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## Chicago No Longer A City of Dropout Factories; But Achievement Remains Very Low Despite 20 Years of Reform

Over the past 20 years, Chicago Public Schools has experienced tremendous growth in graduation rates, but learning gains have been modest, according to a new report from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

The report, *Trends in Chicago's Schools Across Three Eras of Reform*, tracks elementary and high school test scores and graduation rates in Chicago since 1988, when U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett proclaimed the city's public schools to be the worst in the nation. Key findings from the report include:

- Graduation rates in Chicago have improved dramatically, and high school test scores have risen; more students are graduating without a decline in average academic performance.
- Math scores have improved incrementally in the elementary/middle grades, while elementary/middle grade reading scores have remained fairly flat for two decades.
- Racial gaps in achievement have steadily increased, with white and Asian students making more progress than Latino students, and African American students falling behind all other groups.
- Despite progress, the vast majority of CPS students have academic achievement levels that are far below where they need to be to graduate ready for college.

"The tremendous gains in high school graduation should be celebrated, and the growth in high school ACT scores and elementary math scores do indicate progress," said Stuart Luppescu, chief psychometrician for the Chicago Consortium and the lead author of the report. "Unfortunately, we also found reasons for substantial concern: racial achievement gaps are growing and average achievement across the district remains very low."

Many of the findings in this report contradict trends that appear in publicly reported data. For instance, publicly reported statistics indicate that CPS has made tremendous progress in elementary math and reading tests, while this analysis demonstrates only incremental gains in math and almost no growth in reading. The discrepancies are due to myriad issues with publicly reported data—including changes in test content and scoring—that make year-over-year comparisons nearly impossible without complex statistical analyses, such as those undertaken for this report. This leads to another key message in this report:

- The publicly reported statistics used to hold schools and districts accountable for making academic progress are *not* accurate measures of progress.

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