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New research: If current rates hold, 27% of current Chicago ninth-graders would complete a college credential within 10 years

A new joint To&Through Project & UChicago Consortium on School Research study released today **provides an annual update on 3 educational milestones—high school graduation, college enrollment, and college completion—and tracks how rates on these milestones have changed across time in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)**. These rates are then used to calculate an updated Post-secondary Attainment Index (PAI) which represents 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 current rates of attainment were to hold constant over the next decade. The 2021 PAI is calculated using the most recent available data: 2021 high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates for 2021 high school graduates, and rates of college completion for 2014 high school graduates.

Researchers found:

1. If 2021 rates hold over the next decade, of 100 current CPS ninth-graders, 82 would graduate from high school within four years; 37 would enroll immediately in a 4-year college; 13 would enroll immediately in a 2-year college; and 27 would complete any college credential within 10 years of starting high school
2. The **CPS high school graduation rate** declined for the first time in recent history:
 - Among 2017–18 first-time ninth-graders, the high school graduation rate was 81.8% in 2021 vs. from 83.3% in 2020 and 82.2% in 2019.
3. **2021 college enrollment rates** are slightly higher than 2020 rates, and lower than pre-pandemic levels.
 - Among the CPS graduating class of 2021, 58.8% enrolled in a two-year or four-year college in the first summer or fall following high school graduation vs. 58.2% in 2020 and 62.4% in 2019.
4. **2021 college completion rates are similar to prior years.**
 - Among the CPS graduating class of 2014, 46% of students who immediately enrolled in college completed a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate within six years.

“The Post-secondary Attainment Index and its component rates are a starting place for thinking about why these patterns exist and what can be done to improve these patterns,” said Shelby Mahaffie, UChicago Consortium researcher and lead author of the report. “And, importantly, it’s not intended to be a prediction of what will happen. Continued efforts to improve rates of attainment will hopefully result in more CPS students completing high school and college.”

This year’s educational attainment updates are shared for the first time via a [webpage](#) that 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. Researchers hope that this annually updated data can help educators, leaders, and community members:

- Understand how rates of attainment for CPS students have changed over time and interrogate how disparities in attainment are due to issues of equity—particularly racial equity—within the district and higher education institutions.
- Provide an additional measure of systemic efforts to improve high school and college attainment for historically disadvantaged student groups in CPS.
- Question why disparities in student outcomes exist and what can be done, to improve students’ experiences at CPS and after graduation.

- Understand that, while important, examining these data is only a part of the efforts necessary to determine what questions should be asked both within and outside of education to better understand and support student pathways through college.

Additional details about each of these 3 key findings can be found in sub-sections of [The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2021](#) by Shelby Mahaffie, May Malone, Alexandra Usher, Drew Mukherjee, and Jenny Nagaoka.

Related event

On Thursday, February 9th, 2023 at 12pm, To&Through Project and UChicago Consortium researchers will share details from this 2021 educational attainment report, including disaggregated data that provides details for students of different race/ethnicity groups, students who began as English Learners, and students with disabilities. [Click here for event details and RSVP.](#)

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. At the To&Through Project, we:

- Conduct research and publish data on what matters for the attainment of Chicago Public Schools students (in collaboration with the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research).
- Design data tools and resources for education stakeholders that make data meaningful and actionable, including the publicly available To&Through Online Tool.
- Foster conversations about what matters most for students' high school and post-secondary success.
- Facilitate a network of middle grades educators committed to building more equitable and supportive educational environments that promote the success of middle grades students in high school and beyond.

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.

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