Seizing the Opportunity to Advance Education Equity:
Data Insights from Chicago’s Options School Students

June 2021
The Education Lab uses data to improve how public schools serve students facing significant barriers to completing a high school education by designing and testing innovative programs and policies that can support students at scale.

- Individualized Instruction
- Trauma-Informed Supports
- Reengagement
- Post-Secondary Success
Data Insights from Chicago’s Options Schools
Conventional Wisdom Suggests the Educational System is in Crisis...
But what we actually see in the data is that for most kids, the education system works quite well.
Graduation rates have increased dramatically in Chicago and nationally across the country.

Source: Chicago Public Schools, cps.edu/about/district-data/metrics
How do we best support students who face barriers to completing their high school degree?
1. Use data to identify priority students and their needs.

2. Provide students personalized supports—systematically and at scale.
Among 25,000 non-graduates in CPS since 2017, we find 637 unique enrollment pathways.
Among non-graduates in CPS, 2 in 3 enroll in an Options School at some point during high school.
This means the Options Schools system is the size of the entire DCPS high school system.
93% of students who attend an Options School for at least one day never return to a non-Options CPS school.
Percent of total CPS high school population attending an Options School each year, 2009-2020

3% of public high school students enroll in an alternative school nationwide

University of Chicago Education Lab
June 2021
"I have been **out of school**, but I am ready to come back."

"I am a **parent**, and I want a school that can support me as I finish high school."

"I was **expelled**, but I want to finish school. Where can I go?"

"I have been **involved in the juvenile justice system**, and I want to go back to school. Where can I go for help?"

"I am **behind on credits**, and I need help getting back on track toward graduation."

"I **have a job**, and need a school that works around my schedule."

Source: Chicago Public Schools, www.cps.edu/schools/re-engagement-to-high-school/
# Types of Option Schools in CPS

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<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>CPS-run Options Schools (4)</td>
<td>Schools in Cook County Jail, Cook County Juvenile Detention Center, and other CPS-run Options schools. <strong>York, Jefferson, Simpson, Peace &amp; Education.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SAFE Schools (2)</td>
<td>Educational options for students expelled from CPS or pending expulsion for serious violations. <strong>Camelot.</strong></td>
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<td>Alternative Learning Opportunity Programs (10)</td>
<td>Self-paced, blended learning models while following all CPS policies and procedures. <strong>Ombudsman, Pathways.</strong></td>
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<td>Charter Schools (20)</td>
<td>Traditional or accelerated learning models serving primarily students who have dropped out or at risk of dropping out. <strong>YCCS, Instituto.</strong></td>
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<td>Contract Schools (5)</td>
<td>Managed by external operators, offer an accelerated, traditional learning model, with smaller class sizes. <strong>Camelot, Little Black Pearl.</strong></td>
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Source: Chicago Public Schools, [www.cps.edu/schools/re-engagement-to-high-school/](http://www.cps.edu/schools/re-engagement-to-high-school/)
Options Schools serve students with a high concentration of complex, multifaceted needs.
* In the 2018-19 school year.
**Options Schools Students**

- Free & Reduced Lunch Eligible: 84%
- Homeless: 21%
- Individualized Education Plan: 21%

**Non-Options Schools Students**

- Free & Reduced Lunch Eligible: 76%
- Homeless: 4%
- Individualized Education Plan: 16%

*In the 2018-19 school year.*
In the 2018-19 school year:

**Options Schools Students**
- 13%: Previous Year L4-6 Disciplinary Infraction
- 38%: Previously Victimized
- 38%: Previously Arrested
- 93%: Transferred at Least Once

**Non-Options Schools Students**
- 5%: Previous Year L4-6 Disciplinary Infraction
- 12%: Previously Victimized
- 3%: Previously Arrested
- 27%: Transferred at Least Once

*In the 2018-19 school year.*
These differential experiences result in different outcomes...

91% 6-year graduation rate of students in non-Options Schools

39% 6-year graduation rate of students in Options Schools
But without Options Schools, they likely would have been worse.

91%

6-year graduation rate of students in non-Options Schools

? 6-year graduation rate of students without Options Schools
After graduating from high school, almost 70% of Options School students do not enroll in college.
40% of Options students come from just 20 CPS high schools.
Options students miss 10× more school days than the district average prior to enrolling in an Options School.

But that wasn’t always the case.
Four year prior to enrolling in an Options School, Options students’ attendance rates are nearly equal to those of other CPS students.
How can we best support students who face barriers to completing their high school degree?
A personalized approach might help.
Percent of Options School students in SY2019 who:

- Scored in the bottom quartile on their 8th grade NWEA test score: 20% (45%)
- Experienced housing instability: 6% (22%)
- Reported being victimized to the police: 15% (40%)
We have some evidence that this approach works
The Opportunity at Hand

Invest in **data analysis** to better understand the needs of students.

- Who are the students most at-risk of disengaging?
- What are their trajectories and experiences in the school system?
- What barriers do they face to completing their education?

Provide students **personalized supports**—systematically and at scale.

- Use data and relationships with key stakeholders to inform program design and evaluation
- Address policy barriers that prevent adoption

$123 billion

ARP funding provided to states and school districts
This personalized system should utilize touchpoints with social service agencies beyond the school system.

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<td>Medical and Dental Care</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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Identifying priority students and their needs must be informed by data

Partner with key stakeholders to design appropriate supports – including students, families, school and district staff

Build trust and relationships by working on concrete problems of practice and bring resources to partners

Must be complementary to and not supplant approaches to reduce harm

Schools cannot do it alone; we need institutional collaboration around specific individual needs to make this work.
Except where otherwise cited, statistics in this report are derived from SY2009 to SY2020 administrative data obtained from Chicago Public Schools.

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