product of the city colleges -- we have begun to link our city colleges to the demands of a 21st Century workforce.

When I came to office, a few things were abundantly clear:

- Despite nearly ten percent unemployment, there were more than 100,000 job openings just waiting to be filled.
- Roughly 77 percent of all jobs today require some kind of technical skill set or at least two years of college.

It was clear there was a missing link, and we needed an economic plan that provided opportunities for employers and potential employees.

Off the bat, we did two things:

- We determined our City Colleges could serve as a direct bridge between students and the jobs of the 21st century. So we launched our Colleges to Careers program to make this vision into reality.
- Next, I focused on changing our model for business growth and job creation. I changed the way we think about attracting jobs to Chicago by dramatically expanding the mandate of our economic recruitment group: World Business Chicago. Instead of simply responding to companies considering a move to

Chicago already, we took a proactive approach. I appointed to a council of many of the leading businesspeople and citizens in our city to develop an economic plan that used our Colleges to Careers program as a cornerstone for the future economic growth of the City to create the economic climate to get companies to consider creating jobs in Chicago.

In the next 10 years, the Chicago area will need 84,000 new jobs in health care, 44,000 new jobs in IT, and 110,000 new jobs in transportation, distribution and logistics.

In order to meet the growing demand for these jobs, we worked to turn our colleges from a last ditch effort for a remedial education into a first choice for high-skill training leading directly to a good-paying job.

The first thing we did to accomplish this was invest in the future of our community colleges by modernizing and expanding their facilities. We have broken ground for the building a new campus for Malcolm X, which includes a school of health sciences and we've broken ground for a new transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL) center at Olive-Harvey College – both located in economically struggling communities. Those projects will create 1,100 construction jobs, while spurring redevelopment in their surrounding neighborhoods.

Next, we worked to make sure that a City College degree would really mean something in the actual job market. To determine how to train people for jobs, we worked with Chicago's major employers in growing industries that will be the leading source of future jobs such as healthcare and hospitality, and in sectors like transportation and logistics where Chicago leads the world.

Now don't get me wrong. A college diploma is great. It looks nice on the wall. But we wanted a city college diploma to be more than that. We wanted to make it a ticket to a job.

I distinctly remember a young man I met on a train a few years back, who was taking classes full-time at Harold Washington Community College while also working full time at Target. He was doing his part – working hard at school and at work – and it was my job to make sure that once he graduated, he could take that Harold Washington degree to a front office and get a job.

Lastly, we forged partnerships between companies in these fields and our city colleges to design curricula that will result in immediate employment.

- We teamed up with Coyote logistics who helped us develop our supply chain management curriculum.

- And we partnered companies like Allscripts and Rush Hospital with Malcolm X College to design job training in health-care information technology and nursing.

These partnerships aren't just preparing students for jobs, they are also bringing new businesses and economic activity to our City.

Just last month, I broke ground on AeroTerm's new cargo center at O'Hare Airport.

- One of the reasons a world-class company like AeroTerm had the confidence to make the move and invest in Chicago is because Chicago is both the transportation and talent hub of the country.

Or take Whole Foods, for example. We recently announced that the newest Whole Foods is coming to Englewood, a lower-income area in Chicago that isn't exactly overflowing with big box grocery stores. Not only are they coming to Englewood, they are right next door to Kennedy-King College – a City College that focuses on the culinary and hospitality industry.

The success of Colleges to Careers is critical to Chicago's economic future. But our goal is more than that – because no city can succeed if success is beyond the reach of its own children.

You see, Chicago already enjoys a dynamic workforce. On top of our City College system, we are home to some of the world's best universities, such as the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and DePaul and Loyola Universities to name a few.

And Chicago is a magnet for some of the brightest graduates from across the country and around the world. For the first time in history, our burgeoning high-tech sector is attracting entrepreneurs and investment capital from the coasts instead of watching them flow the other way. The result is an average of one new Chicago high-tech startup every day.

Across Chicago, we want children to know they too, can one day work for one of these companies like Google or Braintree.

When they look downtown at Chicago's magnificent skyline, I want these children to be able to envision themselves working in one of those skyscrapers -- in startups or law or business.

Let me tell you about some of these Chicagoans, and how we are helping them to achieve their dreams.

Daniel Robinson came to Chicago as an immigrant from Mexico who barely spoke English. He has wanted to be an architect since he first saw the skyscrapers lining Wacker Drive in Chicago's Loop. Daniel studied architecture at Harold Washington College while working as a paid intern at the global architecture firm Cannon Design, one of our Colleges to Careers partners. He worked side by side with professional architects in Cannon's downtown office. This fall, Daniel transferred to Southern Illinois University to pursue his bachelor's degree.

Shaina Henderson wanted to go into business, but had never set foot in an actual office. She attended Harold Washington College and graduated in May as an Associate in Arts with a concentration in business. Shaina became the first Harold Washington College student to intern with the Colleges to Careers partner Mesirow Financial. She has since transferred to the University of Illinois-Chicago, to study Business Administration and Accounting for her future business career.

Brandy Rodgers always knew that she wanted to help people, but didn't know how to make it her career. Brandy entered Malcolm X College's Respiratory Care Program while working part-time as a dialysis technician. She completed her clinical internship at Trinity Hospital, where she impressed the staff with her initiative and skills. The hospital hired her for a full-time position as a Respiratory Care Therapist when she graduated from Malcolm X this year.

But it's not only aspiring young people who are helped by Careers to College. It's older workers who are looking for a second chance.

Just this past weekend I met a 49-year-old Chicagoan named Jaime Solano. Jaime worked short term jobs at Walmart, Cub Foods and delivering newspapers. But he also found it hard to hold a job because of an addiction problem.

Two years ago, Jaime decided to turn his life around. In December of 2012, he received his GED from Richard J. Daley City College. The next month, he enrolled in the Manufacturing Tech Bridge program and the Advance Calumet Green Manufacturing program. Last month, he finished both programs. And on Monday of this week, he attended a job fair at the Hoist Lift Truck Company and submitted a resume.

Thanks to his own hard work, and the opportunity our city colleges provided, Jaime Solano is poised to become a productive part of Chicago's high-tech manufacturing economy.

These inspiring stories are being repeated thousands of times across our city – providing dedicated students with the skills and career opportunities they deserve. Their success is Chicago's success and is building a stronger foundation for our city's future. It's a future in which every resident of our city, no matter their family

background or where they're from, will have an opportunity for a productive, fulfilling career.

To me, this is what good government is all about – helping to provide these kinds of opportunities for all of our people. Not by creating public-sector jobs that must be supported by hard-pressed taxpayers, but by partnering with our private- and not-for-profit sectors to fill the good-paying jobs most in demand.

I hope that other cities will be encouraged by Chicago's model for building a skilled workforce that can compete in the 21st-Century economy. If we can revive and modernize our training programs to match the needs of high-growth industries, we can catapult millions more people into the middle class and reverse the growing social inequality that threatens our future.

That is Chicago's vision. I hope it will inspire yours.

Thank you.