

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A HIGH-PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOL?

Many Chicago families put a lot of effort and time into the high school choice process. Families take many factors into consideration, from school performance levels to transportation and the availability of specific programs. While it is difficult to know how a particular school may affect an individual student, new research shows how student achievement, student experiences, and college outcomes are different, on average, depending on the performance level of the school.

### HOW DID RESEARCHERS COMPARE SCHOOLS?

This research grouped Chicago high schools by performance as measured by **graduation rate and average ACT scores**. See **Figure 1** for more details on the four groups: selective enrollment and high-, mid-, and low-performing high schools.

Researchers examined how attending a school in one of these performance groups vs. another affected students with similar incoming achievement and backgrounds in three key areas: **student achievement, student experiences, and college outcomes**. See **Figure 2** for more details on these comparisons.

### HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM ATTENDING A HIGHER-PERFORMING, NON-SELECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*Compared to students attending a lower-performing high school (using graduation rates and ACT scores to compare schools). . .*

**Students at higher-performing high schools report better high school experiences, on average.**

- At these higher-performing schools, which include neighborhood and charter high schools, students have:
  - A stronger sense of safety
  - More positive relationships with peers and teachers
  - Improved attendance
  - Decreased likelihood of being suspended

**There are academic benefits for many students who attend higher-performing neighborhood and charter schools.**

- On average, students at these schools may see boosts to:
  - Test scores.
  - College enrollment, persistence, and selectivity. These effects are especially large for students who would otherwise have attended a low-performing high school.

**However . . .**

**GPA's are lower for students in these schools, on average.**

- This may be because their work is compared to higher-performing peers, or because of more challenging classes or higher expectations. Additional research is needed to determine the cause of lower GPA's.

### HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM ATTENDING A SELECTIVE ENROLLMENT HIGH SCHOOL?

*Compared to attending a high-performing non-selective high school. . .*

**Students report better experiences at selective enrollment high schools.**

- They report feeling safer and having better relationships with peers and teachers.

**However . . .**

**Students do not have different academic outcomes, on average.**

- Test scores, high school graduation, college enrollment, and college persistence are largely unaffected.

**Students have lower GPA's, especially students from low-income neighborhoods.**

- Students may see a decrease in GPA, for the same reasons as students in high-performing schools.

**Students from low-income neighborhoods are less likely to attend selective colleges, on average.**

- SEHS students from low-income neighborhoods are less likely to attend a selective college compared with similarly-performing, low-income students who do not enroll in SEHSs. Less selective colleges have lower graduation rates, which is one reason why this difference could matter for students. More research is needed to determine why students are enrolling in less and more selective colleges depending on neighborhood income.

**ABOUT THE RESEARCH**

**The Educational Benefits of Attending Higher-Performing Schools: Evidence from Chicago High Schools**

Allensworth, E., Moore, P., Sartain, L., & de la Torre, M. (2016).

- Examines the effects of attending a higher-performing school on students’ academic and nonacademic outcomes, compared to similar students in lower-performing schools using a propensity score approach with an extensive array of pre-high school characteristics, including prior test scores, grades, attendance, and family and middle school characteristics.
- Compares outcomes among first-time ninth-graders in CPS cohorts entering high school from 2008—2011.
- Classifies high schools into four categories, called tiers: (1) Selective enrollment; (2) Top-tier non-selective (above average ACT scores and graduation rates); (3) Mid-tier non-selective (average ACT scores and graduation rates); (4) Low-tier non-selective (below average ACT scores and graduation rates).

**The Role of Selective High Schools in Equalizing Outcomes: Differential Effects on Students by Neighborhood Tier**

Barrow, L., Sartain, L., & de la Torre, M. (2016).

- Compares outcomes for students who were just above the admission threshold to those just below – similarly-performing students who do and do not attend selective enrollment high schools, using a regression discontinuity design.
- Studies first-time ninth-graders in CPS cohorts entering high school from 2010—2013.
- Investigates differences between students from neighborhoods with low and high socioeconomic status (i.e., tier 1, tier 4).

To read these studies in full, visit [consortium.uchicago.edu/publications](http://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications)

**Figure 1. CPS Class of 2015 Average Performance by High School Tier**

High School Tier	Number of Schools	Four-Year Graduation Rate <sup>6</sup>	Average ACT Composite Score <sup>A</sup>
Selective (SEHS)	10	90.0	24.5
Top Tier*	30	82.3	18.5
Mid Tier*	24	74.0	15.8
Low Tier*	28	50.6	14.8

\*Of all non-SEHS schools, including: neighborhood, charter, and special high schools.

<sup>6</sup>See <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/tool> to compare graduation rates among all Chicago high schools

<sup>A</sup> See [http://cps.edu/Schools/High\\_schools/Pages/HighschoolsIndex.aspx](http://cps.edu/Schools/High_schools/Pages/HighschoolsIndex.aspx) to compare ACT scores between schools

**Figure 2. Changes in Student Outcomes by Tier of School Attended**

Comparison Groups	Student Achievement				Student Experiences		College Outcomes		
	Attendance	Grades	Test Scores	Graduation from HS	Sense of Safety	Relationships	College Enrollment	College Persistence	College Selectivity
Attending a Selective vs. Top-Tier HS	None	Negative	None	None	Positive	Positive	None	None	None or Negative†
Attending a Top-Tier vs. Mid-Tier HS	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Positive	None	None	None
Attending a Top-Tier vs. Low-Tier HS	Positive	None	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Attending a Mid-Tier vs. Low-Tier HS	None	None	None	Positive	Positive	None	Positive	None	Positive

†Negative effect for students living in low-income neighborhoods, but no effect for students living in high-income neighborhoods.

**ABOUT THE UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM**

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. The Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.