

CHICAGO SERVICE COMMUNITY BANDS TOGETHER TO HELP STUDENTS “THRIVE”

New report sheds light on critical elements to help kids succeed in the classroom and community

CHICAGO, December 4, 2014 — Hundreds of Chicago-based organizations are working toward one common agenda: preparing all Chicago youth for a vibrant future. Through Thrive Chicago, an initiative incubated in the Mayor’s Office and now launching as a separate independent organization, local education leaders, post-secondary institutions, researchers, and community-based social service agencies are actively collaborating to help kids succeed.

“From cradle to career, we are working to ensure our children have the quality education they deserve,” said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. “The City of Chicago continues to make the critical investments necessary for our students to succeed through a full day of Kindergarten, the expansion of pre-K for every low-income 4-year old, and increased opportunities in our Dual Credit and Dual Enrollment programs. These investments are showing a clear, positive effect as Chicago students raise the bar of excellence each year with a record graduation rates, freshman on-track, attendance, and ACT scores. Through this support and collaborative efforts like Thrive Chicago, Chicago students will remain on the track to college, career, and a successful future.”

Thrive released a [comprehensive baseline report](#) to provide a fresh perspective on how the consortium of cross-sector organizations can collaborate to address some of the toughest challenges that our youth face.

“The issues facing many of Chicago’s youth, particularly those confronted with violence and poverty are far too complex for any one organization to take on alone,” said David D. Hiller, President and CEO of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, which will serve as host and fiscal sponsor for Thrive Chicago over the next two years. “Our city needs a coordinated response, involving all who care about and invest in the lives and potential of our young people,” added Hiller.

Much of the organization’s first year was spent identifying key outcomes and analyzing relevant data, developing necessary infrastructure and building widespread support for the collaborative work ahead. Thrive Chicago’s partner organizations divided into five Change Networks focusing on specific outcomes along a child’s trajectory from cradle to career:

- Kindergarten readiness
- Engagement in enrichment and academic activities
- High school graduation
- College completion
- Employment at living wages

“Thrive Chicago brings together organizations across multiple sectors to unite efforts from cradle to career,” said Beth Swanson, Vice President of Strategy and Programs at the Joyce Foundation and Board Chair of Thrive Chicago. “By focusing on common outcomes, we will benefit all children.”

Members of each Network used available data to determine where to focus their initial efforts, considering where there was the most need for intervention and where Thrive Chicago could have the biggest effect. Progress accelerated rapidly as the Networks developed specific strategies for systemic improvement across each of the five core outcome areas. These groups prioritized objectives for collaborative action, met regularly to move those initiatives forward, and monitored data to determine where, and how, change is being made.

The following examples highlight Thrive Chicago’s work:

Early Care and Education. A new service for parents, the Early Learning portal, was recently created to help parents find top-quality programs and understand how to enroll their children. For this tool to be effective, parents must understand that it is available and how to use it. Organizations working together in Thrive Chicago are collaborating on an education and outreach campaign to make sure parents can help their children get the services they need.

Enrichment and Academic Activities. Access to quality programs is a problem for many Chicago students. To combat this, members of this group have researched best-practices for out-of-school time programming. They are now working with Chicago community based organizations to design and deliver needed trainings.

High School Graduation. In Chicago, there are around 43,600 16-20 year olds who do not have a high school diploma and are out of school or significantly off-pace to graduate. Working closely with Chicago Public Schools and the Student Outreach and Reengagement Centers, a group of Chicago organizations is working to help these youths to earn high school diplomas or GEDs. To guide the work, a council of these young adults has been convened. Members will meet monthly for discussions to inform Thrive’s efforts and receive leadership training.

College Completion. Youth from low-income backgrounds who enroll in college are more likely to drop out than to complete their degrees. “Even though hundreds of coaches and advisors across Chicago give advice to students on how to apply to and succeed in college, many of those adults may not have the resources they need to guide a student to the college that best meets their academic needs,” said Jennifer Keeling, Director of Thrive Chicago. To ensure that young people receive the highest-quality advising – and have the best possible chance to succeed in college – the group is now collaborating to develop a citywide college advising credential that will provide comprehensive training to college advisers.

Employment at Living Wages. Young adults in Chicago with law enforcement records are faced with substantial barriers to finding a job and embarking on a career path. Most may not have an accurate understanding of their records or what can be done to minimize the impact on

their job search. In order to better educate these young adults and create more opportunities for them, Chicago organizations working through Thrive are piloting an online tool that will help young adults to access their record information and determine whether their criminal records can be expunged or sealed.

About Thrive Chicago

Thrive Chicago is a collective impact initiative that works to align efforts by service providers, city agencies, funding organizations, and non-profits around outcomes that are proven to help children succeed along the cradle to career continuum. Thrive Chicago engages a diverse group of leaders and practitioners from the nonprofit, business, government, education and philanthropy sectors working toward one common agenda: to prepare all Chicago youth for a vibrant future. Find out how your organization can become involved in moving the needle with us. Visit www.thrivechi.org.

About the Robert R. McCormick Foundation

The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is committed to fostering communities of educated, informed and engaged citizens. Through philanthropic programs, Cantigny Park and museums, the Foundation helps develop citizen leaders and works to make life better in our communities. The Foundation was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest foundations, with more than \$1.5 billion in assets. For more information, please visit www.McCormickFoundation.org, follow us on [Twitter](#), or like us on [Facebook](#).

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