

Helping children succeed

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When he laid out his education priorities for the next four years, Mayor Rahm Emanuel made it clear that while Chicago has made great strides in its educational outcomes, we still have a long way to go. The mayor plans to expand high-quality education choices at neighborhood schools throughout the city, and empower parents and school leaders to improve their local schools.

However, he won't be able to achieve these outcomes alone. As he said, he'll need to harness the combined might of parents, teachers and principals. And in addition, he will need to tap the collective power of nonprofits and community groups that support Chicago's young people every day.

Previously incubated in the mayor's office and now launching as a community-led, independent organization, Thrive Chicago is bringing together more than 200 organizations across multiple sectors, agreeing on common outcomes of focus and uniting efforts spanning the entire continuum from cradle to career that results in citywide alignment to benefit all children.

Thrive Chicago's partners are divided into Change Networks that focus on specific outcomes along a child's trajectory: from kindergarten readiness, to helping youth who have dropped out of high school complete their degrees, all the way to employment at living wages.

For example, research shows that participating in early learning activities sets the groundwork for a child's educational success. Parents across Chicago want their kids enrolled in high-quality early education programs.

Organizations working together in Thrive Chicago are collaborating on an education and outreach campaign to make sure parents access the services available for their children.

Similarly, we know that completing college is tantamount to a young person's future earning potential. Yet children from low-income backgrounds who enroll in college are more likely to drop out than complete their degrees. To ensure young people receive the highest-quality guidance — and have the best possible chance to succeed in college — Thrive Chicago is now collaborating to develop a citywide college advising credential that will provide training to college advisers, a group otherwise left without a training regimen.

— Beth Swanson, vice president, Strategy and Programs, Joyce Foundation, chair, Thrive Chicago Board of Directors, Chicago

— Tom Vanden Berk, chief executive officer, UCAN/Peace Hub, member, Thrive Chicago Board of Directors, Chicago