

Embargoed until:
12:01 am CT October 18, 2024

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High school graduation rate, four-year college enrollment rate, and college completion rate index reach all-time high for Chicago Public Schools students

Chicago's rates are similar to national rates—notable given that Chicago has higher proportions of low-income, Black, and Latine students

CHICAGO—A new joint To&Through Project & UChicago Consortium on School Research study released today provides an annual update on three educational milestones—**high school graduation, college enrollment, and college completion**—and tracks how rates on these milestones have changed across time for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students. The report is the 10th annual update of the organizations' college completion rate index, called the *Post-secondary Attainment Index*.

Authors Shelby Mahaffie, Alexandra Usher, Jenny Nagaoka, and Dominique McKoy published the report *The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2023* and found:

- The **high school graduation** rate increased to an all-time high of 85%. (See Figure 3)
- The college enrollment rate increased to 63% after seeing pandemic dips, approaching the prior high of 64% from 2017. (See Figure 7)
 - The **four-year college enrollment rate** increased 2.5 percentage points to an all-time high of 47.5%, while the *two-year college enrollment rate* declined slightly to 15.7%.
- College completion rates are holding relatively steady for four-year and two-year college enrollees—at 54% and 31%, respectively. (See Figures 11 and 12)
 - Completion rates among students who *did not immediately enroll in college* have been declining since 2009, dropped to just 4.3% for the most recent CPS cohort (class of 2017).
- **College completion rate index:**
 - **If current rates hold, 31 of 100 ninth-graders in CPS would earn a college credential** by the time they're 25 years old (see Figure 1: the *Post-secondary Attainment Index*).
 - This is the highest Post-secondary Attainment Index (PAI) reported in the ten years of this annual milestones report
 - For the past 10 years, the Post-secondary Attainment Index (PAI) has served as our best measure of the citywide effort around improving college degree attainment for CPS students.
 - The PAI is *not* a prediction.
 - Historically, actual reported rates have exceeded prior PAI measures (see figure A.2)
 - It presents a starting place for thinking about why these patterns exist and what can be done to improve these patterns.
- **The total number of college completers** from each CPS graduating class has increased over the past 10 years, with 2,613 more students from the CPS class of 2017 completing college than

from the CPS class of 2008 (6,930 vs. 4,317, respectively)—a more than 60% increase (see Figure 14).

“We’re marking our tenth year of this report, and we’re encouraged by the continued increases each year,” said Alexandra Usher, Director of Data & Research at the To&Through Project. “These increases reflect better citywide resources and deepening commitments to student success in both the K-12 and higher ed spaces, which we celebrate today. And there’s more work to be done so that all students who aspire to a college degree can realize their goal.”

“More CPS graduates are earning degrees—and more graduates are also starting and then leaving college without a degree,” said Dominique McKoy, Executive Director of the To&Through Project. “These are Chicago’s young people. How can our city wrap around them, and better support CPS students pursuing their degrees? At the To&Through Project, we’re working on citywide conversations about this.”

National context

Chicago’s rates are similar to national rates—notable given that Chicago has higher proportions of low-income, Black, and Latinx students. Nationally...

- The 2022 average adjusted cohort high school graduation rate for all public school students nationally was 87%. For Black and Hispanic students nationally, the average high school graduation rate was 81% and 83%, respectively.¹
- The rate of immediate enrollment rate into four-year colleges among high school graduates was 45% in 2022, and the rate of immediate enrollment into two-year colleges was 17%.²
- The six-year national Bachelor’s Degree completion rate for 2017 first-time enrollees in 4-year institutions aged 20 and younger was 68.8%.³

About the research

This year’s educational attainment updates are shared in the full, interactive report: [The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2023](#) by Shelby Mahaffie, Alexandra Usher, Jenny Nagaoka, and Dominique McKoy. (*Embargoed until 10/18/24 at 12:01am*)

Post-secondary Attainment Index (PAI) details

The 2023 PAI is calculated using the most recent available CPS data: 2023 high school graduation rates, immediate college enrollment rates for 2023 high school graduates, and rates of college completion within six years for 2017 high school graduates (six-year college graduating class of 2023).

These rates are used to calculate the proportion of current CPS ninth-graders who would complete any degree or certificate from a two-year or four-year college within 10 years if those rates were to hold constant over the next decade—researchers call this the Post-secondary Attainment Index (PAI).

For the past 10 years, the Post-secondary Attainment Index has provided a consistent measure of the progress that the City of Chicago is making in supporting CPS students on their path to a college credential.

Additional data

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi/high-school-graduation-rates>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=51#>

³ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/completing-college/>

- The report links to additional data on the [To&Through Project's data tool](#). Where possible, researchers disaggregated data by race/ethnicity and gender, disability status, and English Learner (EL) status to understand which students face more barriers to educational attainment and where different strategies and supports are needed.
- New this year, users can also explore 1) [data for CPS alumni who enrolled in City Colleges of Chicago](#), and 2) [data by Board of Education districts](#).
- Ten new [To&Through Student Stories](#), interviews with CPS alumni, provide a qualitative perspective on students' journeys to and through college.

About the To&Through Project

In collaboration with educators, policymakers, and communities, the To&Through Project strives to create equitable education outcomes for Chicago Public Schools students by helping educators use data for inquiry and impact. The To&Through Project is located at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute in the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice.

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.

The To&Through Project and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research are part of the Urban Education Institute, within the University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice.

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