

Policy Brief

Measuring What Matters: *Building Effective College Pipelines*

by Jill Gottfred | Winter 2013



■ INCS ■

ILLINOIS NETWORK OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

THE INCS ACTION RESEARCH SERIES

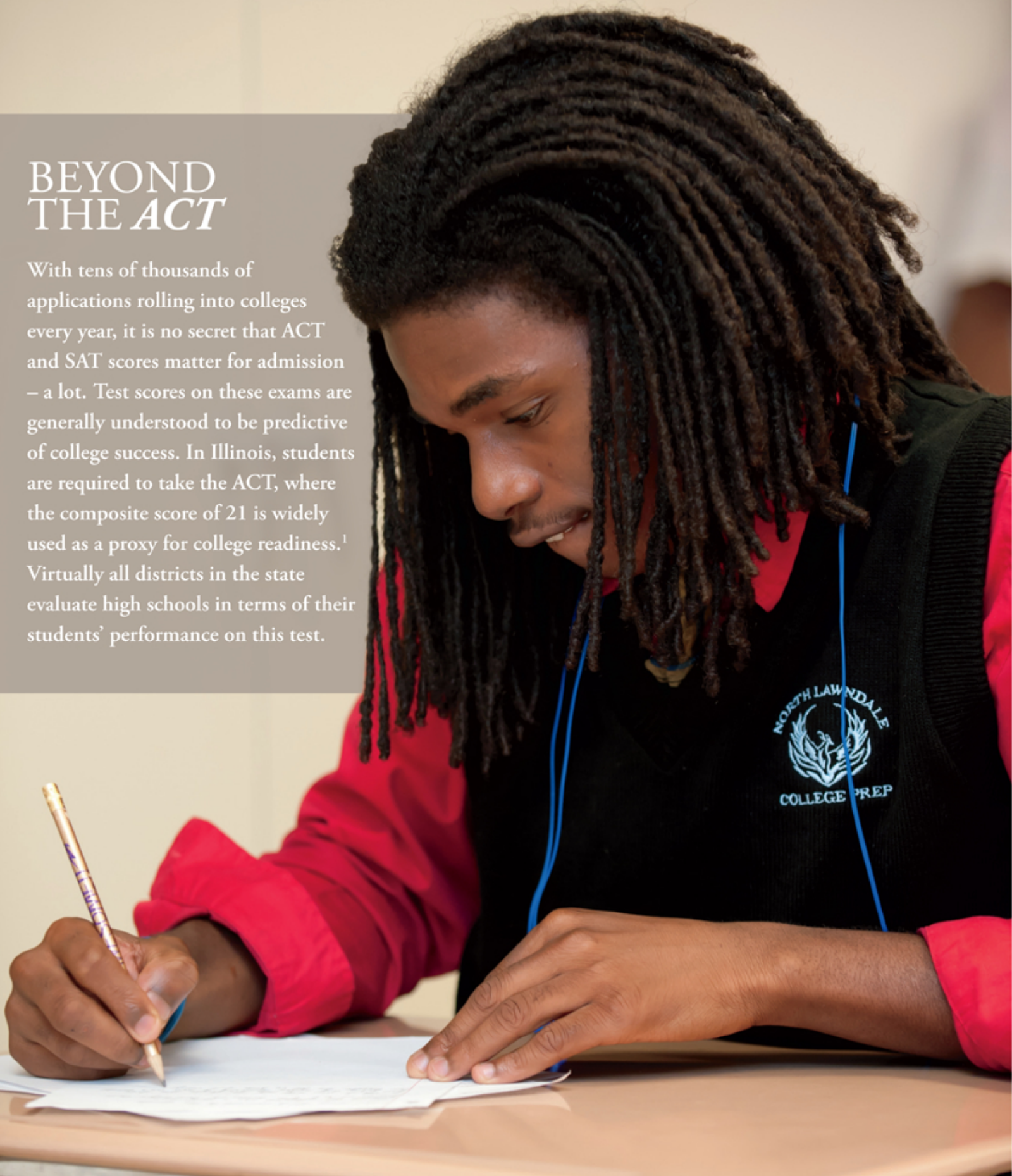
is designed to improve public education by recommending policy and practice changes that benefit all public school students. Unlike traditional policy briefs that assess programs descriptively and often call for additional research, INCS Action Research highlights charter schools and their innovative practices to challenge how schools and their systems operate. Charter schools are pioneering new ways of creating public schools and delivering instruction, all with an eye toward improving student outcomes. It is our hope that this series will test assumptions about the provision of public education and keep charter school innovation at the forefront of the school reform dialogue nationally.

This brief pushes its readers to think about what metrics and practices are important to determine college success, and shares five successful approaches currently used by Illinois charter schools to ensure students are getting to and through college at high rates.



BEYOND THE ACT

With tens of thousands of applications rolling into colleges every year, it is no secret that ACT and SAT scores matter for admission – a lot. Test scores on these exams are generally understood to be predictive of college success. In Illinois, students are required to take the ACT, where the composite score of 21 is widely used as a proxy for college readiness.¹ Virtually all districts in the state evaluate high schools in terms of their students' performance on this test.

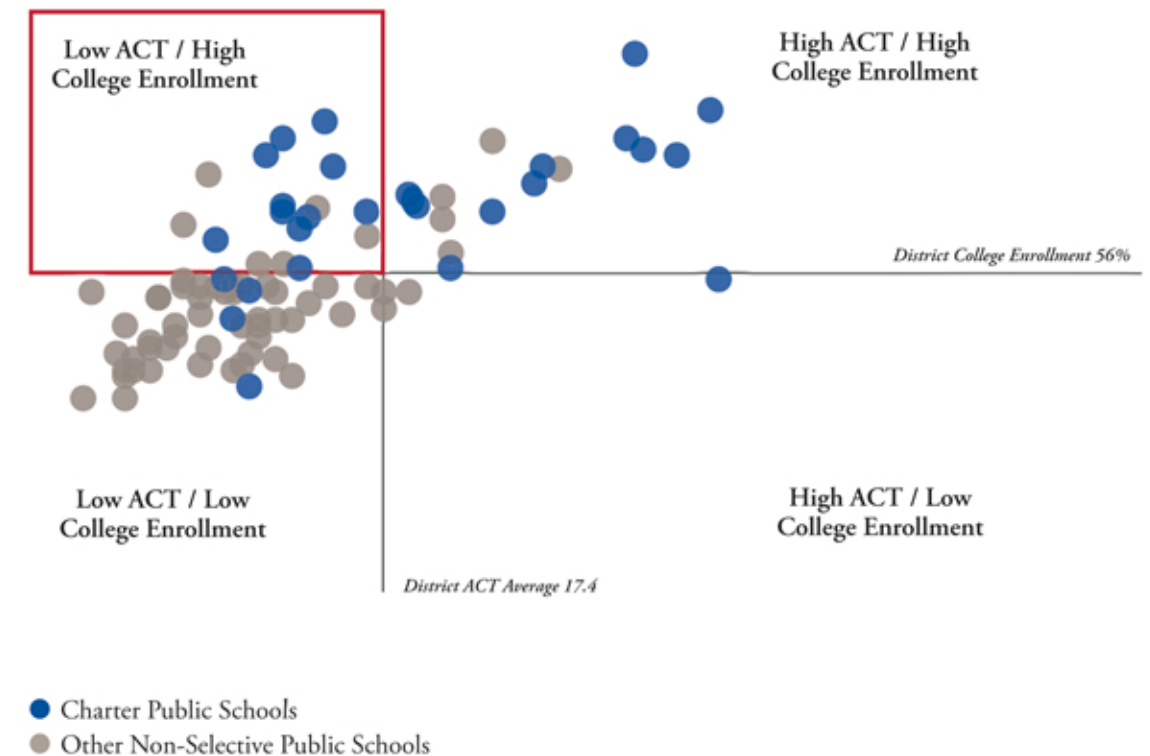


RESEARCHERS, policy makers, and school districts have accordingly focused intensively on this 21 composite threshold as a way to rate students' success and potential, and that of the high schools they attend. ACT has published several reports based on national samples of colleges and universities, drawing correlations between the level of achievement on the ACT and a student's ability to achieve in corresponding first-year college courses.² The weight of this threshold is clear in headlines, such as this one printed in the summer of 2013 in the *Washington Post*: "Just 26 Percent of ACT Test Takers Are Prepared for College," using the ACT college benchmarks as the only criteria.³

But while the prevailing belief is that inability to meet the minimum testing benchmarks on the ACT will doom a student to fail in college and beyond, the work of several schools in Chicago suggests that the issue may not be as cut-and-dry. These are schools that have large numbers of students who did not score above 21 on the ACT, but still enroll and succeed in college—at staggeringly high rates.

As *Figure 1* shows, there are schools of all types in Chicago with ACT scores that fall below or near the Chicago Public Schools ("CPS") average, yet their college-going rates far surpass what those scores might suggest. As the schools in the upper left quadrant show, there is not a perfect correlation between ACT score and college enrollment at CPS. The relationship decreases even further when one extends the timeline to consider college persistence, data that is currently not made public at the district level.

Figure 1. 2011 ACT Scores and 2012 College Enrollment Rates



QUESTIONS CONSIDERED IN THIS BRIEF:

What is happening in some public high schools that produce success among students who, we have been led to believe, were not ready to succeed in college?

What other metrics, beyond ACT scores, are important components of high school student success and high school performance?

THIS BRIEF examines three charter public schools in Chicago that are changing the debate about what it takes to be successful in college and what K-12 school systems should do to ensure their students reach this potential. North Lawndale College Prep Charter School ("North Lawndale College Prep"), Urban Prep Academies ("Urban Prep"), and University of Chicago Charter School ("UChicago Charter") are proving that ACT scores alone cannot predict students' ability to reach and succeed in four-year colleges. *Figure 2* shows the results over time for the three featured schools that are achieving particularly impressive results.

North Lawndale College Prep, Urban Prep, and UChicago Charter serve students who face significant challenges. Over 75% of students who enroll arrive at the schools nearly 2-4 grade levels behind. All three schools serve predominantly African American students from low-income families and the school facilities are all located in predominantly low-income communities on Chicago's south and west sides. And yet, these schools and others like them have led the way in beating expectations - thanks in part to financial and academic autonomies provided in the charter model - and prove that while test scores are meaningful, they only tell part of the story.

In this brief, we call for districts and schools to broaden what we measure and do to prepare students for college and life. We present a number of actions that leaders can take to track and hold themselves accountable to the most meaningful metrics, and implement strategies to succeed on those dimensions. To be sure, increasing college enrollment and persistence is not solely a K-12 problem; colleges and universities have a critical role to play as well. But districts and schools cannot rely on the higher education sector to fill the gaps. Data supports that students from the most challenging backgrounds can succeed in college with the necessary supports that start in a child's K-12 experience.

*Figure 2. Charter Public Schools Getting Students To and Through College at High Rates**

	Chicago Neighborhood	Poverty	ACT Average	College Acceptance	College Enrollment	College Persistence
North Lawndale College Prep Charter School – Christiana & Collins Campus	North Lawndale	95%	15.7	100%	83%	82%
Urban Prep – Englewood Campus	Englewood	83%	16.1	100%	95%	76.3%
University of Chicago Charter – Woodlawn Campus	Woodlawn	85%	16.5	98%	88%	73%

*ACT and poverty data obtained from CPS files. College acceptance, college enrollment, and college persistence data are historical data reported by schools based on National School Clearinghouse data, and transcripts. Data covers all years that each school has had high school graduates. For North Lawndale College Prep, ACT data covers 2001-2011 and college data covers 2002-2012; For Urban Prep, ACT data covers 2009-2012 and college data covers 2010-2012; For UChicago Charter, ACT covers 2009-2011 and college data covers 2010-2012

COLLEGE READINESS IS MORE THAN A TEST SCORE

There is no doubt that too few American students are getting to and through college successfully. In Illinois, only 29% of incoming ninth graders actually graduate from college.⁴ The story is even more bleak in Chicago Public Schools, where only 8% of students who begin high school at CPS are predicted to graduate college.⁵

High school completion is a part of the problem, with 37% of CPS students dropping out before graduation.⁶ But even for those who do graduate, a myriad of obstacles await them after receiving their diplomas; academic readiness is only one component of their chances at success. Many recent studies have shown that the drop between high school graduation and college graduation is often driven by high college tuition costs, lack of financial support, weak social support systems, family obligations and emergencies, student-college mismatches, and misalignment between high school experiences and college expectations.⁷ Once all of these factors are taken into account, it is not surprising that ACT scores alone do not predict college success as well as one might otherwise believe.

Story of Success

Consider Tasha, a North Lawndale College Prep alumna who grew up in a low-income family. Tasha joined the 9th grade at North Lawndale College Prep significantly behind in all of her subjects. With support from her teachers and other supportive adults, Tasha surmounted obstacles, coming to school early and staying late, reworking assignments to achieve higher grades, and taking on several leadership roles in the school. Ultimately Tasha made great progress academically and made up for lost ground, earning a 3.5 grade point average. She matriculated at Loyola University, graduated in four years, and then went on to earn a master's degree in social work. Tasha earned a 17 on her ACT during junior year. If it were not for North Lawndale College Prep's high expectations and intensive support in the years leading up to and following her high school graduation, that ACT score may indeed have predicted her success. But as the following years showed, the true story is far more complex.



High school completion is a part of the problem, with 37% of CPS students dropping out before graduation



WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE: *District impact starts with accountability*

As Tasha's story illustrates, a range of metrics – not just one – matter in telling a success story. To hold high schools accountable for student outcomes, districts must take academic growth, college enrollment, and college persistence into account. Static test scores, year-over-year school improvement, and even graduation rates and ACT scores are important but not sufficient measures of school effectiveness. Academic gains scores are particularly powerful metrics. In fact, student gain scores not only capture the increase in learning that students achieve throughout their years at a school, but in Chicago these rates are also more predictive of college enrollment than ACT scores, as *Figure 3* shows.

As Tasha's example shows, setting high expectations and helping students establish a new trajectory can lay the foundation for success in college and beyond even when the academic starting point is low. Grade point average can also be an important indicator of student achievement and growth. University of Chicago's research shows a strong correlation between GPA and college graduation for CPS students across the system, as indicated in *Figure 4*.⁸

Many factors, both academic and non-academic, explain this phenomenon. Studies show that perseverance, grit, and other non-cognitive skills are essential for success in college – true for all students, but particularly in environments where poverty, violence, and other challenges outside of the classroom are real obstacles.⁹ Metrics like academic growth and GPA take these factors into account, while single test scores like the ACT do not.

Ultimately, college graduation and even outcomes beyond that are the true measures of whether progress made in the K-12 setting is meaningful. In addition to outcome metrics like graduation rate and college enrollment, districts must follow the charter sector's lead by tracking and reporting college persistence at the district and school level. University of Chicago Charter School is a leader in tracking its alumni and using learnings to influence their practice in supporting students on the path to college. As *Figure 5* demonstrates, UChicago Charter knows where their students are going to college, and furthermore tracks students who enroll in more selective schools. This is good practice given that appropriately matching students to colleges can have a positive impact on college persistence and graduation, while under matching can have the opposite effect.¹⁰

Many charter public schools have gone beyond tracking to provide support to seniors and alumni to help them surpass the barriers they encounter. The charter schools we feature in this brief have used their budget autonomy to allocate resources to college counselors, college-preparation curriculum, and alumni tracking and support counselors, increasing the ratio of adults committed to college-going success for each student. If districts are committed to college persistence, they must contemplate how best to allocate limited resources to impact that result. Today, Illinois ranks 45th among the states when it comes to supporting high school students in mapping out a college path, averaging one high school counselor per 314 students.¹¹ There is a long way to go and budgets are tight, but examples exist that show it can be done.

Figure 3. 2011 Student Academic Gains and 2012 College Enrollment Among All CPS Students

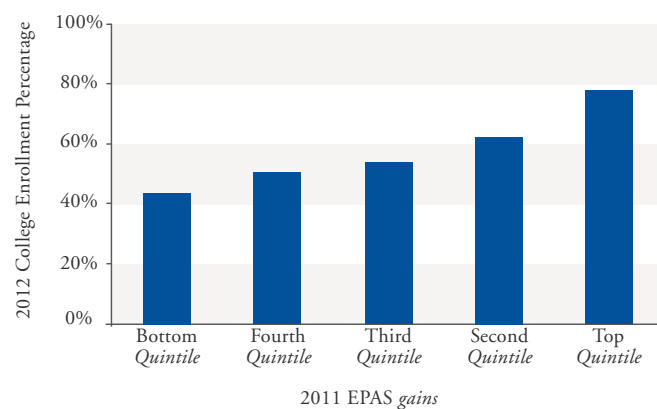


Figure 4. College Graduation Rates Among CPS Alumni by Unweighted High School GPA

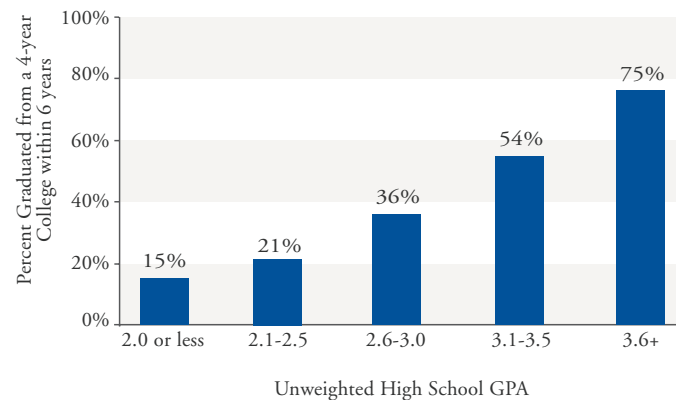
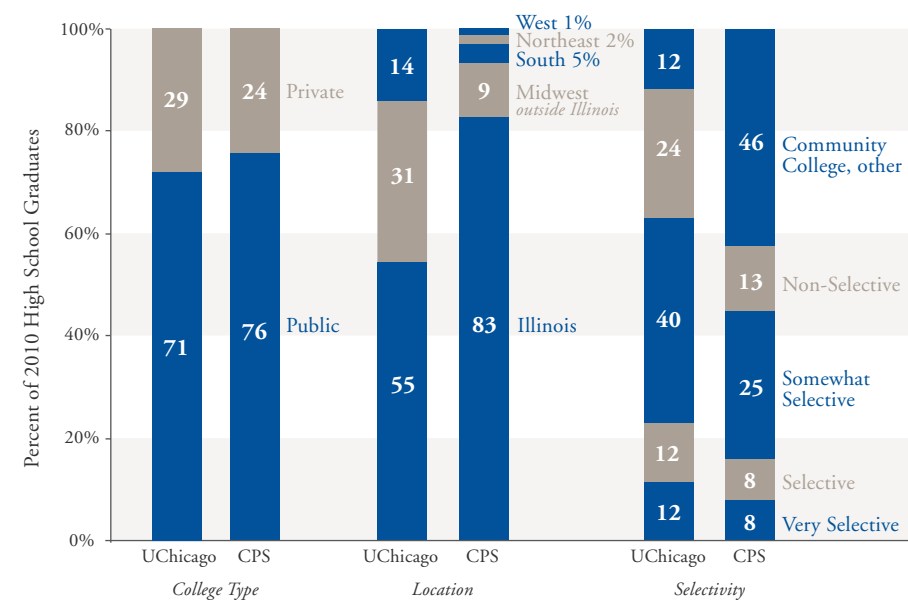


Figure 5. Characteristics of Colleges Attended by UChicago Charter and CPS College-Goers in the 2010–11 School Year



UChicago Charter School college-goers attend more selective colleges than other CPS students, and are more likely to attend colleges outside of Illinois



THE GROUND GAME: *Charter schools are innovating to address barriers*

There is much to be learned from exploring the innovative practices at schools that are outperforming expectations for college-going success. Our featured schools serve high-need communities in Chicago, where students often arrive for ninth grade with significant academic and non-academic challenges. In the face of these barriers, these schools share a fundamental belief that every student can succeed in college, regardless of socioeconomic status, zip code, test scores, or incoming achievement level. They leverage their charter autonomy to ensure that this mission is strongly reflected throughout their day-to-day culture, academic choices, and resource allocation.

THROUGH OUR RESEARCH, *five common themes are characteristic of schools whose graduates experience college success not easily predicted from their ACT scores:*

1 Grit and Persistence: Pervasive Reinforcement of Positive Non-Cognitive Skills

Skills such as grit, motivation, time management, study skills, perseverance, and accountability are hard to measure but necessary to teach.¹² Non-cognitive skills help students to move on, learn a lesson, and try again when they fail or struggle in different life experiences.¹³ More important, emerging research suggests that these skills can be developed in students who initially do not exhibit them, suggesting that schools have a large role to play in imparting such traits. The featured schools recognize that these skills impact college success and therefore work to enforce them in high school classrooms. Working with students to set a goal and then devising plans to overcome specific and inevitable obstacles will strengthen a student's self-control. Non-cognitive skills can easily be related to a student's grades, but must also be reinforced in other ways through college seminars, advisories, mentoring programs, and life experiences.

2 College Fit: Tailored College Counseling and Matching for Each Student

The featured high schools understand that each student's needs are different, and some colleges are better fits for certain graduates than others. To ensure each child is matched with an academically, socially and financially appropriate college, featured schools have prioritized multiple college counselors to provide tailored support for each student and family based on their needs. College counselors also understand the dynamics and build relationships with various colleges and universities across the country. These relationships have proven pivotal in understanding each college's social and academic supports, as well as financial resources available, to inform matching each student to college appropriately.

3 School Culture: Focus on 'College Going' Culture from Day 1 of Freshman Year

All featured schools set high expectations for college graduation as early as the first day of school. The expectation that high school will not be the final stop on the educational journey is communicated to staff, students, and parents from the beginning. In addition to communicating that expectation verbally, these schools reinforce the college-going culture throughout the school year and summer through numerous local and national college visits, college preparation courses, college paraphernalia posted throughout the school building, and public celebrations and rituals for students who get accepted to college, among others. Creating a college-going culture communicates the message that college is a destination for all students and that the school community is committed to helping them get there.

4 Mentorship: A Deliberate Approach to Pairing a Caring Adult to Each Student

When students are not personally supported, they are more likely to withdraw from classes, switch to part-time, take a break from school, or drop out altogether.¹⁴ Beyond direct college counseling, the schools featured here recognize the importance of identifying each student's individual needs, and use a deliberate approach to matching each student with a caring adult mentor in the school building. In addition to ensuring all adults in the school are on board with the college-going mission, there is also space within the school day where students meet in small groups or one-on-one with an advisor or mentor. This assigned adult is tasked with understanding the student's personal needs, troubleshoots personal challenges that may interfere with college completion, offers advice as needed, and generally serves as a role model college graduate that is a resource for the student as he or she begins to navigate the college enrollment process. Special supports are also in place for students with special needs, or students with particularly challenging backgrounds. Assigning an adult to each student is often times critical in ensuring that small personal obstacles do not become roadblocks for college completion.

5 Tracking and Supporting: Relentless Tracking and Supporting of Alumni

It is crucial that schools implement tracking and support strategies that follow students and alumni past high school graduation, college acceptance, and college enrollment. The featured schools work hard to know where their alumni are located, how they are doing in college, and what they need from the high school staff to ensure they persist in college. Some schools use incentives to ensure students stay in touch with the high school and host reunion events during holiday breaks at the high school, while other schools use text messaging, phone calls, email, Facebook, and other social media sites to stay in touch. Featured schools have found that typical obstacles, such as a book fee, a challenging course or discomfort adjusting to a new social setting, often times lead students, particularly first generation college-goers, to prematurely and unnecessarily drop out. High schools that invest in making sure their alumni graduate from college, continue to serve as support systems through challenging times that arise after high school graduation.

CASE STUDIES
OF COLLEGE
PIPELINES:
Sharing Best Practices



NORTH LAWDALE COLLEGE PREP CHARTER SCHOOL

www.nlcphs.org · Number of Campuses: 2

*Figures based on 2013 CPS 20th Day Enrollment Data

Featured Campus	Neighborhood	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race	Special Education
Christiana Campus	North Lawndale	454	94%	98% African American / 1% Hispanic / 1% Other	11%
Collins Campus	North Lawndale	419	96%	98% African American / 1% Hispanic / 1% Other	10%

About North Lawndale College Prep Charter School

North Lawndale College Prep Charter School (“North Lawndale College Prep”) opened in 1998 and has grown to two campuses serving approximately 900 students. The mission of North Lawndale College Prep is to “prepare young people from under-resourced communities for graduation from high school with the academic skills and personal resilience necessary for successful completion of college.” The school integrates high academic expectations with strong supports and opportunities for students. North Lawndale College Prep students thrive in a small school setting and build strong relationships with staff, parents, and community members.

■ Persistence and Grit

North Lawndale College Prep frequently communicates their motto of “The Phoenix Way: Be Peaceful, Respectful, Responsible and Prepared” to all members of the North Lawndale College Prep community. North Lawndale College Prep believes that there are many skills important to academic success that are not measured by static test scores, such as perseverance and personal responsibility. An example of how they work to build and strengthen these skills is through their Senior Project requirement for graduation. During senior year, students are required to complete a rigorous Senior Project which requires college-level critical thinking, research, reading, writing, and public speaking. Throughout senior year, students must continually refine the project, submit multiple drafts, conduct several interviews and hours of research, and persist in achieving a “B” grade on the project in order to graduate. In addition, North Lawndale College Prep facilitates continued enrichment, personal development and college preparation during the summer through the Phoenix Rising Program. The Program is held at colleges across the country, and exposes students to the joys and hardships of college firsthand. Students continue to learn more about how to overcome obstacles that come with being away from home in an unfamiliar environment, and build leadership skills through scheduled enrichment experiences and leadership development programs.

■ College Fit

Through college counselors, advisory periods, and the Phoenix Rising Summer Program, North Lawndale College Prep works hard to match students to the best college for each student. From day one, students are assigned to a counselor who commits to helping them find a college that fits their needs, and then stays in touch with them throughout high school and in their first year of college. Advisory period is scheduled every day, and designed to help students research colleges, learn how to apply to college, and apply for federal financial aid. Students also have time in advisory to prepare for college interviews and develop their personal statements. The Phoenix Rising Program also immerses students in the college experience during the summer, and allows students to become more attuned to what they are looking for in a college experience.



■ School Culture

North Lawndale College Prep was founded with the mission to graduate all students from college, and students are on board with this mission early on. College trips take place throughout all four years of high school. Scheduling time focused on college preparation during advisory period ensures students have the tools needed to get to college. It is a culture that North Lawndale College Prep starts developing on the very first day of school, when every new freshman goes straight through the front door and then out onto a bus for a day trip to DePaul University. North Lawndale wants every freshman to understand from his or her very first moment at the school where each waking moment will lead to.

■ Mentorship

North Lawndale College Prep assigns a counselor to every group of incoming freshman at each campus. The counselor stays with the students for a minimum of five years: four years at North Lawndale College Prep and the first year of college. This strategy gives students an additional support that they might not have, especially if the student is the first in their family to go to college. Counselors help students make the life changing and difficult transition to college. In addition, there are numerous other mentoring opportunities that underclassmen participate in, either through outside programs such as Chicago Scholars, AIM High and Genesys Works, or through the school’s own sophomore mentoring program run by the North Lawndale College Prep’s junior board. Then, this mentoring goes full-scale in senior year. Through the Senior Project program described above, every single senior is paired with his or her own Chicago professional. Whether the student is a Posse Scholar or special education student or temporarily homeless, each student participates in a mentoring relationship that lasts all senior year.

■ Tracking and Supporting

North Lawndale College Prep staffs two full time alumni counselors to track students after they graduate, and support them throughout various obstacles and challenges they may face in college. Counselors stay in touch with students through text, email, phone, and social media sites, and use Salesforce to keep track of graduates. Students who submit their college grades and transcripts receive \$50 rewards. North Lawndale College Prep’s ‘Emergency Fund’ was developed to give small amounts of money to alumni for various issues that all students face in college, such as book fees, transcript fees, and supplies. Being able to support alumni when small obstacles arise can sometimes be the difference between the student continuing on or dropping out. North Lawndale College Prep alumni counselors also partner with The Career Transitions Center of Chicago to help students find employment during college or after college graduation. CTC is a non-profit organization that provides a variety of supports for individuals looking for employment.

From day 1 students are assigned a counselor who commits to helping them find a college that fits their needs, and then stays in touch with them throughout high school and in their first year of college



URBAN PREP ACADEMIES

www.urbanprep.org · Number of Campuses: 3

*Figures based on 2013 CPS 20th Day Enrollment Data

Featured Campus	Neighborhood	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race	Special Education
Englewood Campus	Englewood	496	82.5%	99% African American	20%

About Urban Prep Academies

Urban Prep Academies (“Urban Prep”) is a non-profit organization founded in 2002 by education entrepreneur Tim King and a group of African-American education, business and civic leaders. Urban Prep has grown to three campuses and serves approximately 2,000 students and alumni. Urban Prep operates the country’s first network of public charter high schools for boys. Urban Prep’s mission is to “provide a comprehensive, high-quality college preparatory education to young men that results in graduates succeeding in college.” Urban Prep teachers work to focus on their students’ specific learning styles and developmental needs while also focusing on the unique needs of urban youth. The school network prides itself on its four arcs: Academic, Service, Enrichment and Activity. Urban Prep motivates family, teachers, administrators, staff, donors, and community members to believe in the young men that they serve and believe that they will exceed their potential.

■ Persistence and Grit

Urban Prep instills in their students early on that there are no personal or academic obstacles too big that would prevent a student from completing college. The College Process Class places a priority on providing intensive support to students so that they are able to navigate the college application process successfully. In this class students develop their interpersonal and communication skills through mock interviews and the revising of their personal statements. A variety of learning strategies are also addressed in this class and others, such as study skills, time-management skills, and goal setting. Additionally, students are required to interface with at least ten college admissions representatives and submit at least ten admissions and scholarship applications, visit at least five colleges, compile a list of references and thoroughly research the institutions they are most interested in attending.

■ College Fit

Urban Prep has a network director of college counseling programs and at least two full-time college counselors at each Urban Prep campus. These college counselors help students understand and master the college application process. In addition, all senior students use their time in College Process Class to research colleges that pertain to their interests. Urban Prep developed the Study UP Program, which allows students to have access to the college experience in high school. Students travel to different colleges, stay overnight, attend college classes, and connect with college students and college staff. Students are matched to a college based on their preferences. This matching process helps students learn more about their interests and needs when looking for the best college for them. Additionally, Urban Prep has deliberately formed strong relationships with college communities to ensure a tailored college fit for every student.

■ School Culture

Urban Prep confidently communicates that earning a college degree is the expectation for all students who enroll. Before the first day of school, all freshman students attend a three-week Freshman Academy. The purpose of Freshman Academy is to provide incoming freshman with a comprehensive transitional experience that adequately prepares students to meet the academic and behavioral expectations of Urban Prep. During this time students also take their first college trip as a member of the Urban Prep family. The College Planning Class that students take during Freshman Academy outlines the major components of the four-year college planning curriculum at Urban Prep—sending the message that students are expected to graduate from college upon high school graduation.

Urban Prep has created a variety of rituals for students throughout the college readiness process. For instance, when a student gets accepted in to his first college, there is the “On to the Next One” ceremony, where the student trades his red tie that he has worn for the duration of his high school experience for

a red and gold striped tie which signifies college acceptance. This ceremony is conducted before the entire school community, where all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors partake in celebrating their older classmates, and look forward to getting their own red and gold tie. Additionally, there is the “Urban Prep Signing Day” held once a year, where students are given the opportunity to declare their college of choice.

■ Mentorship

Urban Prep provides a mentor for all freshman students through the Urban Prep Fellows Program. Launched in 2010, the Urban Prep Fellows Program is a one-year service opportunity for recent college graduates interested in working with youth. Fellows work with freshmen in small groups called “Prides” (derived from Urban Prep’s mascot, the Lion) to mentor, tutor, and lead students in their development and progression toward college readiness. The Fellow is focused on the comprehensive academic achievement of just twenty-five students enrolled in his or her “Pride”, and provides support for their intellectual, social, and personal growth. Upper classmen are also placed in Prides where their Pride Leaders are also charged with promoting positive student conduct, participating in the restorative justice process and appropriately advocating for their students. Their main focus revolves around three key areas: character development (through the teaching of Urban Prep Core Values), service learning (through the creation and execution of service learning projects) and academic support (through tutoring and monitoring their attendance and grades).

■ Tracking and Supporting

Urban Prep developed the Alumni Program with three full time staff members who are focused on providing a support system for Urban Prep alumni who are enrolled in college. Alumni Program officers employ a variety of strategies to provide support for students including using phone, email, social media, special events/seminars, and campus visits to be in constant contact with their graduates. Among many things, they offer general advice, tips, and support through the college experience. They also developed a College Contact Database, a list of college staff and community members they trust to support Urban Prep alumni at college, stay in touch with Urban Prep teachers and staff, and provide any additional information on the college. This also helps the department identify different campus resources such as advising, tutoring, and writing centers that will assist the students as well as extracurricular activities such as student organizations and study abroad programs. Additionally, they help identify scholarships, grant, and loan opportunities.

Urban Prep continues to support students in college by hosting career services workshops for students where they edit resumes, cover letters, and practice interviews.

Urban Prep's mission is to "provide a comprehensive, high-quality college preparatory education to young men that results in graduates succeeding in college."



UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CHARTER SCHOOL

www.uei-schools.org/WoodlawnHS · Number of Campuses: 4

*Figures based on 2013 CPS 20th Day Enrollment Data

Featured Campus	Neighborhood	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race	Special Education
Woodlawn Campus	Woodlawn	607	85%	98% African American / 1% Hispanic / 1% Other	15%

About University of Chicago Charter School

The University of Chicago Charter School (“UChicago Charter”) was founded in 1998 and has since grown to four campuses with approximately 1,900 students and 110 teachers throughout Chicago. They currently serve students from PreK-12th grade with the unified mission of achieving 100% acceptance to, and graduation from four-year colleges. Instruction at the UChicago Charter comes from a research-based approach that aims to target academic and social supports and constantly modify instruction. They work hard to provide all students and staff with direct access to advanced technology.

■ Persistence and Grit

UChicago Charter School purposefully instills positive non-cognitive skills through the senior thesis projects and other signature projects that all students participate in. Students complete long-term research studies in a variety of fields such as humanities, science, and social science. Students submit several drafts throughout the year and are required to make a final presentation to their thesis panel, which often includes high school faculty, staff from the Urban Education Institute and members of the broader University of Chicago community. Eventually, the process will call for students to present their findings and recommendations to peers, parents, and experts in the field upon completion. Teachers and staff at UChicago Charter School also put great importance and investment in athletics and extracurricular activities. Students participate in Building with Books, Companies that Care, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Redmoon Theatre, the Court Theater, University of Chicago S.M.A.R.T. Program, University of Chicago MapsCorps, Collegiate Scholars, Summer Accelerated Math Camp, Gallery 37 Arts, You Media, and the South Shore Culinary Program. Students are responsible for applying to participate in these programs, managing their time in relation to various school and family responsibilities and overcoming transportation or financial challenges.

■ College Fit

UChicago Charter School has developed a working list of approximately 20 colleges the school has formed partnerships with. School leaders look at the personal connections they hold at colleges, success rates, small student communities, and the level of success that their previous graduates and other low-income minority students have at these schools. Every student is required to complete 12 college applications that are socially, academically and financially within reach for each student. To help students make informed decisions, UChicago Charter School builds in several hours of college research for students during the school day, as well as sets up between 15 to 20 college visits for each student during their time at the campus.

■ School Culture

UChicago Charter School believes that college success should be the number one measure for high school success. UChicago Charter has developed the ‘6 to 16’ College Readiness Program—a program that begins in 6th grade and continues throughout college. This program asks the question ‘Why College?’ and works with students through the process of understanding the importance of college. ‘6 to 16’ is a direct pathway to college for students and is a required credit-bearing course for every student every year. During junior and senior year, teachers and counselors work with students to match them with the best college possible by analyzing affordability, fit, interests, and other individual considerations.

UChicago Charter School college-going culture extends far beyond the ‘6 to 16’ course. They host College Fridays and College Kickoff Day. College Fridays take place during morning meetings where the whole school gathers for a morning assembly. Every college acceptance letter is read out loud to students from every grade level. The acceptance letters are then posted in the hallways for people to view. Additionally, UChicago Charter School hosts Mandatory FAFSA nights for parents, so they can learn and complete the financial aid process. College Week is another major part of the culture. In 6th through 8th grade, students spend up to three days visiting colleges. In 9th grade, all students visit a historically black college or university. In 10th and 11th grade, students visit a college based on their personal interests such as a fine arts university or a state college. Then, in 12th grade, while the other grades are visiting colleges, senior students spend the week finishing college applications and teacher recommendations. All of these trips take place during the school year as a way to impart to students that going to college should be a priority.

■ Mentorship

Before graduation, there are five full-time counselors at UChicago Charter School who work with students to get the most out of their public education experience. There is a relatively small student to counselor ratio, which allows the students and counselor to form strong and positive relationships. Each counselor works with an individual grade level and focuses on the social-emotional and academic needs of the age group, and serves to set up personal, academic and professional goals for each student. The counselor is also the main point person to set up the summer programs that are offered to the students.

■ Tracking and Supporting

UChicago Charter School partners with the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute to track UChicago Charter alumni. UChicago Charter also employs a 13th grade counselor, who focuses on connecting with and supporting UChicago Charter School alumni. This counselor hosts 3–5 events per year for alumni, fostering community and support for UChicago Charter School’s alumni base. He or she also works to hire UChicago Charter School alumni and college graduates to work at the school in various roles.

UChicago Charter School believes that college success should be the number one measure for high school success. UChicago Charter has developed the ‘6 to 16’ College Readiness Program—a program that begins in 6th grade and continues throughout college.



CALL TO ACTION

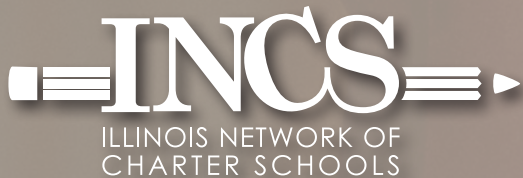
Districts must expand the metrics they evaluate beyond the ACT score to better inform our decisions about how to prepare students for college and life. Evaluating metrics, such as academic growth, grade point average, and non-cognitive skills, will give a richer picture of how schools are serving a student's full potential. In addition, tracking robust data about post-high school outcomes for students is essential for assessing the success of our public education system broadly. The charter public schools featured in this brief embody what is possible when successful practices that drive toward college enrollment and completion are implemented. We urge school and district leaders to consider the five approaches demonstrated to ensure all students are set up for success in college and beyond.



OUR MISSION

The Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) is dedicated to the improvement of education by establishing high-quality charter public schools that transform lives and communities. As the voice of Illinois charter schools, INCS advocates for legislation on behalf of the charter sector, provides support to strengthen charter schools, and influences education policy for the benefit of all public school students.

To find a school or learn more about INCS, visit www.incschools.org.



ENDNOTES

¹ACT, "ACT College Readiness Benchmarks": English (18), Algebra (22), Social Sciences (22) and Biology (23). ACT, 2013. Web. 4 October 2013 <<http://www.act.org/solutions/college-career-readiness/college-readiness-benchmarks/>>

²According to ACT, based on a national sample of colleges and universities, benchmark scores "represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses." Studies of first-year college GPA (ACT, 1998; Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2007) suggest that ACT scores and high school grades should carry approximately the same weight if an institution wants its admission criteria to reflect expected level of first-year academic performance. Another study of the relative ability of ACT scores and high school grades to predict first-year college academic performance (Noble & Sawyer, 2002) suggests that ACT scores should carry greater weight than high school grades if an institution wants its admission criteria to reflect *high* levels of first-year college GPA (defined as 3.50 or 3.75, as compared with 2.00, 2.50, or 3.00).

³Brown, Emma and Lyhn Bui. "Just 26 Percent of ACT Test Takers are Prepared for College." *The Washington Post* 21 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Web. 4 Oct. 2013.

⁴Advance Illinois, "2012 The State We're In: A Report Card on Public Education in Illinois." Nov. 2012.

⁵Roderick, Melissa, Jenny Nagakoa, and Elaine Allensworth. "From High School to the Future" *Consortium on Chicago School Research*. 2006. Retrieved October 4, 2013 from <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Postsecondary.pdf>

⁶Chicago Public Schools. "CPS Set Record Graduation Rate of 65.4 percent for School Year 2012-2013." Web. 4 Oct. 2013 http://www.cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/PR1_08_14_2013.aspx.

⁷Conklin, Kristin D. et al., "The American Dream 2.0: How Financial Aid Can Help Improve College Access, Affordability, and Completion". 2013 http://www.hemstrategists.com/americandream2-0/report/HCM_Gates_Report_1_17_web.pdf. Nagaoka, Jenny et al. "Barriers to College Attainment: Lessons Learned from Chicago," *Center for American Progress*. 2009. Retrieved Nov. 7, 2013 from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/01/pdf/ChicagoSchools.pdf>

⁸Allensworth, Elaine M. "Update to: From High School to the Future." *Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago*. 2006. Retrieved November 14, 2013 from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499368.pdf>

⁹Tough, Paul. *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012. Print.

¹⁰Strategic Data Project, "Do High School Graduates Enroll in Colleges That Maximize Their Chances of Success?" The Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University. 2012 <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/cepr-resources/files/news-events/sdp-spi-college-match-memo.pdf>

¹¹Common Core of Data, State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey, 2010-11.

¹²Tough, Paul. *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012. Print.

¹³Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O. (2012). *Teaching adolescents to become learners. The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance: A critical literature review*. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

¹⁴Richardson, R. C. and Skinner, E. F. *Helping first-generation minority students achieve degrees. New Directions for Community Colleges*, 1992: 29-43. doi: 10.1002/cc.36819928005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Evan Westerfield, North Lawndale College Prep Charter School
Lionel Allen, Urban Prep Academies
Shayne Evans, University of Chicago Charter School
Colleen Meehan, Leadership for Educational Equity Fellow



**Illinois Network
of Charter Schools**

205 West Randolph Street
Suite 1340
Chicago, Illinois 60606

Telephone 312.629.2063

Fax 312.629.2064

Website www.incschoools.org

E-mail info@incschoools.org

