



CONSORTIUM ON  
CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH  
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General questions/arrange interviews

# Chicago graduates of IB, AP programs in neighborhood high schools keep pace with selective enrollment peers

*Even academically advanced students struggle with college application, match*

Nearly two-thirds of students in academically advanced programs graduate with access to selective four-year colleges, yet fewer than half of these students enroll in colleges that match their qualifications -- and about 17 percent didn't enroll in any college after graduation, according to a study released Thursday by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

It is easy to assume that the top students in CPS do not have any problem capitalizing on their high school success and finding their way to good colleges. Yet this study, *From High School to the Future: Making Hard Work Pay Off*, reveals that the road to college for these top students is neither easy nor intuitive.

And, given the groundswell of high-achieving eighth-graders seeking entry into Chicago's college preparatory high schools and programs, the demand for these supports will only continue to grow.

"This is an amazing accomplishment. The students, their teachers, and their parents have done the hard work to develop strong college qualifications," said lead author Melissa Roderick, a co-director at the Consortium and a University of Chicago professor. "But there is a piece missing, and we have to fill in that piece."

*Making Hard Work Pay Off* focuses on the 2005 and 2006 graduates from three groups; graduates of the city's seven Selective Enrollment schools, those who completed International Baccalaureate programs, and graduates who had taken a sequence of at least six honors and two Advanced Placement classes and attended a high school with at least 25 such students—about 5,600 graduates total over two years. The study included case studies of students, analysis of tests scores, high school transcripts, student surveys and college enrollment data.

This research builds on findings from the 2008 study, *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*. This study revealed that many Chicago students who aspire to attain a four-year degree do not successfully navigate the daunting process of enrolling in four-year colleges and are derailed by financial aid hurdles and weak school supports.

The city's top students may have strong academic qualifications, but like their peers across Chicago, they are mostly first-generation college students who often lack the support and resources they need to navigate a complicated college application process, the authors concluded. Moreover, these advanced Chicago students are vying for college spots against another set of peers -- students nationwide who are more likely to come from families and schools that provide structured support for college planning and enjoy greater financial resources.

Other key findings include:

- **AP and IB programs seem to be filling an important gap in neighborhood high schools for students with higher-than-average achievement.** While CPS has significantly increased in the number of schools that offered AP classes in the last decade, graduates who took an AP track in a neighborhood school only accounted for 20 percent of students in academically advanced programs in 2006.
- **Students graduating from academically advanced programs have ACT scores and grade point averages that are substantially higher than the average CPS student--although there are wide variations among schools.** These qualifications have afforded them access to far more selective colleges than their peers across CPS. Nearly two-thirds of these students are eligible to attend a selective or very selective college; virtually all have access to at least a somewhat selective college. The average weighted GPA of students in neighborhood AP and IB programs is nearly a 4.0.
- **Strong college qualifications do not translate into matched college enrollment.** More than one-third of these top students enroll in a two-year or non-selective four-year college—or no college at all. Of those who attend a four-year college, more than 40 percent attend one of the six traditional feeder colleges in the Chicago area.
- **Academically advanced students face distinctive challenges in navigating the road to college--especially if they are first-generation college-goers and cannot count on receiving expert knowledge.** Applications to more selective colleges are typically more complex and are likely to have much earlier deadlines than is typical for less selective schools. These students -- especially those in IB programs -- are doing substantially more homework than other students in CPS, and this makes college search and application even more difficult. Also, academically advanced students are vulnerable to the same confusion surrounding college costs, financial aid procedures, and deadlines for financial aid experienced by their peers -- a particularly sensitive issue for these students because they are often in a position to receive very strong financial aid packages.

“These academically advanced programs should be models of practice in CPS and provide illuminating examples of what high-achieving students across the system could aspire to accomplish,” the authors wrote. “As the educators running these programs look ahead to the next mountain, they can also look behind them to find another group of educators and students just beginning the ascent.”

Founded in 1990, the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago conducts research of high technical quality that influences policy and practice in Chicago and nationwide.