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Chicago Public Schools students' college enrollment rate beats national average

CHICAGO—A new joint [To&Through Project](#) and [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 Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2024](#) report, by Shelby Mahaffie, Alexandra Usher, Jenny Nagaoka, and Dominique McKoy, shows:

1. Near-record highs in CPS students from the class of 2024 **graduating from high school** (84%) and **immediately enrolling in college** (66%).
 - a. These rates are on par with national averages.
 - b. CPS even out-performs the most recent national college enrollment rate by 5 percentage points (66% vs. 61%, respectively).
2. For **college completion**, this year's report notes a record high in the number of CPS alumni who graduated from college with a degree or certificate: 7,368 students from the class of 2018 (the most recent cohort for which authors have six years of post-secondary data).
 - a. At the same time, overall college completion rates for CPS alumni (48%) are below national averages (64%).
 - i. Broken down by college type, 56% of immediate four-year enrollees and 32% immediate two-year enrollees completed a degree or certificate within six-years.
 - b. These rates point to the need for improved college persistence and completion support across the post-secondary ecosystem—K-12 systems, higher education institutions, state and federal policies and practices, non-profit supports, etc.

Taken together, these current rates create what authors call a “**Post-secondary Attainment Index**.” If 100 students started CPS in ninth grade today, 84 would graduate high school, 58 would enroll immediately in college, and 30 would complete a college credential within 10 years.

“I don’t think most Chicagoans know how much progress we’ve made in the last 20 years, and even in the last 10 years” says Alexandra Usher, report author, Director of Data & Research at the To&Through Project and Senior Research Analyst at the Consortium on School Research. “CPS is a national leader in how to prepare students for and get students to college. There is some real cause for celebration in these improvements.”

Students in the classes of 2018 and 2024, whose rates are represented in this data, faced notable challenges, including:

- *The Covid-19 pandemic*, which required the Class of 2024 to start ninth grade with remote learning in the fall of 2020, and the Class of 2018 to move to remote learning their second year in college.
- *FAFSA redesign [delays and other challenges](#)*, which affected the Class of 2024 in their financial aid applications.
- *The [Students for Fair Admissions Ruling](#)* in June 2023, which created uncharted territory for the Class of 2024's college application process.

"Today's students face a new set of challenges, including federal cuts to funding for education, health, and food access. This data is a call for Chicago to build on our track record of improvement, and double down on making sure students who enroll, graduate," says Dominique McKoy, report author and executive director of the To&Through Project. "This will require expanded collaboration across K-12, higher ed, and all the systems that students navigate. Our young people need us to step up and work together."

About the research

Read this year's interactive report: [The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2024](#) by Shelby Mahaffie, Alexandra Usher, Jenny Nagaoka, and Dominique McKoy. (Embargoed until December 2 at 12:01am)

Report release webinar with leaders in post-secondary education

[Join us virtually](#) on Tuesday, December 2nd at 12pm CT for a webinar focused on the report release, including:

- Key insights from the report
- A panel discussion considering report insights within the realities of educational spaces and students' lives today, in Chicago and across the country, with:
 - Dr. Heidi Truax, Executive Director - CPS Office of School Counseling and Post-Secondary Advising
 - Lisa Kurian Philip, Higher Education Reporter - WBEZ Chicago
 - Kyle Southern, Executive Director - Partnership for College Completion

Additional data

The report links to additional data on the [To&Through Project's data tool](#), where users can view data by school, community area, and school board district.

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.

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 Kersten Institute for Urban Education 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.

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