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International Baccalaureate Diploma Program students in Chicago's neighborhood high schools more likely to go to college, persist

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IB DP), an internationally recognized academic program significantly increased the chances that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students in neighborhood high schools would attend selective colleges, according to a new study from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

When compared to a matched comparison group, CPS students in the IB DP were 40 percent more likely to attend a four-year college and 50 percent more likely to attend a more selective college. In addition, IB DP students from CPS who attended four-year colleges were significantly more likely to persist in college for at least two years.

IB DP programs were established across Chicago beginning in 1997, when CPS announced an ambitious plan to expand its flagship IB DP program at Lincoln Park High School to 13 neighborhood high schools. At the time, the scale of this expansion was unmatched by any other school district in the United States. CPS policymakers saw IB DP as a way to create more opportunities for bright CPS elementary students, particularly those with test scores that were above average but typically not high enough to gain admittance to highly competitive selective enrollment high schools. The plan was initially met with a great deal of skepticism—particularly over the qualifications of CPS students and the capacity of CPS neighborhood high schools and teachers to create a “true” IB DP experience.

This report rigorously examines the impact of Chicago’s neighborhood IB DP programs on the postsecondary outcomes of graduates of the classes of 2003-2007. It draws on quantitative data to estimate effects on college enrollment and persistence using a propensity matching technique; it also uses student interview data from CCSR’s longitudinal qualitative study to investigate students’ experiences in college. The report

looks at the effect of the IB DP program in 12 neighborhood high schools. It did not study the IB program at Lincoln Park High School because it is highly selective and serves a different population than the IB DPs at other neighborhood high schools.

Key findings include:

- Three-quarters of IB DP students are African American or Latino, although the IB DP serves a higher proportion of Latino students than the system average, and they are predominantly first-generation college students.
- When in college, IB DP students report feeling prepared to succeed and indeed excel in their coursework, often stating explicitly that their experiences in the IB DP taught the specific skills and behaviors demanded of them in college.
- Despite strong academic qualifications, IB DP students often have limited access to the social capital necessary to successfully navigate college course selection and access the support of college faculty.
- Only 62 percent of students who enter the IB DP Cohort in ninth grade subsequently enroll in the program in eleventh grade. There are no effects of IB DP participation for the 38 percent of students who do not complete the program.

The report authors describe IB DP in the neighborhood high schools as a “bold experiment that paid off.” Specifically, they note that “never before in our work in Chicago have we seen coursework have an effect on college persistence. The fact that it has an effect two years after students graduate speaks to the kind of powerful impact the IB DP program can have on students’ trajectories.” These findings have important implications for other urban districts interested in implementing or expanding IB DP programs. More broadly, they can help policymakers and practitioners better understand what it takes to promote college readiness in urban high schools.

Please go to www.ccsr.uchicago.edu for a copy of the report.