

## **GoCPS: A First Look at Applications and Offers Summary**

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Chicago Public Schools (CPS) offers many high school choices for students. Yet, applying to high school is complicated. CPS offers more than 250 choice programs and 11 selective enrollment programs (SEHSs) in 132 high schools. The programs have different eligibility and application requirements, and until this year, there was no common deadline or place for application submission for all programs. In addition, some students ended up receiving offers from several choice programs while others received none. On April 26, 2017, the Chicago Board of Education adopted a common application across all high school choice programs, including charter high schools, in order to streamline the high school application process. For incoming ninth grade students, the Board also adopted a single best offer model for choice programs.<sup>1</sup> Under this type of system, students receive only one offer from among the choice programs to which they apply. The choice program application, the SEHS application, and many elementary school applications were all moved to an online platform known as GoCPS. The district expects that this new system, will make the high school application process simpler, more transparent, and more equitable for students and families.

Using GoCPS, prospective ninth-graders ranked up to 20 programs. A computerized selection process assigned students to the highest ranked program on their application for which they were eligible and for which seats were available.<sup>2</sup> Program capacity and pre-designated priorities, such as siblings of current students and those living close to the school, influenced how many and which students received offers to each program. When programs had more applicants than available seats, a lottery or application points determined offers, depending on the program. Applications were processed in two rounds. Round 1 was open to anyone interested in enrolling in CPS for ninth grade in fall 2018. Round 2 was open to anyone who did not apply in round 1, did not get an offer in round 1, or preferred a program that was still available in round 2 to a program they were offered in round 1. As in prior years, students were also guaranteed a seat in the general education program at their neighborhood high school.

This paper presents information about the first year of implementation of GoCPS for

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The longer white paper of the same title is available at <https://www.chicagofed.org/~media/others/people/research-resources/barrow/2018-barrow-sartain-delatorre-go-cps-white-paper-pdf.pdf>. Any views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Federal Reserve System, the UChicago Consortium, the University of Chicago, or the Chicago Public Schools.

<sup>1</sup> The SEHS application used the same platform and deadline as the choice program application, but operated in a parallel admission system with the same rules and requirements as in prior years. Because there were no major changes to the SEHS application process, this paper focuses on the choice program application.

<sup>2</sup> Some programs have academic eligibility requirements, some programs require supplemental information (e.g., essays or letters of recommendation), and others require admission screenings, such as auditions. Some programs admitting students based on points also set minimum scores for eligibility. Based on conversations with GoCPS and OAE personnel, principals maintained or set eligibility and selection requirements for each of their programs, many of which existed prior to the adoption of GoCPS. Thus, eligibility and selection requirements are not uniform across similar programs.

students planning to enroll in ninth grade in the fall of 2018. We describe high school programs, student applications, implementation of the selection process, and student offers and acceptances.<sup>3</sup> Main findings include the following:

- Most of the CPS eighth graders in 2017-18 (91 percent, or roughly 24,500 students) completed a high school application using GoCPS.<sup>4</sup> Another 2,500 eighth graders from outside the district also submitted an application.
  - On average, students ranked 7.4 choice programs on their application, with African American students and students who live in lower-income neighborhoods typically ranking more programs.
- Centralized information about demand for choice programs is available for the first time as a result of the centralized application process. Fifty-one out of 273 choice programs (19 percent) had more than 10 times as many applications as seats available. Twenty-one programs (8 percent) had fewer applications than seats available.
  - Arts and Careers and Technical Education (CTE) programs, programs basing admissions on points, and programs in schools highly rated on the district's School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) were more likely to be in high demand.
  - General education and military programs, programs basing admissions on lotteries with eligibility requirements, and programs located in schools with low SQRP ratings were more likely to be in low demand.
  - Current information on program demand is incomplete because all students are entitled to enroll in their neighborhood program even if they did not rank the program on their application. In addition, the few students enrolled in a program in eighth grade that also serves high school grades are eligible to continue in that program without having to apply. We will have a more complete understanding about program demand, particularly for neighborhood programs, after students enroll in the fall.
- Students were offered seats as described on the GoCPS website.
  - In cases where a lottery determined admissions, both the assigned lottery number and whether a student was offered a seat were random for students participating in the lottery (i.e., unrelated to student characteristics or how highly a student ranked the program).
  - In cases where application points determined admissions, students were admitted in order of points. All students admitted to a given program had higher scores than students in the same priority group who were not admitted.

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<sup>3</sup> This paper does not include information on student enrollment; these data will not be available until after the school year starts. A comprehensive follow-up report that includes enrollment analysis and additional findings will be published winter 2018-19.

<sup>4</sup> Our numbers differ somewhat from those reported by CPS due to differences in when eighth-grade enrollment was measured.

- Based on other research about these kinds of selection processes, the best strategy for students is to rank the programs they most want to attend at the top of their lists.
- Almost all applicants from round 1 (93 percent) received an offer at a program they ranked on their application. For 51 percent, the offer was for their top-ranked program; 81 percent received an offer from one of their top three-ranked programs.
  - A small share of round 1 applicants (5.8 percent) received no offer from either a choice program or a SEHS program. Students who did not receive an offer tended to rank fewer programs. Of the applicants who did not receive a round 1 offer, 26 percent submitted an application in round 2.
- Of the roughly 4,300 applicants who participated in round 2, 85 percent received an offer at a program they ranked in round 2. For 61 percent, the offer was for their highest ranked program; 82 percent received an offer from one of their top three-ranked programs.
  - Fewer than 300 round 2 applicants did not receive an offer in round 2 and had not accepted an offer in round 1. Most (84 percent) were on at least one waitlist, and all are eligible to attend their neighborhood program.
- Roughly 20,000 ninth grade seats remained unfilled in programs across the district.
  - Most (approximately 13,000) reflect excess capacity in CPS due to several years of declining enrollment, which is unrelated to GoCPS.
  - We also expect approximately 7,000 students will enroll in their neighborhood program or continue in a program that also serves higher grades. Some of these will be applicants who rejected their high school choice program offer or did not respond. Others will not have participated in GoCPS at all. Information about open seats in the district will be more complete when students enroll in the fall.
- The GoCPS system has streamlined the application and offer system. Yet the various program requirements, priorities, and selection rules are still complicated. Thus, families, schools, and the public may still find the system difficult to understand.

As of the release of this paper in August 2018, the GoCPS applicants have yet to enroll in high school. During the 2018-19 school year, we will study patterns in enrollment, including whether students enroll in the program where they accepted an offer, how many students enroll in programs at their neighborhood high schools, how many programs have enrollments at, above, or below capacity, and how those enrollments compare to projections based on accepted offers. We also have more to learn about the accessibility of programs to different subpopulations of students. For example, we want to understand the role that the distance between students' homes and various school programs plays in students' program preferences. Finally, as these students progress through high school, we will study whether GoCPS influences student transfers and mobility, academic outcomes, and experiences in school.