

UNITED WAY HELPS CHILDREN AND YOUTH SUCCEED

About one third of the funding United Way of Metropolitan Chicago provides focuses on promoting child development and engaging youth. From HeadStart programs to affordable day care and programs for children with special needs, United Way supports quality early childhood programs for those who would not otherwise have access. United Way also plays a unique role investing to fill gaps in funding streams. For example, when a child receives government funding for a half-day Head Start program, United Way funding helps cover the other half day so a parent can work full time. More than \$1 million of United Way funding is directed to community school initiatives designed to make schools the center of the community.

Linking health and human services programs into the school itself makes it easy to gain access to health clinics, English-as-a-second-language programs and after-school programs—which can be located on site in the schools.

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One especially innovative effort spearheaded by United Way is the African American Initiative developed on the theory that it takes a community to raise a child. Directed toward African American males up to 16 years-old, this effort seeks to create greater coordination among the otherwise fragmented services provided in the community. Rather than have a series of isolated programs each with a different focus, whether addressing ex-offenders, gang violence or other community issue, United Way funds collaborative efforts that bring organizations—agencies, churches, community groups and others—together around a population of children to offer an integrated approach to successfully engaging them in their communities.

Increasing the availability and quality of early childhood and after-school programs has a direct impact on the well-being of the region. By helping young people reach their potential, these programs having a lasting impact and lay a solid foundation for the region's social and economic future.

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION STRONGLY LINKED TO FUTURE PROSPECTS

Public education is the single most important factor affecting people's future income, employment prospects and social opportunities—all of which influence lifelong health and security. Said differently, dropping out of high school has a dire impact. Dropouts face a future with the odds stacked against them. They are more likely to be poor, use drugs, join a gang or become a parent at a young age. In fact, failure to complete a high school education is one of the strongest future indicators of poverty.

The statistics are alarming. High school dropouts are 72% more likely to be unemployed than those who graduate. Three out of four state prison inmates nationwide failed to earn a high school diploma. And high school dropouts are

three times more likely than high school graduates to become poor in the span of a year. That is the future facing the approximately one third of high school students in Chicago who drop out before graduation. Without effectively addressing this problem, Chicago youth will lack the educational background to maintain jobs, advance into better ones and attain financial stability.

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FAR TOO MANY LACK THE EDUCATION REQUIRED FOR JOB SUCCESS

While education sets people up for productive lives and good jobs, all too many families across the state are unprepared for today's workforce, let alone the increasing demands projected for the future. Nearly half of Illinois residents have substandard literacy skills. Nearly 35% of low-income working families in Illinois are headed by a parent without a high school diploma or equivalent, ranking the State 40th nationally on this measure. Illinois ranks below average when compared to the nation and other Midwestern states in the percentage of 25-34 year-olds with some college education.

Nearly 35% of low-income working families in Illinois are headed by a parent without a high school diploma or equivalent, ranking the State 40th nationally on this measure.

Consider these facts against the backdrop of the increasing demands from employers. Businesses increasingly need more people entering the workforce with higher levels of education. Nearly two thirds of

all entry-level jobs across the country require workers to have some education beyond high school. By 2013, more than 80% of the 23 million new jobs will require some postsecondary education.

The implications for the region are enormous. Businesses will not invest where the workforce is ill-prepared and families will not be attracted to an area where the schools cannot provide a good education. Efforts to prepare children for school so that they're ready to learn and then keep them on track to graduate are essential both for their futures and for employers in the region as well.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND AFTER-SCHOOL YOUTH PROGRAMS KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS

Studies have shown that about one-third of Illinois students start school not ready to learn, and many never really catch up. So the socialization and learning that takes place before a child enters kindergarten is critical.

For every dollar spent on early childhood education, the investment returns \$7. Children gain better language skills, improved mathematical ability and

display fewer behavioral problems in kindergarten. Longer term, the investment in quality preschool education has been shown to generate a more productive labor force later with workers who have high-level skills and stay in jobs longer.

Long-term studies show that preschool programs significantly reduce the juvenile crime rate. For example, results from the Chicago Longitudinal Study that tracked 900 children from low-income families who attended early-childhood intervention programs showed the juvenile arrest rates for the young people in the study was 33% lower than for children of comparable backgrounds. Violent arrests were 41% lower and the rate of multiple violent arrests dropped by 38%. Ultimately, an investment in early childhood education yields lower criminal justice system costs, savings for crime victims and savings on school remedial services budgets.

Unfortunately, tens of thousands of children currently lack access to these early learning experiences, which jeopardizes their future success in school and life.

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Quality after-school programs for youth are similarly critical to keeping teenagers on track by improving school achievement, fostering community connection and reducing gang affiliation. These programs can transform the after-school hours from a time of risk where youth engage in crime or drugs into a time of opportunity for them to develop themselves.

Underlying the need for these programs are the significant number of absentee, troubled or working parents unavailable to direct how these teenagers spend time. In the absence of good role models at home and without after-school programs, these youth do no school-related work outside the classroom because their attention is directed elsewhere. As a result, these children fall behind in classes, which can often lead to increased disruptions in the classroom, further affecting their ability to learn.