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DIRK HIGHTOWER STEPPING DOWN AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE

ROCHESTER, New York – Dr. A. Dirk Hightower has announced that he will be stepping down from his role as Executive Director on June 30, 2019. He started at Children's Institute in 1982 as the Research Director and assumed the Executive Director position in 1991. Under Dr. Hightower's leadership, Children's Institute has evolved into a highly valued organization that uses a strategic, systematic approach when promoting and implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) across settings in Rochester, New York State, and nationwide. Dr. Hightower will be transitioning into a senior research scientist role to work on social-emotional and whole child health in the community.

Dirk stated:

"In the last 36 years there have only been two times I can think of when I did not want to come to work and both times were when I had the flu. There is a sense of community, a sense of purpose and a rigor at Children's Institute that was started by Emory Cowen, and that I have tried to expand throughout Children's Institute and into the community. Our focus has been improving the lives of children and we have done that by equipping and supporting those who work with children. To do this we rarely work alone, but rather with partners across education, health, and human services systems, which make learning new things and making things happen a daily adventure. I am truly blessed to have worked with so many talented people within Children's Institute and across the education and mental health community. I am looking forward to continuing to work for children and the community in a different role."

Dr. Hightower has been Executive Director of Children's Institute, Inc. for 27 years as well as a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Clinical and Social Psychology at the University of Rochester. Prior to that Dr. Hightower served as Research Director for Children's Institute and the Center for Community Study from 1982 to 1991. He has co-authored scores of research papers, chapters, and a book *School-Based Prevention for Children at Risk*. He has served on the editorial board of various research journals including the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, the *School Psychology Quarterly* and the *School Psychology Review* among others. His primary interests include social and emotional assessment, promoting healthy social and emotional development, evidence-based prevention interventions for young children, community collaboration, and the use and development of web-based decision support systems to enhance the translation and use of information (COMET Informatics). He has been principal investigator on local, state, and federal grants that have supported the Primary Mental Health Project, Early Education Professional Development, and whole child health. He helped initiate and continues to have significant involvement with the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership (RECAP), a multiagency collective impact initiative focused on prekindergarten outcomes. He is a co-founder of the COMET Informatics system and served for six years as Co-CEO of COMET Informatics LLC, which is

owned, in part, by Children's Institute. In addition, Dr. Hightower is Past President of the New York Association of School Psychologists and served three terms on the Board of Education of the Rush-Henrietta Central School District, including one term as President.

Dr. Hightower has had a presence as well in Albany. He currently sits on the Regents Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Education and the NY State Department of Health First 1000 Days on Medicaid Task Force. Recently, he completed terms on NY State Department of Education Safe School Task Force School Climate and Engagement Work Group Review (providing recommendations of NYS's social and emotional learning standards for NYS schools) as well as the NYS Office of Children and Families Services Advisory Board. He has been involved in past state task forces and testified at committee hearings on educational policies, as well as meeting with many of the legislators each year to update them on Children's Institute's programs. Many legislators now recognize how critical social and emotional health is to every child's success. Locally, Dr. Hightower remains an active member of Roc the Future: a cradle to career community collaborative, the Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, the Systems Integration Team, All Kids Thrive, and the Universal Prekindergarten Policy Advisory Board. He has served on the Early Childhood Development Initiative, the Mayor's Early Learning Council, the County Executive's Children's Advisory Board, and the Greater Rochester Health Foundation Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes.

Many people in the community have commented on Dr. Hightower's approach to working collaboratively on team initiatives by suggesting that he has a keen sense of the obvious, is able to connect ideas within processes, pushes himself to continually move toward the next steps, and adds value in a multitude of ways to the many teams he works with—saying what needs to be done, then doing it. He exhibits Children's Institute's core values of respect and honesty when working in the community. Change is difficult to accomplish effectively without a leader who shows a willingness to go down the same path as the rest of the staff, and Dr. Hightower embodies this philosophy.

"It would be impossible to have made the progress that our community has for our children—our youngest citizens and most important legacy—without Dirk Hightower and Children's Institute. His work here has tremendously benefitted our kids and has become nationally known and regarded. They are among our most important community assets," said Jeff Kaczorowski, MD, Executive Director of The Children's Agenda; and National Director, Community Health Training Initiative, American Academy of Pediatrics.

After Dr. Hightower announced his plans earlier this year, the Children's Institute's Board of Directors convened a Search Committee to begin the process of identifying his successor. Potential candidates can review the job description and application process by visiting the Children's Institute website at www.childreinsinstitute.net.

About Children's Institute: Children's Institute is a national not-for-profit organization based in Rochester, NY that works to strengthen children's social and emotional health. Through sound research and evaluation, the organization develops and promotes effective prevention and early intervention programs, materials, and best practices for children, families, schools, and communities. Children's Institute is affiliated with the University of Rochester and has served the community for over 60 years.

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