



The Effects of Place-Based Affirmative Action on Access to Selective High Schools: Unintended Consequences

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Introduction

We look into whether high-achieving pupils from more and less affluent neighbourhoods benefit differently from elite Chicago public high schools. The city of Chicago's place-based affirmative action program assigns seats based on academic accomplishment and Socio Economic Level of the surrounding community (SES). We discovered that while these institutions do not enhance overall test scores, pupils are happier about their high school experiences when using Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD). We estimate negative effects on grades and the likelihood of attending a selective college for students from low-SES communities. We show evidence that the detrimental effect of relative achievement ranking is driving these findings for kids from low-SES neighborhoods.

We're looking into whether sending low-income children with good academic records to elite public high schools can improve their educational achievements and high school experiences. Because the test score gap between low-income kids and their more affluent counterparts has expanded in the previous 50 years, it's critical to understand the potential variability in school impacts for students from low- and high-income families. The fact that low-income pupils frequently attend lower-quality public schools than their high-income peers may play a role in the achievement gap between the two groups. As a result, enhancing low-income students' access to high-quality public schools.

Affirmative action admissions rules recognize that not everyone has equal access to high-quality education options. The purpose of these programs is to boost the chances of historically underrepresented groups getting into elite schools, particularly at the university level. At the same time, there is a large body of research that examines whether these typically race-based policies at higher education institutions harm long-term outcomes for the intended beneficiaries by admitting students with significantly lower academic preparation than their classmates, a phenomenon known as "mismatch." A current review can be found in arcidiacono (2016). Admission to elite high schools in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is based on a mix of prior academic performance and family income, as well as the Socio Economic Status (SES) of the student's residence neighborhood. Students from low-income areas are guaranteed spots under this program. We use this

difference in admissions criteria to see if selective public schools benefit students from low-income neighborhoods more than students from high-income neighborhoods. If low-income students benefit more from selective public schools than high-income students, we should anticipate seeing stronger beneficial benefits of attending a selective public school for low-SES pupils, which could help bridge achievement inequalities based on family income. However, our findings do not support this hypothesis. We find that, regardless of neighborhood SES, selective high school admission does not improve test scores, though students admitted to selective high schools are slightly more likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution in the fall following high school graduation and are more positive about their high school experiences in terms of peer relationships and personal safety. Selective high school admittance, on the other hand, has a negative impact on Grade Point Average (GPA), which is greater for students from low-SES neighborhoods than for students from high-SES communities. We believe this conclusion is driven by relative ranking within school because there is a substantial association between SES and achievement, and we give evidence that this is the case. These differential GPA effects could also explain why students from low-SES communities who are admitted to a prestigious high school are less likely to attend a selective college than those who just miss the admissions threshold. This last finding is especially concerning if college selectivity leads to differing rates of college completion and/or various labor market paths. In light of the favorable benefits of selective schools on high school experiences, one policy issue could be that school districts should focus on improving climate in all high schools rather than selective schools that serve a tiny percentage of the student population.

One reason that previous research has found little evidence that selective high schools in the United States improve student outcomes is that the admissions systems in the cities previously studied take only the highest-achieving students, who are often more advantaged than the district's average student. To put it another way, these programs may identify individuals who would excel academically regardless of which school they attended. This raises concerns regarding the data's generalizability to students at other positions on the achievement spectrum, as well as the possibility of varied impacts for different student populations. The ability to use the CPS admissions policy to evaluate the effects of attending a selective school separately for students from low- and high-SES neighborhoods is a major feature of our research. High-achieving children from low-SES neighborhoods, who might ordinarily attend schools with comparatively disadvantaged peers, may benefit more from access to a high-achieving peer group. On the other hand, mismatch could have harmful consequences. The degree to which admissions criteria are transparent is a major contrast between the mismatch literature and CPS admissions policy. When Chicago kids who have been accepted to a prestigious high school consider enrolling, they are aware of their application score, the admissions guidelines, and the cutoff scores at each elite high school. The admissions process at the postsecondary level, on the other hand, is far less transparent, and students aren't very good at recognizing their position among classmates. There is conflicting evidence about whether access to higher-performing peers in selective primary and secondary school settings increases test scores differently depending on student race or income. Card find that gifted programming has a significant impact on student achievement, especially among black and Latino children. Shi has investigated a North Carolina selective two-year residential STEM high school and

discovers that admitted low-income kids do better on the SAT math and verbal tests and apply to prestigious universities at higher rates than low-income children who do not meet the entrance limit. Shi on the other hand, shows that admission has a negative influence on SAT math scores for students from higher-achieving high schools or high

schools with a higher share of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Bui, find no positive benefits of gifted programming on student achievement in general, or for race or income subgroups, but they do discover negative effects on grades and relative ranking for kids who are slightly above the gifted program's cutoff.