

Key Insights from “Tracking Two-Year College Outcomes: National Student Clearinghouse and Illinois Community College Board as Sources of Two-Year College Data”

In this brief, we summarize key insights from the technical report “Tracking Two-Year College Outcomes: National Student Clearinghouse and Illinois Community College Board as Sources of Two-Year College Data.” The technical report explores the strengths and limitations of using National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data and data obtained through the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS) on two-year colleges. A stronger understanding of the strengths and limitations of these data on two-year colleges will allow us to make more informed decisions about how we can most comprehensively identify and report on Chicago Public Schools (CPS) graduates’ outcomes at two-year institutions and how to interpret those outcomes.

For the technical report, we examined the extent to which rates of enrollment and completion at Illinois two-year institutions differed between CPS graduates’ records in the NSC and Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) datasets and

looked at whether completers with missing information in the NSC data completed a certificate or associate degree according to their ICCB records. While we hope these insights can help inform the use of NSC data and other state longitudinal data systems more broadly, some of the strengths and limitations identified in the technical report may be specific to two-year college outcomes, two-year colleges in the state of Illinois, and to CPS graduates.

To compare the rates of enrollment and completion at Illinois two-year institutions in the NSC and ICCB data, we used the CPS graduating class of 2012 as our sample. The sample was limited to students who received a regular diploma from CPS (excluding students who earned diplomas from a CPS options high school). This 2012 cohort consisted of 19,801 unique students; however, we limited our sample to the 19,207 students who had records in both the NSC and ICCB data.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The ILDS enables the linkage of CPS and NSC data to Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and ICCB data, providing valuable additional information on CPS graduates’ two-year college outcomes.
- 2 NSC appears to be a reliable source of data on CPS graduates’ two-year enrollment and completion of any credential in a two-year college.
- 3 NSC data cannot be used to calculate completion rates of a specific credential type from two-year colleges, including associate degrees.
- 4 Most CPS graduates with blank or uncategorizable completions in the NSC data earned an associate degree according to the ICCB data.
- 5 Exploring the differences between students’ records in the NSC and ICCB datasets also highlighted several additional limitations of the NSC data as a tool for understanding CPS graduates’ trajectories at two-year institutions. Most significantly, we found that there are a small but meaningful number of enrollments and completions by CPS graduates at ICCB institutions that are not represented in the NSC data, and it is possible that certain groups of students, such as undocumented students, are overrepresented in this group. Additionally, the full-time status field in the NSC data may have limited reliability.

Strengths and Limitations of NSC Data for Analyzing CPS Graduates' Outcomes in Two-Year Colleges

STRENGTHS OF NSC DATA

- 1 **Consistent:** Provided regularly to CPS for all CPS graduates.
- 2 **Comprehensive:** Includes data on enrollment and credential completion from both two- and four-year institutions.
- 3 **National Coverage:** Covers institutions associated with 97% of all two-year enrollments nationally, including out-of-state and private institutions.

LIMITATIONS OF NSC DATA

- 1 **Limited Information:** Many completions are uncategorizable as associate degrees or certificates; includes very limited information about students' programs and credits earned towards completion.
- 2 **Incomplete Coverage:** Institutions and students can opt out of reporting data to NSC.
- 3 **Potentially Unrepresentative Sample:** Students who are members of certain groups, such as undocumented students, may be under-represented in the data.

Strengths and Limitations of ICCB Data for Analyzing CPS Graduates' Outcomes in Two-Year Colleges

STRENGTHS OF ICCB DATA

- 1 **Credential Information:** All credentials are classified as associate degrees, long-term, or short-term certificates.
- 2 **Program Information:** Includes information about program types, credits attempted and earned, and early college enrollment.
- 3 **CDDA_ID:** Records can be linked across multiple data systems, including other state agencies, using only ID numbers, without transferring personal identifying information across data systems.

LIMITATIONS OF ICCB DATA

- 1 **Narrow Focus:** Covers only two-year colleges in Illinois.
- 2 **Fewer Established Data Sharing Relationships:** Less research and guidance on best practices exist for working with and interpreting ICCB data in external research.
- 3 **Multiple Independent State Data Systems:** No consistent data system and decision rules between IBHE and ICCB that can be used for calculating students' overall postsecondary outcomes.