



January 30, 2019

Mayor Rahm Emanuel
City of Chicago Office of the Mayor
121 N LaSalle St #507
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: Exclusion of Community-Based Organizations within Universal Preschool
From: The Support Early Education (SEEd) Campaign

CC: Lisa Morrison Butler, Commissioner of the Department of Family and Support Services; Samantha Aigner-Treworgy, Chief of Early Learning at City of Chicago; Cerathel Burgess-Burnett, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Family and Support Services; Michael Abello, Chicago Public Schools Chief of Early Childhood Education

Dear Mayor Rahm Emanuel,

The City of Chicago's goal of universal preschool is laudable, but the current process compromises parents' freedom to choose what setting best meets the needs of their children and is potentially harmful to working families in Chicago. Community organizations offer full-day, full-year, high-quality birth-to-five programming and extensive services for the whole family. If organizations do not have genuine input in the roll out process, working families would suffer the loss of extended hours, which could jeopardize their ability to maintain their jobs, and their access to the quality education and holistic support services they offer.

The Support Early Education (SEEd) Campaign requests that the City of Chicago halt the Chicago Early Learning Request for Proposals until there is a comprehensive plan that:

- **Ensures preservation of preschool slots for three-and four-year olds within licensed community organizations.**
- **Includes substantive input from SEEd Campaign and other community providers.**
- **Conducts analysis of supply and demand for preschool slots by neighborhood and addresses facility needs for programming. Information must be public and disseminated to providers and families.**
- **Articulates how the roll out will address the shortage of qualified staffing and teachers needed to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children within both school and community organizations.**

Over the past century, community-based organizations in Chicago have been long-standing pillars offering a myriad of vital comprehensive services, supports, and programs. Through quality and flexible programming, they meet children's developmental needs, build on racial, cultural and linguistic identity, and provide an array of services for the entire family, such as: workforce development, mental health support, preventative health care, adult education, immigration services, and nutritional services.

There is a concern that the implementation of universal preschool creates unnecessary competition between community providers and public schools. It is not an either/or dichotomy, but a both/and approach that is best for Chicago and families. Moreover, the Department of Family and Support

Services' public meetings with providers have been primarily informational, not intended for community leader input and shared decision-making. This approach limits the opportunity to strategize with school and community partners, to develop community plans that can best serve families. It is only together, that a unified and thoughtful action plan to reach universal preschool can be achieved.

The exclusion of community-based providers from serving three- and four-year olds could threaten the viability of these organizations to serve birth-to-three-year-olds. As organizations rely on numerous funding sources to support programming, many will not have the financial capacity to continue serving that crucial age group. Additionally, most provider facilities are not designed to solely serve children below the age of three and doing so would require substantial capital investments that community providers do not have, particularly following the sustained budget impasse in Illinois.

Continuity of care for children and families ensures the strongest return on investments in early childhood. Longstanding research has shown that children have better educational and developmental outcomes when there is continuity in their child care arrangements because safe, stable environments allow young children the opportunity to develop the relationships and trust necessary to comfortably explore and learn within their surroundings. If the roll out for universal preschool proceeds to prioritize school settings, the continuum of care for numerous families throughout the city will be disrupted multiple times over their children's earliest years when consistency and their children's ability to continuously participate in a program has the greatest impact. In a time of tumultuous immigration threats and school closures, communities will be further destabilized if these anchor institutions are forced to shut their doors or curtail their services.

Families deserve and want the ability to choose the best community-based or school *option* to meet their needs. We urge you to preserve the serving of three- and four-year olds in community settings and to pause the RFP process.

Sincerely,

The SEEd Campaign
(Latino Policy Forum
The Ounce of Prevention Fund
Child Care Advocates United of Illinois)