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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**30,000 Students Participate in First-Ever High School Investigation Day**

*Program aimed at combating dropout rate*

Eighth-graders across the city got their first taste of the high schools they will be entering this fall, as the Chicago Public Schools sponsored its first-ever High School Investigation Days this week. The citywide orientation gave students the opportunity to visit their new high school and become acclimated to teachers, the building, their new classmates and the high school experience.

Chicago Board of Education President Rufus Williams and CPS Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan marked the occasion Thursday at Michele Clark Academic Preparatory High School, which greeted the visiting eighth-graders with performances by its band and step team. The students toured the building, attended a class and participated in team-building exercises. The school also held an activity fair and presented information about its Freshman Connection program this summer. The day concluded with an ice cream social. Clark also held orientation sessions for parents.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get acclimated to your new school,” Williams told students and parents. “They’ve really made an effort to welcome you here, and we hope you take advantage of it.”

Clark will be admitting 300 freshmen this fall. The school divided the class into three groups of students who visited Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Many other schools held multiple High School Investigation Days, allowing smaller, more manageable groups of eighth-graders to visit and ask questions about what to expect from their new school.

High School Investigation Day is one facet of CPS’ dropout prevention policy. A study by The Parthenon Group, released by the district in February, found that when students miss more than 10 days of school in the fall semester of their freshman year, fail two or more core courses in the fall semester of freshman year, and earn fewer than five credits—or failing more than two core classes—by the end of freshman year, they were strong candidates for eventually dropping out of school. Students who do not share these predictors, and aren’t over-age as ninth-graders, have a far greater chance—75 percent—of staying in school and graduating.

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In addition to High School Investigation Day, the district has also established freshman “on-track” labs at six high schools, where staff will work closely with students at risk of dropping out. CPS will also be launching “Freshman Connection,” an academic and recreational summer program for eighth-graders to be held at their destination high schools.

“Freshman year is critically important,” Duncan said. “We want to do anything and everything we can to get our students acclimated to high school and ease that transition.”

The Chicago Public Schools is the nation’s third-largest school system. It includes more than 600 schools and serves about 409,000 students.

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