



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **School-Age Program Earns Gold Circle of Quality Designation**

*The Erie House program for children ages 5–12 is among the first in the state to earn the assessment group's highest mark under new, stricter guidelines.*

February 20, 2019 (CHICAGO)—The School-Age Program at Erie Neighborhood House was awarded the Gold Circle of Quality from Illinois ExceleRate, the state's primary assessment organization for early childhood and after-school programs.

Erie House most recently earned this top designation in 2016 but is one of the first agencies to qualify for the Gold Circle rating under the state's new, stricter guidelines.

"The Gold Circle designation validates that the work our staff are doing is of the highest quality," said Aracelis Perez, assistant director of the School-Age Program. "They make a difference in our children's lives every single day."

At full capacity, the program provides instruction, care and support to 200 children across three different sites. Students arrive after school and participate in a variety of activities that range from tutoring and special interest clubs to gym time, art and nutrition education prior to parent pick-up at 6:00 pm.

During the summer months and most Chicago Public School holidays and professional development days, the program runs on a full-day schedule and engages children in even greater in-depth learning.

"We want to see students grow and develop the necessary cognitive, social, academic, and emotional skills in order to be successful, well-rounded young adults," said Perez, who grew up coming to Erie House herself and worked as an educator in the program before becoming assistant director.

"We also want them to learn how to fail in our safe, nurturing environment so that when they go out into the world they are prepared for all the hardships they will inevitably face," she added.

Joshua Fulcher, who oversees the School-Age Program (ages 5-12) as well as Youth Options Unlimited (ages 12-18) in his role as director of Expanding Learning Programs for Children and Youth, added that the experience and perspective his staff brings is invaluable.

All 3 site directors worked on the front lines of the program prior to entering leadership roles, and this makes a difference. "They trust each other and work very well together

as a team,” said Fulcher, “and this ensures that the quality of the collective sum of their skills is present at all sites.”

Illinois ExceleRate measures programs in three areas—learning environment and teaching quality; administrative standards; and training and education—and reserves its top mark for programs that exceed the highest quality goals. The School-Age Program joins the Early Childhood Education Program at Erie House in possessing the Gold Circle of Quality.

“We are so proud of the work we do to support children and youth at Erie House,” said executive director Kirstin Chernawsky. “From age 2 all the way until they graduate from high school, we are helping our young people reach their potential during these formative years, and that is making a significant impact in their lives.”

For more information on the School-Age Program at Erie House, please visit [www.eriehouse.org](http://www.eriehouse.org).

#### **About Erie Neighborhood House**

*Erie Neighborhood House (ENH) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that reaches nearly 18,000 people annually, empowering them to build better lives while strengthening their communities. ENH offers Chicago’s Latino and diverse low-income residents a range of community-based education programs. With forward-thinking leadership, ENH is committed to continuing its legacy of cost effective, award-winning programming. For more information, please visit [www.eriehouse.org](http://www.eriehouse.org).*

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