When a school district implements a portfolio approach, it offers many different kinds of schools and programs to students and families. Chicago has charter, career academy, magnet, and selective enrollment high schools—just to name a few. CPS has proposed expanding the number of selective enrollment schools. At the same time, the district faces budgetary constraints and must make decisions about where to invest resources. The research presented in this snapshot offers implications for district policymakers.

- Application criteria affect who is admitted. For example, when grades are included, girls are more likely to be admitted because they have higher grades on average than boys. When SES tiers are used, tier 1 (low SES) students are likely admitted because student achievement and SES are correlated (and, therefore, on average, tier 1 applicant scores are higher than applicant scores from tier 4 applicants).

- SEHS applicants with strong academic records succeed academically at high schools that are not SEHSs. Students who just miss the cutoff for admission to a SEHS do just as well or better on a variety of academic outcomes, including test scores and college enrollment rates, than similar students who are admitted to a SEHS. Many who miss the cutoff attend high-performing neighborhood high schools or special programs within high schools, like International Baccalaureates.

- Students perceive SEHSs as having safer, stronger school climates than otherwise similar students who just missed the cutoff. In this study, admission to a SEHS had significantly negative effects on GPA and attendance at a selective college for tier 1 students. Do these negative effects reflect a need for more student supports or changes in guidance on college applications from counselors at SEHSs? It is that many colleges rely heavily on GPA and test scores without regard to the characteristics of a student’s high school? Are there other explanations to consider?

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Research Findings

1 Applicant Preferences
Applicants tend to prefer the same selective enrollment high schools. These most-competitive schools:

- Are located near downtown or on the north side of Chicago. They include:
  - Jones College Prep
  - Lane Tech College Prep
  - Northside College Prep
  - Walter Payton College Prep
  - Whitney Young Magnet High School

- Are listed as the first choice by:
  - 75% of tier 1 (low SES) applicants
  - 91% of tier 4 (high SES) applicants

- Are the schools with the highest cutoff scores for admission.

2 Components of the Admission System
The components considered in any admission process influence who is admitted. CPS uses multiple academic performance metrics and a proxy for students’ SES for SEHS admissions. The district made these choices in part to create more diverse selective enrollment high schools.

- Including SES tiers increases access to the most-competitive SEHSs for low-SES students. Black, Latino, and Latino students, compared to simulated admissions without SES tiers.

3 Student Outcomes
The common perception is that SEHSs benefit all students who attend them. The picture is more complicated, particularly for students who live in low-SES neighborhoods.

Comparing Similar Students
For each SEHS, there are published admission cutoff scores. An applicant scoring above the cutoff score received an offer, while an applicant below that score did not. There is likely little difference in the academic skills of the students very close to, but on either side of, the cutoff. We compare outcomes (like test scores, grades, college enrollment, and perceptions of safety at school) of students in the same SES tier who are on either side of the admission cutoff for that tier. This technique is called a regression discontinuity design.

Compared to similar students, SES groups:

- Have similar:
  - Test scores
  - High school graduation rates
  - College enrollment rates

- Report better experiences:
  - Higher levels of safety at their high school
  - Stronger relationships with peers

How Do Different Academic Criteria Affect Who is Admitted?
On average, female and Latino students have higher grades than their male and Black peers. Therefore:

- Using course grades and test scores in admission criteria increases the representation of:
  - Female students
  - Latino students

- Using only test scores in admission criteria would increase the representation of:
  - Male students
  - Black students

---

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 1
Applicant Preferences for SEHSs Are Similar, Regardless of Their SES Tier

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 2
Including SES Tiers Increases Access to the Most-Competitive SEHSs

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 3
Admission to a SEHS Increases Student Reports of Personal Safety

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 4
Admission to a SEHS Decreases 11th-Grade GPA
Research Findings

Applicant Preferences
Applicants tend to prefer the same selective enrollment high schools. These most-competitive schools:
• Are located near downtown or on the north side of Chicago. They include:
  • Jones College Prep
  • Lane Tech College Prep
  • Northside College Prep
  • Walter Payton College Prep
  • Whitney W. Young Magnet High School
• Are listed as the first choice by:
  • 73% of tier 1 (low SES) applicants
  • 98% of tier 4 (high SES) applicants
• Are the schools with the highest cutoff scores for admission.

Components of the Admission System
The components considered in any admission process influence who is admitted. CPS uses multiple academic performance metrics and a proxy for students’ SES for SEHS admissions. The district made these choices in part to create more diverse selective enrollment high schools.
• Including SES tiers increases access to the most-competitive SEHSs for low-SES students, Black students, and Latino students, compared to simulated admissions without SES tiers.

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 2
Including SES Tiers in Admission Criteria Changes Admission Offers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Student SES Tier</th>
<th>Percent of Admission Offers for SY 2012-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tier 1 (Low SES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Competitive SEHSs</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Admission System (academic performance + SES)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated Admission System (academic performance only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Competitive SEHSs</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Admission System (academic performance + SES)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated Admission System (academic performance only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 3
Admission to a SEHS Decreases 11th-Grade GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Non-SEHS Students (Low SES)</th>
<th>SEHS Students (Low SES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SNAPSHOT FIGURE 4
Admission to a SEHS Increases 11th-Grade GPA

How Do Different Academic Criteria Affect Who Is Admitted?
On average, female and Latino students have higher grades than their male and Black peers. Therefore:
Using course grades and test scores in admission criteria increases the representation of:
• Female students
• Latino students
Using only test scores in admission criteria would increase the representation of:
• Male students
• Black students

Student Outcomes
The common perception is that SEHSs benefit all students who attend them. The picture is more complicated, particularly for students who live in low-SES neighborhoods.

Comparing Similar Students
For each SEHS, there are published admission cutoff scores. An applicant scoring above the cutoff score received an offer, while an applicant below that score did not. There is likely little difference in the academic skills of the students very close to, but on either side of, the cutoff. We compare outcomes (like test scores, grades, college enrollment, and perceptions of safety at school) of students in the same SES tier who are on either side of the admission cutoff for that tier. This technique is called a regression discontinuity design.

Compared to similar students, SES-1s:
• Have similar:
  • Test scores
  • High school graduation rates
  • College enrollment rates
• Report better experiences:
  • Higher levels of safety at their high school
  • Stronger relationships with peers

However, tier 1 (low SES) SEHS students have significantly lower GPGAs and are less likely to attend a selective college than similar tier 1 students who do not enroll in SEHSs.

Note: Heights of the bars represent the regression-adjusted average GPA by admission status. There is likely little difference in the academic skills of the students very close to, but on either side of, the cutoff. The tier 4 effects are statistically significant (p-value < 0.01). Effects are estimated using first-time ninth-graders in 2010-11 to 2013-14. Test scores in admission criteria would only affect 11th-grade GPA for tier 1 students who do not enroll in SEHSs.
Research Findings

**Components of the Admission System**
The components considered in any admission process influence who is admitted. CPS uses multiple academic performance metrics and a proxy for students’ SES for SEHS admissions. The district made these choices in part to create more diverse selective enrollment high schools.

- **Including SES tiers** increases access to the most-competitive SEHSs for low-SES students, Black students, and Latino students, compared to simulated admissions without SES tiers.

**SNAPSHOT FIGURE 1**
Applicant Preferences for SEHSs Are Similar, Regardless of Their SES Tier

- Applicants’ Preferences for SEHSs Are Similar, Regardless of Their SES Tier
  - **91% of tier 4 (high SES) applicants**
  - **75% of tier 1 (low SES) applicants**
  - **72% of tier 2 applicants**
  - **86% of tier 3 applicants**

**SNAPSHOT FIGURE 2**
By SES Tiers, Applicants in the Most Competitive SEHSs

- **Most Competitive SEHSs**
  - **Tier 1**
  - **Tier 2**
  - **Tier 3**
  - **Tier 4**
- **Simulated Admission System**
  - **Academic Performance Only**
  - **Academic Performance + SES**

**SNAPSHOT FIGURE 3**
Admission to a SEHS Increases Student Reports of Personal Safety

- **Immediate Effects**
  - **Stronger relationships with peers**
  - **Higher levels of safety at their high school**
  - **College enrollment rates**
  - **Test scores**

**SNAPSHOT FIGURE 4**
Admission to a SEHS Decreases 11th-Grade GPA

- **Non-SEHS Students**
  - **SEHS Students**

**How Do Different Academic Criteria Affect Who Is Admitted?**
On average, female and Latino students have higher grades than their male and Black peers. Therefore:

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- **Compared to similar students, SEHS students:**
  - **Have similar:**
    - Test scores
    - School graduation rates
    - College enrollment rates
  - **Report better experiences:**
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    - Stronger relationships with peers

- **However, tier 1 (low SES) SEHS students have significantly lower GPAs and are less likely to attend a selective college than similar tier 1 students who do not enroll in SEHSs.**
In the 2015-16 school year, 75 percent of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) ninth-graders opted out of their assigned high school. These students could choose from more than 300 programs at 138 public high schools. Selective enrollment high schools (SEHSs) were among the most high-profile and most sought-after options: 13,400 students applied for 3,600 seats in 11 SEHSs. SEHSs aim to provide high-achieving students with a challenging academic experience and admit students based on prior academic performance. Many of the SEHSs are consistently ranked as the top schools in Illinois by U.S. News and World Report. Criticisms about these schools include that they disproportionately serve affluent students and drain resources from neighborhood schools. This research seeks two key questions: How does the admission policy in CPS affect the profile of SEHS students in Chicago? What effects do SEHSs have on students?

An Overview of the SEHS Admission System in CPS

Students are admitted to a SEHS based on a combination of their application score, their neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES) classification, and the seats available at the SEHSs where they apply.

- **Application scores** are comprised of:
  - Seven-grade GPA
  - Seven-grade exam scores
  - Seven-grade percentile
  - Seven-grade standardized test scores
  - A school performance rating
- **Each applicant is assigned to a “tier”**.
  - At each SEHS, 30% of seats are allocated based on their SES tier.
  - Remaining seats are divided equally among the four tiers of students.

Prior to 2017, the admission system allowed students to use student race, ethnicity instead of neighborhood SES. For more details, see https://cps.edu/explore/program-types

Selecting a high school that is a good fit for you is important. There are a variety of factors to consider when making this decision, including:

1. **Academic Performance**: Students are admitted to SEHSs based on their academic performance. This includes standardized test scores, seventh-grade exam scores, and grades.
2. **Program Offerings**: SEHSs offer a wide range of courses and programs, including advanced placement (AP) and honors courses.
3. **Student Environment**: SEHSs are known for their rigorous academic environment and competitive atmosphere.
4. **College Preparation**: SEHSs provide students with opportunities to build a strong foundation for college success.

In this study, admission to a SEHS had significant negative effects on GPA and attendance for low-SES students. In this study, admission to a SEHS had significant negative effects on GPA and attendance for low-SES students. In this study, admission to a SEHS had significant negative effects on GPA and attendance for low-SES students.
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Implications

[The rest of the text follows, discussing implications for district policymakers.]

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research presented in this snapshot is derived from research by:

- Lisa Barrow, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago
- Valerie Michelman, The University of Chicago
- Lauren Sartain & Marisa de la Torre, The University of Chicago

ABOUT THE UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research conducts research of high technical quality that clarifies and informs policy and practice in the Chicago public schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. The UChicago Consortium emphasizes the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, including institutional factors that promote progress, and by conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working. The UChicago Consortium is a unit of the Urban Education Institute.

Views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the UChicago Consortium, the University of Chicago, or the U.S. government.

ABOUT THE FEDERAL RESERVE BANK

The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago is one of 12 regional Federal Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., make up the nation’s central bank. The Federal Reserve Banks serve the seventh Federal Reserve District, which encompasses the northern portions of Illinois and Indiana, southern Wisconsin, the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, and the state of Ohio. In addition to the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., the Federal Reserve Banks supervise member banks and bank holding companies, provide financial services to depository institutions and the government, and monitor economic conditions in its district.

SELECTIVE ENROLLMENT HIGH SCHOOLS

SELECTIVE ENROLLMENT HIGH SCHOOLS IN CHICAGO: ADMISSION AND IMPACTS

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- **Application scores are composed of:**
  - Seventh-grade GPA in math, English, science, and social studies
  - Seventh-grade standardized test scores
  - A select-elicited interview score

- **How SEHS seats are allocated:**
  - At each SEHS, 20% of seats are allocated to high-scoring applicants, regardless of their SES tier.
  - Remaining seats are divided equally among the four SES tiers (17.5% of seats are allocated to each SES tier)

To further explore this topic, please visit https://go.cps.edu/ selectiveschools.