

# STUDENT STORIES OF NAVIGATING THE MAZE

## LESSON PLAN

Below is a lesson plan inspired by the research report “[Navigating the Maze](#),” which examines the college mobility patterns of 2010–2012 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) graduates, a sample of approximately 63,000 students. It revealed that CPS graduates were much more likely to transfer between colleges and take time off college than previously known. These findings inspired [the To&Through Project](#) to seek out five recent CPS graduates who made these transitions to understand more about their experiences. The below lesson plan is centered around their stories.

### KEY QUESTIONS STUDENTS WILL EXPLORE:

- So you’ve learned what makes a college a good “fit” — what does that mean in reality for recent CPS graduates? What does it mean personally for you?
- How have recent CPS graduates successfully navigated what happens when the college they enrolled in isn’t a good “fit”?

### LESSON ACTIVITIES:

1. **(7 minutes) Have students brainstorm 3–5 factors that they think would make a college a good “fit” for them** on their [worksheet](#)
  - Have students enter their factors into an **instant word cloud generator** (e.g., [mentimeter.com](#)) or post onto a **JamBoard**
  - **Class share out or call out** examining common themes and points of difference
2. **(15 minutes) Using the [Navigating the Maze deck](#)**, introduce why students will be talking about the importance of college “fit” through the lens of recent CPS graduates who have transferred colleges **(Students will write down key stats and facts on their [worksheet](#))**
  - Using the research findings in the deck as a jumping off point,
    - c. discuss the frequency with which CPS graduates have historically transferred between two-year and four-year colleges and taken time off college,
    - d. emphasize the importance of immediate and continuous enrollment, explaining how “fit” ties into the facilitation of this pathway,
    - e. make time and space to address what supports are available if students are thinking about transferring, and
    - f. introduce the idea that some CPS graduates have navigated college transfers successfully

3. (12 minutes) Students will choose one of four student profiles to read. If possible, make sure that each student's story is being read by at least two people in the class. (Each is a story about a student transferring from a four-year college to a two-year college, and back to a four-year college again or to another program to complete the type of degree they wanted) **Students will respond to two written reflection questions** on their [worksheet](#) during and after reading the story they choose.



[Arthur](#) is from the South Side of Chicago and studies IT and cybersecurity. He initially enrolled in an out-of-state four-year college and then transferred to a two-year college in Chicago. He is enrolled in an online bachelor's degree program during the pandemic.

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[Kiara](#) lives in South Shore and is studying to be a nurse. She initially enrolled in an out-of-state HBCU and then transferred to a two-year college in Chicago, where she is currently enrolled in a nursing program.



[Moises](#) lives in West Lawn and is studying to be a special education teacher. He initially enrolled in a private four-year college in Chicago and then transferred to a two-year college. He is now enrolled in a private four-year college outside the city.

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[Nancy](#) grew up in Brighton Park and is studying neuroscience. She initially enrolled in a private four-year college in Chicago, then transferred to a local two-year college. She is now enrolled in a public four-year college in the city.



4. **(11 minutes) Students turn to someone near them who read the same student's story and map out the following** on a piece of paper, JamBoard, or PowerPoint slide (*Have students finish for homework if not completed during class*)
- The major challenge(s) that the student faced at their first four-year college
  - The supports that they took advantage of when transferring between colleges
  - The qualities, supports, or resources that made their two-year college and final four-year college better “fits” for them

*If the lesson will go on for more than 45 minutes, or will span two instructional days, use the following to extend the lesson:*

5. **(20 minutes)** With their partner from #4, **have students participate in a “gallery walk”** — whether physically, with pieces of paper taped to the wall, or virtually, exploring different slides or JamBoards — **so that they can read about other students' stories and learn about different challenges students faced and the supports offered at different colleges**
- Have students discuss with their partner or in a small group their answers to the following questions:
    - a. Do you think you would prioritize the same qualities, supports, or resources at a college as the students in these stories when deciding whether a particular college is a good “fit” for you? Why or why not?
    - b. Go back to your list of three to five college “fit” factors that you brainstormed at the beginning of class yesterday. Would you add anything, or take anything away?
    - c. What do you think would make a particular college not a great fit for you?
6. **(10 minutes)** Have **students write down their answers** to these three questions on their [worksheet](#)
7. **(15 minutes) Whole-class share out or call out** about pieces of the different students' stories that students found surprising, relatable, or confusing. **Ask students to make connections between the stories and the colleges they are thinking about attending:**
- What are the supports that students in these stories took advantage of that seemed important to their success?
  - Discuss how students could go about finding out whether a college has that particular support/resource or something like it. Model how to conduct this search, and challenge students to do the same
    - a. **Consider assigning as homework**, e.g., *have students take their final list of 3–5 “fit” factors personally important to them and Google if the colleges they're thinking about enrolling in have these or similar supports/resources (or reach out to the academic advising department at that college, for example)*