

Rogers Park & Edgewater Education Politics

Chicago Math and Science Academy Boasts High Graduation Rate

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ROGERS PARK — Officials from a neighborhood charter school are boasting an expected graduation rate this year that's 29 percent higher than the rest of [Chicago Public Schools](#).

After CPS Chief Executive Officer Barbara Byrd-Bennett [announced last week](#) she expected to graduate 63 percent of high school seniors city-wide, up from 44 percent a decade ago, [Chicago Math and Science Academy](#) principal Aydin Kara was quick to point out his charter school's successes, including a projected 92 percent graduation rate.

"When you compare us, our students are more likely to go to college, more likely to get scholarships," Kara said of the school formed in 2004 at 7212 N. Clark St.

Kara's comment comes at a time when tempers are flaring over public education in Chicago after Byrd-Bennett and Mayor Rahm Emanuel fought for months to close "underutilized" schools throughout the city. Two weeks ago, the Chicago Board of Education [decided to shutter](#) 49 elementary schools and one high school despite widespread protest.

Although no schools in Rogers Park were closed, [activists have protested against new charter schools from opening](#). Opponents say the semi-private institutions can be used to replace, or drain resources from, neighborhood schools like [Sullivan High School](#) and [Senn High School](#).

Ald. Joe Moore, a proponent of the math and science academy, has even supported a moratorium on new charters for the next school year.

"It's been tough," Kara said of being billed as part of the problem, but credited the school's strong reputation in the community as an anchor.

School spokeswoman Irene Bermudez said CPS was "moving in the right direction," but was still a ways off from the charter school's expected 92 percent senior graduation rate this year.

Another telling statistic is the percentage of students who begin in ninth grade at a school and stay there and graduate within five years.

In 2012, Chicago Math and Science Academy's rate was 79.4 percent, while Senn High School's was 47.9 and Sullivan High School's was 45.2.

The school further boasted a 92 percent college acceptance rate for its 80 seniors this year, who received \$6.1 million in scholarships.

Bermudez says accountability instilled by the school's five-year contracts with CPS and its mission as a college-prep school motivate both faculty and students.

Kara says the 600-student school is small enough so its two counselors can help each senior apply to schools.

"We know the needs of every student," he said. "That's the beauty of being a small school." And the school has a waiting list of 400, he said, and admits students on a first-come, first-served basis, unlike selective magnet schools.

Neighboring schools, like Senn and Sullivan, have similar demographics but enroll more students. Senn has more than 1,000.

"We have a system to help every eligible student achieve their dreams," he said. "We are not letting a single student slip."

And Kara insists charters like his — and two others managed by the same company, [Concept Schools](#), that were [recently approved to open in the city](#) — "are not the reason CPS is closing down schools."



Chicago Math and Science Academy seniors, from right, Alexis Castro, 18, Amanda Hyde, 17, Cesar Ayala, 19, and Pedro Rayes, 17, walk in December alongside their social studies teacher Tom Stonis,