

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT: Jennifer Calloway**

202.535.1096 (desk)

## **Fenty and Rhee Announce the Grand Opening of the Early Stages Center**

*A Free Diagnostic Testing Center for Children with Developmental Delays*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Every child in the District will have the opportunity for a stronger start to school with the opening of the Early Stages Center (ESC), announced Mayor Adrian M. Fenty and District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Chancellor Michelle Rhee. The Center is a free, comprehensive diagnostic testing facility that evaluates children 3-to-5-years-old for developmental delays and identifies the services that will help them succeed as they enter school.

“The Early Stages Center is a significant investment in children with special education needs, and an investment in our education system as a whole,” said Mayor Fenty. He continued, “The Center demonstrates monumental progress for special education in the District by making sure early intervention is an integral part of public education.”

The goal of the Early Stages Center is to provide individualized high-quality evaluations and services that will allow every child in the District a strong beginning by identifying any delays at a young age.

Part of the Northwest One development project, this state-of-the-art facility is located in Ward 6 at Walker Jones Education Campus (EC), which includes a Preschool-8 school, a public library and a technology center.

“The impact of early intervention on student growth is just one of the reasons the Early Stages Center is so vital to DCPS,” stated Chancellor Rhee. “We finally have the structures in place to make the strongest impact on children’s future educational success.”

Before the new Early Stages Center opened, DCPS only had the capacity to offer smaller scale screenings for development delays and to provide piecemeal services by multiple specialists. Now, the ESC offers expanded outreach and individualized case management providing proactive and comprehensive support to District families.

The ESC is staffed by dedicated educators, childcare experts, and special education professionals. Child Find Field Coordinators (CFFCs) execute the Center’s outreach campaign. In pairs of two per ward, CFFCs locate, identify, and evaluate children for special education services. Family Care Coordinators (FCCs) work one-on-one with children and their families as advocates. FCCs conduct school visits with

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families, coordinate interpreter services, and can link families to other services such as Medicaid and food stamps.

As a team the diverse ESC staff takes a holistic approach to serving parents and families with concerns about how their child is walking, talking, playing, learning and behaving. Through the process of evaluation, determination of eligibility and the exploration of placement options --children and families receive support services that will help them begin their academic careers on a level playing field.

“Our approach to special education focuses on results for each individual child– we are committed to providing comprehensive, high-quality evaluations that identify the services children need to get them on the right track to educational success,” added Dr. Richard Nyankori, DC Public Schools Deputy Chancellor for Special Education.

Early Stages services are available to all families who live in the District, whether a child goes to public school, private school, is home-schooled or has not yet entered the school system.

“Our daughter is proof of how catching delays early can make all the difference. Knowing your child is going to need extra help can be pretty overwhelming sometimes, but having services available to assist you in this journey is invaluable,” said Elizabeth Rihani, a parent with a daughter who was evaluated DCPS and who is now also a Child Find Field Coordinator for Ward Three. She continued, “As a parent and as a new Early Stages employee, I am inspired by the depth of DCPS’s renewed commitment to our city’s youngest special needs kids.”

In addition to DCPS, the Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF) is providing support for this important initiative. Through a collaborative effort between DCPS and DHCF, Early Stages will receive Medicaid funds for services provided to Medicaid beneficiaries through the Early Stages Center.

Early Stages will be an exhibitor at the NBC4 Health and Fitness Expo on Saturday, Jan. 16 and Sunday, Jan. 17 at the Washington Convention Center. Early Stages staff will be sharing information about child development and providing developmental screenings for District children aged 3-5.

For more information about the Early Stages Center, please visit [www.earlystagesdc.org](http://www.earlystagesdc.org).

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