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12 a.m., Thursday, Feb. 28, 2013

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General questions/arrange interviews

## **UChicagoCCSR Report: Senior Year in CPS too often fails as launching pad to college and careers**

There is much work to do if Chicago Public Schools is to shift the focus of twelfth grade from finishing graduation requirements to preparing for college or employment, according to a new report from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. The report finds that the majority of CPS seniors have schedules dominated by makeup courses and electives and other non-core subject areas, and students themselves describe senior year as unchallenging and easier than previous years.

The study, *From High School to the Future: The Challenge of Senior Year in Chicago Public Schools*, analyzes the coursetaking patterns of more than 50,000 CPS students in the graduating classes of 2003 to 2009. It looks at the impact of senior year coursetaking on college enrollment and persistence; describes the post-graduation outcomes of CPS graduates with extremely limited access to college; and draws on data from interviews with seniors in three CPS high schools to take an in-depth look at students' experiences during senior year.

While the study finds that the highest-achieving students in CPS are generally participating in a rigorous senior year, "there seems to be no organizing framework and common set of expectations for students who might be college bound but are not the most highly qualified," said Thomas Kelley-Kemple, report author and senior quantitative analyst at UChicagoCCSR. Among students who begin senior year positioned to attend a somewhat selective college, only 60 percent took four or more core classes in their senior year, less than half (43 percent) took a fourth year of math, and just one-third took an AP course.

Other key findings include:

- CPS requirements ensure that all students take a common set of courses from ninth to eleventh grade and graduate meeting minimum entrance requirements for four-year colleges. It is in senior year that the expectations for and experiences of students become differentiated by race/ ethnicity, achievement, and especially by high school.
  - Only one-quarter of African American and 29 percent of Latino graduates from the report's sample took at least one AP class in twelfth grade. In comparison, nearly half of white and 68 percent of Asian American graduates had taken at least one AP class. Similar patterns are observed for fourth-year math.
- Students' coursetaking decisions were strongly influenced by the school they attended.
  - Among students who are qualified to attend a selective college, the proportion of students taking Advanced Placement courses varies from around 10 percent in some high schools to more than 90 percent in others.
- This variation in coursetaking may have real implications for college access. Though it is not associated with improved college retention in college once students are enrolled, taking Advanced Placement courses and a fourth year of mathematics is associated with an increased likelihood in enrolling in more selective colleges.
- The overwhelming majority of the seniors in the qualitative study describe senior year as unchallenging. They characterize senior year as easier than previous years; describe multiple classes in which little work is required; and many say that they learned so little in senior year that they might as well have skipped the grade.
- CPS must grapple with what senior year should look like for a particularly challenging group of students: Roughly 45 percent of CPS graduates begin senior year off of the trajectory to attend a four-year college with some level of selectivity. These students face rapidly deteriorating employment prospects.
  - In the fall after graduation, the most common outcome for CPS students who have very low college qualifications was to be neither working nor in school. Those who do enroll in postsecondary education are unlikely to persist, and those who find work are substantially underemployed (analysis of the graduating cohorts of 2003-2005).