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UChicago Consortium on School Research releases analysis of GoCPS high school applications, offers, and enrollment patterns

GoCPS did not result in major changes in enrollment patterns

CHICAGO—The UChicago Consortium on School Research and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago released a new study today analyzing the first year of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) centralized application system, GoCPS.

In April 2017, the Chicago Board of Education adopted a common application for all high school choice programs, including charter schools, with one deadline and a single best offer. GoCPS, CPS's online hub for exploring and applying to high schools, launched in the fall of 2017. The UChicago Consortium and Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's new report, *GoCPS: A First Look at Ninth-Grade Applications, Offers, and Enrollment*, analyzes the first year of GoCPS implementation for students who enrolled in ninth grade in the fall of 2018.

Key Findings: Applications and Offers

- Engagement with the GoCPS platform was high. Almost all CPS eighth-graders (93 percent) used GoCPS to apply to high school.
- Students were offered seats according to the process described on the [GoCPS website](#)—lotteries admitted students at random and points-based programs admitted the highest scoring students first.
- Almost all applicants received an offer, and most applicants (81 percent) received an offer from a school ranked in the top three on their application.
 - Applicants who did not receive an offer to any choice program applied to fewer programs on average and tended to be enrolled outside of CPS for eighth grade.
- Students living in lower-income neighborhoods and Black students applied to more schools, on average, compared to other students, but were less likely to rank a highly rated school at the top of their application. School quality ratings are determined by the [CPS School Quality Rating Policy](#).
- More than one-half of students applied to a program with additional requirements beyond the GoCPS application, such as attending an information session or auditioning. However, less than half of the applicants who applied to these programs completed the additional requirements, making most applicants ineligible to receive an offer from those programs.

“Before GoCPS, we did not have a comprehensive sense of which high schools and programs students were applying to,” said Lauren Sartain, Senior Research Analyst at the UChicago Consortium. “The centralization of the application process with GoCPS provided new insights about the set of choices considered by students and families applying to high school and can help us examine whether a centralized application system results in better matches between students and schools, improved student experiences, and better educational outcomes in the future.”

Key Findings: Enrollment

- GoCPS did not result in major changes in enrollment patterns.
 - Student enrollment at different types of schools (e.g., charter, neighborhood, selective enrollment high schools) remained very similar before and one year after the launch of GoCPS. Overall, neighborhood schools experienced a very slight enrollment increase.
- Most GoCPS applicants enrolled in the high school where they accepted their offer.
- Differences in enrollment patterns by race/ethnicity that existed prior to the adoption of GoCPS persisted. For example, students living in lower-income neighborhoods and Black students were less likely than other students to be enrolled in schools designated as highly rated according to the [CPS School Quality Rating Policy](#).

“Our findings suggest that some students may face barriers to enrollment in particular types of programs,” said Lisa Barrow, Senior Economist and Research Advisor, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. “However, the data do not tell us why families make the application and enrollment decisions that they do. A preferred school may have programs and supports in place that attract and serve families that are not directly reflected in measures like school quality ratings. More research is needed to better understand what families consider and value when it comes to selecting a high school.”

Research Takeaways for Students and Families

1. **Rank schools in order of most preferred.** The GoCPS selection process considers students for programs in the order ranked.
2. **Rank all the programs of interest.** Students who ranked more programs were more likely to receive an offer. Students may rank up to 20 programs and six selective enrollment high schools.
3. **Accept the offer before the deadline.** Students must accept offers by the deadline, or the offer is considered declined.
4. **Complete all program application requirements.** Some programs have additional requirements for offers, such as attending an information session. If a student does not attend the session, they are ineligible to receive an offer.

About the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

The [UChicago Consortium](#) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. The Consortium seeks to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. The UChicago Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice but does not advocate 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.

About the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago

The [Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago](#) is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, DC, make up the nation’s central bank. The Chicago Reserve Bank serves the seventh Federal Reserve District, which encompasses the northern portions of Illinois and Indiana, southern Wisconsin, the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, and the state of Iowa. In addition to participation in the formulation of monetary policy, each Reserve Bank supervises member banks and bank holding companies, provides financial services to depository institutions and the U.S. government, and monitors economic conditions in its District.

Cite as: Barrow, L., & Sartain, L. (2019). *GoCPS: A first look at ninth-grade applications, offers, and enrollment*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.