

DRIVERS OF *Postsecondary* READINESS

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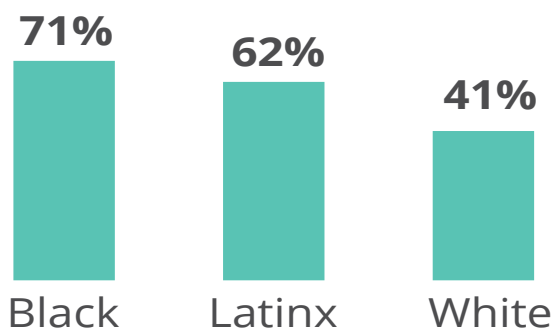


Young people are not *sufficiently* *or equitably* prepared for life after high school.



46%

of Illinois' community
college students are placed
in remedial courses.



Black and Latinx students
are more likely to be placed
in remedial courses than
White students.

Nationally, high school graduation rates have increased from 78% in 2011 to 85% in 2018. In Chicago, the rise in graduation rates during the same time period was even steeper, moving from about 57% to 78% (National Center for Educational Statistics). However, significant equity gaps remain when the Windy City's graduation rates are further broken down. In 2018, 72% and 78% of Black and Latinx students respectively graduated, while 86% of White students graduated (LaTrace, 2018).

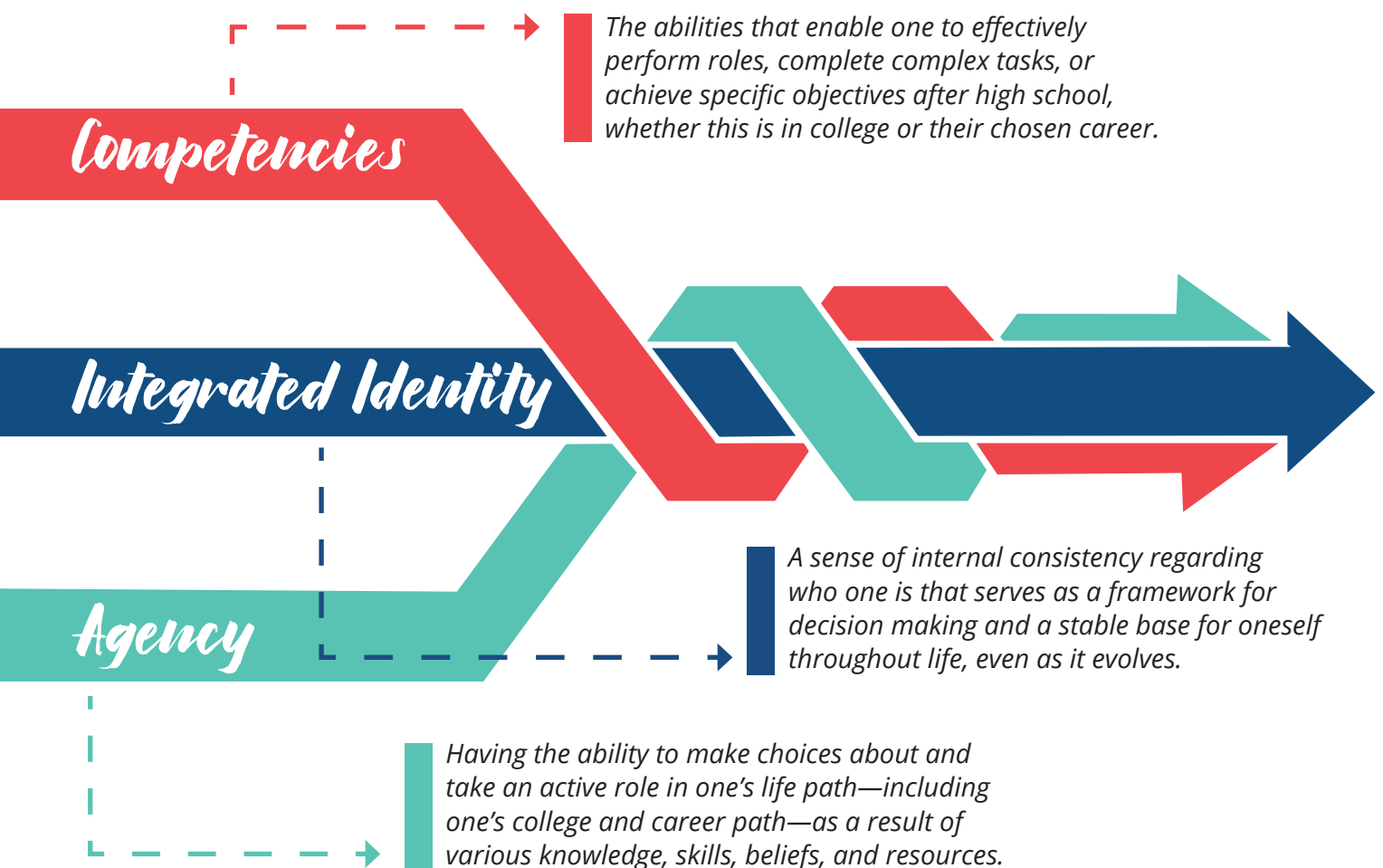
In addition, postsecondary readiness rates remain stagnant across the board. One study across Illinois estimated that, in spite of increases in graduation rates between 2013 and 2018, the college and career readiness rate remained at just 38% (Advance Illinois, 2019). In addition, key indicators of students' lack of postsecondary readiness, such as placement in remedial courses, remain high and inequitably distributed. Within Illinois, 71% of Black students and 62% of Latinx students are placed in remedial courses within Illinois community colleges compared to 41% of White students (Advance Illinois, 2019).

The lack of postsecondary readiness is especially problematic in today's economy because trends suggest that 65% of jobs need some form of postsecondary education and training beyond high school (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013). In addition, it's highly likely that students who enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation will need the same level of skills and knowledge as students entering college (Kline & Williams, 2007).

If we want all young people to thrive in and transform the 21st century, we must better prepare them for life after high school.

So what can be done to better prepare young people for life after high school? The first step is to understand the factors that drive success. While there are various ways to categorize and label these factors, the [University of Chicago Consortium in School Research Foundations for Young Adult Success \(YAS\) Framework](#) provides a helpful place to start. It highlights three factors that are critical to preparing young people for meaningful, productive futures: **competencies**, an **integrated identity**, and **agency**. Each of these factors can also be used to understand what drives postsecondary success, whether this entails admission to and the successful completion of a postsecondary program or immediate entry into a fulfilling career.

To better support our students we must understand what factors *drive* success.



Competencies

AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

The YAS framework (2015) defines competencies as, “the abilities that enable people to effectively perform roles, complete complex tasks, or achieve specific objectives.” When students do not develop critical competencies before graduating high school it can be hard to remediate. In fact, research demonstrates that remediation impedes graduation, especially in the first two years of college (Moore & Shulock, 2009; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Students who need remedial courses at community colleges are 12% more likely—and, at four-year universities, 74% more likely—to drop out (Education Reform Now). In addition, remediation is costly, it takes students six to 11 months longer to graduate if they persist through remediation and their education costs them from \$3,000

Black students who are placed on these remedial courses, only about 8% go on to graduate compared to ~32% of White students.

A wide range of competencies support postsecondary success, and while the specific competencies needed for success in different contexts vary, research suggests that today many students who enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation need the same level of skills and knowledge as students entering college (Kline & Williams, 2007). The importance of metrics like grade point average and test scores suggest academic knowledge and skills are one set of competencies that are important to postsecondary success. In fact, these metrics are two of the three strongest

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to \$12,000 more than if they'd arrived ready for college-level work (Education Reform Now). Within Illinois, 46% of community college students required remediation in 2019, mostly in Math (Advance Illinois, 2019). This challenge disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx students; 71% of Black students and 62% of Latinx students are placed on remedial courses within Illinois community colleges compared to 41% of White students. In addition, of the

predictors of college postsecondary success among Chicago Publics Schools (CPS) students, a pattern that is also seen beyond just Chicago (Miller, 1998). A 2004 study found that students with the highest scores were six times more likely to graduate from college in four years than students with the lowest scores (Ryan, 2004).

Research also shows that rigorous coursework and attendance are strong predictors of postsecondary success

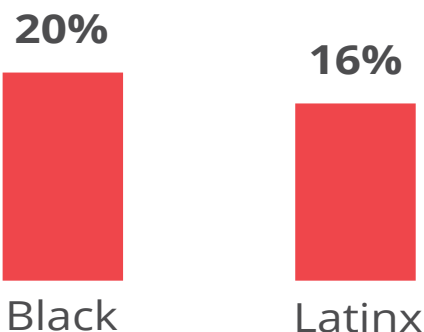
(Miller, 1998). Students who can manage an adequate course load and take rigorous classes, including “at least three years of mathematics, typically through the content of Algebra II, and four years of rigorous, grade-level English” are more likely to succeed in college (Achieve, 2017). However, only about one-third of students currently reach this benchmark and the numbers are lower for Black and Latinx students. Specifically, while nearly 75% of high school graduates will attend college, only 32% of students who enter 9th grade and graduate four years later will have mastered basic literacy skills and have completed the coursework necessary to succeed in a four-year college course. For Black students, this figure is 20%, and for Latinxs it is just 16%. However this is not the fault of students, it is largely the result of fewer opportunities being provided to Black and Latinx young people, including less access to rigorous coursework, such as AP classes (Oakes, 2015; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016)

It is also important to note that academic success and behaviors, such as attending school and completing assignments during ninth grade, are especially crucial for keeping students “on-track” to graduate. Within CPS, the link between ninth-grade course failure and eventual dropout is so strong that each additional failed semester course in the first year of high school is associated with a 15 percentage point decrease in the probability of graduating (Farrington et al., 2012). This is worrisome given that ninth-grade failure is widespread within the metro area. Over half (53%) of ninth-graders in Chicago fail at least one semester of a course and 41% fail two or more (Farrington et al., 2012). This can result in a lack of credit accumulation, which plays a key role in the link between the ninth-grade transition and school dropout. Also, while overall 5-year high school



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completion rates across Chicago increased to 78.2% in 2018 compared to 56.9% in 2011, one-third of Black male students are still not completing high school.

However, grades, “in addition to measuring students’ content knowledge and core academic skills, also reflect the degree to which students demonstrate a range of behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that are critical for success in school and in later life,” such as skills that allow them to interpret information, solve a variety of problems, collaborate with others, and manage themselves well through the process (Conley, 2007; Farkas, 2003; Paris & Winograd, 1990). As a result, thinking skills and interpersonal skills that are transferable across various postsecondary pathways are essential for learning environments to cultivate.

These skills are broad and high leverage. They permit a freshly appointed graduate to make an immediate contribution to a workplace (Greenwood et al., 1987; Elliott et al., 1994; Athiyaman, 2001). In particular, the demonstration of social-emotional skills increases employability for entry-level positions in high-demand jobs (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Yet, while employers have expressed a desire for hires who possess team working, decision-making, and communication skills, they also note that graduates currently entering the labor market tend to be deficient in them (Silver, 1991; Assister, 1995; Sargeant & Matheson, 1996; Nabi & Bagley, 1998; LDP, 2000; IIE, 2001).



Integrated Identity

AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Integrated identity is “a sense of internal consistency of who one is across time and across multiple social identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, profession, culture, gender, religion). An integrated identity serves as an internal framework for making choices and provides a stable base from which one can act in the world” (Nagaoka et al., 2015). Individuals who have an integrated identity deeply understand themselves, including what they value and believe in, as well as what their strengths, interests, and areas for growth are.

Working toward an integrated identity is a key developmental focus during middle and high school (Erikson, 1972). In late adolescence, students tend to form an independent sense of who they are and who they want to become. They grow more capable of identifying what they value about themselves, their peers, and family members and increase their match potential for future plans (Cohen & Garcia,

2008). Having an integrated identity is important for students as they navigate decisions about their postsecondary pathways. Knowing one’s interest and goals as well as the community one wishes to be a part of can help a young person choose a career track or college that is a good fit. This is important because research suggests feeling a sense of belonging while in college, especially as a freshman, is important to retention and overall success (Farrington et al., 2012). This is particularly important for students of color, whom research has shown tend to report a lower sense of belonging than their peers while in college (Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008a). However, in CPS, only about one-third of CPS students who aspire to complete a four-year degree enroll in a college that matches their qualifications, and indeed, even among the most highly qualified students in CPS, only 38% enroll in a matched college (Roderick et al., 2008).

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In addition to deeply understanding one's identity, having a sense of self-efficacy is also important to postsecondary success. Young people need to feel confident in their ability to succeed in their life goals. Self-

efficacy contributes significantly to scholastic performance (Multon et al., 1991). Beliefs in personal efficacy have a substantially greater impact on academic performance than the personal, social, and occupational outcomes expected for proficient performance (Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989). By influencing preparatory development and occupational choices,

efficacy beliefs partly shape the courses that lives take. Additionally, perceived academic efficacy plays an influential role in career choice and development. It helps predict academic grades, the range of career options considered, and persistence and success in chosen fields (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Lent & Hackett, 1987).

After graduation, self-efficacy also influences college and career success. Research suggests those who have a high sense of efficacy are more successful in regulating their own learning and do better academically than those who are uncertain about their intellectual capabilities (Pintrich

& Schrauben, 1992; Wood & Locke, 1987). College students with high self-efficacy are better able to adjust to the more rigorous academic expectations in college. They also perceive they have a greater range

of career options and majors (Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986). Similarly, academic self-efficacy is linked to aspirations for careers that require advanced education and training (Ali, & Saunders, 2008). In addition, first-generation college-bound students are more likely to attend and persist in college when they can envision themselves as college graduates, believe they can do it, aim to do it by setting realistic goals throughout school,

and then organize themselves in such a way so as to make it happen (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Overall, because strong self-efficacy beliefs affect how one construes and responds to setbacks, self-efficacy increases one's likelihood of success, regardless of actual ability level, whereas a low sense of efficacy to manage the academic demands and interpersonal aspects of college life is accompanied by high levels of anxiety and stress-related symptoms (Sol-berg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993; Farrington et al., 2012).

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Agency

AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Agency is “the ability to make choices about and take an active role in one’s life path, rather than solely being the product of one’s circumstances” (YAS, 2015). Having this ability requires a mixture of knowledge and skills, belief in one’s ability to control a situation and be successful, and resources such as financial support and social capital. In addition to the types of competencies discussed above, other wayfinding skills are an essential ingredient in the postsecondary success recipe. Wayfinding skills help students navigate important transitions and challenges throughout their lives.

For high-schoolers, one important wayfinding skill is the ability to navigate postsecondary decision-making, including the college application process. Filing a FAFSA and applying to multiple colleges are important steps of this process and help shape students’ likelihood of being accepted to and enrolling in a four-year college (Roderick et al., 2008). However, CPS students who aspire to complete a four-year degree often do not effectively participate in this process (Roderick et al., 2008). In fact, among CPS students who aspire to attain a four-year degree, only 41% took the steps necessary in their senior year to apply to and enroll in a four-year college. Students of all levels of qualifications have difficulty taking the steps to enroll in a four-year college.

Some students begin the college application process with great intentions but are not able to make these intentions a reality. In CPS, nearly all high school graduates hope to complete a college degree (two- or four-year), but in the end, only two-thirds



65%

of 2017 CPS graduates enrolled in a two- or four-year college program by the fall after graduation.

58%



Black

66%



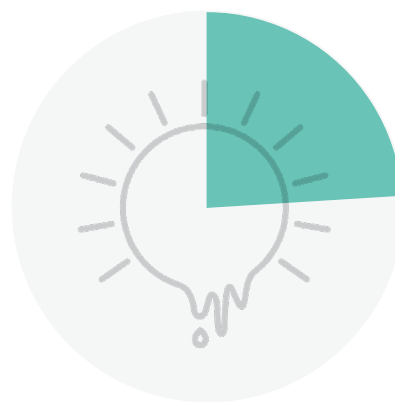
Latinx

Enrollment rates were slightly higher for Latinx student and lower for Black students.

of those graduates enroll in college by the fall after graduation (CPS, 2017). The cost of college and navigating financial aid is one reason for this. One study found that students from low-income backgrounds, who need aid the most, are more likely to state that attaining it is too complicated and that the cost of college is too high for them to apply, and they are less likely to apply for financial aid early in order to maximize their likelihood of receiving state and institutional aid (De La Rosa, 2006; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006). This demonstrates the importance of building finance literacy skills and providing students with differential support as they navigate financial aid applications based on their level of need.

Some of the mismatch between students' intentions and actual college enrollment is also due to the phenomenon known as 'summer melt.' Harvard University defines summer melt as "a common problem, especially among low-income students. Many high-school graduates who have been accepted to college and say they plan to enroll are knocked off-course if they do not obtain sufficient financial aid, miss administrative deadlines, or lack support from family and friends." Summer melt affects roughly 20% of students from low-income communities who intend to matriculate at college but end up never showing up on their college campus, with rates as high as 40% for some populations (Castle & Page, 2013). This emphasizes both the importance of helping students build the wayfinding skills needed to support agency and the need to provide students with support and guidance until these skills are sufficiently developed. It is also critical to note that first-generation college students and students from low-income backgrounds are especially dependent on nonfamilial adults, such as teachers, to assist them with the college application process (Roderick et al., 2008).

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24%

of students in district run CPS schools experienced summer melt in 2017.

POSTSECONDARY READINESS

Toolkit

Fostering the competencies, integrated identity, and agency that are important to postsecondary success requires schools to make intentional design decisions. However, understanding the range of decisions a school could make and the practices they could integrate into their overall design can be challenging. Transcend has assembled a toolkit with information on various practices in hopes of making the process a bit easier.

The toolkit explains each practice with a short overview, highlights additional research on the importance of the practice for postsecondary readiness, and then

provides some examples of how various schools are engaged in the practice as well as resources to help schools get started with it. You can access the toolkit entries through the links below.



[Rigorous Curriculum and Course Load](#)



[Interventions and Support for Struggling Students](#)



[Opportunities for Accumulating Credentials and Credits Before Graduation](#)



[Transitional Support for Ninth Graders](#)



[Opportunities to Practice Self-Direction and Perseverance](#)



[Opportunities to Develop Social Skills and Responsibilities](#)



[Opportunities to Transfer Skills to Different Contexts](#)



[Identity Affirmation and Sense of Belonging](#)



[Culture of Success](#)



[Opportunities to Build Social Capital](#)



[Opportunities to Explore the Postsecondary Landscape](#)



[Support for Finding a Good Fit and Making a Well-matched Postsecondary Choice](#)



[Postsecondary Preparation and Aid](#)



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