

**EMBARGOED UNTIL:**

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**New research and first-of-its-kind data tool show educational attainment outcomes for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students across Chicago's community areas**

*While CPS students' high school and college enrollment rates were similar regardless of what community area they lived in, their community area continued to matter greatly in whether they attained a college credential*

New research and a first-of-its-kind public data tool released today by the [University of Chicago Consortium on School Research](https://consortium.uchicago.edu) and the [To&Through Project](https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu) examine how Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students' educational attainment looks by their community area — as opposed to the more common comparison by high school. Together, the research and data tool consider high school and college graduation rates based on where students live in Chicago, providing new insights into the district's progress in addressing geographic inequities in students' outcomes.

"This research and the [To&Through Community Milestones Tool](#) finally enable the broader public to begin to track our district's and city's delivery on their mission to provide high-quality education for every student, regardless of their zip code, that prepares them for college success" says Dominique McKoy, study author and Associate Director of Engagement for the To&Through Project.

"And more importantly," says McKoy, "the data on this tool show that it is not enough for the district to help students overcome educational inequities that exist by community; changing the educational trajectories of Chicago's young people also requires institutions and organizations across sectors to address other deep-seated inequities through investment in the communities in which students live."

The study found that the expansion of school choice in CPS over the past two decades has resulted in a district where, in most community areas, the most commonly-attended high school enrolled less than 25 percent of the students living in that community area. There is a stark pattern in student dispersion by race, with the community areas that were majority-Black being the most likely to have their students dispersed across many different high schools. This pattern raises questions about the reasons why students in majority-Black community areas are more likely to opt out of attending their assigned school, particularly compared to students in majority-White community areas.

The study also found that there is less variation in high school graduation and college enrollment rates between community areas than there is between high schools. In 2019, high school graduation rates were similar across community areas; in most community areas the rates were between 70 and 80 percent. However, the rates for the same students by high school ranged from 49 percent to 99 percent.

Likewise, the pattern of college enrollment for 2019 graduates looks very different when analyzed by high school rather than community area. The rates vary dramatically between high schools, but in the majority of community areas, high school graduates immediately enrolled in college at a rate between 50–70 percent.

“It serves as a reminder of the power of high schools in shaping young people’s lives,” says Jenny Nagaoka, study author and Deputy Director of the UChicago Consortium on School Research. “It also serves as a reminder that in every community across Chicago, young people desire to succeed academically — and many are reaching their goals.”

On the other hand, the data on college completion outcomes by community area point to how deep-seated many of the inequities in opportunities are. Unlike high school graduation and college enrollment rates, college completion rates varied widely by community area. Among immediate college enrollees in the CPS graduating class of 2013, the college completion rate by community area ranged from 24 percent to 74 percent. This means that while similar percentages of students across community areas are enrolling in college, very different percentages are completing a degree.

In sum, the rates at which students graduated from high school and went on to college were relatively similar regardless of what community area they lived in, but that was not true for college completion. Providing students with the option of attending high schools that enhanced their college enrollment chances was not enough in the long term to ensure they completed college.

Consequently, the report and the data on the [To&Through Community Milestones Tool](#) both reinforce and complicate the story of rising high school and college attainment among CPS students. The tool is a publicly available online data resource that begins to fill Chicago’s gap in community-centered education data. The tool tracks five key milestones of high school and college attainment for CPS students in each of Chicago’s 77 community areas across time and for students of different races/ethnicities and genders.

For example, users can drill down into high school enrollment data to gain hyper-local insights into how student demographic patterns and CPS enrollment in different community areas have changed over time, answering questions like what types of high schools — neighborhood, charter, selective enrollment, or citywide — students from a particular community area most commonly attend. Users can also explore college completion data for a particular community area over time to surface questions about how students’ experiences both inside and outside of CPS classrooms are affecting their educational outcomes.

The data on the tool as well as these research findings point to the importance of community context in students’ educational experiences, demonstrating an unmet need for public agencies, community organizations, and colleges to provide resources where their students live. “To improve educational attainment outcomes for CPS students, we need to understand their outcomes as interconnected with the work and decisions of people within *and* beyond school buildings,” says Nagaoka. “It will require challenging leaders and decision-makers across sectors to address the inequities in the communities where students live.”

**Free virtual events related to the release of this research and data tool:**

- *Release webinar: Research findings overview & data tool demo*  
**Investigating Educational Attainment for CPS Students from a Community Perspective**  
Thursday, November 4, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (CST) | [RSVP](#)
- *Panel discussion with leaders from community-based organizations*  
**Community-Based Approaches to Educational Improvement**  
Tuesday, November 9, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (CST) | [RSVP](#)

- *Panel discussion with leaders from organizations collecting and using community-based data*  
**Using Community-Based Data for Educational Equity**  
Wednesday, November 17, 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM (CST) | [RSVP](#)

Cite as:

McKoy, D., Usher, A., Nagaoka, J., & Khatri, S. (2021). *Approaching Chicago student attainment from a community perspective*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

### **About the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research**

With the goal of supporting stronger and more equitable educational outcomes for students, the [UChicago Consortium](#) conducts research of high technical quality that informs and assesses policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families, and communities as we support the search for solutions to the challenges of school improvement. The UChicago Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action and practice but does not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school improvement by identifying what matters most for student success, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

### **About the To&Through Project**

In collaboration with educators, policymakers, and communities, the [To&Through Project](#) aims to significantly increase high school and postsecondary completion for under-resourced students of color in Chicago and around the country by providing education stakeholders with research-based data on students' educational experiences and facilitating dialogue on its implications for adult practice.

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