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## Chicago Commons' Little Scholars Fund

### The Need for the Little Scholars Fund

The families at our four early education centers are predominantly Latino and African American. Approximately 5% of our families are homeless; 94% live at or below 150% of the federal poverty level; and 85% are single mothers. Families face a plethora of challenges including economic instability, lack of access to affordable and safe housing, community violence, lack of mental health services, and a lack of access to healthy food. The average household income of Chicago Commons' families is just over \$16,000 with many parents/guardians working low-wage, hourly jobs to make ends meet. As COVID-19 continues to tear through our communities, many of these jobs have recently been deemed "essential," but yet are still the first to be eliminated when the economy hits a downward turn creating an immense amount of financial difficulty in providing the most basic of human needs such as food and shelter.

While the majority of our families utilize Illinois' Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to help subsidize the cost of their child(ren) attending quality early education programs, they are required by the state to remit a co-pay directly to Chicago Commons. These copays may be modest, but for families living paycheck to paycheck, these co-pays can present a significant monthly financial challenge. This is particularly true if more than one child is attending early education. While Chicago Commons would never turn families away due to their inability to pay their co-pay, this does inevitably create a loss of revenue for our centers which, in turn, can limit resources available for children and families.

### Invest in Education and Families!

**To ensure that quality early education remains an option for families in low-income communities, we are introducing Chicago Commons' Little Scholars Fund!** This fund will help alleviate the financial burden of CCAP co-pays while also ensuring that Chicago Commons receives full compensation for providing early education in the high-need communities we serve. This also guarantees the maintenance of high-quality resources and supplies for enhanced learning experiences for both children and their parents.

An investment of \$1,000 will cover the co-pay of one child for one year. A donation of \$5,000 covers the co-pays of five children, and so on. Your generous donation will give a lucky child the "Head Start" that he/she needs for success in elementary school and in life. We have a goal of raising \$250,000 to alleviate the co-pay for 235 children enrolled at Chicago Commons.

As a thank you, you will receive a thank you message from a sponsored child and their family as well as a progress report and special briefing on the successes and challenges of our early education programs from Director of Early Education Programs Karina Slaughter. You will also be recognized as a member of [Chicago Commons' Graham Taylor Society for donors of \\$1,000 and over.](#)

You may choose to make this a yearly donation if you would like to help sustain our families and our high-impact early education programming. You may also choose to fulfill your pledge through monthly recurring donations throughout the year.

### Helping Kids GO Further: Early Education at Chicago Commons

Chicago Commons has a long history of providing early education for young children going back to our first kindergarten in the late 1890s.

Today, Chicago Commons is a leading provider of high-quality, comprehensive early education. Through our four year-round early education centers in Pilsen, West Humboldt Park, and Back of the Yards, Commons serves children from birth to age five (the majority are in Head Start/Early Head Start), and ages five to 12 with an after school program in Pilsen. Through 10 community partner programs, we also provide early education services in other communities across Chicago, reaching a total of nearly 1,200 children.

### Reggio Emilia Approach

Chicago Commons' early education centers were among the first in the nation to systematically implement the principles of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy with children from under-resourced communities, earning us

national attention. The Reggio Emilia approach is based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and parent and community engagement. Using Reggio Emilia principles, children are empowered to author their own learning processes through self-directed, experiential learning. Our centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), recognizing our high-quality learning environments, program administration, and teacher qualifications.

*Art Studios (Ateliers)*

We believe that the school environment is critical to learning, and each of our schools has an art studio (or “atelier”) at its heart. The studio is abundant with materials and media, with tools for the mind and imagination. Clay is frequently used by our teachers to promote physical, cognitive, symbolic, and expressive learning processes. Through working with clay and other art materials, teachers guide students’ development in key learning objectives. In tune with Reggio Emilia’s emphasis on nature, each studio strives to provide materials that are either naturally derived or repurposed/upcycled for student projects.

*STEM Education*

Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) concepts are integrated into day-to-day activities within the Reggio Emilio pedagogy. Children become interested in a topic based on something like a storybook or a new object in the classroom, and this becomes the springboard for study. To create a physics lesson, for example, a teacher helps students consider what they already know, pose questions, and then guide children to answer those questions through scientific exploration. In the coming years, we are working to increase the capacity of our staff in regards to age-appropriate STEM education through lending libraries, professional development, and additional materials and books for classroom use.

*Family Support Services- Family Hub*

Through Chicago Commons’ Family Hub, the parents or caregivers of our students are provided with wraparound supports aimed at helping families to accomplish their goals. Using a two-generation approach, our Family Hub exceeds what can be achieved through separate child and parent services. By combining these services, parents are able to build the tools to realize their ambitions, knowing their children are well cared for. Within the Hub, families can access ESL and digital literacy education, financial coaching and workshops, health workshops, and employment services all from one program.

**Helping Kids and Families GO Further: Our Impact**

In a city where only one out of four children is sufficiently ready to enter kindergarten, students in our centers routinely meet or exceed widely held expectations across various educational domains compared to city and national averages. Through our four centers and 10 community partners, we reached 1,251 children in fiscal year 2019, most of them in Head Start or Early Head Start.

Teaching Strategies GOLD is a widely used, research-based tool that shows the percentage of children whose skills, knowledge, and behaviors are at or above benchmark levels. These scores tell us where to focus to improve outcomes both at the student and classroom levels, informing teachers’ instruction as well as training. (See table.)

<b>Teaching Strategies GOLD 2019 Outcomes</b>		
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Ages 0-3</b>	<b>Ages 3-5</b>
Social Emotional	83%	90%
Physical	84%	94%
Language	72%	88%
Cognitive development	82%	93%
Literacy	76%	89%
Math	76%	83%

Looking long-term, providing high-quality early childhood education is a key strategy for fueling economic and social progress. Several studies, including those by Nobel Laureate James Heckman of the University of Chicago, have demonstrated the link between high-quality birth-to-five education and greater earnings, higher educational attainment, reduced incarceration, and better health later in life.

Integrating early childhood education with services for families that improve financial stability and employment is another key strategy. A Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality study found that for families earning less than \$25,000 with children under age five, a \$3,000 boost in income was associated with children earning 17% more in adulthood. Our Family Hub participants have made measurable gains in employment, credit scores, and savings.