



Consortium on Chicago School Research

For release Monday, July 29, 2002

Contact: Shazia Miller
Associate Director, Research Outreach
(773) 834 5428, 9am to 5pm

Impact of Chicago's Policy to End Social Promotion Reaches Beyond Elementary Schools

CHICAGO—The Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) controversial policy to end social promotion has had an impact on student performance that reaches far beyond the system's elementary schools, a new study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research shows. Chicago public high schools felt powerful spillover effects from the policy, which imposes a combination of cut-off scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and other benchmark indicators in grades three, six, and eight.

Some of these effects, such as rising high school graduation rates, increased ninth-grade success, and higher rates of students taking honors classes and college preparatory course loads, were anticipated. But the policy had several unanticipated consequences as well: there was a systemwide decline in high school enrollment caused by a decrease in the number of students entering the ninth grade, and a decrease in students' likelihood of spending more than four years getting their high school diploma. Study authors also link the system's promotion policy to a substantial increase in the number and proportion of students with disabilities enrolled CPS high schools.

"The policy to end social promotion in the elementary schools did result in a hoped-for improvement in high school student performance, but it also had the unanticipated consequence of dramatically increasing the percent of students with disabilities—a consequence which must be considered and addressed," said Shazia Miller, Associate Director for Research Outreach at the Consortium.

The substantial rise in the percentage of ninth graders with disabilities enrolled in Chicago public high schools stems in large part from an increase in the identification of students with disabilities in the elementary schools, most notably in grades three, six, and eight, and an increase in the retention of low performing general education students. This has in turn resulted in the concentration of students with disabilities in struggling neighborhood high schools, and an increased likelihood that students with learning disabilities will be separated from general education students in high school classrooms.

"This study reinforces the need to look at elementary school policies not only in light of their direct effects on the schools they are meant to serve, but also on how they will change the system's high schools," said Ms. Miller.

(continued)

Notes for Editors

1. These findings are from the Consortium study, *The State of Chicago Public High Schools: 1993 to 2000*, which looks at how Chicago high schools changed under the second wave of public school reform starting in the mid-1990s.
2. Improvements in student performance exist even though study authors included in their analyses those students who dropped out between eighth and ninth grade or were sent to Academic Preparatory Centers, in addition to all first-time ninth graders. [Academic Preparatory Centers are transitional schools for eighth graders who are too old to remain in elementary school but have not yet been promoted to high school.] The study measures ninth-grade success by whether a student was “on track” at the end of his ninth-grade year. To be on track, a student must have enough credits to advance to sophomore status on time, and have received no more than one “F” in a core course (English, math, science, and social science).
3. The data on which study results are based include transcripts, tests scores, and demographics for all relevant CPS students. These data were analyzed using means, regression analysis and hierarchical linear modeling.
4. For additional information on this study, please see *Student Performance: Course Taking, Test Scores, and Outcomes*, by Shazia Rafiullah Miller, Elaine M. Allensworth, and Julie Reed Kochanek; *Declining High School Enrollment: An Exploration of Causes*, by Elaine M. Allensworth and Shazia Rafiullah Miller; and *Changing Special Education Enrollments: Causes and Distribution among Schools*, by Shazia Rafiullah Miller and Robert M. Gladden. Copies of the full reports, as well as brief summaries of each, are available from the Consortium’s Public Informing office (773 702 5428), and can be downloaded from the Consortium’s website at www.consortium-chicago.org.
5. The Consortium on Chicago School Research conducts and reports research in order to inform education policies designed to improve student achievement, enrich classroom instructional practices, and assess the progress of Chicago school reform. Formed in 1990, the Consortium is an independent federation of Chicago-area organizations with an interest in elementary and secondary education in Chicago’s public schools. A twenty-four member Steering Committee takes an active role in the development and dissemination of the organization’s research. Seven individuals represent the Steering Committee’s five institutional members. These include the Chicago Public Schools, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Chicago Teachers Union, the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association, and the Chicago Academic Accountability Council.
6. Shazia Rafiullah Miller joined the Consortium in 1998 and is the Associate Director for Research Outreach. She has a particular interest in education-to-work issues, and leads the Consortium’s work on Chicago’s high schools. Ms. Miller previously conducted evaluation research studies at the US General Accounting Office. She received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Social Policy from Northwestern University.

###