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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 15, 2016

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Chicago Housing Authority Approves Landmark Grant to Summer Advantage USA to Help Chicago Youth ‘Learn and Earn’

Chicago, IL – The Board of Commissioners of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) has approved a five-year, \$9M contract for Summer Advantage USA, a leading national provider of summer learning programs, to implement the CHA’s ‘Learn and Earn’ program. The contract will allow Summer Advantage to provide over 700 CHA youth, ages 13 to 15, with a high quality learning experience each summer that enables them to grow academically and develop pathways to future careers.

Youth in the ‘Learn and Earn’ program (who are referred to as “scholars”) spend their mornings preparing for academic success by sharpening their reading, writing and math skills; in the afternoons, the focus is on career exploration, talent development, job readiness, post-secondary planning, and life skills such as financial literacy, communication and goal-setting. Each week, guest speakers expose scholars to career opportunities, describe pathways to success, and inspire scholars to make the right choices. Scholars also engage with their community by visiting local colleges and universities, participating in community service projects, and visiting cultural and learning attractions in Chicago.

The program is offered by CHA in partnership with the City Colleges of Chicago and Loyola University, helping youth to have a “college experience” where they are able to learn more about City Colleges and Loyola, tour campuses, and interact with faculty. Participating teens also gain a hands-on “first job” experience in which they are held accountable for their daily attendance, work ethic, and performance, much like in a real workplace. Youth can earn a stipend of up to \$100 per week based on attendance and other performance criteria.

“This program, which combines academics and enrichment, is a proven method that helps our young people to gain stronger skills, confidence, life experiences and poise to guide them on their personal pathway to success, both in school and in life,” said Summer Advantage USA’s Director of Programs Sheila Brillson. “We have a really strong commitment to our scholars and are very excited for the opportunity to continue providing the Learn and Earn program. This program really impacts the lives of our Chicago scholars with a safe, nurturing environment and an engaging program.”

“Effectively serving middle- and high-school students is one of the most pressing issues in education today, and all young people deserve to have access to the summer learning opportunities that can help them reach their full potential,” said Summer Advantage Founder and CEO, Earl Martin Phalen. “We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to partner with the Chicago Housing Authority to help address these critical issues and to ensure that Chicago’s children can excel.”

The program is part of a city-wide effort, Chicago City of Learning, aimed at keeping city youth engaged in learning and in summer activities that support their development. Learn and Earn is part of the CHA’s



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“Year of the Youth” initiative, a year-long youth engagement campaign that includes unique business partnerships, internship programs, and youth-related programs that focus on mentoring young people and putting them on the path to college and careers. Learn and Earn also partners with Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s “One Summer Chicago” program. The CHA collaborates closely with the City and partner agencies in planning youth programs and tracking how youth succeed in those programs.

Summer Advantage USA has partnered with the CHA to provide the Learn and Earn program since 2012. The program utilizes Summer Advantage’s scientifically-validated approach to provide a summer learning experience that has been highly effective at improving youth participants’ academic achievement and career readiness. Over one hundred years of research shows that high quality summer learning is one of the most important strategies for raising student achievement. When not engaged in learning during the summer months, youth can lose up to three months of skills in reading and math, putting them at risk of falling behind in school. By contrast, participating Learn and Earn youth have gained an average of 3 months of academic skills during the six-week program, helping them return to school in the fall with renewed confidence in their ability to succeed.

For more information regarding Summer Advantage USA and the Learn and Earn program, please contact Sheila Brillson, Director of Programs, at sbrillson@summeradvantage.org or (219) 809-9198.