

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FEBRUARY 2013

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE FUTURE
**The Challenge of Senior Year
in Chicago Public Schools**



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Not in College, Not Working, and Out of Options

A Closer Look at the Characteristics and Post-Graduation Outcomes for Seniors with Low Qualifications

In 2012, high school graduates with low test scores and low GPAs are in deep trouble. While students with poor academic records at the end of high school have always faced limited college options, this was less of a problem in the past. The majority of high school graduates traditionally found employment immediately after high school, with workplace readiness skills often developed through employment during high school. In the current economy, such avenues to employment have been largely cut off for these young adults whose college options remain extremely limited. As a result, these graduates are primarily out of school, out of work, and out of options.

This section investigates the post-graduation outcomes of the large group of CPS graduates who fit this profile: those who have access only to either nonselective four-year colleges (whom we describe as having very limited college access) or to open enrollment two-year colleges (whom we call marginal high school graduates). We consider the postsecondary outcomes of three cohorts of these students (graduates of 2003-05) and add further analysis on their employment. In light of the current recession, we use national data to consider how youth employment prospects have changed in recent years. The breadth and complexity of the problems facing these students makes it easy to declare that this is not a “senior year” issue. This is true. In the long run, it is critical to ensure that all CPS students enter senior year with higher grades and test scores and greater college access. In the short run, however, these very low-achieving students and their post-graduation prospects must be part of an immediate, critical discussion of senior year and of what needs to happen both in high school and in the postsecondary sector to ensure that vulnerable students are not left behind.

Characteristics and Post-Secondary Status Nine Months after Graduation

Perhaps the most daunting challenge in this report is posed by the 25 percent of seniors who graduate from CPS with such low ACT scores and GPAs that they would likely only be eligible to attend a two-year college.

Another 20 percent of CPS graduates have such low ACT scores and GPAs that they would have difficulty gaining admission to most public state universities in Illinois.

Together, these two groups of students represent nearly half of all CPS graduates. **Table 7** describes the demographic characteristics and college qualifications of these two groups of students. Strikingly, graduates of CPS with access only to two-year colleges are disproportionately male, African American, and old-for-grade relative to their classmates. Their average ACT score of 14.2 places them in the bottom 10 percent of students nationally. An average GPA of 1.51, moreover, means that these students have passed their classes with Cs and Ds and barely made it to graduation. Students with access to nonselective four-year colleges look somewhat more demographically similar to system averages and are slightly higher achieving, though they still face very poor college prospects.

What do these vulnerable students do in the year after graduation? As part of its postsecondary tracking systems, CPS collects employment records from the Illinois Department of Employment Security.²⁹ CCSR obtained employment data for the CPS graduating classes of 2003, 2004, and 2005. Thus, for these three cohorts, we were able to examine both college and work outcomes from October 1 through April 1 in the year after high school graduation (two quarters). Among CPS graduates with the lowest qualifications, more than one-third (37 percent) were neither working nor in college in the fall following high school graduation (see **Figure 17**).^{30, 31} When these students did find employment, they were substantially underemployed. We can gauge the extent

TABLE 7

Demographic and achievement characteristics of CPS graduates with limited college options

2003-05 Cohorts	Marginal High School Graduates (Not Eligible for a Four-Year College)	Very Limited College Access (Eligible for Only Non-Selective Four-Year Colleges)	CPS Average
Percent of CPS Graduates	25%	20%	100%
Average ACT	14.2	15.7	17.5
Unweighted GPA	1.51	2.10	2.36
Race/Ethnicity			
African American	58%	52%	46%
Latino	34%	36%	34%
White	6%	9%	13%
Asian American	2%	3%	7%
Concentration of Poverty in CPS Graduates' Neighborhoods	.338	.263	.237
Male	52%	42%	41%
Old for Grade	22%	14%	14%

Note: This table represents students from the graduating classes of 2003-2005. Concentration of Poverty is taken from the 2000 census data. Higher values represent higher concentrations of poverty.

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of underemployment by comparing the earnings of a graduate to the earnings that graduate would have if she or he worked full time at the minimum wage. The median earnings of this group of graduates who worked but were not in college was \$3,824, equal to 67 percent of a full-time minimum wage job.³² Thus, these young adults were either working less than full time or working intermittently in this six-month period. Underemployment was most pronounced for African American graduates. African American males who finished high school with very low ACT scores and GPAs and who worked at some point during the six months after high school graduation had earnings equal to 56 percent of a full-time minimum wage job (see Figure 18).

Finally, in the fall after high school, approximately one-third of graduates with access only to two-year colleges were enrolled in college—predominantly in two-year colleges. Tracking these enrolled students, we find that, of those students who enroll in two-year schools, only 55 percent were still enrolled two years later and less than 5 percent had earned a degree. Similarly, students who enrolled in a four-year college had a 55 percent likelihood of being enrolled in school two years later. For students with access to nonselective colleges, the average persistence two years out is 63 percent at four-year colleges and 65 percent at two-year colleges.

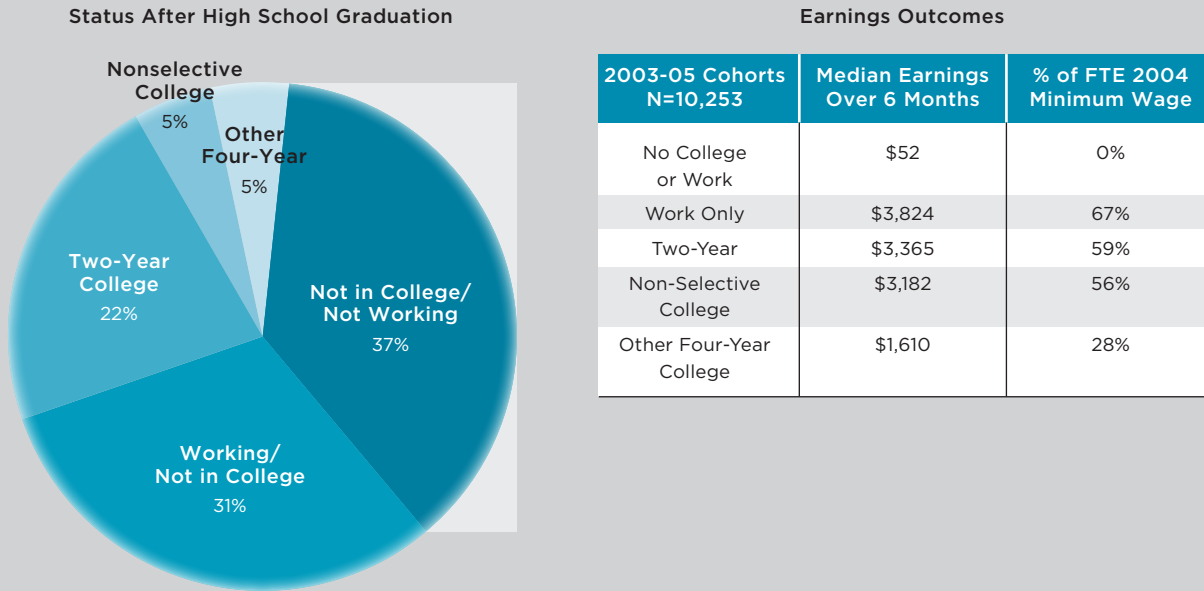
Nationally, the Percentage of High School Graduates Not In College Who Are Working Has Fallen Precipitously in the Last 10 Years.

These outcomes are not encouraging, but the prospects of young high school graduates has become even more dismal in the current recession. Though we do not have current employment data for CPS students, the employment outcomes nationally for students who graduate from high school and do not go to college have declined dramatically over the past 10 years. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) tracks the employment and school enrollment status of recent high school graduates in the annual October Current Population Survey. From 2000 to 2010, an analysis of BLS data done for this report by the Economic Policy Institute shows that the percentage of high school graduates not in college who are employed in the fall after high school graduation has declined from 75 to 60 percent (see Figure 19).

Employment outcomes are much worse among African Americans who have recently graduated from high school and do not go to college. In 2011, only 49 percent of African American recent high school graduates who did not go to college found jobs by the fall after graduation, compared to 64 percent of white and 58 percent of Latino recent graduates. Strikingly, this analysis also shows that the gap between African American and white graduates has always been significant.

FIGURE 17

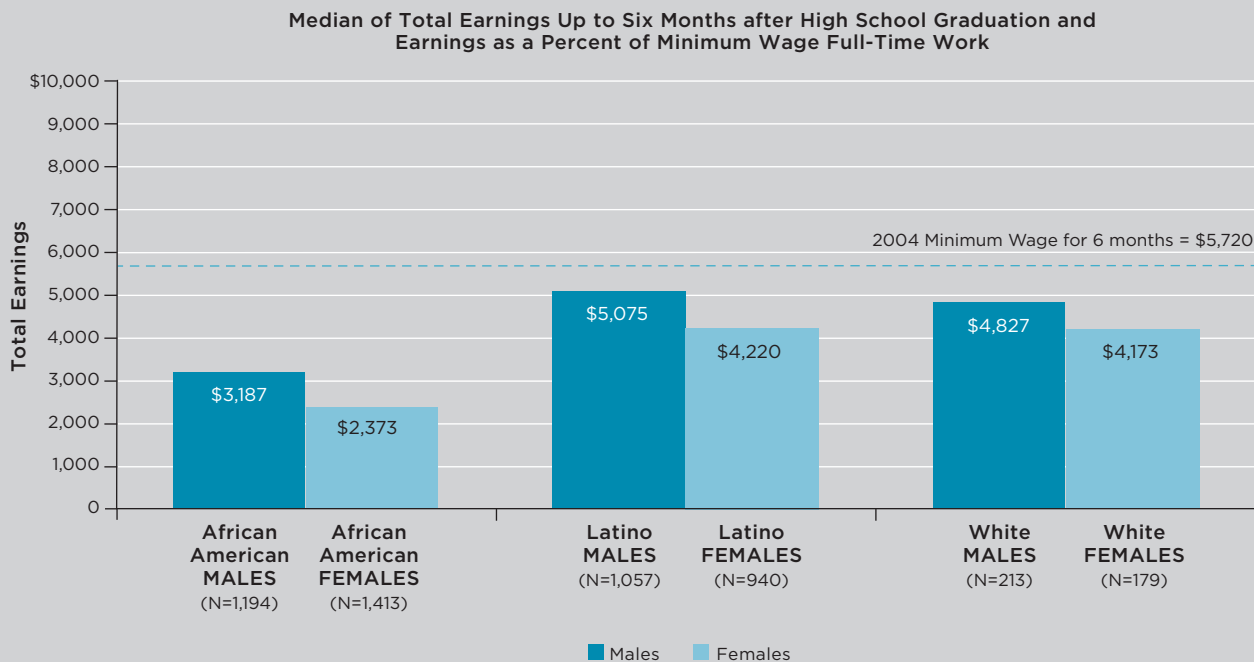
CPS marginal high school graduates were most often not in college or employed in the fall after graduation



Note: % FTE is the percent of what a worker at minimum wage would make if they worked full time. If a person was working full time (40 hours/week or 1,040 hours over six months) at the 2004 minimum wage rate (\$5.50), s/he would have earned \$5,720. So a student who earned \$3,824 over six months at a minimum wage job would have worked 695 hours (4,376/5.50) which is 695/1040 = 67% of a full-time job. Earnings data is collected by the Illinois Department of Employment and Security. Earnings are measured for a six-month period starting the October after a student graduates.

FIGURE 18

The 31 percent of CPS marginal high school graduates who were employed and not in college in the year after graduation were substantially underemployed



Note: This figure shows students from the graduating cohorts 2003-2005 who had access to a nonselective four-year college or a two-year college (N=17,710). The sample in this figure does not include students who were in special education, alternative high schools, or charter high schools. Students were categorized as "working" if they accumulated at least \$100 in earning over two quarters. Data on earnings come from IDES information.

What Should Be the Purpose of Senior Year for Students with Weak Skills and Poor Grades?

For seniors with such low qualifications for college, the central question is: What should be the goals of senior year? At present, students with very low qualifications are the least likely to take an academically oriented senior year, in large part because many of these students need senior year to complete basic graduation requirements. Nearly half of these students (46 percent) were taking make-up courses their senior year, and almost two-thirds needed music and art credits to graduate.

The question of how high schools can facilitate a more effective transition for students who are just making it to graduation is particularly challenging for two reasons. First, there are very few options available for these students, making it difficult to know what an effective approach would look like. A recent Harvard University report by the *Pathways to Prosperity Project* argued that the United States must develop a broader set of options that mix employment and academic training and add at least one more year of education. As the report concludes:

...the message of college for all places far too much emphasis on a single pathway to success; attending and graduation from a four year college after completing an academic program of study in high school...It is long past time that we broaden the range of high-quality pathways that we offer to our young people beginning in high schools.³³

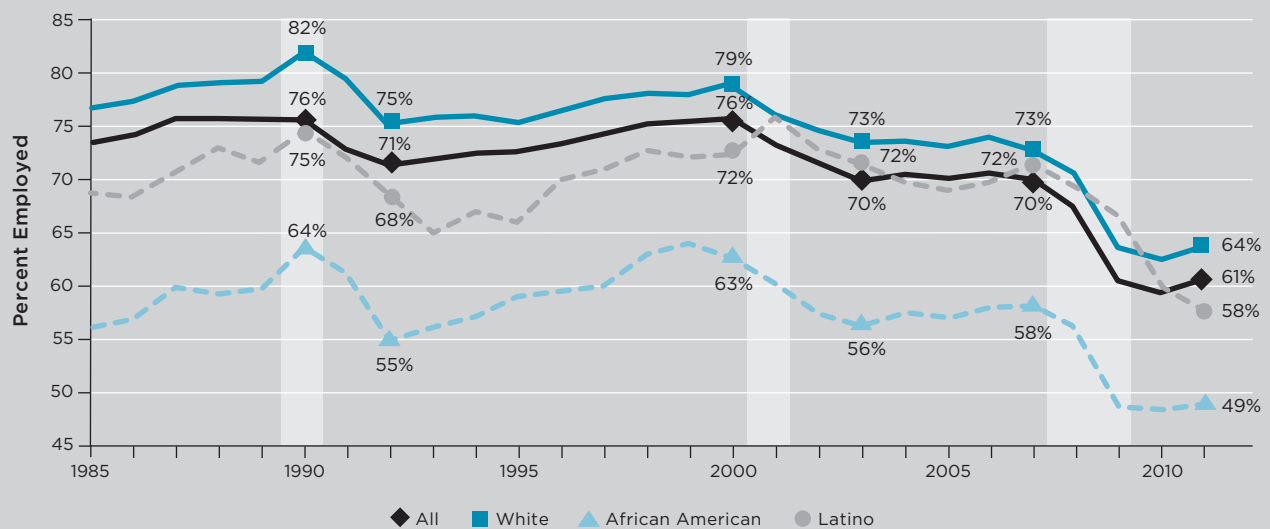
But at present, high schools do not have those pathways available; few training and employment supports are offered to students who do not go to college.

Second, the constellation of problems facing these low-achieving CPS graduates is compounded by the fact that few of these students work in high school. Historically, for many youth, employment during high school played a critical role in developing work readiness skills and creating pathways to adult employment. Over the last 10 years, however, the employment rates of high school students across race/ethnicity have been cut in half (see Figure 20). In 2010, only 9 percent of Latino and 8 percent of African American high school students were employed.

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FIGURE 19

Over the past 11 years, the employment rate of high school graduates not in college has declined from 76% in 2000 to 61% in 2011



Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey data. Population is high school graduates never enrolled in further education. Recessions are highlighted.

FIGURE 20

The percentage of students working while in high school declined precipitously from 2000 to 2010



Source: <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/?q=node/374> accessed on 5/4/2012.

Taking a closer look at the challenges facing these students in twelfth grade does not mean that the solution is to fix only twelfth grade. Senior year is far too late to intervene. During the senior year, teachers cannot make eligible for college a group of students who, after 11 years, are barely meeting graduation requirements. And clearly high schools cannot address these students' needs without the development of new post-secondary training and institutions.

At the same time, it is clear that high schools play an increasingly central role in the lives of urban youth. As we demonstrated in *Potholes on the Road to College*, first generation college students are especially dependent upon high schools for the information, experiences, and supports that allow them to translate aspirations and achievement into college access. The problems

facing the lowest-achieving CPS graduates, outlined in this section, pose an equally significant challenge. Even 20 years ago, most high school graduates did not attend college and most students were not relying on their teachers to help them make an effective transition to the labor market. The fact that over 45 percent of CPS graduates essentially did not have the academic qualifications to attend a four-year college would not have sounded alarms in earlier times. Now the situation constitutes a call to action. Dramatic changes in the economy mean that youth who barely manage to graduate from high school and who lack work experience are increasingly dependent upon high schools and postsecondary training to help them develop skills and connect to the labor market.

Endnotes

- 29** CPS only is able to collect Illinois employment data on graduates with valid social security numbers in the CPS Student Information System (about 88 percent of graduates).
- 30** We count students' post-graduation status in the fall rather than summer to distinguish between students who are employed and not in college and those who are employed and attending college.
- 31** Outcomes were only slightly better for CPS students who could only qualify for a nonselective college. For these students, 30 percent were not employed and not working,

26 percent were working but not in college, and 21 percent were enrolled in a two-year college. The most significant difference between our two-year only and nonselective four-year group is that 23 percent did enroll in a four-year college

- 32** In 2004, if a person worked full time at the minimum wage rate (\$5.50) for six-months, s/he would have made \$5,720.
- 33** Symonds, W.C., Schwartz, R.B., and Ferguson, R. (2011). *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st Century*. Report issued by the Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Transcript of Roundtable Discussion on How High Schools Can Address the Needs of Seniors with Low Qualifications

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In early summer 2011, researchers from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) convened a panel of practitioners and policy experts to grapple with challenges facing a group of Chicago Public Schools students featured in their most recent report, *The Challenge of Senior Year in Chicago Public Schools*. These students were high school graduates whose grades and test scores disqualify them from any post-secondary options other than two-year, open-enrollment colleges. The post-graduation prospects of these students—who make up 25 percent of CPS graduates—are bleak: 37 percent were neither working nor in college six months after high school graduation. For those who did find work, median earnings were equal to 67 percent of a full-time minimum-wage job. In addition to addressing the challenges faced by this group of particularly low-performing students, panelists discussed the needs of the much larger population of CPS students who are likely to struggle to earn a four-year college degree.

Dramatic changes to the labor market exacerbate the problems faced by these students. Historically, employment during high school played a critical role in developing work readiness skills and creating pathways to adult employment. However, over the last ten years the employment rates of high school students across race/ethnicity have been cut in half. In 2010, only 9 percent of Latino and 8 percent of African American high school students were employed. Not surprisingly,

these same students struggle to find work after graduation. From 2000 to 2010, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the percentage of high school graduates not in college who are employed in the fall after high school graduation has declined from 75 to 60 percent. Employment outcomes are much worse among African American recent graduates who don't go to college. In 2010, only 27 percent of African American recent graduates who did not go to college found jobs by the fall after graduation, compared with 60 percent of Latino and white recent graduates.

Because the Senior Year report provided the impetus for the convening, panelists were asked how the senior year of high school in CPS would have to be re-imagined to address the needs of students who likely will struggle to attend a four-year college or find gainful employment. Their responses, recorded here, provide a starting point for thinking about how to reconfigure not only senior year but also the entire high school experience in Chicago to meet the needs of all students.

The following is an edited version of a four-hour discussion that included **Bob Schwartz (BS)**, co-author of *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century* and Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education; **Aarti Dhupelia (AD)**, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Office of the CEO at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and former Director of Early College

and Career Education, Office of Pathways to College and Careers at CPS; **Jacquelyn Lemon (JL)**, Leadership Coach and Transformation Manager at the Network for College Success and former Principal at Chicago Talent Development High School and Dyett High School in Chicago; **Melissa Roderick (MR)**, Hermon Dunlap Smith Professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and Senior Director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Other CCSR researchers also participated.

MODERATOR: Let's start with defining the problem that we are trying to address. Does anyone want to summarize their main takeaways from the Senior Year report?

AD: There is a large percentage of students who are graduating high school not ready to do anything, really, right after high school and who don't have the support system to be successful, whether it is in college or not. The issue is throughout high school...and the solution may be different for different groups of kids. Currently, I don't think we have targeted solutions in place for students.

BS: What strikes me is you have this first population of kids who you think are pretty much on-track to enroll in selective four-year institutions, and they're probably going to be okay. . . . But then you get this larger group of kids who are likely to go off to four-year institutions and struggle and not succeed. And then you have kids—and this becomes more worrisome—who are almost certainly not going to go off to college at all. And these are the kids we really need to think differently about. There is this whole larger group of students for whom we need to use post-secondary education or training rather than four-year colleges as the frame to get them to succeed.

MODERATOR: So, are you saying that the goal for many CPS students shouldn't necessarily be attending a four-year college?

BS: The overriding goal should be to prepare all kids for careers and citizenship. College is a means, not an end. Given the national data now telling us that over

half of young BA holders are either unemployed or working at jobs that didn't require a bachelor's degree, this might suggest that we are too focused on four-year college as the destination for all kids. Our fear around tracking means we've just allowed a whole ton of kids to slip off our screen. It may make the adults feel good to say, "College for all, College for all," but the reality is that only 30 percent of 25-year-olds have a bachelor's degree, and that number has barely budged over the last decade. In cities like Chicago, of course, that percentage is much lower.

MODERATOR: Jackie, as a former CPS principal, what is your reaction to Bob's argument? Has the current college-for-all focus allowed a large group of students to "slip off our screen," as Bob suggests?

JL: Yes, I think so, but, I think the conversation has to begin at a higher level because there is so much pressure for the four-year college enrollment outcomes. Until we have an honest conversation about that marginal group of students and put metrics in place that we can celebrate, I don't know how likely principals will feel to even have that conversation.... Right now the value is college enrollment, period. And the expectation is the school is going to magically get the student who enters high school with a third grade reading level, to enroll and succeed in college. We have to dare to reassess our values; we've got to also value new metrics for the students who often get marginalized.

MODERATOR: But by celebrating outcomes other than college enrollment, do we risk creating a two-tiered system, where poor, minority kids are on a vocational track and more advantaged students are on a college track?

JL: Absolutely, we do have to be careful that we don't send the message that "Okay, college is for this group of kids but not this other group of kids." We have to really think about how are we messaging that.

MODERATOR: Right, the messaging and policy implications of this are not easy, because I'm not so sure that we know that these kids couldn't or shouldn't be graduating from college.

AD: But I think that we also know that the optimal college-going rate, even for kids who are kind of more in the middle, is not 100 percent. And so I think it's important to have an understanding that there are always going to be kids who are not going to go to college. They might not even go to a two-year college. And actually having a viable alternative to that is important.

MR: I just want to make one point. When I graduated from high school, that was the best thing you could do. The biggest payoff was going from dropout to graduate. That was the step that got you the most money. Now, the only step that gets you anything is graduating from college. And that pushes me—I'm always in this conundrum of not knowing what to say when people say to me, "college is not the only option." What do I tell people, Bob?

BS: I'm trying to follow your data. The question isn't who goes off to college. The issue is you need a different strategy for kids who are highly likely to wind up, at best, with some college, but not a four-year degree. We need alternate pathways that can take kids from high school into a postsecondary certificate or two-year degree program in a technical field where there is high demand in the labor market and where they can be on a career path that can lead them to a family-supporting wage. The argument I'm making is that this will be a better choice for those kids, for their lives, than starting a four-year degree program where the high likelihood is that they will leave with nothing other than debt. You have to try to set up a system where kids and families have choices.

AD: Right.

BS: And the choices are fully laid out and—and they're picking. So it's not the system that is making decisions about which kids are in which category. Right now, you simply don't have viable options for a majority of the kids. We need to build a more robust set of pathways or options so that, by age 16 or so, kids and their families have some real choices alongside the four-year college pathway.

MODERATOR: Let's back up a bit here. We are talking about creating additional pathways, but what problems would those pathways be designed to solve? What skills do students without college prospects need? Aarti, you are out in the community all the time talking to employers. What are you hearing from them about CPS students? What types of skills would they need to have to make them employable?

AD: It's not research-based, but what I hear about what kids are lacking is all social development. It's attitude, it's work ethic, punctuality, appearance, looking people in the eye. It's, in general, these kids aren't ready to be here. I have had employers tell me, "This is the biggest thing that kids are missing; and I would take them if they just had this basic attitude, punctuality, etc., and I could work with them on the rest."

MR: And kids aren't getting these skills because they're not working anymore during high school. What really bothered me was when I was doing this analysis, everyone kept saying, "But they're working, they're working, right?" And I'm telling them that only 8 percent of African American high school students are employed. And people are saying, "That sounds really low." In the '80s the question was, "Are high school kids working too much?" And in the 1980s, if you didn't go to college, 85 percent were employed before graduation. This is just a totally different world.

JL: And this problem is made worse because some students are coming from communities where they don't see a significant portion of adults working. They don't have a vision, so it's about exposing the kids. Getting them out of the school building. What about giving them graduation credit for working?

BS: This makes the case for much, much, much more purpose. We need high school programs that mix work and learning. We need a different mix for probably half of the kids in the system—we need high-quality education that combines rigorous academics with relevant technical education, coupled with work experience, ideally with a strong connection to a two-year institution. That's going to get a whole lot more kids through

high school with some employability skills and on into some form of postsecondary career education or training.

MODERATOR: Bob, your work focuses on creating additional pathways for students. What would these additional options or pathways look like?

BS: My bias is, in particular, is to try to create models that span the last two years of high school and at least the first year of a post-secondary program. You do what you can to level the playing field up to the tenth grade. I'm for putting everyone through the same kind of core curriculum and then really creating more robust options from there. The programs would be sector-specific—leading to recognized industry credentials.

MODERATOR: Can you give specific examples of where this has worked?

BS: There are striking examples in Europe.... Finland is the highest-performing country in Europe and the place where social class is the least predictive of school performance and where the variation between schools and within schools is the narrowest. Forty-two percent of 16-year-olds in Finland opt for the career pathway rather than the university pathway. Switzerland is now the third-highest performer in math and science on the most recent PISA assessments, and 42 percent of the Swiss kids who get 4s and 5s on the PISA assessment are in the vocational system, not the university system. And Switzerland, by the way, has a 6 percent youth unemployment rate, while ours is closer to 20 percent.

AD: There are certainly organizations in the U.S., industry associations, and organizations like in Europe, that help bridge those gaps between high school and work. I think the problem is, there is nothing at scale. So you can also get a ton of job shadows, a ton of short-term mentorships, but we don't really have a pipeline or pathway system that we've developed with them and that's where I think it requires a broader level of community involvement to say this is part of the city's kind of moral imperative and economic imperative to actually do this.

BS: You get evidence that in those systems we really can create robust options for students. In any one of those central and northern European systems, 40 to 70 percent of students opt for these three-year programs that mix work and learning. And these systems are set-up to provide a lot of support for kids. You talk to employers and others, and they don't see this as simply preparing kids for jobs. They see it as part of a larger societal commitment to help kids get through the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

JL: In the meantime, I'm thinking, what are the rigorous courses I could offer senior year that would also teach employability skills, so at the end of the year I could administer an assessment that would measure these skills. Then I could possibly say, "The 80 percent of my students who were not matches for four-year college were at least work-ready." What kind of metrics will we celebrate for these students?

AD: I can speak to what we're trying to do in CTE. We have a work-based learning continuum where we're pushing kids to think of how they need to act in the work place, and then we're basically developing a curriculum just around work-based readiness skills with those who have worked with schools and worked in business. And then you take that framework and make the students apply it in different settings—job shadows, interviews, with a guest speaker.

JL: At the charter school, we were able to set outcomes for those soft skills and actually give students grades. I don't know if that could have been done in a traditional CPS school, but programs like After School Matters are great opportunities for kids to practice those skills. If you don't come on time, you don't come every day, you don't get a paycheck. That's a great lesson and conversation to have with some students.

AD: In terms of creating metrics that we can celebrate around work readiness, in CTE we've created an online tool to screen which kids are ready for employment. There's a very clear rubric—click, click, click. Fifteen skills that you rate kids on. We use this tool to screen for which kids we sent out on job shadows in February,

and there was a 90 percent match between how our teachers assessed the kids and how their employers evaluated them, so there's an alignment. And I think this is something that the whole district needs to use, quite frankly, because this is the missing piece.

MODERATOR: Jackie, if schools really did have metrics for workplace readiness and indicators that would predict whether students were ready for employment, what tools would schools need to move those indicators?

JL: I'm just so happy you asked that because when we started the conversation around on-track to graduate (a freshman-year indicator that is highly predictive of whether students are likely to graduate from high school), CPS did not give us the technology to do the work, which was quite frustrating. We had to literally pull each student's transcript and try to calculate the numbers ourselves. This leads to schools coming up with different numbers. Additionally, I wonder if the huge bump in on-track (from 55 percent in 2007 to 71 percent in 2011?) occurred when the technology, like the freshman watch lists, were put in place to help.

AD: Actually, in CTE, we're launching our own early warning system that has all sorts of metrics: Are they on-track to industry certification based on their technical assessment scores; have they participated in the service learning by the end of their sophomore year? Have they done a job shadow by the end of junior year? Have they done an internship by the end of senior year? And it's going to have red flags if they're behind track along that work-based learning continuum. As well, we can tell if they are off-track in their employability skills, so we can actually tag, "Are you deficient in three or more employability skills?" But that is all in the context of CTE.

MODERATOR: Aarti, correct me if I'm wrong, but CTE is targeted at a pretty specific group of kids—those with skills that really put them at the middle of the pack in CPS. CTE really isn't a solution for students in that bottom quarter, those students who leave CPS with no access to anything but a two-year, open-enrollment college. And that raises the question of how to address those really marginal kids?

AD: I'll be very honest. We don't have an answer for that yet, and I think that's a question that's bigger than CTE. We try to gear our programs to all achievement levels, and there are varying levels of rigor, depending on whether you're taking carpentry versus Cisco Networking. But the problem is that the lowest-performing students drop out of our programs because they're struggling with everything else. I just don't know how CTE becomes the solution for those students. I mean, I'm told that you can't even read an auto-mechanic manual unless you have a sophomore in college reading level.

BS: For those kids we're most worried about, who leave high school with no prospects and no resume, we need to mobilize people to help them get some form of work experience or some surrogate for it on their resumes pretty quickly. You could try to do something like a career passport, as an expanded version of a resume. If by their early twenties young people don't have a resume that has both education and some work experience, they're just in deep trouble. We need to figure out a strategy for giving kids at the back of the queue some sort of currency. Again, I don't know exactly what that looks like or how you do it, but I think you can mobilize people around that idea.

MODERATOR: So, which people need to be mobilized around all of the issues we have raised today? Clearly, all of the issues with workplace readiness cannot be put on the shoulders of CTE—or of CPS.

AD: I think there's a huge amount of buy-in that has to happen in the business community. We need to figure out a way to incent business to engage in the solution. This is such a simple, rudimentary example, but we actually pay for our kids that we place in summer internships. But a lot of times what we'll do is ask the businesses, "If you like this student, will you take him on and pay him during his senior year? So we could use Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds or something to encourage businesses to take a chance to restore their confidence that students can actually deliver and it's not just a charity case.

BS: There are things a mayor can uniquely ask people to do and can cast a search light on them for performing or not performing. I mean, you could imagine a gathering where you've got the mayor convening leaders across the sectors and challenging them to build a visible opportunity structure that will motivate families and kids to do the hard work. What are the two groups that complain most about the under-preparation of CPS kids? Employers and higher education institutions, right? They are the two main consumers of the products of the K-12 system. And the mayor is the person in the best position to say, "We need you guys to come to the table in a much more serious fashion. Here is a set of proposals for how you can collaborate more effectively with the schools. And I'm going to keep score and create a set of metrics that apply to employers and higher education institutions around this agenda, not just the schools."

AD: Look, Melissa, you have said many times that for many of these kids, high school is the last public institution...

MR: Hopefully!

AD: Right, hopefully, because the next one for lots of these kids is not a good one. And kids who are going to college are getting connected to an institution. We need to think of reasonable alternatives—besides jail—for the rest of the kids. We have to have somebody or something that we hand these kids off to after senior year—whether it's a community-based organization, whether it's employers, whether it's just an adult in the community. We just can't send them off unattached.



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OUR MISSION The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.



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