



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ENCOURAGES FAMILIES TO ENROLL CHILDREN IN PRESCHOOL  
FOR UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR**

*Time to enroll the city's youngest learners in Chicago Early Learning now with  
additional full-day preschool opportunities created this year*

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today joined the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to encourage parents and guardians to enroll their three- and four-year-old children in a Chicago Early Learning preschool program this year. With three weeks left until school starts, the City is working to ensure all eligible children are enrolled in a program either through a City-funded community agency or in programming available at Chicago Public Schools.

This year, the City will increase its investment by \$76 million to provide families with better access to high-quality early learning programs than ever before, anticipating serving up to an additional 3,000 children at school and community-based sites across the city. Parents can apply now at a wide range of community centers citywide, or by visiting [www.chicagoearlylearning.org](http://www.chicagoearlylearning.org).

“Pre-kindergarten is proven to close the achievement gap and reduce financial burdens placed on working families, which is why it is crucial eligible children are enrolled in CPS or community-based early education programs,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “For Chicago to be a world-class city, we must develop a diverse, vibrant, and challenging public education system that starts with early learning and guarantees equal opportunities for students, regardless of their zip code or parents’ income.”

The City has also directed an additional \$42 million to community-based partners, awarded as part of a competitive RFP process aimed at implementing Chicago Early Learning Standards and quality across the board and increasing funding transparency in the process. With the award of these grants tied to quality and community need, the City will ensure all school-based and community-administered programs meet the same state and federal benchmarks, raising equity and ensuring the same high-quality standards for preparing children for success in their early years and beyond.

“This continues our commitment to improving the quality and equity of access to pre-K programs in Chicago,” said Department of Family and Support Services Commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler.



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Yesterday, CPS released a budget that includes \$120 million for pre-k facilities conversions and expansions across the city. In addition to the historic \$120 million investment in pre-K classrooms, the budget includes school-based funding to open more than 100 additional pre-K classrooms in 28 high-needs communities, which will serve up to an additional 2,800 students in the upcoming school year.

"By expanding free, full-day pre-k across Chicago, the city is helping families create a strong academic foundation for their children," said CPS CEO Dr. Janice K. Jackson. "As we work toward providing every four-year-old with access to a world-class education, we are grateful to have a champion and partner in Mayor Lightfoot who is dedicated to investing in the future of our youngest students."

This year, the City will continue to increase equity in programming, by providing all four-year-olds with access to a free, full-day of preschool in 28 of the City's high-need communities, primarily in Chicago's South and West sides. The 28 high-needs communities that will have universal pre-K this upcoming school year include: Auburn Gresham, Avalon Park, Burnside, Calumet Heights, Chatham, East Side, Englewood, Greater Grand Crossing, Hegewisch, Pullman, Riverdale, Roseland, South Chicago, South Deering, Washington Heights, West Englewood, West Pullman; Austin, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Lower West Side, North Lawndale, South Lawndale, West Garfield Park, West Town and Uptown.

While applications are up more than 20% from last year, there are still approximately 8,000 open seats remaining for three and four-year-olds throughout the city. To meet the needs of all families in every community area, the City relies equally on community-based partners and CPS to provide high-quality services for preschool children. In addition to preschool, community-based partners also provide robust, full-day services for children birth through five.

Research is clear about the impact that high-quality learning environments have on children before they enter school, during their most formative academic years, and the continued positive effects those experiences have on school and life success. Numerous studies have shown that high-quality preschool positions students for kindergarten readiness, and that children with access are less likely to drop out of school, become a teenage parent, be placed in special education, never attend college, and be arrested for a violent crime.

To ensure a robust pipeline of highly qualified early educators, the City continues to invest in scholarships that allow teachers to continue their education in early learning. Under Mayor Lightfoot's leadership, the City has doubled the number of scholarship recipients pursuing a bachelor's degree in early learning, expanding high-quality staff to care for and educate children as city programs grow. Educators interested in applying for these scholarships are encouraged to visit [www.chicagoearlylearning.org/scholarships](http://www.chicagoearlylearning.org/scholarships).

All current early learning site locations can be found on the City's easy-to-use, interactive online portal at [www.chicagoearlylearning.org](http://www.chicagoearlylearning.org). Through this website, parents or guardians can find and apply for programs at both community organizations and CPS. Additionally,



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families can visit one of the City's family resource centers or call the Chicago Early Learning Hotline at (312) 229-1690.

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