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New UChicago CCSR report: Thousands more CPS students will earn four-year college degrees due to rising high school graduation and college enrollment rates

An estimated 14 percent of ninth-graders in Chicago Public Schools will earn a four-year college degree within 10 years of starting high school, according to a new analysis by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. The figure is an index of the percentage of CPS students who graduate high school, immediately enroll in a four-year college, and earn a bachelor's degree within six years of beginning college. The index has nearly doubled since 2006, when UChicago CCSR estimated that just 8 percent of CPS freshmen would earn a bachelor's degree by their mid-20s.

The study also estimates the national index to be 18 percent, placing Chicago close to the national rate and ahead of other large urban districts that publish similar figures. "This is a moment to celebrate the real progress that Chicago has made—and to acknowledge that we have a long way to go to live up to the aspirations we have for our students and that our students have for themselves," said UChicago CCSR senior researcher Kaleen Healey, lead author on the report. "Clearly this is not just a Chicago problem, it's a national issue."

The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: A Focus on Four-Year College Degrees is part of the Urban Education Institute's To & Through project, a three-part release over the next year of data reports and an online tool designed to provide targeted information to schools, civic leaders, parents and other stakeholders on key levers for college success.

Findings from the district overview include:

- **The improvement from 8 percent to 14 percent was driven by increases in the rates at which CPS students are graduating high school and enrolling in four-year colleges.**

Meanwhile, the college graduation rate among students who enroll in four-year colleges has increased only slightly. Four-year high school graduation rates have improved by 15 percentage points, to 73 percent in 2014, and four-year college enrollment rates among high school graduates have improved by 7 percentage points, to 40 percent.

- **More CPS students are graduating from high school, and they are finishing with higher qualifications, but many CPS students remain unprepared for college.** The average ACT score of CPS graduates has increased by nearly a point since 2006, even as 5,500 additional students annually now take the ACT due in large part to improving high school graduation rates. Still, nearly half of CPS students graduate with below an 18 on the ACT.
- **Very low institutional graduation rates at the colleges CPS students frequently attend present a major barrier to college completion.** Prior UChicago CCSR research has shown that students with the same qualifications upon leaving high school are much more likely to graduate if they attend a college with a high institutional graduation rate. At four of the 10 four-year colleges most frequently attended by CPS graduates, the six-year institutional graduation rates are below 50 percent.

“CPS has succeeded in getting many more students through high school and into college, but there must be commensurate focus on ensuring students who enroll in college earn degrees,” said Jenny Nagaoka, Deputy Director at UChicago CCSR and co-author of the report. “This will require not just making more students ‘college ready,’ but also making more colleges ‘student ready.’”