

# THE ROAD TO A COLLEGE DEGREE: HOW DID OTHER STUDENTS GET THERE?

If you're interested in completing a college degree or certificate within the next six years, you may want to know about the pathways other students typically took to a college degree. For example, where did students start off the fall after high school graduation?

Out of the 63,000 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) graduates included in [our study](#), about...

**23,000 students**  
immediately enrolled  
in a four-year college

**13,000 students**  
immediately enrolled  
in a two-year college

**27,000 students**  
did not immediately  
enroll in college

enrollment

completion

College is not easy: not all students who immediately enrolled in college completed a degree within six years.

**13,000 students**  
completed a four-  
year degree

**5,000 students**  
completed a two-year  
degree or certificate

**45,000 students**  
did not complete a  
degree or certificate

Fortunately, CPS graduates' college completion rates have risen over the past decade, and our goal is to foster further growth in completion rates. Below, we dispel some common myths about what students should know, do, and focus on to make it to and through college.

**MYTH:** Taking a “gap year” after high school increases students' likelihood of staying in and graduating from college.

**FACT:** Students who immediately enrolled in college were most likely to complete a degree within six years of high school graduation.

**Almost all students**  
who completed a **four-  
year degree** immediately  
enrolled in college.

**About 7 out of 10 students**  
who completed a **two-year  
degree or certificate**  
immediately enrolled in college.

Among students who **did not  
immediately enroll** in college,  
**only 1 out of 10**  
completed a college  
degree or certificate.

**MYTH:** College students who take time off from school usually return and complete a degree within six years of high school graduation. — — — — —

**FACT:** Taking one semester or more off from college — or “stopping out”— was common, but students who stopped out were less likely to complete a college degree or certificate.

Among students who immediately enrolled in a **four-year college**, nearly **5 out of 10 students** stopped out.

**More than 4 out of those 5 students** did not complete a college degree or certificate within six years of high school graduation.

Among students who immediately enrolled in a **two-year college**, about **8 out of 10 students** stopped out.

**About 7 out of those 8 students** did not complete a college degree or certificate within six years of high school graduation.

The vast majority of students who stopped out for at least one semester of college did not complete a degree or certificate within six years of high school graduation. At the same time, life happens, and we know that it is not realistic for every single student to stay continuously enrolled in college. Whether due to health, financial, or other reasons, sometimes students need to take time off.

Among students who did need to take time off college, which of their pathways was most closely associated with finishing a college degree within six years? **Students who only took one semester off from college were most likely to complete a degree.**

**MYTH:** Most students who immediately enroll in a two-year college transfer to a four-year college and complete a four-year degree. — — — — —

**FACT:** The majority of students who completed a four-year degree within six years immediately enrolled in a four-year rather than a two-year college.

Not everyone who enrolls in a two-year college intends to complete a four-year degree. At the same time, some students who aspire to complete a four-year degree may find that immediately enrolling in a two-year college after high school might be their best option: two-year colleges are relatively affordable, and they can give students the option to stay close to home.

However, historically, immediately enrolling in a two-year college after high school with the intention of completing a four-year degree has not been an easy pathway to navigate for CPS graduates. Among CPS graduates who immediately enrolled in a two-year college after high school graduation, about **2 out of 10 students** ultimately transferred to a four-year college, and fewer than **1 out of 10 students** completed a four-year degree within six years.

The good news is that the relationship between CPS and City Colleges of Chicago is getting stronger due to efforts like the [Chicago Roadmap](#). For students who do enroll in a two-year college, it's very important to take advantage of the supports that exist around course planning and to start working with their college from the beginning to plan their transition to a four-year college.