



**ELEVATING CHICAGO:**  
Bridging the City's College Divide



## ■ Introduction

*In 1997, Chicago's first charter public high schools opened their doors. The educators leading these new public schools sought to improve the dire state of Chicago's public school system. They believed that through innovative teaching practices, increased autonomy, and strict accountability to families, educators could build school communities that give all children an opportunity to achieve at the highest level – not just a privileged few.*

**In the 20 years since, student enrollment at Chicago charter public high schools has grown to more than 28,000 students – more than a quarter of the city's enrollment in grades nine through twelve.** At scale, their impact on the city's students has been profound; charter school students were 20 percent more likely to enroll in college last year than their peers in district-run schools.

Half of  
the city's top  
20 schools  
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last year.

Although the charter public school sector's growth has been remarkable, it isn't surprising. Chicago's charter public schools are in demand for good reason, which is why thousands of families are on waitlists to attend them. In addition to outperforming the rest of the city in every major post-secondary category – including graduation, dropout, and college enrollment rates – charter high schools offer students the surest path to college in 83 percent of the neighborhoods they serve.

Even more impressive: charters are generating these outstanding outcomes while enrolling Chicago's most under-resourced and highest-need students. Citywide, charter high school students were 16 percent likelier to be Black or Latino, 10 percent likelier to be low-income, and 16 percent likelier to be students with disabilities than their peers in district-run schools last year.

But charter high schools aren't simply delivering above-average results – they are producing student outcomes on par with the city's most competitive high schools. In fact, half of the city's top 20 schools for college enrollment were charter schools last year. Students at these top tier charter schools were 64 percent likelier than students at district-run schools in the top 20 to be Black or Latino, twice as likely to be low income, and more than twice as likely to be students with special needs.

Altogether, this means that 20 years after they were founded, Chicago's charter high schools have made significant progress toward a decades-long effort by educators to eliminate the achievement gap between traditionally underserved students and their better-resourced peers.

### **An analysis of Chicago Public Schools (CPS)<sup>1</sup> data for the 2015-16 school year shows that:**

- **Compared to students who graduated from other public high schools, charter school graduates were 20 percent likelier to enroll in college.** Seventy-three percent of charter school graduates enrolled in college, leading the district-run school average of 61 percent by 12 points. Charter high schools outperformed the statewide rate for college enrollment by five points.
- **Half of Chicago's top 20 public high schools for college enrollment were charter schools.** Meanwhile, these top-tier charter schools served a vastly different student population compared to district-run schools in the top 20 – most of which were Chicago's selective enrollment high schools. Charter school students attending top 20 schools were more than twice as likely to be students with special needs, twice as likely to be low-income students, four times as likely to be bilingual, and 64 percent more likely to be Black or Latino.
- **In 83 percent of Chicago's neighborhoods with charter high schools, a charter school reported the community's highest college enrollment rate.** A charter high school had the neighborhood's highest college enrollment rate for graduates in 19 of the 23 community areas with charters reporting data.

<sup>1</sup>Schools included in this analysis were operated under the authorization of the Chicago Public Schools in 2015-2016.



## Chicago's Charter High Schools Enroll the City's Most Underserved Students

Over 28,000 students, including many of the city's most under-resourced students, attend Chicago's charter high schools. 95 percent of charter high school students last year were Black or Latino, and 90 percent were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL).

### STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS: 2015-16 SCHOOL YEAR

School Group	Black or Latino	SPED	Bilingual	FRPL
Charter Public High Schools	95.0%	16.2%	7.8%	89.5%
Public District-run High Schools	82.0%	13.9%	7.8%	81.6%

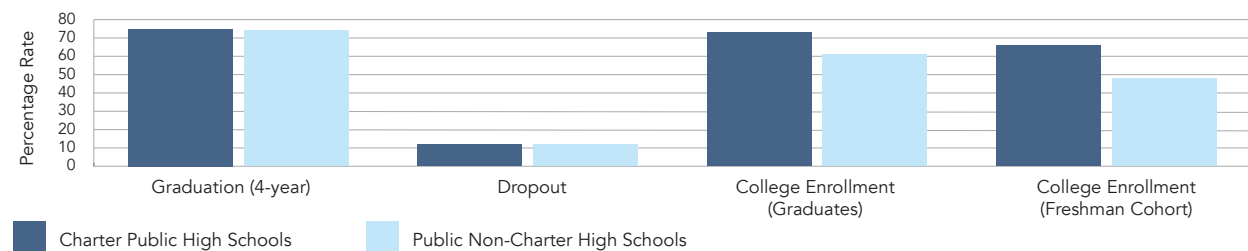
In fact, Chicago's charter high schools enroll students of color, special needs students, and low-income students at markedly higher rates than their district-run counterparts. Last year, students at charter high schools were 16 percent likelier than students at district-run high schools to be Black or Latino, 16 percent likelier to be students with disabilities, 10 percent likelier to be eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and equally likely to be bilingual learners.

## Charter High Schools Led the City In Every Major Achievement Category

Charter public high schools enrolled students of color, low-income students, and students with special needs at a higher rate than other public high schools, and delivered above-average results in every major achievement category.

On average, students at Chicago's charter high schools were one percent more likely than their peers at district-run schools to graduate in four years and two percent less likely to drop out.

### POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES: 2015-16



Charter schools delivered their largest advantage where it counted most: college matriculation. **Charter high school graduates were 20 percent likelier to enroll in college than CPS seniors in district-run schools, and freshmen who started high school at charter schools were an estimated 20 percent likelier to enroll in college than their peers at district-run schools.**

### POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES: 2015-16 SCHOOL YEAR

School Group	Four-Year Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate	College Enrollment Rate (Graduates)	College Enrollment Rate By Freshman Cohort (Estimated)
Charter Public High Schools	76.2%	13.1%	73.1%	56.3%
Public District-run High Schools	75.6%	13.3%	61.0%	46.8%



## ■ Many Charter High Schools are On Par With Chicago’s Most Competitive Public High Schools

*Charter schools aren’t simply delivering above-average results in the city’s most underserved communities. They’re producing student outcomes on par with the city’s most selective public schools. In fact, half of Chicago’s top 20 public high schools for college enrollment were charter schools last year.*

Enrollment in the top 10 charter schools very closely resembles that of Chicago’s public school system as a whole – in stark contrast to their selective district-run counterparts.

Of the ten district-run schools in Chicago’s top 20 schools for college enrollment, eight are selective enrollment high schools that require applicants to pre-qualify for enrollment based on test scores. After qualifying, students enter an application process which lasts from September through March and includes a separate entrance exam. As a result of this rigorous and time-consuming admissions process, gaining entry to Chicago’s best district-run high schools is notoriously difficult and favors students with access to test prep, tutors, and high-quality K-8 schools.



At the ten charter schools in the top 20, however, all students seeking admission are admitted equally, and no entrance exam is required. As a result, their enrollment very closely resembles that of Chicago’s public school system as a whole – in stark contrast to their selective district-run counterparts.

Compared to their peers at selective, district-run high schools, students at charter schools in the top 20 public high schools were more than twice as likely to be students with special needs, twice as likely to be low-income, more than four times as likely to be bilingual, and 64 percent more likely to be Black or Latino. Despite this profound contrast in student demographics, charter schools and district-run schools in the top 20 reported nearly identical college enrollment rates for graduates last year – charter high schools were barely edged out by their district-run counterparts, 86 percent to 85 percent.

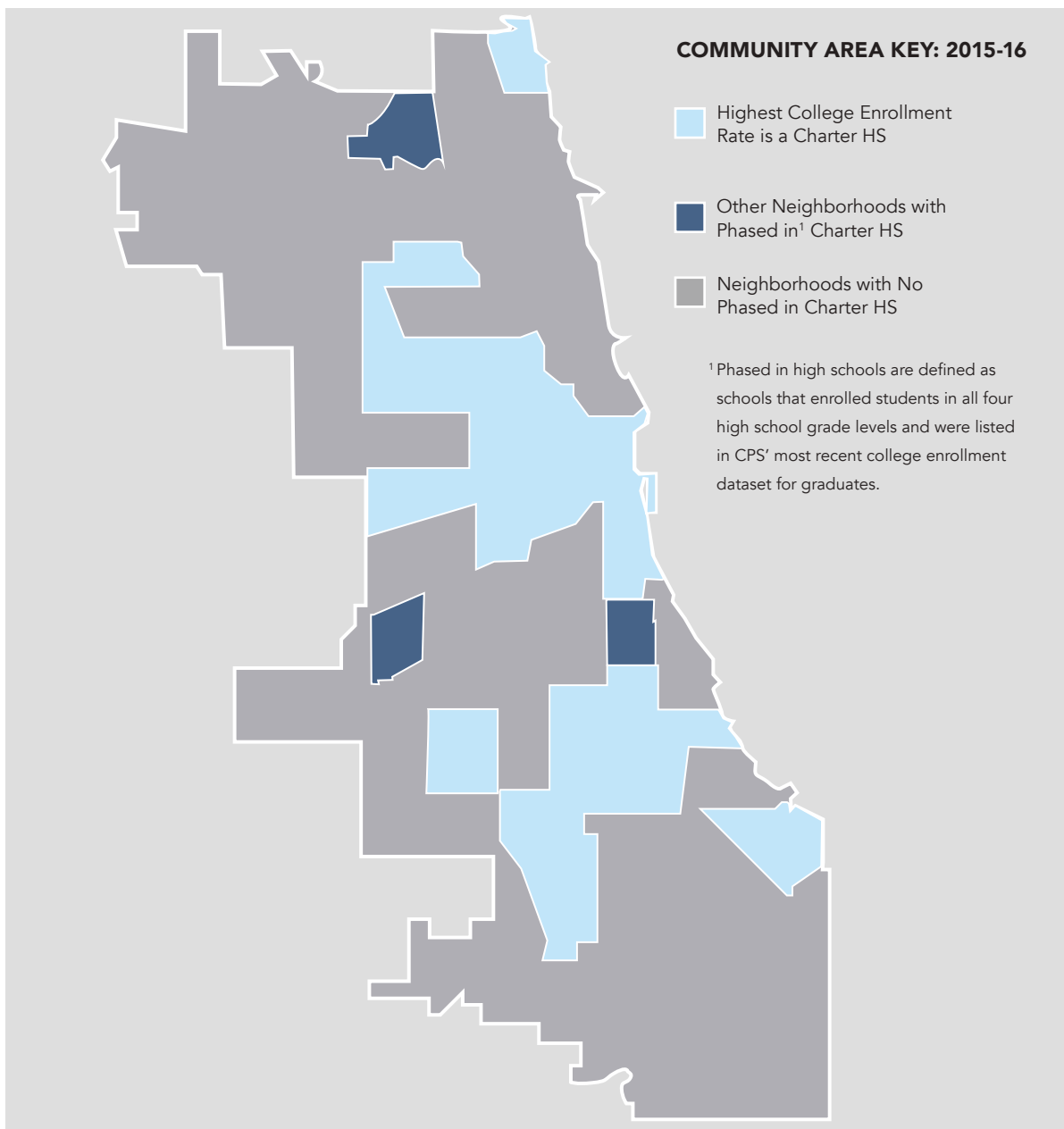
### CHICAGO’S TOP 20 PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS FOR COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES (GRADUATES)

Top 20 Schools by Type	Schools	College Enrollment (Graduates)	Black or Latino	FRPL	SPED	Bilingual
Charter Public High Schools	10	85%	96.6%	88.3%	14.0%	4.9%
District-Run Public High Schools	10	86%	58.8%	41.4%	6.9%	1.3%



## ■ Charter High Schools Paved the Surest Path to College in the Vast Majority of Their Neighborhoods

*In addition to leading the rest of the city in every major post-secondary achievement category, charter public schools also ranked first in post-secondary achievement in the vast majority of the individual communities they served. In 19 of the 23 community areas where charter high schools reported results – or 83 percent of their neighborhoods – a charter school produced the community’s best college enrollment rate for graduates.*





## ■ Conclusion: Twenty Years In, Chicago's Charter Public High Schools are Changing the Game for Underserved Students



*Twenty years after Chicago opened the doors of its first charter public school, charter high schools have proven to be the best pathway to college for students that have too often been left behind. In every post-secondary measure, charter high school students are not only outperforming the city average, but often achieving at the level of the city's most selective public high schools. They have achieved these results while serving a student population that is more likely to include students of color, students living in poverty, bilingual students, and students with disabilities.*

A college degree matters more than ever in today's

economy. College graduates earn more than \$1 million more over the course of their careers than those with only a high school diploma. New research has shown that 95 percent of the jobs created since the Great Recession of 2008 have gone to individuals who had completed college or career training after high school. By focusing relentlessly on preparing students to succeed in college, charter public schools are leveling the playing field for underserved students and bridging the divide between Chicago's tale of two cities.

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## ■ Methodology and Other Notes

*To identify high schools for this analysis, the complete list of 144 high schools covered in CPS' 2016-17 School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) report was retrieved from the file's High Schools and Combination Schools tabs. According to the report, the data contains "SQRP results for the 2016-17 school year, based on 2015-16 data."*

### **For each school, the following data was retrieved:**

- Student demographic data by race, from CPS' "Racial/Ethnic Report" dataset;<sup>2</sup>
- Enrollment data from "Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP" dataset;<sup>3</sup>
- Freshman cohort sizes, from CPS' "Cohort Dropout and Graduation Rate, 2015 Method" school level dataset;<sup>4</sup>
- College enrollment totals and corresponding graduating cohort totals, from CPS' "College Enrollment and Persistence Data" school level file;<sup>5</sup>
- Community area and geographic network data, from the City of Chicago's "Chicago Public Schools – School Locations SY1516" dataset.<sup>6</sup>



### **The resulting data sample included:**

- 144 high schools in total, including 96 public district-run schools and 48 charter public schools
- 127 high schools with complete graduation data, including 89 public district-run schools and 38 charter public schools
- 126 high schools with complete college enrollment data, including 92 public district-run schools and 34 charter public schools
- 120 high schools with complete college persistence data, including 86 public district-run schools and 34 charter public schools.

Chicago's four special education high schools were then removed from the assembled data and excluded from subsequent analysis.

<sup>2</sup> "Racial/Ethnic Report: School Year 2015-16," Chicago Public Schools: Demographics Reports, accessed January 25, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> "Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP Report: 2015-16," Chicago Public Schools: Demographic Reports, accessed January 25, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> "Cohort Dropout & Graduation Rates, 2015 Method: School Level," Chicago Public Schools: Metrics Reports, accessed January 25, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> "College Enrollment and Persistence Data," Chicago Public Schools: Accountability Reports, accessed January 25, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> "Chicago Public Schools – School Locations SY 1516," City of Chicago Data Portal, accessed January 25, 2017.



**The assembled data was used to compare charter and district-run schools in the following areas:**

- **Enrollment rates for students of color, students with disabilities, and bilingual students.**

Weighted comparisons were calculated at the citywide, geographic network, and community area levels.

- **Graduation and dropout rates.** Weighted comparisons were calculated using freshman cohort totals, four-year graduate totals, and dropout totals. These comparisons were run at the citywide, geographic network, and community area levels. In each community area with charters reporting data in these categories, the school type (charter or district-run) of the top scoring school was identified for both categories.

- **College enrollment and persistence rates for high school graduates.** College enrollment and graduate totals from the College Enrollment and Persistence Data file were used to compare college enrollment rates for students who graduated high school. In each community area with charters reporting data in these categories, the school type (charter or district-run) of the top scoring school was identified for both categories.

- **Projected college enrollment and persistence rates for adjusted freshman cohorts.** College enrollment rates for each school were applied to each school's graduate total for 2015-16 and divided into each school's senior cohort total for 2015-16. This figure was used to estimate each school's college enrollment rate for the most recent senior cohort. In each community area with charters reporting the data needed to run these projections, the school type (charter or district-run) of the top scoring school was identified.



Initial findings indicated community area level comparisons offered the best insight into the local impact of the post-secondary advantages charter high schools are delivering. As a result, evaluating Chicago's charter high school sector in the neighborhood context became the focus of developing key findings.





## Appendix – Neighborhood Achievement Leaders

Community Area	4- Year Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate	College Enrollment Rate (Graduates)	College Persistence	Projected College Enrollment Rate by Freshman Cohort
Archer Heights	Charter	Charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter
Auburn Gresham	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Avondale	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Chicago Lawn	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Douglas	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Englewood	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Grand Boulevard	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
Greater Grand Crossing	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Hermosa	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Humboldt Park	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
Loop	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
Lower West Side	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Near South Side	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Near West Side	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
North Lawndale	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
North Park	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
Riverdale	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter	Non-charter
Rogers Park	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
South Chicago	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Washington Heights	Charter	Non-charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
Washington Park	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
West Garfield Park	Charter	Charter	–	–	–
West Town	Non-charter	Non-charter	Charter	Non-charter	Charter
Woodlawn	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter	Charter
<b>Charter Share</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>74%</b>



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**CHICAGO**

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