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23 CHA Youth Graduate from Siemens College Prep Course
Summer Program Teaches Life Skills, Prepares Youth for College

CHICAGO (Aug. 7, 2008) – In just seven weeks, 23 high school juniors and seniors who will be completing their last year of high school and beginning the transition to college life and the “real world,” celebrated their achievements Thursday with improved skills and scores to reach their career goals. Sponsored by the Chicago Housing Authority, Siemens Building Technologies and Windows of Opportunity, the Next Step: College Prep course is a different kind of summer school. This summer school program is more of an office than it is a classroom.

Made possible by the kind of unique public-private partnership that has marked the success of the CHA’s Plan for Transformation, the Next Step program taught students test-taking skills, study habits and note-taking to improve test scores, grades and overall academic success and prepare these young men and women for future coursework.

However, the lessons did not stop at academics. With the tools to succeed in college now in-hand and graduation just around the corner, participants in the summer program spent much of their time honing their job search skills as well. Interviewing techniques, etiquette courses, relationship and social training, resume writing and how to ‘wow’ employers were as important as reading, writing and math training in the Next Step program.

Shamiko Horace is an example of the progress made possible by the life skills course. Before her first year – Horace is one of four who participated two years in a row – she admits she was not excited about starting the program last summer, but she credits the curriculum for improving her grades and looked forward to enrolling again this summer. “To be honest, I took the class last year because I had nothing better to do,” says Horace, a resident of the mixed-income development Mahalia Place at Legends South. “But I had a good time last summer, and [during the 2007-2008 school year] my grades went from a B average to mostly A’s. So, coming back this year was an easy choice.”

The results speak for themselves. Using a system of standardized tests administered throughout the seven-week course, students improved their reading fluency skills by an average of more than 34%. Shamiko, for example, improved her reading ability by

more than double, improving from 104 words per minute to 220 WPM during the course. Students also saw their math scores improve in programming including Problem Solving, Graphing, Algebra, Fractions and real-life time and currency problems.

CHA CEO Lewis Jordan spoke about the importance of programs and partnerships that help rebuild the lives of residents living in CHA properties or the private market using Housing Choice Vouchers. “I commend you for your efforts over the past seven weeks,” Jordan told the graduates. “The lessons you have learned this summer will prepare you for more than your next classroom, they will stay with you for the rest of your life. You’ve finished the hard part – you signed up and completed an important program – what you make of the rest is up to you.”

“One of our goals for the kids this summer was two-fold; to expose them to the ever changing world of science and technology, as it specifically relates to green-collar jobs in energy and the environment; and to provide them exposure to a continuous flow of successful ex-CHA residents who are able to provide them with real life stories of challenge, hard work, and achievement,” said Jeff Carroll, Siemens Senior Account Executive, a former CHA resident, and engineering graduate of Illinois Institute of Technology.

Students in the program attended classes at the Illinois Institute of Technology five days a week, for four hours each day to ensure success in the coming school year. Siemens provided participants with food and transportation vouchers while the CHA provided each participant a stipend of \$900 to assist students who chose intense training over a traditional summer job.

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About the Chicago Housing Authority

The CHA was created by state legislation in 1937 to create and expand affordable housing opportunities for low income families and seniors. Today, through federal and other resources, the CHA assists approximately 35,000 families who participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program in private units owned by private landlords. In addition, the CHA owns 15,500 units for families in scattered site, traditional public housing or mixed income developments and 9,500 units of housing for senior citizens in 56 senior developments across the city.

About the Plan for Transformation

In 1999, the City of Chicago began a multi-billion dollar, 15-year initiative to renovate or replace the CHA’s entire portfolio of 25,000 public housing units throughout the city. Currently, 61 percent of the units have been completed, including the comprehensive renovation of the entire senior developments and scattered-site stock. Eighty percent of the portfolio is scheduled to be complete by 2009. The Plan is a collaboration between the CHA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the City of Chicago and its many agencies, area businesses and non-profit organizations.

Note for Editors: Photos of the event are available upon request.