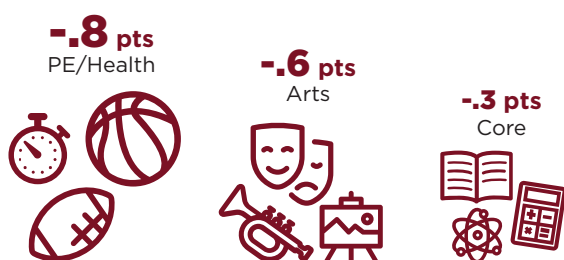


Strong freshman grades are a critical indicator of high school graduation and college readiness, but most CPS students see their grades fall significantly between the eighth and ninth grades. Research from The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research suggests that these declines are mostly due to changes in students' attendance and study habits as they adjust to a new school environment, not to changes in the difficulty of their coursework. In ninth grade, students are asked to adjust to new teachers, peers, environments, and expectations all at once, and they sometimes receive less personal attention from teachers and other school staff than they did in elementary school. Developmental and environmental challenges like these often change students' attendance and study habits, which are reflected in their grades. Even students who earned high grades and test scores in eighth grade are at risk of seeing their academic performance decline in ninth grade.

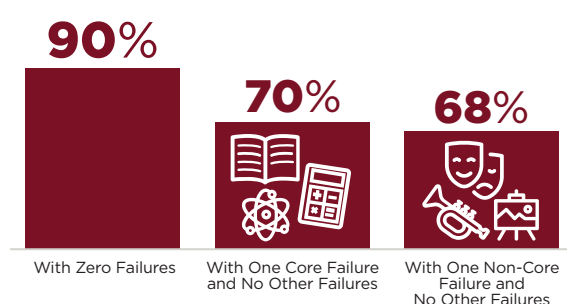
Students' grades typically fall in all subjects as they transition to high school, not just in core subjects like Math, English, Social Studies, and Science. In fact, most students actually see much larger declines in their grades in non-core subject areas like PE/Health and the Arts than in core subject areas. On average, students see their grade fall twice as much in PE/Health and the Arts as in the core subjects between the eighth and ninth grades.

Students' freshman grades in their non-core courses, including PE/Health and the Arts, matter just as much as their grades in their core courses. Research suggests that one failure in a non-core course in the ninth grade is just as detrimental to students' likelihood of graduating from high school as one failure in a core course. Ninety percent of students who pass all of their courses in ninth grade graduate from high school within four years, but students who fail even one semester of one course—core or non-core—during their freshman year have only around a seventy percent chance of graduating.

**Students lose significantly more GPA points in PE and Arts than in core subjects from 8th to 9th grade**



**A non-core course failure is just as detrimental as a core course failure to students' likelihood of graduating from high school**



Non-core grades also count just as much as core grades in students' overall GPAs, which play a role in determining their access to selective colleges and universities. On average, more than a third of a CPS graduate's cumulative GPA is composed of grades in non-core courses.

A successful transition to high school is a critical step on the path to and through high school and college. Earning strong grades in all classes in ninth grade, including non-core classes, sets students up for further success in high school and beyond.

*This data insight is part of The To&Through Project, a partnership between the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute and Network for College Success. The To&Through Project produces research, data, and resources designed to support CPS high school students as they move to and through high school and college.*