

RESEARCH REPORT OCTOBER 2022

Elementary On-Track

Elementary School Students' Grades, Attendance,
and Future Outcomes



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Executive Summary

The elementary and middle years give educators a profound opportunity to impact students' long-term outcomes: in our research, students with strong grades and attendance in elementary school were more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college than their peers.

Although some Chicago Public Schools (CPS) elementary schools use CPS's existing Elementary On-Track (EOT) indicator to identify and intervene with students, the practices around this indicator are still emerging, and there is an opportunity to accelerate on-track work in elementary schools. In this research brief, we offer a simplified version of CPS's EOT metric that we call the "Condensed Elementary On-Track" (Condensed EOT). In order to be on-track in our Condensed EOT indicator system, students in grades 3-8 need to have:

- At least a **3.0 GPA** and
- At least **90% attendance**

In our analysis of the Condensed EOT categories in CPS, our most notable findings are:

- Students in grades 3-8 in the *On-Track* category graduated high school at more than twice the rate of students in the *Intensive Support* category (93 percent vs. 39 percent) and enrolled in college at more than four times the rate of students in the *Intensive Support* category (72 percent vs. 16 percent).

- Students in the *Academic Support* category, who came to school regularly yet were still not earning a 3.0 GPA, made up nearly 40 percent of students in the 2018–19 school year. These students' academic struggles persisted beyond the middle grades: only 17 percent had earned a 3.0 or higher at high school graduation and only 20 percent enrolled in four-year colleges.
- Black and Latinx students were less likely than their peers to be in the *On-Track* category. And within each race/ethnicity group, boys were less likely to be on-track than girls.

Following the disruptions caused by COVID-19, monitoring and responding to students' GPA and attendance is especially critical, as the pandemic highlighted the need for robust academic and mental health supports for students. Utilizing these indicators, along with improving opportunities and experiences for students of color, is essential work for practitioners at every level.

Introduction

Monitoring student performance and knowing how best to intervene are among educators' most critical responsibilities. Throughout their daily interactions with students, educators collect a wide range of formal and informal, quantitative and qualitative data points that can inform and guide those efforts.

An on-track metric based on students' attendance and grades can help educators systematize this process. Chicago has a long history of high school educators building systems of support around the combination of their Freshman OnTrack data¹ and their qualitative insights.² When used effectively together, on-track and qualitative data have helped high schools identify students for interventions and design changes to school culture, and have led to significant improvements in the district's high school graduation rate.³

Inspired by the success of Freshman OnTrack (FOT) in high schools, CPS introduced an Elementary On-Track (EOT) indicator in 2018; like FOT, the EOT indicator also uses grades and attendance data to help educators identify students who need additional support. As of 2022, although some Chicago Public Schools (CPS) elementary schools use CPS's existing Elementary On-Track indicator to identify and intervene with students, the practices around this indicator are still emerging, and there is an opportunity to transfer even more of the high school on-track success to elementary schools. The purpose of this research brief is to accelerate this transfer by **1**) introducing a simplified version of CPS's EOT indicator, called Condensed Elementary On-Track (EOT), and **2**) showing how

Condensed EOT is related to both CPS's EOT and to students' later outcomes, like high school graduation and college enrollment. The Condensed EOT framework and findings are best suited for conversations among educators and adults who work with educators—not directly with students themselves.

We hope that by clearly documenting these relationships, we can make a compelling case to elementary and middle school practitioners that by integrating attendance and GPA indicators into their existing systems of student support, they can more effectively identify and track student interventions. This is especially important because past research has shown that students' attendance and grades tend to decline as they make the transition from eighth to ninth grade, so it is crucial for elementary schools to provide students with as strong a foundation as possible.⁴ Although the data used in this analysis comes from Chicago, the importance of attendance and grades data and the implications for practice are relevant to any elementary school practitioners.

In **Chapter 1** of this research brief, we introduce our simplified version of CPS's EOT that we call the Condensed EOT, showing the relationship between each of the four Condensed EOT categories and high school graduation and college enrollment rates. In **Chapter 2**, we show different student groups' distribution across the four Condensed EOT categories. We conclude the brief by noting the long-term impact that elementary educators can have on their students and the opportunity to increase this impact through the use of on-track indicators.

1 The Freshman OnTrack metric is based on student's credit accumulation and grades during their ninth-grade year. A student is considered on-track as a ninth-grader if they fail no more than one semester of a core course and earn at least five credits by the end of ninth grade and is highly predictive

of future outcomes. See Allensworth & Easton (2005) for more information.

2 Philips (2019).

3 Philips (2019).

4 Seeskin, Nagaoka, & Mahaffie (2018).

Condensed Elementary On-Track Categories

In 2018, CPS developed a formal Elementary On-Track (EOT) indicator that uses attendance and GPA to place students in grades 3-8 into one of five different levels of “on-track” (see Figure 1). This indicator was part of the district’s school accountability system, the School Quality Rating Policy (which was suspended beginning with the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic). Before 2018, CPS used a simpler on-track/off-track EOT indicator, which was not part of the accountability system, and learnings from that simpler indicator informed the creation of the current CPS EOT. The current indicator’s use of five categories makes it more precise than a simple on-track/off-track designation, has the potential to help educators and students chart an improvement trajectory, and can prevent schools from focusing on one small group of “bubble” students to improve their rate.

Following conversations with CPS leaders and

practitioners, here we offer a simplified version of CPS’s EOT here metric that we call the Condensed EOT (see Figure 2).⁵ In different ways, CPS’s EOT and our Condensed EOT indicators can each be helpful for schools in their efforts to integrate on-track into systems of student support. In some cases, particularly when working with individual students, schools may prefer the nuance of CPS’s EOT. In other cases, such as when they are analyzing school-wide trends or identifying and matching students with interventions, schools may prefer the Condensed EOT categories. Most importantly, for schools, it is important to know that improving one metric will almost always improve the other. We use the simpler Condensed EOT metric in our analysis of the connection between students’ EOT categories and long-term outcomes because these comparisons felt clearest and most actionable (see Appendix B for outcomes connected to CPS’s EOT).

FIGURE 1
Chicago Public Schools’s EOT grid

Attendance / GPA	0.0 - <2.0	2.0 - <2.5	2.5 - <3.0	3.0 - <3.5	3.5 - <4.0
97.5% - <100%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
95% - <97.5%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
92.5% - <95%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
90% - <92.5%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
87.5% - <90%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
85% - <87.5%	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track	On-Track
<85%	Off-Track	Off-Track	Off-Track	Off-Track	Off-Track

■ Off-Track
 ■ Far from On-Track
 ■ Near On-Track
 ■ Almost On-Track
 ■ On-Track

⁵ There is not a clean overlap between the CPS EOT categories and the Condensed EOT categories and, as a result, condensed does NOT mean collapsing of the categories.

Condensed EOT categories, shown in **Figure 2**, were created using two thresholds:

- **A 3.0 GPA:** 3.0 or “Bs or Better” is a standard thresh-old in Chicago’s high school on-track work and previous research has shown that CPS middle grades students needed to earn As or Bs in elementary school to have higher odds of being college-ready by the end of high school.⁶
- **90 percent attendance:** Ninety percent attendance⁷ is a commonly-used metric in the national conversation, and a recognized definition for chronic absenteeism.⁸ Although students whose attendance is above 90 percent may still need additional support to come to school more often, this minimum threshold for attendance works as an indicator of which students need more urgent intervention.

CPS elementary schools can see their own Condensed EOT data over time and connect it to future outcomes for their students in our publicly-available online [Elementary School Milestones Tool](#). Importantly, our online tool displays end-of-year data, not in-time data, and does not include student-level data; therefore, it is best used for practitioners to observe long-term trends at their schools and strategically set priorities and systems of support to prevent low attendance and grades. Within CPS, internal systems supply the data necessary for practitioners to use the CPS’s EOT and/or the Condensed EOT category cutoffs to monitor students who are struggling on a day-to-day basis. We recommend practitioners use the Condensed EOT framework at least quarterly to identify and intervene with students. **See Appendix A** for more information on the Condensed EOT categories over time and by student groups, **and Appendix C** for more information on the online tool.

FIGURE 2
CPS’s EOT grid overlaid with Condensed EOT categories

Attendance / GPA	0.0 - <2.0	2.0 - <2.5	2.5 - <3.0	3.0 - <3.5	3.5 - <4.0
97.5% - <100%			3.0 GPA		
95% - <97.5%					
92.5% - <95%					
90% - <92.5%					90% Attendance
87.5% - <90%					
85% - <87.5%					
<85%					

⁶ Allensworth, Gwynne, & de la Torre (2014).

⁷ This analysis uses the same method to calculate attendance as is used by CPS. Attendance is calculated as the total number of days a student is present divided by the total number

of days they are enrolled. There is no exception made for excused absences.

⁸ Chicago Public Schools (2022); Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang (2014); Bruner, Discher, & Chang (2011).

Condensed EOT categories & student outcomes

The Condensed EOT categories can help elementary and middle schools quickly and easily match students in grades 3-8 with interventions and monitor progress over time. To establish a districtwide baseline, **Figure 3** shows the distribution of students in grades 3-8 from the 2018–19 school year into the four Condensed EOT categories. Importantly, students who attend charter schools are not included in this analysis, since we do not currently have access to course performance or GPA information for students in charters. See **Appendix D** for more information on the data used in this analysis.⁹

FIGURE 3

More than one-third of elementary students came to school regularly but needed academic support

Distribution of the Condensed EOT categories for students in grades 3-8 from the 2018–19 school year

Attendance / GPA	<3.0	3.0 - 4.0
90% - 100%	Academic Support 38% N=54,019	On-Track 50% N=71,072
<90%	Intensive Support 8% N=11,636	Attendance Support 3% N=4,838

Note: The sample for Figure 3 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2018-19 for whom grades and attendance data were available. In total, this sample consisted of **141,565 students**. The proportions shown above add to 99 percent rather than 100 percent due to rounding. See box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

Data used for student outcomes analyses

Outcomes analyses for this brief used three different sets of data:

1. To investigate *recent elementary school outcomes*, we used data from students in grades 3-8 from school year 2018–19 (**represented in Figures 3 and 10**), as this is the most recent school year which was unaffected by the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic.^A
2. To investigate the relationship between *elementary grades outcomes and later educational achievement*, we used data from students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010–11 (**represented in Figures 4-9 and Figures A.2-A.6**). This allowed sufficient time to elapse to see whether students graduated from high school in four years and immediately enrolled in college.
3. Finally, to show *changes in elementary school outcomes over time*, we used data from third through

eighth-graders in each school year from 2008–09 to 2018–19 (**represented only in Figure A.1**).

For all three sets of student data in this report's analysis, a student's end-of-year core GPA (using final grades from math, reading, social studies, and science) and end-of-year attendance rates (i.e., the proportion of days present of days enrolled) determined their placement into an EOT category for a given year. For analyses that used multiple years of data, each year of a student's GPA and attendance was treated as its own data point which was then averaged at the district level. Due to data limitations, students attending charter schools were not included in the analysis, and patterns may look different for these students. See **Appendix D** for more information on data decisions applied to the student samples used in the findings for this brief.

A This report does not intend to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elementary grades outcomes. Instead, this report's intention is to establish the Condensed EOT categories and their relevance to school practice while connecting them to later outcomes. Nevertheless, as more research and data on student experiences during this ongoing pandemic become available, further investigation on the Condensed EOT categories in this new context will be necessary.

⁹ The distribution shown in Figure 3 looked similar when run for each grade level individually, with the exception that there were

slightly fewer students in the On-Track category and slightly more in the Academic Support category in grades 6, 7, and 8.

Data from an earlier cohort of students in grades 3-8—from the 2010-11 school year—allows us to examine longer-term outcomes for students in each category, and offers helpful insights about the connections between Condensed EOT categories and high school graduation and college enrollment (see *Data used for student outcomes analyses* box on p.5 for additional details on the cohorts and data used in this analysis):¹⁰

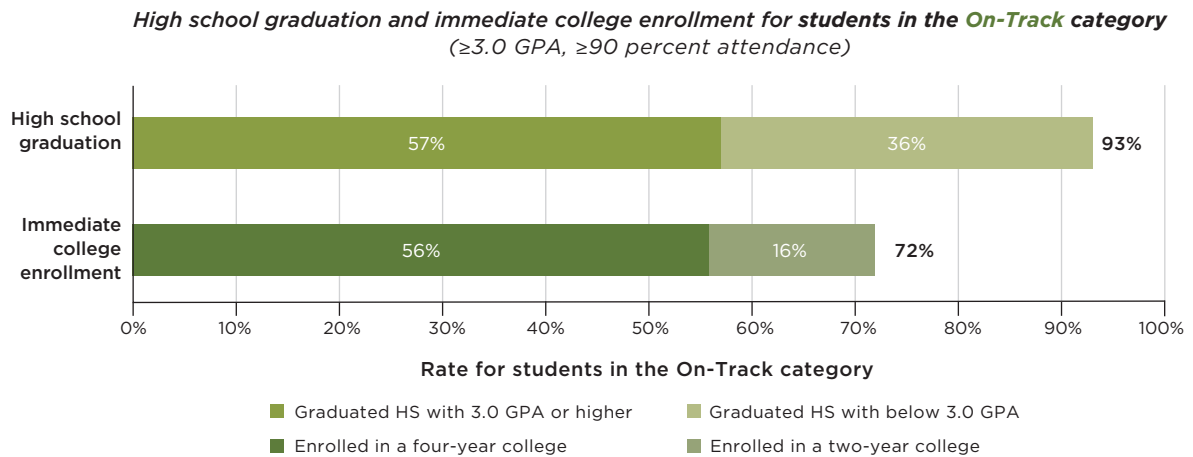
- **On-Track (GPA above 3.0, attendance greater than 90 percent):** Given their high grades and attendance, the data suggests students in the On-Track category were doing well, attending school frequently and

earning high grades. More than 90 percent of students in this category went on to graduate high school and 57 percent earned a 3.0 at graduation (see **Figure 4**); nearly 3 in 4 enrolled in college, with more than one-half enrolling in a four-year college.

For elementary and middle grades educators, the goal is to get more students in this category and, once there, to engage, challenge and support these students so that they stay on-track.

Key Question for Practitioners: How can we engage, challenge, and support students in the On-Track category so that they continue to be on-track?

FIGURE 4
Most students in the On-Track category graduated from high school in four years and enrolled in college



Note: The sample for Figure 4 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11 with a GPA of at least 3.0 and an attendance rate of at least 90 percent. The rates for immediate college enrollment include students who did not graduate from high school. In total, this sample consisted of **36,603 students** (39 percent of the sample used across Figures 4-7). See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

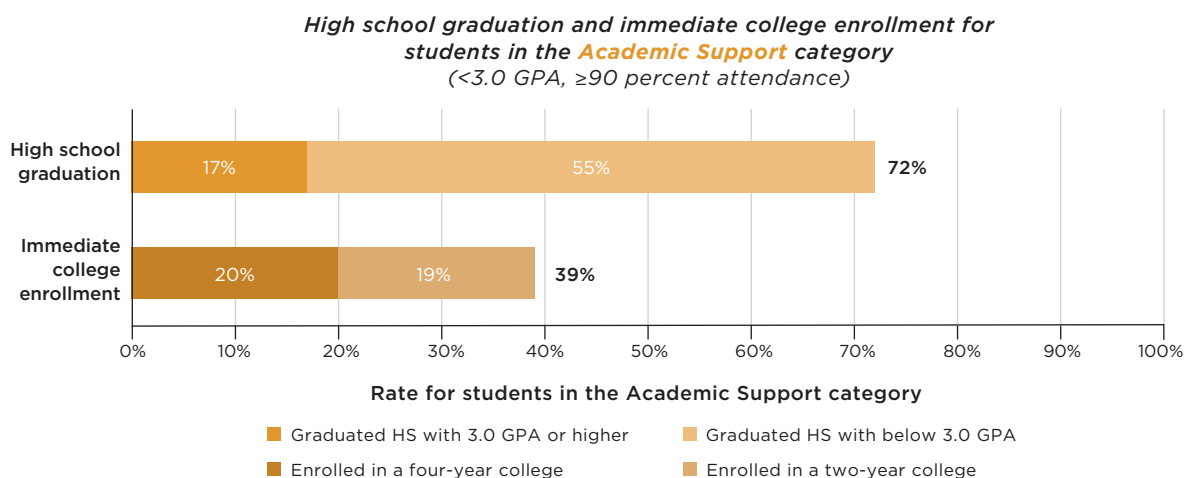
¹⁰ For context, the 2021 CPS high school graduation rate for students districtwide was 83 percent, and the college enrollment rate was 58 percent (Malone, Mahaffie, Hernandez, Usher, & Nagaoka, 2021).

- Academic Support (GPA below 3.0, attendance greater than 90 percent):** Students in the Academic Support category came to school regularly yet were still not earning a 3.0 GPA, suggesting something about the curriculum, assessment, or classroom culture was not working for many of them. These students' academic struggles persisted beyond the middle grades, with only 17 percent earning a 3.0 at high school graduation and 20 percent enrolling in four-year colleges (see Figure 5). Given the large size of this group, it is likely that many schools and classrooms have large numbers of students in the academic support group.

While the needs of these students may not be solely academic—many students in this group may also need support with out-of-school challenges—educators can make whole-school and classroom practice changes in order to improve the GPAs of students who attend regularly. This should include assessing and addressing students' sense of engagement and belonging in their classes. In certain cases, particularly those where students are failing core classes, more specific, individual intervention may be necessary.

Key Question for Practitioners: How do classroom culture, instruction, assessments, and/or curriculum play a role in preventing students in the Academic Support category from earning high grades?

FIGURE 5
 Though most students in the Academic Support category graduated high school in four years, only 17 percent did so with a 3.0 GPA or higher



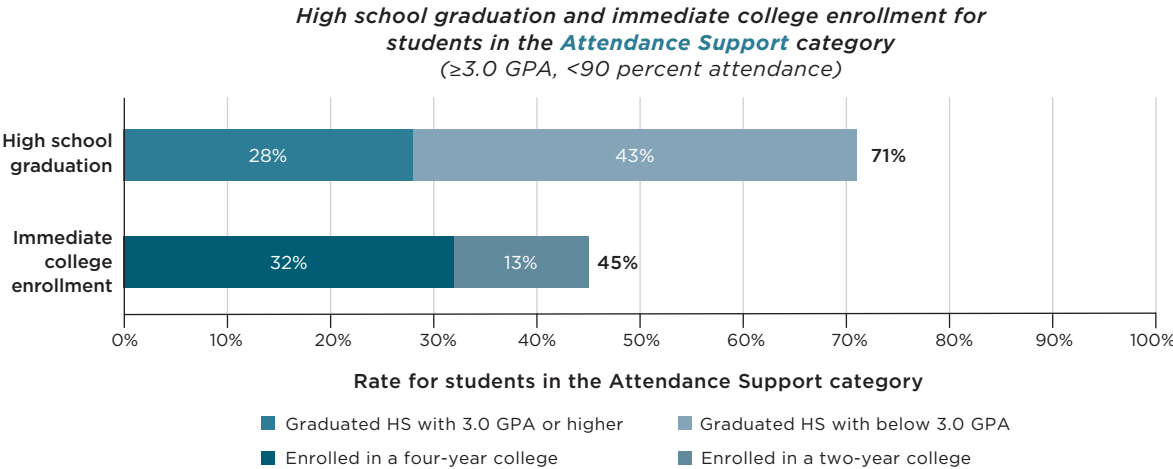
Note: The sample for Figure 5 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11 with a GPA below 3.0 and an attendance rate of at least 90%. The rates for immediate college enrollment include students who did not graduate from high school. In total, this sample consisted of **47,669 students** (51 percent of the sample used across Figures 4-7). See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

- Attendance Support (GPA above 3.0, attendance less than 90 percent):** Previous research has shown that attendance is a leading indicator of a high GPA,¹¹ and as a result, we found relatively few students who were able to maintain a 3.0 GPA despite coming to school less than 90 percent of the time. And though students in the Attendance Support category were able to maintain a relatively high GPA, there was still reason for concern: students in the Attendance Support category graduated high school at 71 percent, below the 2018–19 district average of 82 percent, and fewer than one-half attended college (see Figure 6).¹²

Since some of these students may be experiencing special circumstances, like prolonged sickness or unstable housing, educators likely need to actively identify what is preventing them from regularly attending school and to provide some focused support to improve their attendance.

Key Question for Practitioners: What is preventing each student in your school’s Attendance Support category from coming to school and how can we more effectively support their efforts to regularly come to school?

FIGURE 6
 Though less than one-third of students in the Attendance Support category graduated high school in four years with above a 3.0, another one-third enrolled immediately in a four-year college



Note: The sample for Figure 6 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11 with a GPA of at least 3.0 and an attendance rate less than 90%. The rates for immediate college enrollment include students who did not graduate from high school. In total, this sample consisted of **1,306 students** (1 percent of the sample used across Figures 4-7). See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

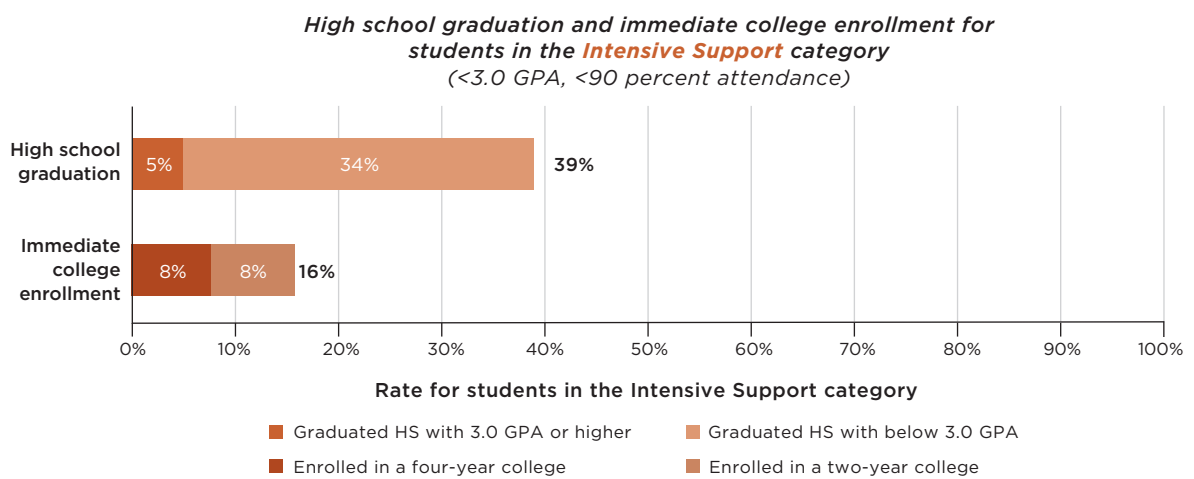
¹¹ Allensworth et al. (2014).
¹² The CPS high school graduation rate has increased from 78 percent to 83 percent from school year 2013-14 to school year 2019-20; Malone et al. (2021).

- Intensive Support (GPA below 3.0, attendance less than 90 percent):** Since students in the Intensive Support category struggled with both grades and attendance, they likely required more intensive interventions and personalized support. Though 39 percent of students in the Intensive Support category graduated high school, more than one-half did not, and more than 80 percent of these students did not enroll directly in college (see Figure 7).

When a student’s GPA and attendance both fall below these thresholds, schools likely need to immediately work with the student and their family to identify the root cause and provide the necessary support to get them back on-track.

Key Question for Practitioners: What are the root causes behind these students’ struggles and what systems do we have to connect them with additional in-school and out-of-school resources and monitor progress?

FIGURE 7
 More than one-half of students in the Intensive Support category did not graduate high school in four years



Note: The sample for Figure 7 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11 with a GPA below 3.0 and an attendance rate less than 90%. The rates for immediate college enrollment include students who did not graduate from high school. In total, this sample consisted of **8,039 students** (9 percent of the sample used across Figures 4-7). See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

Outcomes across Condensed EOT categories

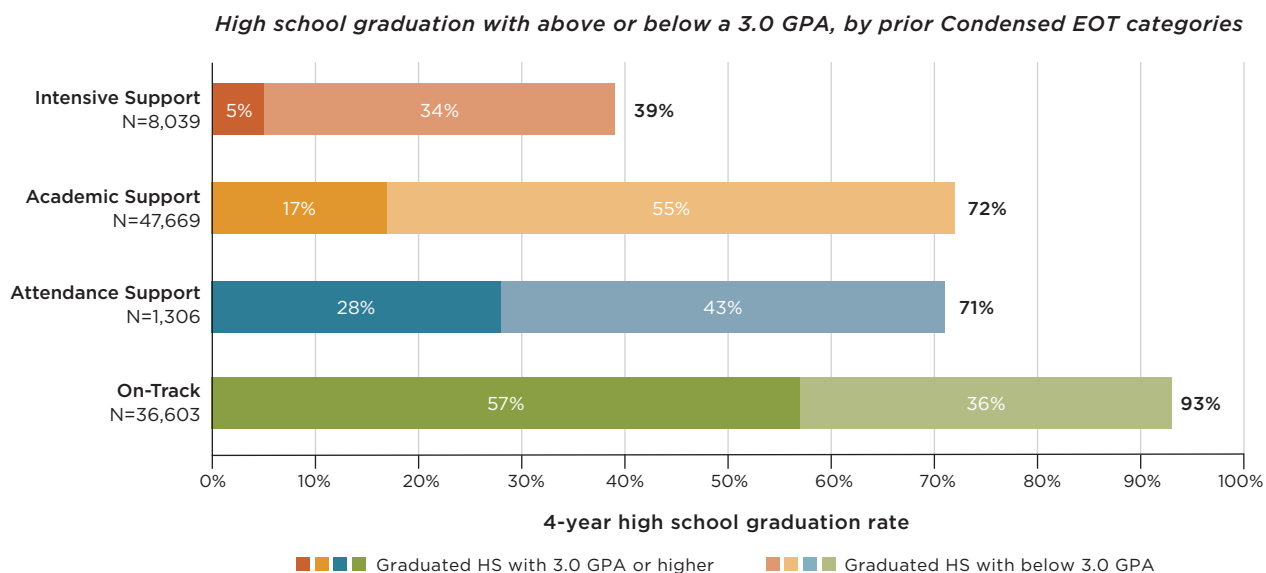
What is the relationship between middle grades attendance and grades and later outcomes? **Figures 8 and 9** highlight a finding that has considerable prevalence in prior research: higher grades and attendance were associated with higher rates of high school graduation and college enrollment.¹³

In particular, students in grades 3-8 in the On-Track category graduated high school at over twice the rate of students in the Intensive Support category (93 percent vs. 39 percent) and enrolled in college at over four times

the rate of students in the Intensive Support category (72 percent vs. 16 percent).

Though students in the Attendance Support and Academic Support categories had similar high school graduation rates, students in the Attendance Support category were more likely to graduate high school with a 3.0 GPA, more likely to enroll in any type of college, and much more likely to enroll in a four-year college. In order to get a 3.0 GPA, most students needed to attend more than 90 percent of the time; very few students with low attendance were able to earn a 3.0 GPA.

FIGURE 8
Students with high GPAs and attendance in grades 3-8 graduated high school with a 3.0 GPA more often than their peers with low GPAs



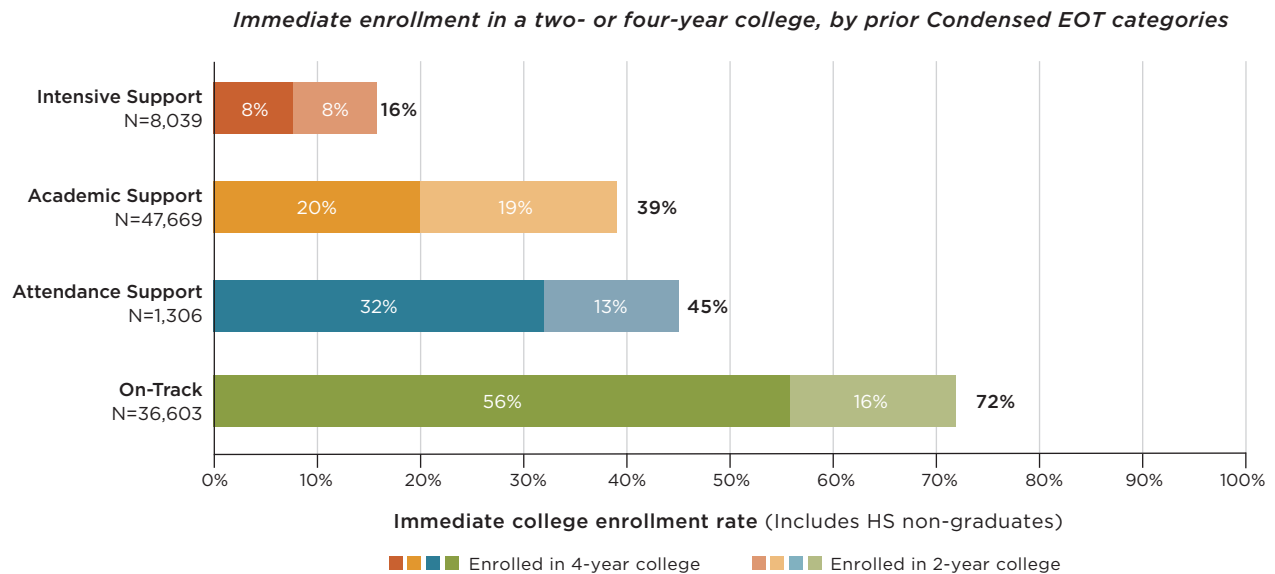
Note: The sample for Figure 8 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. In total, this sample consisted of **93,617** students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

¹³ When run for each grade level individually, Figure 8 looked very similar; in other words, the relationships between Condensed EOT categories and future outcomes hold for

individual grade levels as well as the sample as a whole. See Appendix B for additional data on the same outcomes across CPS EOT categories.

FIGURE 9

Students with high GPAs in grades 3-8 enrolled in college more often than their peers with low GPAs



Note: The sample for Figure 9 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. In total, this sample consisted of **93,617** students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

What EOT work looks like in action

Drake Elementary School offers one example of how on-track work can look in CPS elementary schools.^B During the 2021-22 school-year, the Drake Middle-Grades team^C met every other week to develop strategies to improve their middle grades students' grades, attendance, and sense of belonging. The team used grades and attendance data to ask short-term questions that led to immediate interventions and long-term questions that led to shifts in strategy.

At meetings, the team typically looked at a spreadsheet of students with their attendance and grades in each subject. Sometimes they dove deep into interventions for a single student with a particularly challenging situation; other times they discussed a small group of students who were struggling with grades. By using a mix of educators' knowledge and structured data tools, the team identified strategies that could work for entire groups of students—such as middle school boys—and those that were needed to support individual student needs. The idea was to use the indicator data as a way to more easily identify

students who needed more intensive interventions and maximize educators' time supporting those students.

At the same time, Drake's team also reserved time each quarter to look at longer-term trends to highlight equity gaps and set strategy. Several years ago, they noticed their boys consistently earned lower grades than girls across subject areas, despite having relatively similar attendance. They conducted surveys and focus groups to better understand boys' perceptions of the curriculum or the classroom culture. This work led to larger strategic shifts, including a male mentoring program and regular one-on-one conferencing. Drake has also done intentional work around grading practices, resulting in the implementation of a "no zeros" policy and a 50/59 policy for Fs (meaning that if a student does no work, the lowest grade they can receive is an F worth 50 points, and if they do engage with the work but it does not meet standards, the lowest grade they can receive is an F worth 59 points). The team monitors these strategies using 5-week and 10-week summary data on grades and attendance.

^B Drake is part of the To&Through Middle Grades Network (MGN), a group of schools dedicated to creating more equitable and supportive educational environments where middle grades students can thrive. For more information, see <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/middle-grades-network-improvement-community>

^C For the 2021-22 school-year, members of the Drake Middle-Grades team included: Sydney Golliday, Principal; Christopher Robbins, Assistant Principal; Shawnton Mickles-Kuykendall, School Counselor; Nai Colton, Middle School Math Teacher; Smitha Mathen, Middle School Science Teacher; LaSonda Wiggins, Middle School ELA Teacher; Victoria Jackson, Special Education Teacher; Monica Cherry, Special Education Instructor; Allyson Vree, Social Worker

Student Groups and Condensed EOT Categories

Although it can be challenging to see and discuss differences in Condensed EOT by race/ethnicity (see the box titled *Disaggregating data by race/ethnicity on p.13*), and it is important to recognize the limitations of the metric, differences in Condensed EOT are representative of some of the different educational opportunities and out-of-school challenges for different groups of students. Looking at outcomes for different groups of students can seed critical conversations about educational equity. With that in mind (and noting the context in the box titled *Disaggregating data by race/ethnicity on p.13*), we look at Condensed EOT categories by race/ethnicity and gender in **Figure 10**, showing that in the 2018–19 school year:

- Black and Latinx students were less likely than their peers to be in the On-Track category. And within each race/ethnicity group, boys were less likely to be in the On-Track category than girls, and more likely than girls to be in the Academic Support or Intensive Support categories.
- Given the relationship between being on-track and later outcomes, there is every reason to think that if more Black and Latino boys were on-track in

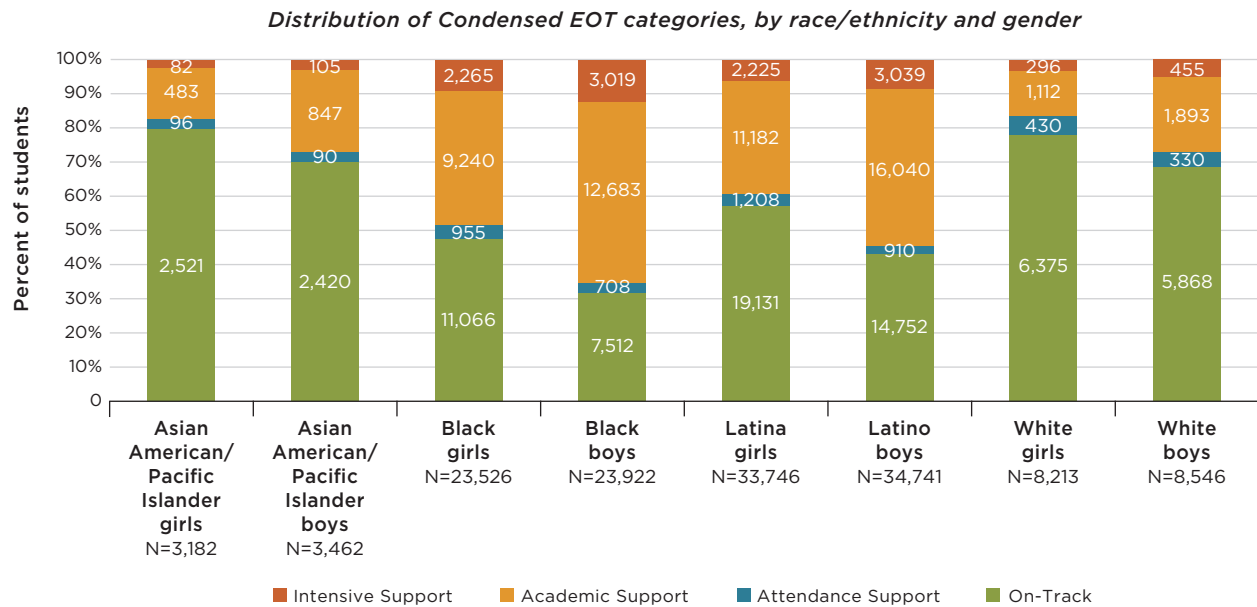
elementary school, CPS would see higher high school graduation and college enrollment rates for Black and Latino young men.

- More than one-half of Black boys, and almost one-half of Latino boys, came to school 90 percent of the time or more, but still earned less than a 3.0 GPA, suggesting that their experiences inside of schools and classrooms may not always successfully drive their learning.
- At the same time, in addition to looking at rates, it is also important to look at student numbers. Many Black and Latino boys are having academic success; in the 2018–19 school year, there were more than 7,000 Black boys and 14,550 Latino boys who were on-track.

Please see the Appendices for additional breakdowns of data by race/ethnicity and gender. **Appendix A** provides figures describing the relationship between Condensed EOT categories and future outcomes, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. **Appendix C** provides information on where users of the To&Through Online Tool can view data disaggregated by race and gender for students from different high schools or community areas.

FIGURE 10

Elementary Black and Latinx students were less likely to be in the On-Track category in school year 2018-19



Note: The sample for Figure 10 was students in grades 3-8 in school year 2018-19. In total, this sample consisted of **139,338** students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure. Race/ethnicity categories not shown due to small group sizes include: Native American/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and students whose race/ethnicity was not available. Our Asian American/Pacific Islander category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories.

Disaggregating data by race/ethnicity

Though grades and attendance are imperfect and incomplete metrics (especially when used to assess individual students), looking at Condensed EOT categories by race/ethnicity and gender can help uncover different learning opportunities and pathways that different groups of students have access to.

The analysis in this report seeks to answer the *what* and *who* questions about Condensed EOT and future student outcomes, rather than the *why*. However, not answering the *why* runs the risk that readers will intentionally or unintentionally ascribe educational outcomes solely to the choices and capacity of CPS students, families, and communities, disregarding the broader and longstanding impact of racism and structural barriers.

It is therefore critical to state plainly that the differences in attainment that we see in this report are due to the historical and ongoing oppression of people of color, and the many structural barriers they face. Though there are real examples of students and schools overcoming these obstacles, structural racism remains embedded in our systems.

As such, these data are meant to be consumed as part of a collaborative dialogue about the inequitable policies, systems, and practices that prevent too many Black and Latinx CPS students from reaching their academic potential. Although students and families must be at the table to achieve equitable elementary and middle grades learning experiences, the responsibility for change must lie with adults and institutions in Chicago.^D

^D The language in this box is drawn from our report, *The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public School Students: 2019*; Nagaoka, Mahaffie, Usher, & Seeskin (2020).

Conclusion

The findings in this research suggest that elementary and middle school educators can and do provide critical supports that set students up for long-term success: Students with strong grades and attendance in elementary school were more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college than their peers. Following the disruptions caused by COVID-19, monitoring and responding to students' GPA and attendance is especially critical.

Utilizing these indicators, along with improving opportunities and experiences for students of color, is essential equity work for practitioners at every level. Indeed, it is likely that if grades and attendance were to improve for Black and Latinx boys, we would likely see corresponding increases in their long-term outcomes. One area for future study is to further explore the differences by race/ethnicity and gender in Condensed EOT categories and the underlying challenges leading students to be off-track. This should include data based directly on student experiences, for example through interviews, focus groups, or student shadows.

While not all school districts may have the capacity

to undertake research and develop their own Elementary On-Track metric like CPS did, nor may they want something as intricate, our research shows that the Condensed EOT metric offers valuable insight to practitioners on which students are on-track and who may need additional support. Used in conjunction with qualitative data, grades and attendance data can create the foundation for systems of identification and support. Far from easy, this work means that educators will need to continue working together to assess classroom cultures, curriculum, and relationships, getting closer to ensuring that all students have opportunities to engage in authentic and meaningful learning.

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Appendix A

Additional Data on Condensed EOT Categories

This appendix provides supplemental findings and resources that give practitioners a deeper look into the nature of GPA and attendance in grades 3-8 as part of the Condensed EOT categories. From this, one can better understand the limits, nuances, and strengths of the Condensed EOT categories as they are used in practice.

Condensed EOT Over Time

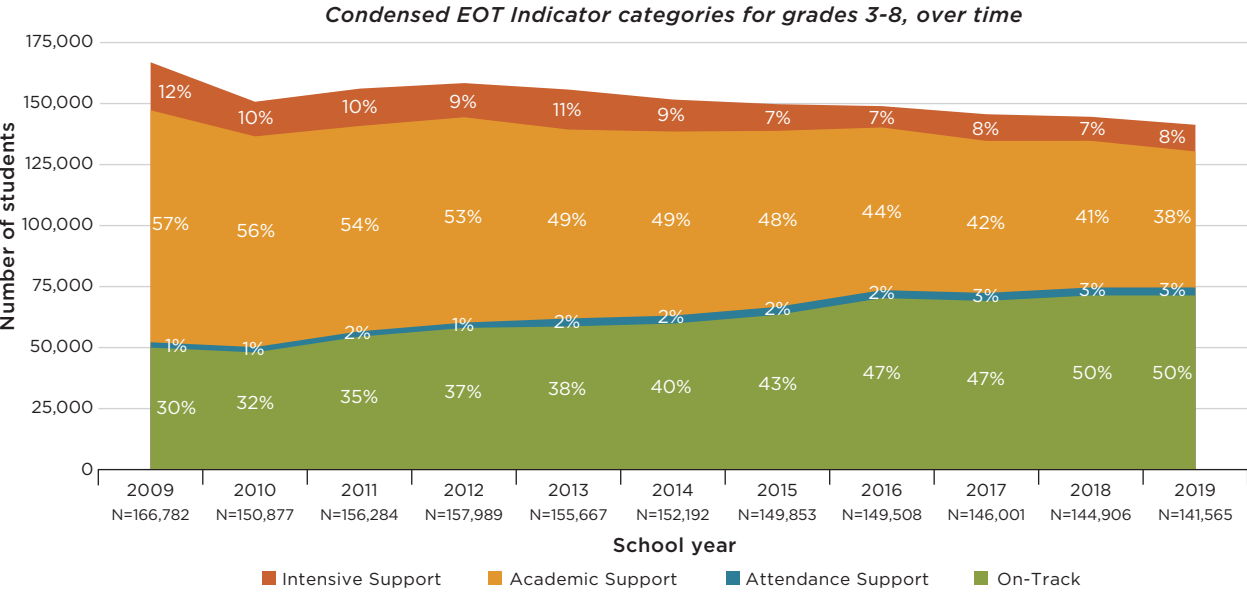
Figures 4-9 showed the connection between Condensed EOT categories for students who were in grades 3-8 in school year 2010-11 and subsequent high school and college enrollment outcomes. While the future outcomes of current students in grades 3-8 are yet to be

seen, this section shows the districtwide changes in the sizes of the Condensed EOT categories from school year 2008-09 to 2018-19.

Figure A.1 shows the distribution of CPS students in grades 3-8 into the Condensed EOT categories over time.

- The percentage of students in the Intensive Support category decreased from 12 percent to 8 percent from 2009 to 2019.
- Between 2009 to 2019, the percentage of third-through eighth-grade students in the On-Track category increased by 20 percentage points.

FIGURE A.1
The number of students in the On-Track category has steadily increased over time



Note: The sample for Figure A.1 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school years 2008-09 to 2018-19. Each year of a student's GPA and attendance was treated as its own data point which was then averaged by Condensed EOT category at the district level. Component rates for each school year shown above may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

Outcomes across Condensed EOT Categories by Race and Gender

In addition to examining differences in the Condensed EOT categories by race/ethnicity and gender in Chapter 2, this section offers additional information about the relationship between the Condensed EOT categories and future outcomes by race/ethnicity and gender in **Figures A.2-A.5**.

It is important that readers not ascribe educational outcomes solely to the choices and capacity of CPS students, families, and communities, disregarding the broader and longstanding impact of racism and structural barriers. Therefore, it is critical to state plainly that the differences in attainment that we see in this report are due to the historical and ongoing oppression of people of color, and the many structural barriers they face. For more on disaggregating data by race/ethnicity, please see the box on p.13.

Black and Latino boys in both the On-Track and Intensive Support categories were less likely to graduate high school with a 3.0 GPA than their peers

in the same categories (see Figures A.2 and A.3).

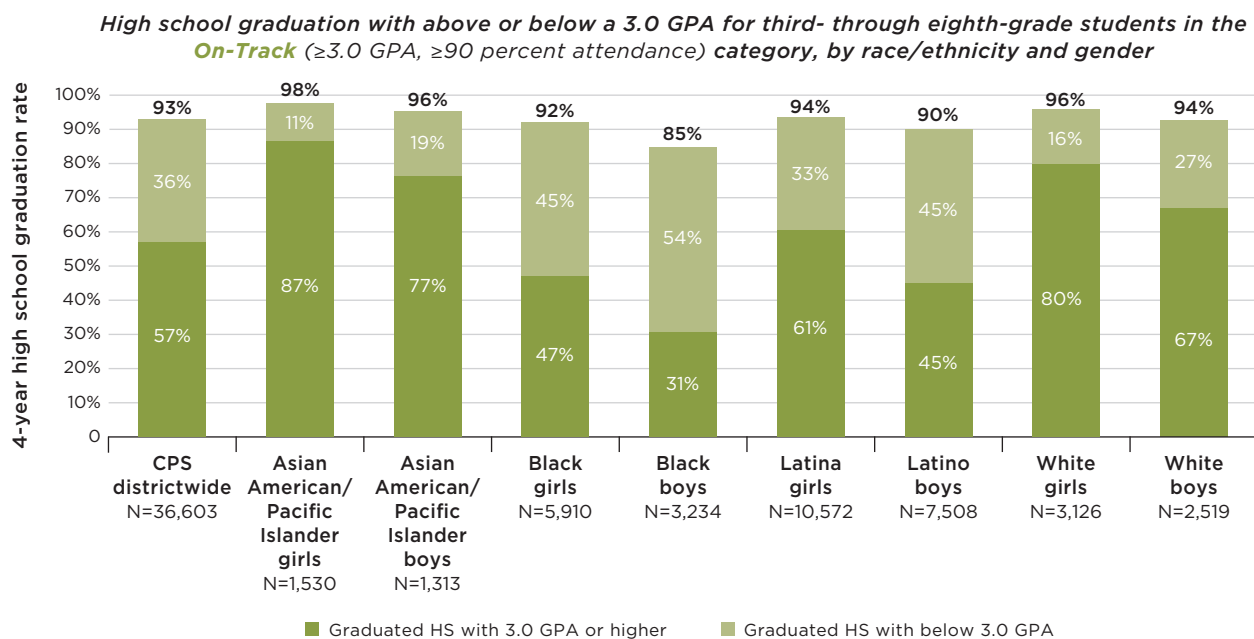
- Black boys in the On-Track category were 26 percentage points less likely to graduate with a 3.0 GPA than the district average rate.
- Black boys in the Intensive Support category were less likely to graduate high school compared to the district average, and Black and Latino boys in this category were less likely to graduate high school with a 3.0 GPA compared to the district average.

Black and Latino boys in both the On-Track and Intensive Support categories were less likely to enroll in college than their peers in the same categories (see Figures A.4 and A.5).

- Black and Latino boys in the On-Track category were 13 percent points and 7 percent points less likely to enroll in college than the district average, respectively.
- In comparison to the district averages, Black boys in the Intensive Support category were less likely to enroll in a four-year college and were also less likely to enroll in a two-year college.

FIGURE A.2

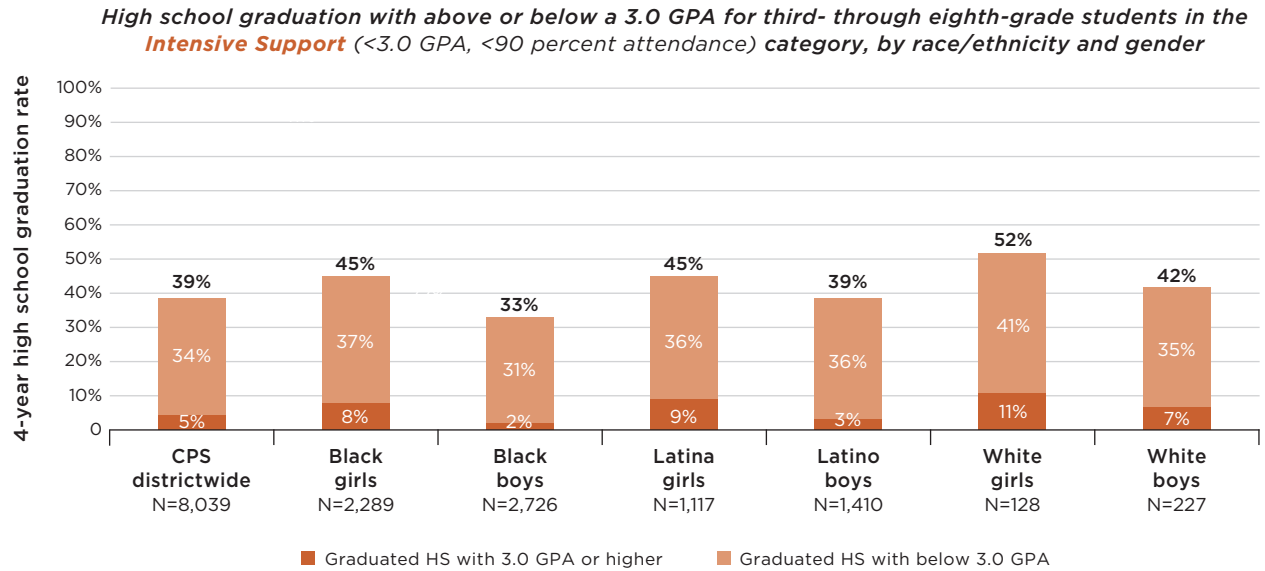
High school graduation varied by race/ethnicity and gender among students in the On-Track category



Note: Figure A.2 consisted of two samples, both of which are limited to students in the On-Track category (≥ 3.0 GPA, ≥ 90 percent attendance) in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. The first sample for Figure A.2 was comprised of 35,712 Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, and White students in the On-Track category, in order to determine their respective immediate enrollment rates. Race/ethnicity categories not shown due to small group sizes include: Native American/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and students whose race/ethnicity was not available. Our Asian American/Pacific Islander category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories. The second sample for Figure A.2, which included students of all races, was used to show the high school graduation rate of students in the On-Track category with above or below a 3.0 GPA across the entire district (denoted by “CPS”), and consisted of 36,603 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

FIGURE A.3

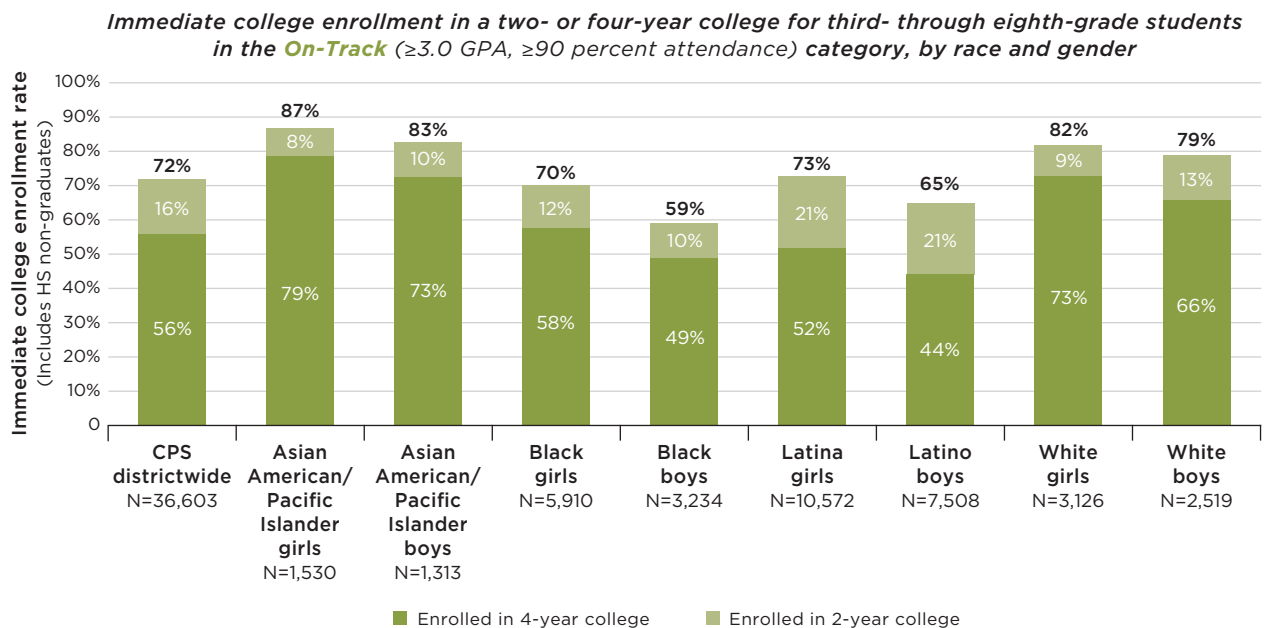
High school graduation rates varied considerably by race/ethnicity and gender among students in the Intensive Support category



Note: Figure A.3 consisted of two samples, both of which are limited to students in the Intensive Support category (<3.0 GPA, <90 percent attendance) in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. The first sample for Figure A.3 was comprised of 7,897, Black, Latinx, and White students in the Intensive Support category, in order to determine their respective immediate enrollment rates. Race/ethnicity categories not shown due to small group sizes include: Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and students whose race/ethnicity was not available. Our Asian American/Pacific Islander category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories. The second sample for Figure A.3, which included students of all races, was used to show the high school graduation rate of students in the Intensive Support category with above or below a 3.0 GPA across the entire district (denoted by “CPS”), and consisted of 8,039 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

FIGURE A.4

College enrollment rates varied considerably by race/ethnicity and gender among students in the On-Track category

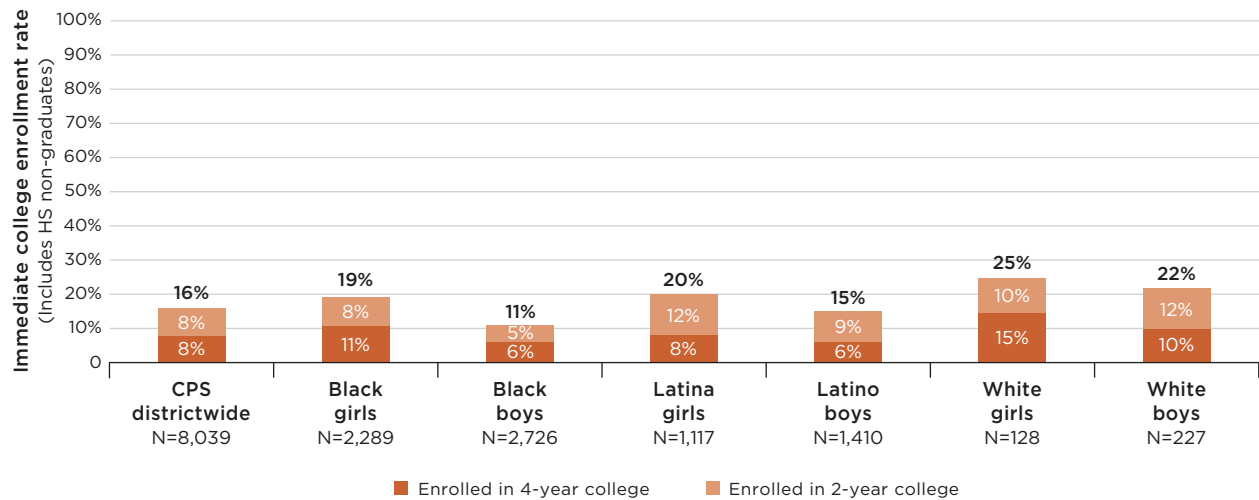


Note: Figure A.4 consisted of two samples, both of which are limited to students in the On-Track category (≥3.0 GPA, ≥90 percent attendance) in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. The first sample for Figure A.4 was comprised of 35,712 Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, and White students in the On-Track category, in order to determine their respective immediate enrollment rates. Race/ethnicity categories not shown due to small group sizes include: Native American/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and students whose race/ethnicity was not available. Our Asian American/Pacific Islander category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories. The second sample for Figure A.4, which included students of all races, was used to show the immediate enrollment rate of students in the On-Track category across the entire district (denoted by “CPS”), and consisted of 36,603 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

FIGURE A.5

College enrollment rates varied by race/ethnicity and gender among students in the Intensive Support category

Immediate college enrollment in a two- or four-year college for third- through eighth-grade students in the Intensive Support (<3.0 GPA, <90 percent attendance) category, by race/ethnicity and gender



Note: Figure A.5 consisted of two samples, both of which are limited to students in the Intensive Support category (<3.0 GPA, <90 percent attendance) in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. The first sample for Figure A.5 was comprised of 7,897, Black, Latinx, and White students in the Intensive Support category, in order to determine their respective immediate enrollment rates. Race/ethnicity categories not shown due to small group sizes include: Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and students whose race/ethnicity was not available. Our Asian American/Pacific Islander category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories. The second sample for Figure A.5, which included students of all races, was used to show the immediate enrollment rate of students in the Intensive Support category across the entire district (denoted by “CPS”), and consisted of 8,039 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

Appendix B

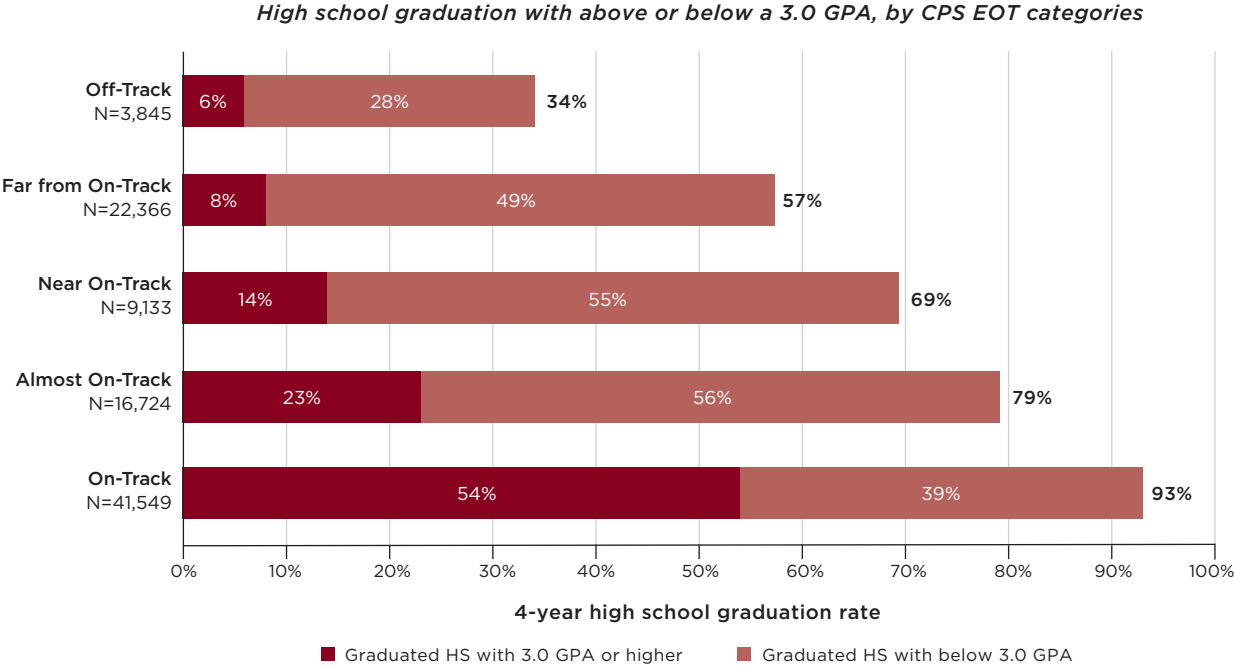
Outcomes Across CPS EOT Categories

Given that the Condensed EOT categories were developed to be used in tandem with the existing CPS EOT categories, it is important to demonstrate the connection between CPS EOT categories and longer-term outcomes, as well. **Figure B.1 and B.2** detail the connection between third through eighth-grade CPS EOT categories and the later outcomes of high school graduation and college enrollment as a point of comparison to Figures 8 and 9, which does the same for the Condensed EOT categories.

Students in the CPS EOT On-Track Category were at least twice as likely to graduate high school with a 3.0 GPA or above and to enroll in a four-year college than their peers in any other CPS EOT category.

- Students in the CPS EOT On-Track category graduated high school at almost three times the rate of students who were off-track (93 percent vs. 34 percent) and enrolled in college at five times the rate of students who were off-track (14 percent vs. 70 percent).
- Elementary students in the Almost On-Track category, whose GPAs and attendance rates can vary widely (see Figure 1), graduated high school just over three-quarters of the time and enrolled in college about one-half the time.
- Students in the Far from On-Track category graduated high school and enrolled in college at nearly twice the rate of their peers who were off-track (see Figure 1).

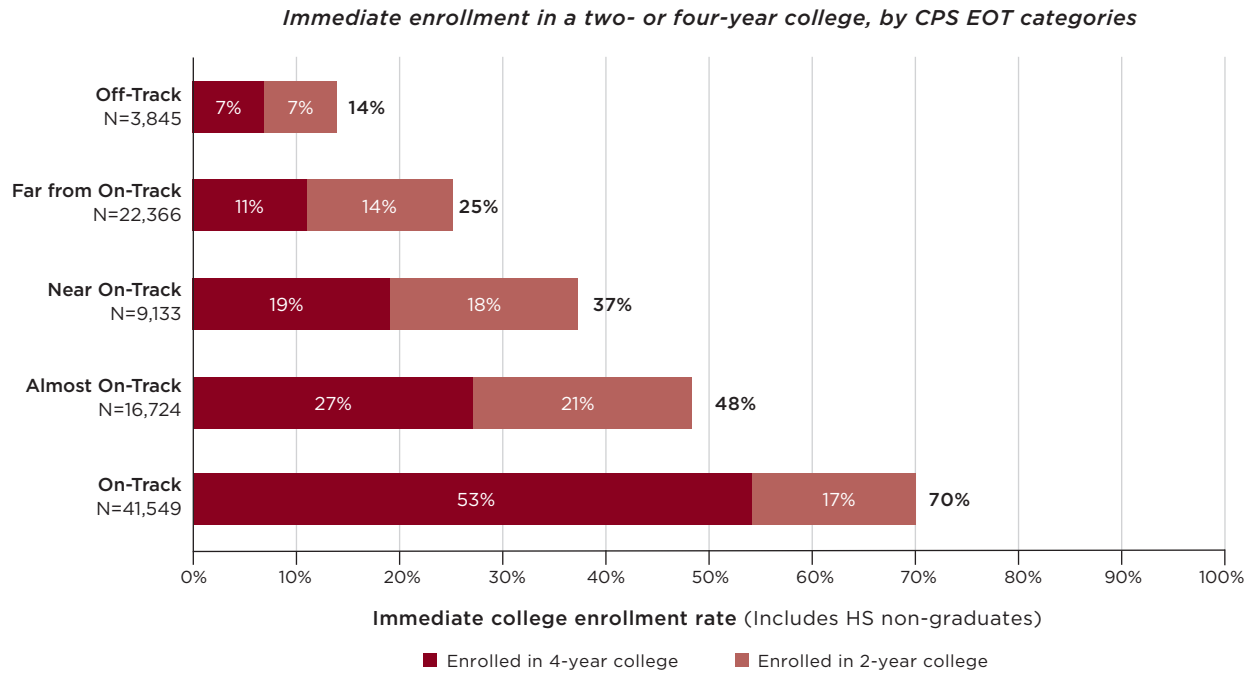
FIGURE B.1
Students in higher CPS EOT categories had progressively higher rates of high school graduation



Note: The sample for Figure B.1 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. In total, this sample consisted of 93,617 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

FIGURE B.2

Students in higher CPS EOT categories had progressively higher rates of immediate college enrollment



Note: The sample for Figure B.2 focused on students in grades 3-8 from school year 2010-11. In total, this sample consisted of 93,617 students. See the box titled *Data Used for Student Outcomes Analysis* and Appendix D for relevant decisions made to obtain the student sample shown in this figure.

Appendix C

Using Condensed EOT Categories on the To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool

The To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool is a publicly available online data resource that answers long-held questions about how students perform once they've left their middle grades schools. The tool enables users to drill down into CPS educational attainment data for 450 of Chicago's schools serving grades 6-8. By showing the key milestones for students from each elementary school—starting in the middle grades and ending with college enrollment—elementary school practitioners can see for themselves how the academic achievement of students in their building plays a crucial role in future academic performance. This data provides a bird's eye view for practitioners as they develop improvement plans and interventions for the coming school years. Importantly, in order to be most actionable for practitioners and drive focus to the middle grades, data on the tool is limited to students in grades 6-8, in contrast to this report, which includes data on students in grades 3-8. However, due to the same data limitations as discussed in Appendix D, the tool does not include data on Condensed EOT for students in charter schools.

Among its many capabilities, practitioners can use the To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool to see the Condensed EOT categories applied to their respective school and to explore outcomes for

students from these categories after they leave the middle grades (see Figures C.1 and C.2).

Using the tool, users can interact with different elementary schools' data to answer the following questions:

- **Sixth-grade enrollment:** Which community areas are students at my elementary school coming from?
- **Sixth- through eighth-grade Condensed EOT:** How did students in grades 6-8 at my elementary school perform academically in past school years (school years 2012–13 to the present)? What does that academic performance look like broken down by race/ethnicity and gender?
- **High school enrollment:** What high schools do students from my elementary school attend?
- **Freshman OnTrack:** Were students from my elementary school on-track in their ninth-grade year of high school?
- **High school graduation:** How have the high school graduation rates of students from my elementary school changed over time?
- **College enrollment:** How many graduates from my elementary school enrolled in college? How do these rates differ by how students performed academically in the middle grades? By race/ethnicity and gender?

FIGURE C.1

Snapshot of the To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool landing page



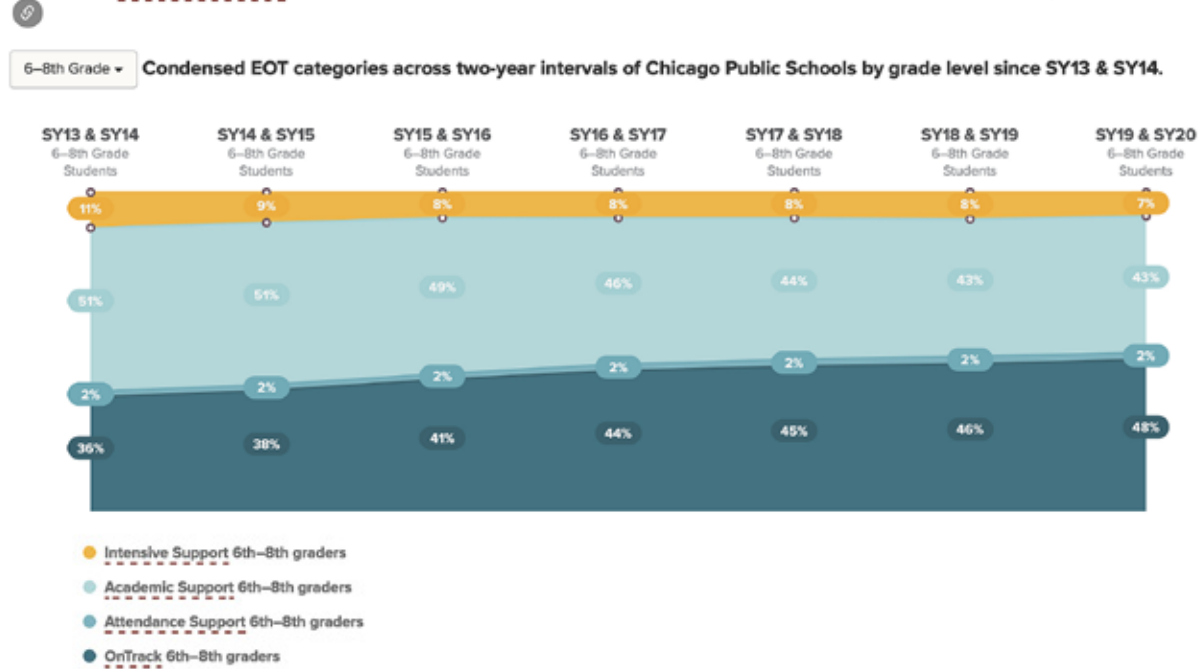
Note: To see your school's data on The To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool spanning from the past school year to up to seven years prior on any given milestone, visit <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/tool/cps/>

FIGURE C.2

The Condensed EOT categories for grades 6-8 across all of CPS on the To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool

Across Years

How have Condensed EOT categories for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders from Chicago Public Schools changed over time?



Within My District

How do the college enrollment rates for different student groups from Chicago Public Schools compare to each other?

Compare Fall 2019 & Fall 2020 college enrollment rates of Chicago Public Schools 8th grade graduates who enrolled in a CPS high school by



Note: To see your school's data on The To&Through Elementary School Milestones Tool spanning from the past school year to up to seven years prior on any given milestone, visit <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/tool/cps/>

Appendix D

Data Notes

There are notable data decisions and omissions from certain data samples of this analysis that are important to consider in understanding the scope of the results presented in this brief. This appendix lists these decisions according to the findings to which they correspond.

Data decisions applied to all student samples

Many CPS charter schools use different student information systems from the IMPACT/ASPEN systems used by non-charter schools. Because each system varies in the way that it stores information about courses, credits, teachers, periods, grades, and other data, creating linkages across systems is difficult, and our data archive currently does not include records of charter school students' course performance. Therefore, since GPA was part of this brief's analysis, the student samples analyzed in this brief did not include students attending charter schools in grades 3-8 in any given school year (in school year 2018–19, this represented 20,195 of 166,785 students enrolled in grades 3-8, or about 12 percent). There were also students in grades 3-8 in non-charter schools who were missing a record of either GPA or attendance in any given school year and were also not included anywhere in this analysis (in school year 2018–19, this represented 5,315 of 166,785 students enrolled in grades 3-8, or about 3 percent).

Students' GPAs were calculated by obtaining the average of their final grades in their core courses (math, reading, social studies, and science) to maintain consistency with CPS, which uses only core courses when calculating elementary GPAs. An exception was made for students who attended CPS Academic centers (selective enrollment seventh- and eighth-grade programs associated with specific high schools in CPS) in grades 7-8. For students attending CPS Academic Centers, GPAs were calculated by averaging together all core classes, since the course-taking patterns of these students vary significantly from those of non-academic center CPS elementary school students. Students needed to have at

least three end-of-year course grades in math, reading, social studies, and science in order for their GPA to be calculated, in order to maintain a relatively even comparison of core GPAs across students while still being inclusive of students who did not take the standard four core courses in a given year.

Data decisions applied to findings on high school graduation and college enrollment (Figures 4-9 and Figures A.2-A.6)

Our sample for this analysis started with 180,217 students who were enrolled in CPS in grades 3-8 in school year 2010–11. We first excluded students who transferred out of the district before or during high school (48,600 students). We then excluded students for whom we did not have elementary grades or attendance data, students for whom we did not have high school graduating GPA, and students for whom we did not have college enrollment information (the majority of students for whom we do not have grades, attendance, or GPA data are students in charter schools). Students who eventually graduated from high school but who took more than four years to graduate were not included in the sample of third- through eighth-graders from school year 2010–11. This resulted in a sample of 93,617 students which was used for the analysis.

Data decisions applied to findings on race/ethnicity and gender

(Figure 10 and Figures A.2-A.5)

Native American/Alaskan Native and Multiracial students are not shown as their own respective category in figures that disaggregate Condensed EOT relationships by race/ethnicity and gender because relatively few students identified their race/ethnicity in this category, making it difficult to reliably interpret rates (for the most recent year of analysis, school year 2018–19, this represented 2,602 students of 166,785 students enrolled in grades 3-8, or about 2 percent); however,

they are included in the overall numbers. Furthermore, the race/ethnicity and gender categories available in the data used for this brief are limited and therefore do not accurately reflect the full spectrum of races/ethnicities and genders embodied by CPS students.

CPS changed its race/ethnicity categories in the 2010–11 school year to include a Multiracial option

and the Asian/ Pacific Islander category was split into two categories: Pacific Islander/ Hawaiian and Asian. In this brief, our “Asian American/Pacific Islander” category combines three CPS data categories—Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific Islander—due to the small number of students in the latter two categories.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ALEX SEESKIN leads the To&Through Project, which aims to significantly increase high school and post-secondary completion for under-resourced students of color in Chicago and around the country, by providing education stake-holders with research-based data on students' educational experiences and facilitating dialogue on its implications for adult practice. Previously, he served as the Director of Strategy of the UChicago Charter School, and as a Resident at UChicago Impact. Prior to coming to UEI, Alex taught high school English in Chicago Public Schools for seven years, serving as the English Department Chair at Lake View High School from 2008–12. He earned a BS in communications from Northwestern University and an EdLD from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

THOMAS MASSION was a Research Analyst at the UChicago Consortium at the time this research was conducted, where he worked on the To&Through Project to conduct statistical analysis and develop data tools for students, teachers, and administrators in CPS. Before coming to the UChicago Consortium, Thomas created software to improve data collection and storage in various contexts, including an initiative with the Department of Homeland Security on the allocation of diesel fuel for disaster relief and the database management of a high-frequency trading firm. Most recently, Thomas designed a mathematical model as part of a partnership between the World Wildlife Fund and the Institute of Sustainability and Energy at Northwestern for the optimization of Nepalese home construction with respect to cost and environmental impact. Thomas believes in the power of education as a vehicle to uplift historically marginalized populations, and he applied his engineering background at the To&Through Project by connecting technological insights and solutions to the needs of CPS communities.

ALEXANDRA USHER is an Associate Director of the To&Through Project and a Senior Research Analyst at the UChicago Consortium, where she leads the research and data processes that inform the To&Through Project. Alexandra most recently led data strategy for the AUSL network of schools, and prior to that spent time at Chicago Public Schools and the Center on Education Policy. She holds a BA in international affairs from the George Washington University and an MPP from the University of Chicago Harris School.



The To&Through Project In collaboration with educators, policymakers, and communities, the To&Through Project aims to significantly increase high school and postsecondary completion for under-resourced students of color in Chicago and around the country by providing education stakeholders with research-based data on students' educational experiences and facilitating dialogue on its implications for adult practice. At the To&Through Project, we:

- Conduct research and publish data on what matters for the attainment of Chicago Public Schools students (in collaboration with the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research).
- Design data tools and resources for education stakeholders that make data meaningful and actionable, including the publicly available To&Through Online Tool.
- Foster conversations about what matters most for students' high school and post-secondary success.
- Facilitate a network of middle grades educators committed to building more equitable and supportive educational environments that promote the success of middle grades students in high school and beyond.

The To&Through Project is located at the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute in the School of Social Service Administration.

This report reflects the interpretation of the authors. Although the UChicago Consortium's Steering Committee provided technical advice, no formal endorsement by these individuals, organizations, the full Consortium, or the To&Through Project, should be assumed.

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OUR MISSION With the goal of supporting stronger and more equitable educational outcomes for students, the UChicago Consortium conducts research of high technical quality that informs and assesses policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families, and communities as we support the search for solutions to the challenge of transforming schools. We encourage the use of research in policy action and practice but do not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for systemic school improvement by identifying what matters most for student success, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.



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