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News Release

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT FOR CPS GRADS REACHES 50 PER CENT, MAYOR DALEY AND SCHOOL OFFICIALS SAY

Four-year Gains Outpace Nation in All Racial-Ethnic Groups

Half of all Chicago Public Schools graduates in the Class of 2007 enrolled in a college or university within the first year since high school graduation, Mayor Richard M. Daley and CPS officials said today.

The college enrollment rate of Chicago Public Schools graduates has climbed 6.5 percentage points over the last four years –outpacing the national rate in almost every category-- since the district created a department aimed at boosting the number of students who go on to colleges and universities.

The CPS Department of Postsecondary Education and Student Development also announced that even bigger jumps have been gauged in the number of students attending four-year universities and in the number of male students attending college, particularly among black and Latino graduates.

“Our schools have worked so hard over the past several years to lift students’ expectations, to help them see high school graduation not as an ending, but as only the first step toward a successful career in their chosen field,” Mayor Daley said in a news conference held at John Hope College Prep High School, 5515 South Lowe Ave., which has seen an increase of 20.6 percentage points in its college enrollment rate since 2004.

“The conversations in all of our high schools across the city are changing from ‘How do I get to graduation day?’ to ‘Where is the best place for me to continue my education?’” the mayor said.

In 2007 alone, the overall number of CPS graduates enrolling in post-secondary institutions rose by 2.1 percent over the previous year. Since 2004, when the CPS post-secondary department began tracking the college enrollment rate of graduates, the overall number has steadily climbed by about 2 percentage points each year.

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But CPS has seen bigger increases in enrollment since 2004 for all racial/ethnic groups, with the greatest increases among male students—white males from 52.7 percent to 63.6 percent; black males from 36.7 percent to 44.9 percent; and Latino males from 29.8 percent to 37.4 percent. While college enrollment for both gender groups rose, male enrollment increased at a higher rate than female enrollment—slowly closing the gender gap from 9.2 percent in 2004 to 6.1 percent in 2007.

The data, gathered from the National Student Clearinghouse, also shows that the percentage of CPS students attending four-year institutions has steadily increased since 2004, from 60.2 percent to 68 percent in 2007. While two-year colleges are the appropriate choice for some students, in general students are much less likely to drop out of four-year colleges. The percentage of students attending college full-time also rose: from 68.2 percent of enrolled students in 2006 to 71.3 percent in 2007.

CPS also has seen a higher percentage of students enrolling in highly selective colleges, including Big Ten Conference universities (29.8 percent), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (9.8 percent), Associated Colleges of the Midwest, a group of liberal arts colleges that includes Carleton, University of Chicago and Grinnell College (25.7 percent), Associated Colleges of Illinois, which includes Lake Forest College and Knox College (24.4 percent).

A small portion of CPS' overall gain in college enrollment over the last year – 0.5 percent – can be attributed to the inclusion of East-West University students, who had not been counted by the National Student Clearinghouse previously.

“Our post-secondary department has developed a lot of great programs in a short time to help more of our students realize the dream of getting a college education,” said Arne Duncan, CEO of Chicago Public Schools. “In some cases, they’ve been helping kids overcome non-academic hurdles, like completing their financial aid forms, and in other cases, they have focused on ensuring that our students finish high school.”

College enrollment also continues to increase across all GPA categories since 2004, with the greatest increases coming from students with a 2.5 to 2.9 GPA (7.6 percent increase) and students with a 2.0 to 2.4 GPA (6.3 percent increase).

Meanwhile, CPS has considerably outgained the nation in every category since 2004:

- CPS' overall college enrollment has gone up 6.5 percentage points, versus the nation's 0.5.
- Male student enrollment has increased 8.2 points, versus the nation's 4.7.
- Female student enrollment has increased 5.1 points, versus the nation's decrease of 3.2.

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- African-American student enrollment has increased 7.4 points, versus the nation's decrease of 5.9.
- Latino student enrollment increased 5.5 points, versus the nation's 2.0

"It's important for us to understand that graduating high school is no longer the finish line it once was," Daley said. "Forty or fifty years ago, a high school diploma better guaranteed a good job and success in life.

"In today's global economy, however, while having a high school diploma is still essential, it is simply not enough for many professions.

"That's why we've worked so hard over the past several years to lift students' expectations, to help them see high school graduation not as an end, but as the first step toward a successful career in their chosen field," the Mayor said.

CPS and the National Student Clearinghouse also continue to track CPS graduates as they progress through college; retention numbers will be available later this year.

Daley also reminded eighth-graders to sign up for Freshman Connection, a free summer program to be held at the eighth-graders' destination high schools.

"This program allows ninth-graders to attend academic and recreational programs at their destination high schools at no charge. Students can register right up until the program starts on June 30, and I encourage every incoming ninth-grader to take advantage of this tremendous opportunity to get a head start on high school," Daley said.

CPS is offering incentives for eighth-graders who sign up and complete Freshman Connection. Students who registered before the early deadline of April 18 received iTunes gift cards. Students who attend the program and have two or fewer absences will receive mp3 players. CPS also will provide free CTA passes for every student in the program who needs one.

"Our schools are at a turning point. We must not settle into the status quo," Daley said. "Our work isn't done until every student in every school is reaching their full potential and is on the path to the positive future they want for themselves."

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