


From High School to the Future: Making Hard Work Pay Off

The Road to College for Students in CPS's Academically Advanced Programs



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Executive Summary

Education reform is increasingly focused on improving college access and success for high school graduates, particularly through the rigor of their coursework, and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has been on the forefront of this trend. Between 1999 and 2006, CPS opened five new selective enrollment high schools and expanded International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings in neighborhood high schools. As we demonstrate in this report, most graduates from selective enrollment high schools and students who participate in a rigorous sequence of AP or IB courses attain the strong qualifications needed to gain access to more selective colleges.

Producing graduates with strong academic qualifications poses distinctive challenges, opportunities, and potential lessons for schools. If graduates from these academically advanced programs are to fully capitalize on the opportunity they have earned to enroll in more selective colleges, they will need to navigate a more complicated process of college search and admission. It is often assumed that the top CPS students do not have any problems translating their high school success into admission to top colleges. However, our previous report, *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*, shows how qualifications and skills are not the only factors that shape college access; even CPS graduates with strong academic qualifications and high aspirations for college often struggle in application and search.

This report expands on the findings of our previous work on the importance of developing specialized supports for the college search and application process for highly qualified students. We focus on three groups of students: graduates from CPS's selective enrollment high schools, graduates from IB programs, and graduates who have taken a sequence of honors

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and AP courses in neighborhood high schools. This report presents a portrait of the demographic characteristics and college qualifications of students in these programs. We draw on data from the CPS postsecondary tracking system to examine the college enrollment of these students and compare the kinds of colleges students are qualified to attend to the kinds of colleges to which students apply and to which they ultimately enroll. Finally, we draw on both qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify five areas where academically advanced students in CPS—most of whom are also first-generation college students—face particular challenges as they negotiate the complicated and competitive college application process. This report is not intended to be a rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of selective enrollment schools, IB programs, or AP initiatives. Rather, it is intended to provide critical information that allows school staff and district administrators to assess their own efforts and discuss what it means to develop programs that prepare students to compete for admission to top colleges and universities.

This report focuses on a small group of programs and schools, but the lessons learned here have important implications for the future of high school reform in Chicago. The number of high-achieving elementary students has been growing, and the opening of new selective enrollment high schools has not kept up with demand. In addition, academically advanced programs in neighborhood high schools have remained small. While AP participation has expanded rapidly, few high schools engage their students in a rigorous sequence of AP and honors coursework that would give them an academic experience comparable to a selective enrollment school or IB program. Building rigorous academic programs is a central component of recent high school initiatives in Chicago. The hope is that, as these initiatives mature, there will be an expanding pool of highly qualified students, and, as a result, more and more students and schools will need to meet the challenges described in this report. Addressing these challenges faced by highly qualified students is critically important because these academically advanced programs could be models of practice in CPS and provide illuminating examples of what high-achieving students across the system can aspire to accomplish.

Key Findings

1. Students participating in academically advanced programs have higher incoming achievement test scores than the average CPS student, but they do not necessarily come from more advantaged communities or families.

Students in selective enrollment high schools have much higher eighth-grade test scores than students in IB and AP programs in neighborhood high schools. Thus, AP and IB programs seem to be filling an important gap in neighborhood high schools for students who have higher-than-average achievement but still may not be able to gain admission to highly competitive selective enrollment high schools.

In part because of the geographic distribution of these schools and programs, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of these students vary widely. Students in IB programs have strikingly similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics to other students in their school; they are largely first-generation college students, predominantly minority, and often come from neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and limited access to adults with college experience. This is also true of many students in selective enrollment high schools and in AP tracks.

2. The college qualifications of graduates from academically advanced programs are impressive. Nearly two-thirds graduate from high school with access to a selective or very selective four-year college.

Many students in academically advanced programs and schools graduate with ACT scores and grades that demonstrate to colleges that they have worked hard and done well in rigorous courses. Students in these programs have ACT scores above the national average and have much higher grade point averages (GPAs) than other CPS students. In fact, the average weighted GPA of students in neighborhood AP and IB programs is nearly a 4.0.

3. Strong college qualifications do not translate into matched college enrollment. Fewer than half of students from these programs enroll in colleges that match their college qualifications.

More than one-third of students in academically advanced programs enroll in a nonselective or two-year

college—or no college at all. Among selective enrollment students, for example, 64 percent are qualified to attend a selective or very selective college, but only 37 percent enroll in one. Similar patterns are observed among students in IB and AP programs. These students apply to more colleges than the average CPS student, but only apply to a few colleges that match their qualifications. Many academically advanced students end up defaulting to colleges within CPS’s traditional feeder patterns; of those who attend a four-year college, more than 40 percent attend one of the six most popular colleges for CPS students.

4. Students in academically advanced programs face distinctive challenges compared to their less qualified peers in navigating the road to college.

The college enrollment patterns of students in academically advanced programs often mirror those of their less qualified peers. As outlined in the “Potholes” report, having strong qualifications does not alter the reality that these students often come from families and neighborhoods that are less able to provide concrete

support and knowledge about the college admissions process. Too often, these students, like their neighborhood peers, struggle in taking the steps necessary to apply to and enroll in four-year colleges. In fact, one-fifth of students in academically advanced programs do not even apply to a four-year college.

There are also a number of barriers academically advanced students face related to the problem of match. First, though these students are in a position to conduct wider college searches that include more selective colleges, many do not understand the broad range of colleges to which their qualifications afford them access. Second, when they do consider more competitive colleges, they often lack the structured support necessary to navigate the application process for colleges that tend to have more complicated and specialized application procedures. Third, these students face competing demands from their challenging coursework. Finally, far too often, lack of knowledge of financial aid possibilities and lack of effective participation in financial aid prevent them from getting the aid they deserve.

Building the sophisticated knowledge base needed to enroll in more selective colleges requires that high schools do more than simply set expectations that students go to college: they must also fill the gaps in students’—and their parents’—understanding of college search, application, and selection. In this report, we raise new challenges that practitioners will have to meet in order to build college-going cultures that meet the specific needs of academically advanced students. For these students, our benchmark should not be whether or not they attend any four-year college. If we truly want their hard work to pay off, our benchmark should be whether students and their families have made a fully informed college choice based on full knowledge of the wide range of college options available.



Wild growing unit

- ① Find the question
- ② Plot the graph -
- ③ Find coordinates (solve)
- ④ Test coordinates (see which)

$$\text{Var}(x \pm y) = \text{Var}(x) + \text{Var}(y)$$

$$\sqrt{\text{Var}(x \pm y)} = \sqrt{\text{Var}(x) + \text{Var}(y)}$$

$$= \sqrt{2^2 + 29}$$
$$= \sqrt{33}$$
$$= 5.74$$

$$10 - 100 = 140$$

$$200 - 200 = 770$$

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