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Preliminary Findings: The Impact of Hope Chicago on College Enrollment

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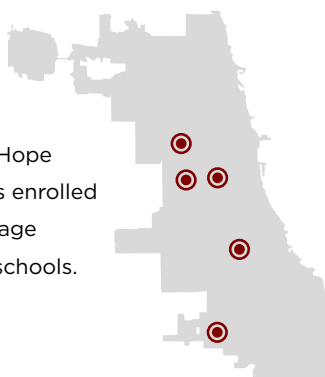
THE CHALLENGE

Higher education is often viewed as a key pathway for socioeconomic mobility, but persistent disparities in college access and success underscore the need for programs and policies with a proven track record of closing these gaps. First-generation students, those from low-income families, and students of color – like many of those served by Chicago Public Schools (CPS) – may face multiple barriers to college access and success, including information gaps, financial barriers, and academic constraints.

THE PROGRAM

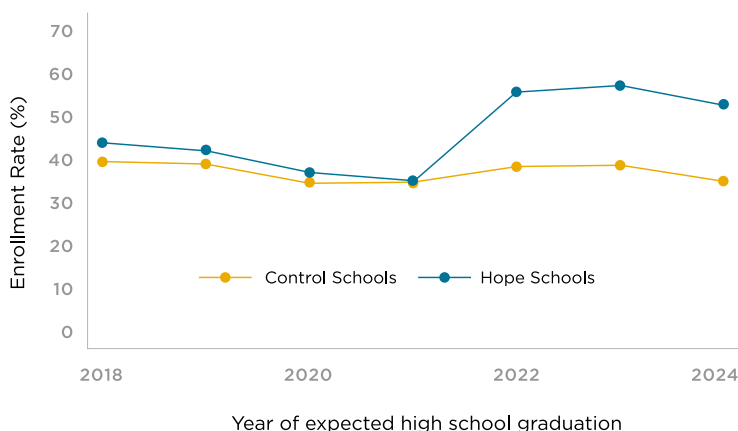
Hope Chicago is a two-generation college pipeline program that addresses these barriers through multiple components: funding to fully cover college tuition and fees, books and supplies, and living expenses; wraparound support, including advising and mentoring during both high school and college; and financial support for parents of Hope Chicago students to pursue postsecondary training. Beginning in the 2021-22 school year, five CPS high schools partnered with Hope Chicago (indicated on the map to the right). On average, 48% of students entering Hope Chicago schools were Black, 51% were Hispanic, and 14% were English language learners. In the year prior to the implementation of Hope Chicago, only 35 percent of students enrolled in college – 30% lower than the average college-going rate across CPS high schools.

[Click here for more information on Hope Chicago's work.](#)



HOPE CHICAGO'S PROGRAM SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED ENROLLMENT

After Hope Chicago was established, postsecondary enrollment rates increased to above 50% - representing a 40% improvement compared to prior years. In early analysis of the first two cohorts, we also find a significant increase in the number of students enrolling for at least two consecutive years, providing suggestive evidence of a positive impact on college persistence.



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THE STUDY

Since 2022, an Education Lab team led by principal investigators Matteo Magnaricotte and Lesley Turner has been working with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Hope Chicago to evaluate the impact of Hope Chicago's intervention on CPS students' college enrollment and completion. We study the first three cohorts of twelfth-grade students who have received Hope Chicago's program. This brief summarizes the findings on college enrollment as of August 2025.

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the causal effect of Hope Chicago, we use the 10 schools in the shortlist that were not selected for the program as a benchmark or "control schools" for the 5 selected schools. We then use a difference-in-differences (DiD) research that compares changes in outcomes for students in cohorts eligible for Hope Chicago at the 5 treated schools relative to earlier (ineligible) cohorts at those same schools to the same change in outcomes of corresponding cohorts at control schools. Assigning students to schools and expected graduation cohorts based on their ninth-grade enrollment allows us to overcome concerns that students transferred to Hope schools strategically to gain access to its services and funding. We measure students' postsecondary enrollment within one year of high school graduation using the National Student Clearinghouse database. For further details on our methodology and data, you can review the contents of our pre-analysis plan.

We find that Hope Chicago's program significantly increased postsecondary enrollment by approximately 14 percentage points, an increase of over 40% compared to prior cohorts. Pre-trend analysis validates the chosen research design. Event study analysis does not show meaningful differences in the impact of the program for different cohorts.

These estimates are preliminary and subject to change. Future work will refine the current analysis and focus on postsecondary persistence and graduation rates.



Photo provided by Hope Chicago.

THE EDUCATION LAB

The Education Lab partners with school districts to design, test, and scale programs to ensure all students have the opportunity for future success. By generating cutting-edge evidence in a real-world setting, our insights are not theoretical; they are designed to be applied in the classroom and to reach students at scale – translating into maximum impact for students nationwide.

[Click here or scan below for additional information on our work.](#)

