



**the
To&Through
project**

UCHICAGO Consortium
ON SCHOOL RESEARCH

The Research Behind To&Through

The To&Through Project's tools and data reports build on 25 years of our research pinpointing what really matters for college success—equipping stakeholders with actionable information to put more students on the path to college completion. The UChicago Consortium on School Research at the Urban Education Institute has conducted years of rigorous, applied research on what factors indicate and impact success in the middle grades, high school, and in preparation for college.

This research has revealed the critical importance of grades and attendance, engaging instruction, support and monitoring for students, and other key components of success along a student's path to college. The To&Through Project builds on these findings to give students, families, high school counselors, principals, philanthropists, district leaders, as well as higher education officers the data and tools that support smarter decisions for greater college success.

Look inside to learn more about the UChicago Consortium research behind The To&Through Project





To&Through Middle School

Looking Forward to High School and College: Middle Grade Indicators of Readiness in Chicago Public Schools (2014)

Studying 20,000 Chicago Public Schools students as they transitioned from elementary school, researchers examined the ways in which students' performance in the middle grades can be used to predict their success in high school. Not only were grades and attendance the most important factors, but only students with very high middle school grades and attendance were well-positioned to succeed in high school. While the students at highest risk for high school course failure can be identified as early as sixth grade, many additional students with stronger academic records still falter and fall off-track in the transition to high school.

Free to Fail or On-Track to College: Why Grades Drop When Students Enter High School and What Adults Can Do About It (2014)

Detailing the dramatic drop in grades, attendance, and academic behavior that occurs between eighth and ninth grade, this report demonstrates how intense monitoring and support can help schools keep more ninth-graders on track to graduation. A significant shift in adult supervision between eighth and ninth grade makes it easier for students to skip class and stop doing work: average grades drop by more than half a letter grade, and students miss almost three times as many days of school. The degree of this decline varies greatly across high schools and can be mitigated if schools provide students with individualized attention around specific academic problems and have structures and strategies designed

to address attendance and sustain engagement.

Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago (2010)

Drawing on extensive longitudinal data spanning two decades and hundreds of elementary schools throughout Chicago, this study provided groundbreaking insight into a set of school practices and school and community conditions that led to substantial improvement in student learning. Schools that were strong on five essential supports—effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction—were 10 times more likely than schools with just one or two strengths to show substantial gains in reading or math.

From High School to the Future: The Pathway to 20 (2008)

This research report points to a “major misalignment” between the standards set by the state ISAT tests in elementary school and the college-readiness standards expected of all juniors in Illinois high schools as measured by the ACT, which is part of the state's PSAE exams. The study found that it takes a score well into the Exceeds Standards category on the eighth-grade ISAT to have a good shot at scoring well on the ACT in eleventh grade.

Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework (2015)

Amid growing recognition that strong academic skills alone are not enough for young people to become successful adults, this comprehensive report offers wide-ranging evidence to show what young people need to develop from preschool to young adulthood to succeed in college and career, have healthy relationships, be engaged citizens, and make

wise choices. It concludes that rich experiences combining action and reflection help children develop a set of critical skills, attitudes, and behaviors. And it suggests that policies should aim to ensure that all children have consistent, supportive relationships and an abundance of these developmental experiences through activities inside and outside of school.

To&Through High School

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools (2007)

Following a 2005 report that defined the freshman on-track indicator and demonstrated its power for predicting which students would graduate high school—students who were on-track at the end of their freshman year were nearly four times more likely to graduate—this 2007 report analyzed the school characteristics and the patterns in student behavior that contribute to keeping freshmen on track. Attendance and grades matter greatly. Just one to two weeks of absence per semester, which are typical for CPS freshmen, are associated with a substantially reduced probability of graduating. Virtually no student with an average lower than a D in the freshman year earned a CPS diploma, while almost all students with a B average or higher at the end of their freshman year graduated within four years.

Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance (2012)

Success in school is largely determined by factors not measured by standardized tests— attributes like persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, and

self-confidence that together are called “noncognitive factors.” In this 2012 report, researchers found strong evidence that academic behaviors, academic perseverance, mindsets, and learning strategies were strongly linked to student engagement and better course performance. A key component of getting students to exhibit positive behavior and work hard is their academic mindset—whether they think of themselves as a learner who belongs in the school community, believe that their skill grows with their effort, and view the work as valuable. These skills are influenced by the classroom and school environment; whether a student displays good or bad academic behavior depends on whether educators intentionally develop these traits, strategies, and attitudes.

Preventable Failure: Improvements in Long-Term Outcomes when High Schools Focused on the Ninth Grade Year (2014)

This 2014 study found that efforts to improve the academic performance of ninth-graders drove large improvements in graduation rates three years later in a diverse set of 20 Chicago public high schools. District-wide, improvements in on-track were accompanied by across-the-board improvements in grades at all ends of the achievement spectrum, and increasing ninth-grade on-track rates did not negatively affect high schools’ average ACT scores—despite the fact that many more students with weaker incoming skills made it to junior year to take the test.



From High School to the Future: A First Look at Chicago Public School Graduates’ College Enrollment, College Preparation, and Graduation from Four-Year Colleges (2006)

This 2006 report was the first in-depth analysis tracking multiple cohorts of CPS graduates through their college experiences. It revealed areas of considerable concern: only about 30 percent of seniors enrolled in a four-year college within a year of graduating high school, and only 35 percent of those who enroll received a bachelor’s degree within six years. Overall, only 8 in 100 CPS freshmen would go on to earn a college degree. Low grades and low test scores created significant barriers to college access, with few students qualified for selective four-year colleges. The report also highlighted the importance of college choice for college completion, with considerable variation in degree attainment among the colleges most CPS graduates attend.

From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College (2008)

“Potholes” found that many Chicago students who aspire to a four-year degree do not apply to a four-year college, and many who are accepted do not enroll. Of those who do, a majority—62 percent—enroll in colleges that are less selective than they are qualified to attend. One of the biggest potholes en route to college enrollment is the timely completion of the FAFSA, or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Among students accepted into a four-year college, those who did not complete the FAFSA were more than 50 percent less likely to enroll.

From High School to the Future: ACT Preparation—Too Much, Too Late (2008)

Despite highly motivated students and extensive test preparation, CPS students’ ACT scores remain below many college benchmarks. Test practice and learning test-taking skills have limited value; using class time to practice the

test did not produce higher scores. Improvements were higher the more school staff were able to get students to engage in appropriate academic behaviors (coming to class, doing their homework) and when class time was used for engaging instruction that encouraged deep analytic class work.

From High School to the Future: Making Hard Work Pay Off (2009)

This report examines the path to college for students in academically advanced programs—graduates of the city’s Selective Enrollment schools, those who completed International Baccalaureate programs, and graduates who had taken a sequence of at least six honors and two Advanced Placement classes. The study reveals that nearly two-thirds of these students graduate with access to selective four-year colleges, yet fewer than half enroll in colleges that match their qualifications, and many, about 17 percent, didn’t enroll in any college after graduation.

From High School to the Future: The Challenge of Senior Year in Chicago Public Schools (2013)

This report shows that the majority of CPS seniors have schedules dominated by makeup courses and electives and other non-core subject areas, and students themselves describe senior year as unchallenging. For college-bound students, taking advanced coursework in senior year accounts for much of the difference between meeting minimum admissions criteria and being competitive in admissions.



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