

Mayor Emanuel announces early childhood education expansion for fall of 2013 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

As part of the Emanuel Administration's drive to provide Chicago's children access to the full education they need to excel, Mayor Emanuel today announced a three-year investment that will create opportunity for over 5,000 children to access early childhood education (ECE) programs across the city beginning in the 2013-2014 school year.

In addition to increasing the number of children who will have access to this critical programming, the City is also overhauling the process for reviewing and allocating funding for these programs in order to ensure high-quality seats that give children in every neighborhood the best chance at success later in life.

"Chicago's children deserve a full education that gives them the time, skills and information they need to compete on a national level, and early childhood education programs are a critical piece," said Mayor Emanuel. "From the cradle to college, we are investing in high-quality options for our children."

High-quality early childhood education is a critical foundation for success both in school and later in life and effective support for these programs is essential to helping Chicago's students excel. In Chicago, a student who attends a high-quality ECE program is 29% more likely to graduate from high school.

Currently, about 37,000 children between the ages three and four are enrolled in City-funded ECE programs across the city that vary in quality and therefore do not equally prepare students for kindergarten and continued learning. To remedy this, the City is overhauling the application and allocation process for providers of early childhood education programs:

Taking A Comprehensive Look at All City-Funded Programs: All schools and community-based organizations are invited to apply for early childhood education program funding for the 2013-2014 school year, increasing the pool of applicants that can better deliver high-quality early learning for children and encouraging innovation among program providers. High quality early childhood programs provide a nurturing and individualized environment, dedicated teachers, a research-based, comprehensive and balanced curriculum, and opportunities for parent engagement and support.

Streamlined Review Process: Applications to DFSS and CPS will be reviewed using a combination of internal and external reviewers with expertise in early childhood education who will provide better insight into community need, program quality and design. Rubrics outlining the quality expectations for programs will be posted online along with the application package at www.cityofchicago.org/bids/chicagoreadytolearn; ^[2]

Increased Coordination: The Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) will work more closely together to ensure that funding through each agency is strategically allocated across the city in a way that best serves the most children.

While many ECE programs across the nation are facing cuts through tough budget decisions, Chicago is undertaking this three-year investment in order to give Chicago's students a full education. This funding supplements existing state and federal funding in order to increase the number of seats available to children. Additionally, a portion of this funding will go towards increasing wraparound services, such as intensive parent engagement and community partnerships, for about 4,000 children in existing ECE programs over three years, providing children that have traditionally been hardest to reach with access to additional services that help to amplify the impact of ECE programs.

The changes being announced today 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. The members of the Executive Council are:

Jean-Claude Brizard, CEO of Chicago Public Schools;

Dr. Bechara Choucair, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health;

Evelyn Diaz, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services;

Ricardo (Ric) Estrada; President and CEO of Metropolitan Family Services;
Janine H. Lewis, Executive Director of the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition;
Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, President of the Erikson Institute;
Diana Rauner, President of the Ounce of Prevention Fund;
Jesse Ruiz, Vice President of the Chicago Board of Education;
Elizabeth Swanson, Deputy Chief of Staff for Education to Mayor Emanuel; and
Maria Whelen, President and CEO of Illinois Action for Children.

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