

The University of Chicago

The Effectiveness of the Chicago Public School High School Selective Enrollment System

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A thesis submitted for partial fulfillment
of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree in

Public Policy Studies

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April 2021

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friends and family for their support throughout this process. It was incredibly grueling, and I couldn't have done it without them. Thank you to my amazing Preceptor Kelsey for doing everything she could to help us all through this process.

Thank you to every single person who completed my survey. It was so encouraging to get all of those responses. A special thank you to every person who was willing to interview for this project. They are all amazing people who were brave enough to share their stories with me and I am forever grateful.

Abstract

Research that has previously attempted to determine the effectiveness of selective enrollment institutions in Chicago, compared to their non-selective counterparts, has almost exclusively focused on quantitative approaches. This project sought to evaluate whether SEHS (selective enrollment high schools) are beneficial for all students who attend from a qualitative perspective. Former students were surveyed and interviewed as a part of the study.

The study found that there is a discernable benefit to attending these institutions, compared to other schools, due to many SEHS having fundraising arms that bring in hundreds of thousands of additional dollars a year. This extra money means that teachers have more equipment to perform their job, and students generally have better resources and facilities. However, there is a stark divide in the kind of students who benefit the most and least from attending these schools. Low income and/or POC students have unique challenges when they attend these schools. These issues include but are not limited to distinct racism/classism and long commute times. Wealthier students do not face the same burdens as their lower-income peers. Therefore, CPS must make changes to its selective enrollment schools to better serve the needs of its most vulnerable students.

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Introduction

Neoliberal educational policies led to the eventual creation and expansion of Selective Enrollment high schools in Chicago. Neoliberalism is generally defined as the ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition; this ideology has transformed the way that government structures view and provide public services, ranging from education to housing policy (Smith; Jankov, Caref). In particular, neoliberalism is often characterized by:

its confidence in the free market model as a means to induce competition;
a belief that profit-seeking achieves economic growth resulting in human progress; and
rational self-interest combined with the previous factors will make the state and society more efficient and beneficial for all (Smith, 2014; Jankov, Caref 2017).

Neoliberalism also tends to portray notions of equality and opportunity within its ideological framework, so in theory it is not intended to cause harm to members of society. In practice, however, this idea of equal opportunity and benefit as apart of neoliberalism is nuanced as demonstrated by the effects of neoliberal education policies like selective enrollment high schools.

Chicago pioneered neoliberal education policies that were designed at restructuring public education on free market principles (Lipman, 2011). In 1995, the state legislature gave Mayor Richard M. Daley more control of the Chicago Public School (CPS) System through the *Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act* (Jankov, 2017). Primarily Daley was able to appoint a board of education and a CEO (formerly superintendent) that did not need to have a strict education background. Mayor Daley appointed his budget director Paul Vallas to lead CPS as its first CEO. Vallas instituted a variety of different neoliberal educational policies that stemmed

from his “top-down” approach to education. He stressed the need for standardized testing as a way of evaluating teacher, student, and school performance. New top-down accountability tactics coupled with high stakes testing forced low scoring neighborhoods, which were in predominantly black and Latinx communities, to narrow curricula to focus on tested subjects, replace textbooks with test prep books, and mandate scripted forms of instruction (Hauser, 2000; Lipman, 2004). This new standardized form of evaluation allowed the school district to put underperforming schools on probation, most of which were low-income and black (Parents United for Responsible Education, 1999). Since the school district could now prove that certain schools were underperforming, without properly addressing underlying causes, the Vallas administration and the Board was then able to further stratify schooling by race/ethnicity, social class, and neighborhood by expanding top tier selective enrollment schools in the 90s and 2000s. The expansion of selective enrollment high schools is a key part of neoliberal education policy because it theoretically allows students to have more options for their education forcing schools to compete for students and subsequently improving schools due to competition. In other words, Selective Enrollment high schools were part of a neoliberal educational approach to try and help students gain a better education; however, it is unclear whether or not SEHS actively benefit all students who attend academically and socially.

Selective enrollment high schools in Chicago are schools that students have to apply for to gain admission. In order to apply, students are given a score out of 900 (Selective Enrollment High School Profiles). The first 300 points are determined by the student’s cumulative 7th grade grades, the second 300 is determined by 7th grade state exam scores, and the last 300 points are determined by an admissions exam taken at the beginning of 8th grade (Selective Enrollment High School Profiles). Once these three buckets are completed, students are given a score out of

900. Students are then designated as part of one of four tiers based on their address and the corresponding average income level in the area. Each tier has a different average acceptance score for each selective enrollment school. Lower income students have a lower threshold for acceptance than their wealthier counterparts. There are currently eleven selective enrollment schools in the city, predominantly located on the north side of the city.

At the surface level, selective enrollment high schools in CPS appear as incredible feats of educational ingenuity because they go against the negative reputation that the school district and its respective high schools developed in the 80s. The selective enrollment high schools in CPS excel when compared based on quantitative constraints. According to US News and World Report, the top five public high schools in the state of Illinois are all selective enrollment high schools within the city of Chicago (The Best High Schools in Illinois, Ranked). In fact, Walter Payton College Prep, which is currently ranked as the number one high school in Illinois, is also ranked ninth among all public high schools in the country (The Best High Schools in Illinois, Ranked). Therefore, when studying whether SEHS are equitable purveyors of quality education for all students who attend, one may look at the current rankings for selective enrollment schools and immediately decide that they have certainly been a positive educational imperative for all students. Compared to the state of Chicago education in the past, the current This seems to be the natural conclusion when you compare the current state of Chicago education to the past; however, this sentiment fails to recognize multiple nuances in evaluating the effectiveness of selective enrollment schools. When evaluating whether selective enrollment high schools (SEHS) in CPS are beneficial for all students who attend, one must account for academic, social, historical factors, race, and socioeconomic status.

In this study, I will not be evaluating academic benefits through a standard quantitative lens. Instead, I will be using qualitative research to determine potential academic benefits received by students from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. By social factors, I am addressing various aspects of the social environment that students from differing backgrounds face when attending a SEHS. When delving into the social environment of students, specific attention is given to instances of inequity, such as, instances of racism or classism as these constructs negatively impact the experiences and outcomes of students. In order to evaluate historical factors, this study will tie historical analysis of issues faced by CPS students into determining the potential impact of SEHS on all students attending SEHS.

Multiple studies have observed the effectiveness of selective high school systems across the country by looking at academic factors like tests scores, GPA, college outcomes and enrollment in contrast to peers who did not attend selective schools. Researchers in Boston and New York sought to determine the effects of going to selective exam schools like those in Chicago by using regression discontinuity models (Abdulkadiroglu, 2014). Their research focused on observing differences in PSAT and SAT scores and also college enrollment and selectivity rates. A recent study conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research specifically focused on conducting a similar regression discontinuity model study on CPS selective enrollment high schools (Sartain). The study looked at GPA, test scores, and college enrollment and selectivity statistics. In contrast to the prior studies done in New York and Boston, the UChicago Consortium study studied how socioeconomic circumstance effects student outcomes given that the Chicago admissions process takes socioeconomic status into account, contrasting the approaches of the Boston and New York testing centric models of admission.

Prior research on the effectiveness of selective enrollment high schools almost exclusively focuses on quantitative academic factors, and when social factors are considered the research lacks depth into the real student experience. Is the selective enrollment system beneficial for all students who enroll, based on qualitative academic and social factors? In order to fully evaluate the impact of selective enrollment schools on all students who attend, I will interview former CPS students who have attended SEHS in Chicago in order to understand the unique benefits and challenges that come with attending a SEHS. In addition, historical analysis into how CPS has historically treated communities of color and low-income communities in contrast to wealthier/whiter counterparts will also play a role in determining the degree to which SEHS can have an impact given the foundation of disenfranchisement for many Chicago students.

Context/Background

Chicago Public School System's Past and Education Developments that led to the creation of Selective Enrollment High Schools

In 1987, then Secretary of Education William Bennet declared, "Chicago's public schools are the nation's worst" (Byers). This statement by the Secretary of Education marked a turning point for public education as a whole; more specifically, it led to more radical changes in how education was conducted in the Chicago. However, Bennet's visit to Chicago and his statement of declaration overlooked how Chicago's segregated history set the school system for failure, primarily for students of color (Ewing, 2018).

As African Americans were escaping racist Jim Crow laws in the South, they were met with a less overt form of racism. Throughout the 20th century, Chicago's policies enforced segregation at the institutional level (Rury, 1999). A combination of discriminatory housing

policies: red-lining, racial profiling for home loans, and restrictive covenants coupled with social and state-sanctioned violence against minorities forced mostly black families into specific areas of the city (Rury, 1999). Segregation led to racial and income inequalities. These inequalities hindered minority economic development and led to further disparities in educational resources for minority students (Jankov, 2017). White community members actively tried to keep black people out of their neighborhoods (Ewing, 2018). In the first half of the 20th century, white community members in Hyde Park, a neighborhood in Chicago, worked to prohibit black people from moving in, denying black students' entry into neighborhood high schools, and thus upholding the "Black Belt" (Daniels). The Black Belt was an area of Chicago where black families were able to reside, but they were systematically forced to stay within that area.

In 1953, when Benjamin Willis took over CPS, he believed in the neighborhood school system and that local professional educators knew what was best for the students of the community (Ewing, 2018: 77). Given that Chicago and CPS had forced the black community into a "Black Belt", Willis's philosophy meant that he was unwilling to actively address the pervasive segregation in Chicago schools. There were multiple efforts to try and force Willis and CPS into de-segregating the Chicago Public School system, so black students would not be forced into overcrowded conditions in their neighborhood schools that were inevitably hurting the student population. For example, 1958 the NAACP published "De Facto Segregation in the Chicago Public Schools" in its journal, which argued that CPS leadership was responsible for the segregation due to its policies; additionally, the segregation in CPS meant that black students were assigned less experienced teachers while attending more crowded schools (Ewing, 2018: 78). Willis's response to these claims was to blame the growing black demographic and he argued for and executed the building of multiple schools in areas of the "Black Belt", and even

with the new schools, black students were still forced into auxiliary trailers and converted apartments in order to seat all of the children in a “classroom” (Ewing, 2018: 79). Tensions came to a head in 1963, October 22 when there was a massive walk out of schools and thousands of people protested Willis and CPS in what became known as “Freedom Day” (Rury, 1999). The results of this movement culminated with the federal government threatening to withhold funding from CPS until it rectified the system; however, Mayor Daley Sr. worked out a deal with President Johnson and black students remained in overcrowded and ill resourced schools (Ewing, 2018: 82).

Since prior attempts to integrate black students in predominately white schools failed, in the late 60s and 70s community organizers refocused their efforts from school integration to trying to make sure CPS provided black schools with the resources they needed to thrive (Ewing, 2018: 82). The segregated nature of the Chicago Public School system gained national attention once more in 1980 when the US Department of Justice alleged that the school district was illegally segregating students through various practices (Jackson, 2010). The practices included altering attendance zone boundaries, adjusting grade structures in racial/ethnic ways, allowing intra-district transfer for white students so they could avoid assigned schools, and maintaining overcrowded and thereby educationally inferior schools for African American students and less crowded schools for white student (Jackson, 2010). Rather than going to court, the Justice Department and CPS entered into a consent decree agreement (Ewing, 2018: 83). A consent decree involving education defendants, usually means that school boards or other educational entities agree to discontinue specified illegal activities such as segregation based on race, disability, or gender (Jackson, 2010). In CPS’s case, they committed to desegregating as many schools as possible. Unfortunately, the Consent Decree was completely overturned in 2009 not

because CPS had desegregated the district but more so because of the drop in the white student population in CPS (Ewing, 2018: 84; Martinez). Even while the Consent Decree was active, it did not have enough enforcement to make a huge difference. For example, the transferring between schools as a means to combat segregation was a completely voluntary measure, and CPS used magnet schools that had a racial admissions component so that they could be symbols of integrated schools (Jankov, 2017).

As the concept of selective enrollment schools started to gain traction in the 90s, mostly because of the aforementioned Daley regime's affirmative stance on neoliberal education policies, the Consent Decree made race a factor in admissions to these selective schools. Given that, CPS could tout selective enrollment schools as symbols of an integrated school system. However, the reality of selective enrollment schools was quite different than fostering a true diverse, integrated network of schools because selective enrollment schools, along with supporting neoliberal thought, were also made to keep middle class, mostly white, families in the city (Woestehoff, 2007; Jankov 2017).

Although students from across the city could theoretically attend these new schools, the demographics of those who attended these schools when they first opened were mostly white, wealthier students. Northside College Prep was built in 1999 and was the first high school CPS had built in a 25-year period and cost 40 million to make (Martinez, 1999). The new school was located in the predominately white Northwest side of the city, and initially only drew students from the North and Northwest sides of the city, leading to a student enrollment that was 49% White, and just 5.5% Black in its first year (Martinez, 1999).

Along with Northside's opening, CPS continued its expansion efforts to include:

By 2002, CPS had built a second state-of-the-art selective enrollment high school on the wealthier north side, Walter Payton College Prep. CPS also closed the highly successful Jones Commercial high school, which prepared predominantly African- American juniors and seniors for top-line administrative and managerial jobs with downtown corporations. The school was located in the gentrifying South Loop and was reopened in 2002 as a third selective-enrollment college prep high school. Now called Jones College Prep, the school is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation, including expansion onto newly acquired property (Woestehoff, 2007).

There are 11 selective enrollment high schools across Chicago, predominantly located on the northside or loop area. Since Chicago has invested heavily into these institutions - at the detriment of other programs and initiatives - the degree to which these selective enrollment schools benefit all students who enroll must be questioned from an academic and social environment perspective, keeping in mind the history of CPS and using that history as a tool for further analysis. This project sought to conduct an evaluation of that nature by qualitatively analyzing interviews from former SEHS students and former educator.

Literature Review

Theory

Neoliberalism was first coined to describe the return to classical liberalism thought. This return first took place in the 1970s by the works of economists Friedrich van Hayek and Milton Friedman after economic stagnation and rising public debt. The ideological thinking was adopted by major conservative parties in the United States and the United Kingdom and began affecting a multitude of different sectors including education. Neoliberal thinking affected educational policies and frameworks, in part, by emphasizing the usage of standardized testing as an

evaluative tool for teachers and schools coupled with the idea of competition between individual schools. By adopting standardized exams as a form of evaluation for all schools, administrators can figure out what schools are underperforming by those evaluative metrics and take the necessary actions to correct the problem. In most instances a failing school might be closed and then replaced by a subjectively better option like a charter school, contract school, military academy, selective enrollment schools, and other options.

Standardized testing grew in popularity in the Chicago Public School system due to Paul Vallas's administration pushing neoliberal education policies. To this day, part of the admissions process for selective enrollment schools relies on standardized test results (Selective Enrollment High School Profiles). Additionally, multiple studies use standardized test scores as a way of judging the output of selective schools across the country (Sartain; Abdulkadiroglu, 2014). However, standardized testing has existed for decades before neoliberalism even existed as a concept. One of the most prominent examples of such a test is the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). Given that the test is still used today one might assume that its origins were noble in nature; however, the SAT and the origin of standardized testing comes from the Eugenics movement (Lemann). Eugenicists believed in the notion that intellectually superior beings should procreate whereas intellectually and otherwise inferior beings should be prevented from procreating so that their inferior gene pools were eliminated (Duster). Despite the inherently flawed origin and nature of standardized testing, it is still used as a prominent tool to measure educational outcomes today. One of the most recent examples of standardizing testing serving as an educational tool is the No Child Left Behind Act where one of the purposes of the Act was to "establish yearly testing and assessments of student performance" (Boehner). This law forced

standardized testing on students across America, partially in an effort to close the racial achievement gap in Education.

However, despite the law's attempt at closing the racial achievement gap primarily through standardized testing, it ultimately ended up creating narrower curricula, incentivizing the teaching of low level skills that are reflected on high stakes tests, and misinterpreting the abilities of special needs and English language learning students (Darling-Hammond). Standardized testing and other quantitative forms of academic assessment cannot be the primary markers to understand the racial achievement gap. Research on the academic achievement gap views race as a variable that has statistical significance in examining test scores but fails to ask how or why race matters (Lewis). In order to understand how race affects education, one must understand the history of racism in education, its consequences, and recognizing how it persists in the present day and those affected by it (Lewis).

That said, in order to even evaluate the perceived benefit that selective enrollment high schools in CPS have for all students, race has to be a key factor that is gauged. The University of Chicago Consortium on Education has produced quantitative studies that try to determine the academic benefit of selective enrollment schools, but this research lacks a thorough understanding of historic racism in CPS but more importantly how racism affects students in the schools (Saurtain). A qualitative approach to research allows for one to access how race plays a role for students in addition to the aforementioned quantitative work produced by the Consortium because the tier-based system that academic research is based on also falls within racial constraints. That is, the Chicago Public School tier system used for selective enrollment schools and thus for quantitative studies is a tier system that breaks up students by income but also race. The tier system is broken up by socioeconomic divisions, but due to the historic

segregation in the city the tiers can be used to imply race. Therefore, when evaluating the relative impact of elective enrollment schools by tier, racism and its effects on schooling must be taken into account.

In addition to looking at racism as a factor in education, classism is also a relevant construct to discuss. Classism is a particularly important subject with the case of CPS selective enrollment schools due to the prior explanation that the selective enrollment tier system is based on socioeconomic status. Literature, both old and new, has shown that students' socioeconomic background shapes their school performance while cultural capital mediates this relationship (Fischer; Calarco). This idea of cultural capital originated with Pierre Bourdieu's research into schools where he defined cultural capital as the possession of the dominant culture and described how the education system turns this capital into power and wealth (Bourdieu). He also argues that this cultural capital is not equal between the different social classes or in more contemporary terms socioeconomic statuses, and the educational system rewards those who hold more cultural capital, i.e. the wealthy, and punishes those who hold less. Since CPS has already divided its selective enrollment student body by social class through the tier system, qualitative analysis on how classism might disrupt student education is necessary in order to evaluate the selective enrollment system's ability to benefit students.

Recent literature has also tied Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital with race. In her book *Despite the best intentions: why racial inequality thrives in good schools*, Lewis demonstrates how institutional and everyday forms of discrimination mean that although all kids enter school with social and cultural resources (i.e. cultural capital), only some of those resources "pay off" and translate into currency in the context of formal schooling. Therefore, the idea of cultural capital in education extends to both issues of racism and classism, furthering the need for

allows them to understand student environmental experiences such as safety and peer relationships.

The various data pools discussed above allowed the Consortium to create a Regression Discontinuity Design study to compare students who were just able to obtain the cutoff score to go to a selective enrollment schools and those who missed the cut off by one point. By observing the difference of a cutoff score, the researchers assume that these students are virtually the same at the time of entering the high school. The results of the study revealed that there was no difference in test scores between students who had attended a selective enrollment and those who did not. There were no statistically significant differences with regards to academics except from GPA. Due to the notoriety that selective enrollment schools hold, one would expect the GPAs of these students to be higher than their peers. However, the reality of the situation is that GPAs were lower for selective enrollment students from all tiers across the board (Sartain: 111). This finding could potentially be explained by claiming that SEHS are more rigorous institutions and thus students have a more difficult time achieving stellar grades. This theory is invalidated by UC CCSR's student survey data, which found that there was no discernable difference in academic rigor between students who had gone to a SEHS and those who did not.

The study also found that all SEHS students had their GPAs negatively impacted by attending a SEHS tier one students had the most significant negative impact. Effectively this means that the poorest students are the most negatively impacted with regards to their GPA by attending a SEHS. As discussed previously with the demographic and tier maps of Chicago, tier one is predominantly black and Hispanic/Latinx students, so this disparity in educational outcomes reveals that SEHS are not addressing historic racial education gaps, nor are they closing the education gap between poor/well off students. The poor GPA performance of tier one

students was also shown to negatively impact the rate at which they attended selective colleges. There was no difference in college enrollment and persistence.

Lastly, the study attempted to gauge whether there was a discernable difference in social environments between selective and nonselective schools. Their findings were informed by survey data that they had accumulated from students. They found that students who attended selective enrollment schools reported higher levels of safety and had better relationships with their peers. This conclusion suggests that SEHS lead to better social environments; however, the survey data that UC CCSR used is unreliable because it does not allow students to flush out and explain their social experiences in detail.

Relationships

Peer Support	<p>How much do you agree with the following statements about students in your school? Most students in my school: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like to put others down • Help each other learn • Don't get along together very well • Treat each other with respect
Classroom Personalism	<p>The teacher for your [target] class: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps me catch up if I am behind • Is willing to give extra help on schoolwork if I need it • Notices if I have trouble learning something • Gives me specific suggestions about how I can improve my work in this class • Explains things in a different way if I don't understand something in class
Teacher-Student Trust	<p>How much do you agree with: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My teachers really care about me • My teachers always keep his/her promises • My teachers always try to be fair • I feel safe and comfortable with my teachers at this school • When my teachers tell me not to do something, I know he/she has a good reason

UC CCSR Student Survey Data Set Questionnaire

The image above comes from the UC CCSR student questionnaire. This questionnaire does not allow for students to elaborate on their experiences, nor does it ask students about instances of racism, classism, or other unique hardships that they face due to their school. Therefore, further analysis of the social environments of selective enrollment high school is needed in order to more holistically address whether selective enrollment high school are beneficial for all who attend.

Methods

I have interviewed various selective enrollment key stakeholders, namely students and one former teacher. Specifically, I have interviewed 11 former CPS selective enrollment students. They were asked multiple questions about their respective high school experiences. Particularly, they were asked questions regarding their social environment, potential instances of racism/classism, and other forms of educational equity or inequity. The full set of interview questions are in the appendix.

Along with conducting 30-minute interviews with key stakeholders, I have also used a google form to data. This form was posted in selective enrollment alumni groups and Chicago Public School action networks on Facebook. This Google form allowed me to collect broad instances of negative or positive experiences relating to selective enrollment schools, particularly focusing on how instances of racism/classism may affect the education that students have received. I also collected data about school commute times and resources students either had or lacked when they were applying to selective enrollment schools. Prior research fails to properly dive into the impact, both beneficial and detrimental, of social environments in selective enrollment schools and this research will help determine the full scale of attending a selective enrollment school. In addition, this research helps society understand peripheral academic

impacts of attending selective enrollment schools that cannot be measured by traditional academic measures. To elaborate, certain students might need more help transitioning to a totally foreign academic environment than what they've previously understood and this research illuminates what selective enrollment schools potentially do or don't offer to help students gain extra help. With regards to college admissions, this research can show what selective enrollment schools may offer in addition to other traditional nonselective schools via resources, college counselors, college visits, and other potential factors.

I have taken measures to protect all participants including using pseudonyms when referencing participant interviews. Given that I am only talking to former teachers and students, the participants do not need to fear any potential repercussion; however, this concern is further unfounded because participant data will remain anonymous and destroyed once the study is concluded.

I have taken measures to protect the identity of all participants including using pseudonyms and limiting background information collected about student participants. The only background information collected about students will be their name, school attended, racial/ethnic background, and high school tier.

Researcher Positionality

I am a former CPS selective enrollment student, so my personal schooling experience may cloud my judgement when I am judging the selective enrollment school system. In order to prevent this from occurring, I will not induce a negative or positive bias with my interview questioning and I will stick to assumptions and facts that are based on historical, academic, or qualitative based data. I am also an Asian-American student, who did not grow up on the south or west sides of Chicago, so I do not have the same foundational framework that many of the Hispanic and Black students in CPS have. A large part of this study looks at how CPS has

interacted with these students historically and in the recent years, so although I do not share an identity with these participants, I will do my best to accurately reflect their honest experiences.

Findings

Academic Preparedness & Varying Levels of Academic Aptitude

Laura is a former Northside College Prep student who is from a tier one neighborhood.

Laura is unique because she is an outlier based on the findings of the UC CCSR study. Not only did Lesley have an impressive academic record on all fronts while at Northside, she's also a senior at Dartmouth College on a full ride. Therefore, Lesley's interview can speak to her experience as an outlier while also speaking about how her peers from tier one neighborhoods experienced high school.

Laura was asked to comment about how students from lower income backgrounds [tier 1] tend to do more poorly than their wealthier peers.

Laura responded:

Well, I think it makes sense and it is. It's hard because I am an outlier, but I think, looking back at it, friends who didn't come from tier one, and also comparing my experiences it, it's just when you go to a grammar school that doesn't prepare you, it's going to be hard to transition into a school that expects a lot from you. I do think my grammar school, didn't prepare me as much.

This response speaks to the fundamental flaw with the idea of selective enrollment schools when thinking of them as a method for educational equity for low-income/minority students. In the city of Chicago, primary schools in disadvantaged areas lack vital resources similar to neighborhood high schools, so they are unable to prepare students to the same degree that more privileged primary schools can. As discussed previously, the city of Chicago has historically ignored the needs of its disadvantaged student populace. When CPS decided to close Dyett middle school,

thirty-six students filed a complaint with the US Department of Education, alleging that closing Dyett reflected racially discriminatory practices:

The Board has deprived our school of resources, and undermined numerous promising attempts by our community to improve the school. What was the Board's response when, as late as 2008, we had the largest increase in students going to college in all of Chicago Public Schools? Disregard and disinvestment. We are now a school with only 1 counselor, no assistant principal and have lost several quality teachers. As explained below, this may very well have been because the Board knew long ago that it would close Dyett, and felt that investing resources in us was unwise. (Ewing, 2018: 26)

The response above highlights multiple instances where CPS knowingly handicapped one of its schools, even though the community, students, and teachers were all doing their best to achieve educational success. This lack of resources has long lasting effects for students from disadvantaged neighborhoods. Once they enter high school, there is already a major gap between students who attended better primary schools and those who did not. When former SEHS were asked whether they believed that all students who enrolled into a selective enrollment came on a level playing field none of the ten respondents agreed with the statement. Despite being from various backgrounds these students understood that there were vast differences in the quality of elementary and middle school education. Kristen, a former student from Walter Payton College Prep shared her primary education experience versus others as a response to the concept of a level playing field:

Now, I definitely don't think that, um, there's like so many backgrounds that people come from, like, I had no idea what a Montessori School was before I started high school. But then, I feel like the Montessori kids adjusted really easily to [the] academics. And people

who came from maybe their neighborhood middle school, and their neighborhood school was in tier one, I guess you could say, definitely, it was a greater adjustment.

Some students in disadvantaged neighborhoods are able to attain an education that is equivalent to their peers but this is not the norm. Laura describes her experience with primary school math in comparison to her peers as:

Look into maybe how prepared students were in let's see, like math, because I do think my school did a good job and prepare me for algebra. Because then I took geometry my freshman year, but my two friends [from tier one schools] would say it was hard for them. They didn't understand the concepts and you know; I think at the end of the day it's about how schools prepared tier one students and also how Northside prepares prepare them to transition.

Laura was able to attain a better mathematical foundation than her peers and this set her up for success later in high school, but her peers were not so lucky. Entering high school is difficult enough since students are adjusting to many new changes, and this process is made even more stressful when coupled with catching up to new peers. If they are unable to catch up, their academic record is damaged. In the admissions process for SEHS, CPS tries to account for the different levels of academic preparedness by allowing for varying cutoff marks depending on tier. For example, the image below shows the different cutoff scores for Northside College Prep.

School	Selection Method	Min	Mean	Max
Northside	Rank	894	897.61	900
Northside	Tier 1	745	817.39	894
Northside	Tier 2	843	871.14	894
Northside	Tier 3	875	884.06	894
Northside	Tier 4	888	891.63	894

This image is provided by CPS selective enrollment data & admissions

The standard for acceptance is vastly different between tier 1 and 4, which does aid in some level of equitable acceptance. However, selective enrollment schools do not cater to these academic differences once accepted. Laura describes the Northside’s response, or lack thereof, to the differing academic standings of the student body by saying:

I don't think they took they took into consideration the different levels of academic preparation that students bring with. And they don't really use the resources for I mean, we do have counselors, but you have to actively go ask them for help. And I don't know I think a lot of at least immigrant students from immigrant parents are afraid to ask for help, maybe because they it's just like a cultural thing, or they just don't know how to approach a counselor. So yeah, I don't I don't think they really want students to transition.

CPS recognizes that students from across the city have different educational backgrounds, but once they are admitted into the school there are not enough support systems in place to allow these students to compete with their peers. Not only are disadvantaged students not offered more academic resources, in some cases these students might not recognize what resources exist and how to advocate for themselves. It is important to remember that in some cases these tier one students may have been the best in their primary school class, so upon entering a high school they are faced with their first instance of academic distress.

Resources

Selective Enrollment high schools do not get more funding from the Chicago Public School System than their non-selective counterparts. CPS uses a per-pupil model of funding that allocates a certain amount of money for each student in a school. Additional funding is for every student that meets a certain income threshold. Therefore, selective enrollment schools don't get more money from their counterparts, at least from a yearly budget allocation perspective.

However, although selective enrollment schools don't get more money directly from CPS, they are endowed with other financial benefits that positively aid every student who enrolls in those schools. For starters, Selective Enrollment high schools are typically housed in newer buildings. This allows students, teachers, and other school officials to have access to newer, better functioning facilities. In 2013, Walter Payton College Prep received 17 million for an expansion (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013). This expansion was announced at a time when CPS had a one-billion-dollar deficit and had implemented the controversial decision to close dozens of neighborhood schools (Editorial: Why \$17 Million Went to Payton Prep, 2013). In 2009 another selective enrollment school, George Westinghouse College Prep, was built with a price tag of 103.5 million dollars, 40 million over budget (Rossi, 2007). These two examples show that although CPS claims to lack monetary resources for certain schools, mostly older neighborhood schools located predominantly on the southside of Chicago – as demonstrated by the school closings, selective enrollment high schools are an exception given their high price tag building and renovation costs. All students who attend these selective schools benefit from the newer facilities in ways that nonselective schools cannot.

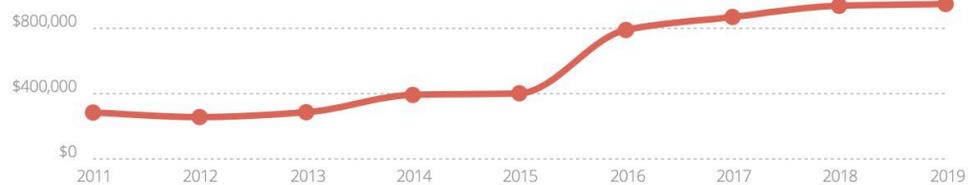
To illustrate the types of facilities at selective enrollment schools, Maria, a tier 1 graduate from Walter Payton College Prep, discussed having a professional planetarium set up for science classes:

It was an actual room. It was a big room too. It wasn't like a classroom. And there was a dome in there. And there was a like a projector. It was professional. It wasn't like something that you got off Amazon, it was professional. She [her biology teacher] took us there. And she turned it on. And she could literally show us all of the constellations. And she could change it. She could point it to like the other side of the world. She can make it day and night.

Maria shared how her teacher was able to use this planetarium as a tool for her classes and emphasized that not every high school student had access to tools such as a Planetarium. For Maria, it was tools like this that allowed her teachers to perform their job better. This ultimately enhanced the quality of education she received.

Although Selective Enrollment high schools do not receive more budgetary funding from CPS despite their status, they are able to acquire more funding due to parent fundraising organizations. Multiple selective enrollment schools have school foundation fundraising arms that are typically run by current and former parents.

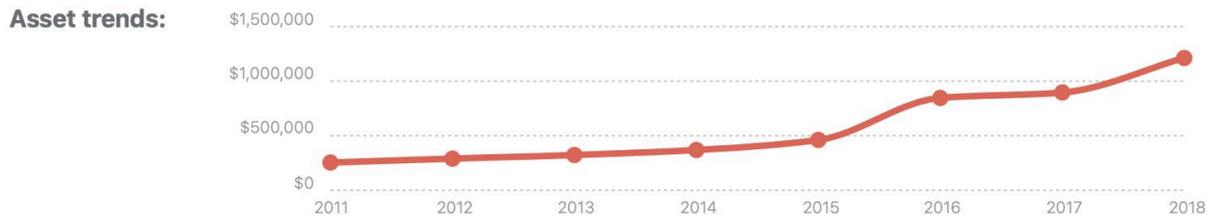
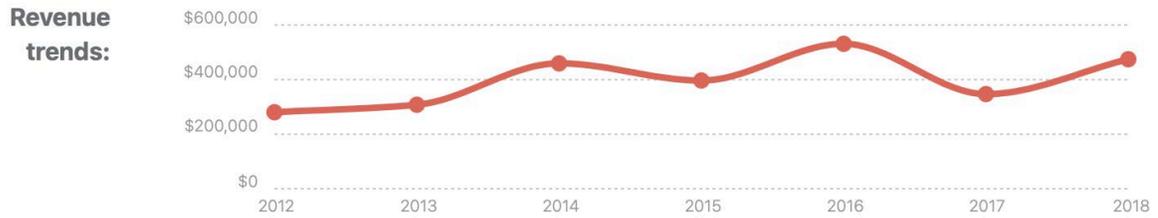
Revenue trends:



Asset trends:



Friends of Walter Payton Association, Revenue and Asset trends: Courtesy of Cause IQ Data Provided by IRS tax forms



Friends of Northside Association, Revenue and Asset trends: Courtesy of Cause IQ Data Provided by IRS tax forms

The four graphs above depict revenue and asset data for the parent fundraising arms of Walter Payton College Prep and Northside College Prep respectively. In 2019, Payton had \$948,918 in revenue and \$879,910 in assets. In 2018 Northside had \$474,668 in revenue and \$1.2 million in assets. These sums of money pay for a variety of different resources available in both schools. According to the Friends of Northside website, their fundraising pays for many resources available for all students such as: a language lab, student clubs, a celestial garden, security cameras, supplemental college counseling, etc.

The parent fundraising organizations characteristic of selective enrollment schools evidently provide a plethora of extra resources to help students excel. They also provide cushions for these schools when external budgetary crisis may otherwise force layoffs or various cuts in enrichment. Alex, a former Northside College Prep Student shared:

When I was a senior in high school, Rauner prevented a budget. This screwed all the CPS schools. I think every school lost a ton of funding that year. Tens of thousands, maybe more. I remember that there were a few things they had to cut back on. We lost our

librarian and instead someone else, who I assume was cheaper, was hired. But even though we didn't leave that situation unscathed Friends of Northside raised a ton of money that year. We were much better off than most schools because the external funding allowed us to continue functioning more or less the same.

Not only are selective enrollment schools able to better fund enrichment opportunities, they are also able to self-sustain themselves in a way that most other schools cannot. They have the ability to independently raise thousands of dollars which allows them to best support their students no matter the external circumstances. From a resource standpoint, selective enrollment schools are beneficial for all students who attend. SEHS have many more resources than their counterparts which aid every student's experience in the school. Additionally, all students who attend these institutions are better shielded from external bureaucracy issues because SEHS have the capability to sustain a greater amount of financial damage than their counterparts.

Quality of Teachers

Students who attend selective enrollment schools benefit from more qualified teachers. By qualified, these teachers tend to have better credentials than most teachers and they tend to be more experienced. Jay, a former student from Northside College Prep, when asked whether he believed SEHS have better teachers than non-selective counterparts, he replied:

My biology teacher was doing research at UChicago, my AP environmental science teacher, she was doing research at USC while pursuing her PhD, and my math teacher had one of the most prestigious [teaching] awards. She did a Fulbright teaching fellowship in Singapore.

George, a former Walter Payton College Prep student, elaborated a similar point that on paper the teachers were the best of the best:

I will say that, like, I think all my teachers were top quality. I mean, on paper, um, you know, they have like Ivy League degrees, they've been teaching for like, several years.

And they have good ratings, right? A friend of mine their bio teacher, like, in the past two years, 100% of the students pass the AP bio test.

Based on these student responses it's clear that teachers at selective enrollment high schools tend to have more prestigious credentials than their non-selective counterparts. By having teachers with top notch credentials, SEHS help all students given the theory of cultural capital that was previously discussed. Students from all socioeconomic statuses benefit from being around teachers who have pursued advanced degrees, often from some of the best universities in the country. Particularly for low-income/first generation students, teachers with added credentials allows them to have access to information about elite universities and career paths that they might not have had otherwise.

The reason SEHS can maintain having better credentialed and more experienced teachers is because of the application process for SEHS jobs. Martin, a former SEHS teacher described the competition as such:

If you wanted a job as an English or Social Science teacher, there will potentially be one to two hundred applicants for the job. Therefore, whoever gets selected is in theory the cream of the crop. Even for teaching positions that are more niche, like Latin or Physics, there are multiple highly qualified applicants.

As Martin puts it, SEHS can obtain the "cream of the crop" out of a multitude of applicants. This ensures that teachers have better credentials in the form of higher degrees and prior work experiences.

However, multiple former students also pointed out that just because they had gone to a SEHS did not mean they were spared from the occasional bad teacher or even bad department. This means that although SEHS can claim that their average teacher has better educational credentials and potentially experience than the average public-school teacher, it does not mean that every SEHS teacher is a good educator. In fact, multiple respondents pointed out that teaching is partly based off of the amount and quality of resources a teacher has at their disposal. Former Northside College Prep Student Michelle pointed out the disparity between SEHS teachers and neighborhood high school teachers:

I also kind of believe that there are those same teachers in neighborhoods Schools, it's just the fact that these teachers often don't get adequately supported while working in neighborhood schools to the point where the only place that they can be adequately supported is in selective enrollment schools, which is where it becomes the idea of selective enrollment schools getting better teachers, not because the teachers themselves are better, but just because the teachers are adequately supported in a way that some neighborhood schools don't adequately support their teachers because of funding or other things. Because I think that selective enrollment schools are the same as every school is there, great teachers, there are teachers and there are bad teachers. Um, it all really comes down to the fact that selective enrollment schools often do have more money to be able to support their labs or support their computer labs or any other thing that they may possibly do.

As Michelle points out, contrary to popular belief SEHS don't universally have better teachers, but they objectively have better resources than their counterparts. This was already discussed and proven in the prior section by looking at the revenue and assets for the respective SEHS parent

foundations. Leon, a former Lane Tech College Prep student discussed the different types of equipment and tools teachers had in order to better do their job:

I think that well, I guess not necessarily, better teachers, but definitely better teaching resources that those teachers could use. At Lane, they had like, a greenhouse. So, the biology teachers had like a class for that. We had an aquaponics lab; we had a lot of resources for them to teach well.

Teachers of Lane Tech HS, specifically those in the science department, have the resources to provide more engaging and exciting lectures. In addition, students can use these tools to further their own personal interests. Although SEHS can have more credentialed educators with more experience, this doesn't ultimately mean that they have teachers who are better than their nonselective counterparts. When asking about whether SEHS have better teachers than their counterparts, the real question being asked has to do with which type of school has access to more resources. In this case, SEHS have more resources as previously discussed, and this inequity in resources allows every SEHS teacher to perform their job better than if they didn't have those extra resources.

Inequitable Geographic Locations of Schools and Transit Times

The majority of the SEHS are located on the northside of Chicago, and the top five SEHS are all exclusively located on the northside of Chicago (CPS School Locator; Selective Enrollment High School Profiles). However, the students who attend these schools do not selectively come from the northside of Chicago, rather students are accepted from all over the city. Therefore, the inequitable distribution of SEHS forces some students to bear the burden of

Tier 1	4
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1 – 1.5 Hour Transit Time	
Tier 4	3
Tier 3	1
Tier 2	1
Tier 1	3

1.5+ Hour Commute Time	
Tier 4	0
Tier 3	0
Tier 2	0
Tier 1	2

The tables above represent data that I collected from former SEHS students about their commute times. Although this is a limited sample size, it does show a tier disparity in the most extreme commute times. Commute times above 1.5 hours saw only tier 1 respondents; likewise, for the shortest commute transit range of 1-30 minutes there were no tier 1 or 2 students represented. Additionally, the shortest range of commute time range saw 9 tier 4 students. Therefore, this data set supports the idea that tier 4 students on average had shorter commute times than their lower income peers.

This disparity in commute times does impact the ability of students to succeed while they're in school. Leon, a former Lane Tech student stated:

I mean, I lived an hour and a half or more away from the school...that really long commute takes a lot of like energy out of like, students themselves, and I feel like, had they, you know, attended a school that was a little closer to where they live, you know, they might, they might have been more successful, just because they're not sleep deprived.

Sleep and the ability of a student to be generally well rested is crucial to academic success; additionally, sleep deprivation, particularly for adolescent youth, increases the risk for depression, suicide, car crashes, and substance abuse (Weintraub). Studies have also shown that the size and quality of sleep provide an explain for disparities in class performance; students who had better quality and quantity of sleep hours performed better in class than their peers who had poor sleep (Gruber). In fact, the evidence for harm due to sleep deprivation is so large that the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement that no middle school or high school should begin no earlier than 8:30 AM (Adolescent Sleep Working Group). School start times are only part of the equation when discussing what students need to do in order to get a proper amount of sleep. Commute times, especially long ones, drastically affect a student's sleep cycle. The longer the commute, the earlier a student will have to get up in order to reach school on time. James, a former student from Walter Payton, discussed the disparity between students from different tiers with respect to commute:

I was like oh, these people come from like you know just richer backgrounds. It's just so much easier for them as well. Um, I remember, from logistical to the personal, it was all different. Even getting to school, it used to just be like a 10–15-minute walk for me. And now [in high school] it turned into like, an hour and a half transit. You know, it was like, a bus and two trains that I had to take every morning like to and from school. And then I

would hear other, and I thought that was the same for everyone. I was like, Oh, yeah, like the school is pretty far for everyone. No, it wasn't. Some people are like, oh, yeah, I just lived down the street. Like, I live in a condo, or like, you know, stuff like that. And I was like, oh, like, this really is a different population.

The quote above was part of James's larger response when asked about whether low-income students had a more difficult time adjusting to their new high school environment than their high-income peers. In this quote, James's discusses how his commute went from a manageable 10-15 minutes to a difficult hour and half commute across multiple forms of public transit. However, this commute was something that James originally thought everyone in the school had to go through, but he eventually realized that his higher income peers were more likely to live closer to the school. Therefore, his commute struggle was not a universal one. He had an extra challenge to adjusting to high school life. His commute was an extra hurdle to his overall success while in high school. Leon, a former low-income student of Lane Tech, had a similar commute time as James. In his description of the commute, he illustrates the toll it took on him and students like him:

I mean, like, I live, an hour and a half or more away from the school. And just like that really long commute takes a lot of like energy out of like, students themselves, and I feel like, had they, you know, attended a school that was a little closer to where they live, you know, they might, they might have been more successful, just because they're not sleep deprived.

Not only does Leon point out that long commutes take a great deal of energy out of students, but he also points out that some students may have been more successful had they gone to closer neighborhood school simply because they would have been less tired. Studies have shown that

more sleep does lead to better grades, so there is validity in Leon's statement that less tired students, due to attending a closer school, may be more successful academically (Wheaton; Gruber).

Additionally, student success is not only tied to academic performance. It's also tied to after school activities. After school activities are a critical part of the collective school experience because they allow students to explore their varied interests, develop friendships with like minded peers, and deepen relationships with school personnel. Additionally, after school activities, or more commonly extracurricular activities, are crucial parts of college applications since they have their own designated common app section and are often talking points for college essays (Application Guide for First Time Students). Therefore, extracurricular experiences are important for holistic student develop and play a vital role in where the student can eventually attend college. Unfortunately, students who have to commute long distances in order to attend SEHS are robbed of normal extracurricular experiences because they can't stay afterschool as long due to long commute times. Additionally, as previously shown commuter students are more likely to be low-income students, so they bear more of the burdens that come with being commuter students. Mikaela, a former low-income Walter Payton student described her commute and its effects on extracurriculars as:

It was usually, on a good day, an hour away on the bus, I would take two buses, or I would take a bus in the train. On bad days I would take like an hour and almost 30 minutes. Sometimes if you miss even just a few minutes you're marked absent from homeroom. For a while, um, I would get there so early because I would [try to] anticipate a 30-minute delay. If I had been part of something, you know, like track, I would say, like, some of my friends that did join [track] that, you know, they ended very late. And

they also lived really far. When they would talk to me about it they would say sometimes I just walk home fast, you know, in and out from the train station. And just like that's still very risky. We don't really live-in areas that are considered like, safe to be around after dark. And especially during winter, when some areas aren't even cleared and stuff like that, you know, you really, you're risking getting frostbite, you know, if it's below freezing. You're also risking being mugged or being followed. I just didn't want to do that. So, I didn't, I straight up didn't.

In this interview excerpt, Mikaela describes how she had the additional stress of trying to account for her commute when she was in high school. If she miscalculated, she could be tardy or marked absent, even though the situation was mostly out of her control. Additionally, Mikaela describes why she wasn't able to partake in a sport, as many high school students tend to do. For Mikaela, and her friends who ultimately did partake in track, there was the constant stress of having to go home after the sport was over for the day. These students, due to their commute, risked frostbite and unsafe traveling zones in order to participate in afterschool activities. Ultimately, for Mikaela the benefits of a sport didn't outweigh the costs. This experience isn't limited to students at Walter Payton either; in fact, Cassie, a former Lane Tech student, recounted the inequity her friend experienced because she had a long commute:

My best friend was from Chinatown. And she would take, like the 6am bus, just to make it to school versus like, friends who would be able to walk to school because they lived across the street. And, like, that's the that's the biggest, probably difference. Because my, my best friend wasn't able to do as much extracurriculars because she needed like, two hours to get home.

In addition to commute times prohibiting extracurriculars, these students are also unable to attend afterschool tutoring and other similar services that might help students catch up with their peers. This inequity furthers the preexisting educational divide between low-income students and their peers since noncommuter students have the ability to address gaps in knowledge while also getting ahead.

Racism and Classism in Selective Enrollment High Schools

Selective enrollment high schools in Chicago are unique in that they accept students from all over the city; however, bringing students from various racial and class backgrounds in such a manner can lead to instances of racism or classism. Unfortunately, selective enrollment high schools have failed to prevent hostile racial and socioeconomic status environments. All eleven of the former students that I interviewed attested to racism or classism taking form in their respective school in some form or another. In addition, twenty-three of my survey respondents described instances of racism or classism that they or one of their peers faced. Students who are most damaged by these attacks are POC and/or low-income students because they tend to be the victims of the aggressions.

Based on student reports, instances of racism or classism can be grouped into two categories: macro and micro level aggressions. Macro aggressions tend to be moments where a student(s) was directly discriminated or harassed based on their socioeconomic or racial status. Microaggressions are instances where students were indirectly discriminated based on their race or class background either by school administrators, students, or teachers. Either form of aggression is damaging for students in different ways. Macro-aggressions tend to be one off occurrence that can be damaging depending on the episode, but microaggressions are equally if not more insidious because they don't have defined start and end times. Microaggressions can

occur throughout the student's tenure at their school and can come from a multitude of sources that ultimately otherize the student. The otherizing of the student can make them feel excluded from their school environment at large, which can negatively affect their academic and social aptitude.

Multiple former selective enrollment students reported instances of macro and microaggressions. Mikaela, a former student of Walter Payton College Prep, reported a macroaggression that occurred during her senior year of high school:

There was a betting pool [that was] majority white [students], there was actually like one student of color part of this group, who was rich. He was very classist. So, this group had a betting pool about whether or not the students from this other group - the activists, very black lives matter - whether or not they would one get into college [and] two get into a legitimate college. There was a Google document that had names of students from this group of [activists]. It was their name, yes or no, whether they would get into college? And if so, is it a legitimate college? You know, and legitimate colleges weren't the historically black colleges and universities.

In this particular macroaggression, Mikaela points out that the aggressors in this situation held racist and classist sentiments. These aggressors specifically targeted a group of outspoken students and bet against their success. This instance shows how racism and classism in SEHS undermine the achievements of low-income and/or POC students. No matter how hard these students worked, they are still otherized in their school environments. Additionally, the added negative implication regarding historically black colleges and universities furthers the racist and classist narrative that educational success must come from an Ivy League institution and cannot be achieved by other valid institutions. Ultimately, this example shows how the achievements of

POC and/or low-income students are downplayed, and these students are also otherized from the larger school community. The otherization of students negatively impacts their ability to succeed in school both academically and socially.

Microaggressions by teachers and students alike also further this experience of otherization. Multiple survey respondents from different schools discussed how they or someone they knew experienced racial or classist microaggressions through back handed jokes or incidents where the intelligence or capability of the student was questioned due to racial or classist prejudice. These incidents were performed by student and teachers alike. One survey respondent explained this type of issue:

[I had] my contributions ignored during groupwork (many times my contributions would have been helpful or even the "correct answer" but my white classmates never acknowledged that). I do remember this particular instance where my Latina friend and I were doing an activity where we had to work in a group with others (white students). One white student asked a question because they didn't understand a concept; my friend repeated the answer about 3 times and not once did they acknowledge her. Finally, one of the other white students looked through her notes for the answer and said exactly what my friend had said. That student received compliments and praise. My friend was left feeling discouraged and defeated.”

Although the white students involved in the incident above didn't directly insult or attack the POC student involved, they did dismiss her ability due to her background. Studies have shown that white people in America, on average, do hold intelligence bias that correlates with the darkness of one's skin tone (Hannon). That is, lighter skinned Hispanic/Latinx and black people were perceived to be more intelligent than their darker counterparts by white people (Hannon).

In the instance above, the POC student's intelligence was doubted due to their race. This occurred because of an implicit bias that was held by the white students. The result was that the POC student was "discouraged and defeated" in an academic environment where they had the correct logic and answer. This type of situation is harmful for POC students because they can happen repeatedly over a student's tenure, which collectively otherizes and demeans the student's ability to achieve academic success.

James, a former Walter Payton student, also shared how his intelligence and ideas were constantly discredited for the opinions of his white peers, even though he believed that he was just as capable if not more:

In group work, honestly, I would just, get ignored all the time. Or like, sometimes in an English class, we would trade essays and peer review them. And then it'd be like, Okay, cool. That's a cool comment. And that's it, you know, just kind of pass it off. And I felt like I honestly, just like, they did not have respect for me, or, like, just value any of the things I had to say. There were other people who were like, honestly way dumber than me. Because they were white, they got listened to. We would be like, yes, let's try and do that [plan] for a physics lab. And I would say, Oh, we should do x plan. The group would say, Oh, no, we should do [the] white [people] plan. And then, low and behold, the white plan was not working at all. And the x plan was actually the right thing.

James explained that for his first two years in high school he felt as though he wasn't respected. He had to prove his academic merit for two years before people started respecting him. His white peers didn't experience this phenomenon. James was able to overcome this hardship by taking multiple AP courses and doing well enough that his peers recognized his merit. In addition, he explained that he had a non-black/Hispanic/latinx friend who was recognized as an intelligent

individual, so this friendship helped prove his academic merit by association. Even though James was able to overcome his hardship, his experience demonstrates the added pressure that low-income/POC students have when attending SEHS. These students have to navigate the standard problems faced when starting high school coupled with the fact that they are routinely made to feel academically less than, even when evidence suggests otherwise.

Lastly, while discussing micro and macro aggressions with students two systemic problems arose regardless of the school. One, students did not know how to report incidences. They had no idea who they could tell in the school that would take them seriously. Second, when students were able to alert faculty or administrators of an aggressive episode, there were no meaningful repercussions for the aggressors. Leon, a former Lane Tech student recalled:

I guess, like, a lot of these experiences are a little, like shocking at the moment, but that I probably me and like the other students, we, while they were like, we were taken aback by them, we didn't really like know how to how to deal with them. And I mean, there's been action now, where students have addressed some of these issues, a lot of like, you know, screenshots from people saying they like the N word and ad being brought up to like the administration, and they actually held a rally this summer to address the issues, and the administration that they weren't very, like, responsive, I guess. Yeah, I guess I'll leave it there.

Leon's statement addresses both issues, and it shows that students who are harassed aren't simply ignoring the issue at hand. Despite not having a clearly defined reporting method, these students are still trying to bring attention to racist/classist instances. Unfortunately, they are met with unresponsive administrators who are not putting systems in place to aid victims and punish aggressors.

Policy Recommendations and Implementation

Academic Preparedness

The first key finding of this study is that students from lower income tiers are not as adequately prepared to succeed and SEHS, compared to their wealthier peers. In order to fight the educational gap that low-income students have when they start at a selective enrollment school, CPS needs to improve its educational outcomes starting at the primary school level. This is a task that can be achieved through many different initiatives; however, I assert that this process starts with CPS implementing better accountability measures for its primary and secondary schools. Therefore, I propose that the original tenants of the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 be resurrected, primarily the wider ranging powers of the Local School Councils:

Sole authority to select and evaluate the principal; approve an annual school improvement; plan help develop and approve a school budget, with major control over an average of \$500,000 per year in flexible funds from the state. (Katten, 2012)

By allowing local communities to have more power over their schools, starting at the primary education level, student educational outcomes should improve. Studies have shown that starting at the age of seven, the degree to which families engage with their children's learning has six times more impact in educational attainment than the quality of the school itself (Desforges, 2003). By reinstating the powers that LSCs once had, communities and thereby family members can play a larger, more impactful role in their children's education. Additionally, every school in Chicago has different immediate needs, so by allowing LSCs to have flexible spending funds from the state they can collectively decide where immediate funds go to in order to better their respective schools. This flexible funding model is also similar to how SEHS currently operate. SEHS are able to raise additional funding through their nonprofit arms, as previously discussed. This money can be used at the school's discretion to improve, fix, and generally alleviate any

problems the school may face. Given that SEHS have this extra funding, parents and other respective family members are able to play a larger role in their children's education. Familial involvement improves educational attainment, so this model should be in place for every CPS school and returning LSCs their historical powers would accomplish this task (Desforges, 2003; Park, 2015). Furthermore, the other enumerated powers – approving annual school improvement plans, creating and approving school budgets, and having sole authority to choose principals – will only aid in attracting more community and family involvement in education.

Additionally, in order to close the educational gap between lower and higher tier students before they enroll in SEHS, I propose the following reforms to the 1995 Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act: (1) require that the CEO of CPS have a background in education, (2) revert the title of CEO to superintendent, (3) reinstate regional superintendents, (4) and implement an election model for members of the Chicago Board of Education. Along with these reforms, CPS should mandate that Charter Schools and Military Academies have Local School Councils (LSC) and have similar community and district wide accountability measures as traditional neighborhood schools.

The Chicago Public School system is not a corporation, nor does it have a goal to make money from relevant parties. Therefore, the individual involved with running CPS does not need to have the title of “CEO”. A reversion to the old title of Superintendent would also signal that the school system is not operating like a business. This reform, although symbolic, is important to reinstate trust with Chicago families going forward. Additionally, given that the leader of CPS is not running a corporation and is working within a unique not for profit framework they should have a background in education. This will allow future CPS leaders to better work with the Chicago Teacher's Union and understand the needs of students because they have some degree

of familiarity with the fundamental issues of teaching and education. Additionally, this change will signal to Chicago families that the school system is prioritizing student betterment because they are mandating that future leaders be equipped education backgrounds resulting in more trust of the system at large.

I am recommending the final three reforms because they all encourage the idea that parents and community members should hold more power in their children and local school's future. More community and parental involvement in education improves educational attainment, which would benefit the system as a whole, but also better prepare low-income students for attending SEHS and closing the education gap between tiers. Regional superintendents can make sure that historically marginalized communities have more direct access to power that produces tangible change, thereby preventing CPS from taking actions that completely disregard community input as it did in the 2013 school closings (Ewing, 2018). Regional superintendents also provide more transparency for the levels of power within CPS, allowing for more effective communication between local communities, administrators, and the school system at large. Following similar reasoning, I recommend implementing an election system for the Board of Education so that the families of Chicago have more power over their children's education. This also prevents policy makers from producing decisions that disregard community input because community members can elect representative that share their views.

The majority of Charter Schools and Military Academies in Chicago are located on the city's south and west sides (Tzeggai, 2016). Therefore, these schools are playing a more prominent role in educating historically marginalized community members who are more likely to reside in tier one or two (lower income tiers). Despite the difference between traditional neighborhood schools and their respective educational models, community and family members

should still be allowed to play a larger role in their child's educational environment. Therefore, CPS should mandate that these institutions have their own Local School Councils. This measure will allow for better educational attainment thereby better preparing students to attend SEHS.

Most of these reforms do not require additional capital. The only measure that might require more capital is the flexible funding that LSCs would theoretically have. In order to pay for this reform, I propose: a yearly review of the dollar amount allocated to LSCs based on budgetary expenses, a reform of the current per-pupil model of funding, and lastly using money from the Tax Incremental Fund (TIF) program.

Inequitable Geographic Locations of Schools and Transit Times

Students from low-income tiers are uniquely disadvantaged due the geographic locations of SEHS and the resulting high transit times. In order to alleviate this issue, I propose that CPS only build future SEHS on the south and west sides of Chicago. This will allow students to attend schools that are geographically closer to them thereby shortening their commute times. Additionally, given that lower income students tend to travel longer distances using public transit to attend schools, I propose that these students be given Ventra passes that allow them to travel on CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) busses and trains for free. CPS does have a reduced fare for students; however, since low-income students have to travel further and thus take more methods of transit, they inevitably pay more for their collective transit to and from school than their wealthier peers. I also propose some form of shuttle system for students who have to travel long distances to attend their respective school. The shuttle system could either take students to train stations or the schools directly. By using a shuttle system as an intermediary or direct transit measure, CPS could transport students who attend different schools at the same time. This would cut down on the overall cost of the program.

In order to alleviate issues that are related to transit time, such as lack of sleep and the inability to take part in afterschool activities, I propose that all SEHS push back their starting times and allow for students who are traveling further to have a grace period of fifteen minutes. This measure would allow students to gain sleep, which is crucial to their cognitive ability, and reduce inequitable punishments for students who have to travel long distances. Additionally, I propose that all SEHS adopt a block system similar to Walter Payton College Prep or Northside College Prep because these systems have built in enrichment time for students. This means that students can take part in extracurriculars and tutoring during school hours. Therefore, students can still take part in crucial high school activities while also getting home within a timely and safe manner.

Racism, Classism, and Equity

In order to combat the racism and classism that is prevalent in SEHS, I first propose reforms aimed at the admissions process for SEHS. First, I would reinstate the Consent Decree that was overturned in 2009. The Consent Decree allowed for race to be a factor in SEHS admissions. Since the decree was overturned in 2009, the number of black students in SEHS has decreased (Walker-Berry). This trend must be reversed because the most marginalized students in the system must have access to schools with the most resources i.e., SEHS. In addition, I propose an optional written portion for the admissions process. As previously stated, standardized exams are not holistic measures of academic aptitude and do not allow students to explain their unique circumstances. Lastly, the current admissions process reserves 30% of the incoming SEHS classes for the highest collective scorers. This practice overwhelmingly favors students from the highest income populations in Chicago because they tend to have access to

better schools and tutoring. By eliminating this practice, the incoming SEHS classes can better reflect Chicago's population.

To combat racism and classism that is seen in school populations, SEHS should mandate student and teacher training that can happen virtually. This practice would be similar to the required training modules that college students and employees have to take about a plethora of important issues. In addition, CPS should mandate that SEHS use some of their in-school enrichment time to facilitate dialogues about racism and classism. Additionally, SEHS must have a clearly defined method for reporting instances of racism and classism. The procedure should be stated on the school's website and any other applicable areas in the physical school. On the flip side, SEHS must also define punishments for aggressors in these instances. The form of punishments, whatever they may be, should be clear and transparent to all parties.

Conclusion

Based on qualitative research looking into the academic and social environments of Chicago SEHS, this study has attempted to illuminate whether SEHS are beneficial for all students who enroll. Prior research on this topic primarily looked at this issue from a quantitative lens focused on academic criteria such as GPA, test scores, attendance, etc. Although the quantitative lens is important, the qualitative lens allows for stakeholders to explain the intricacies and challenges related to their experience in SEHS. This lens showed that there is a stark income divide between students who get the most and least from attending SEHS.

This study's findings show that there is a lot to gain from attending a SEHS. These schools are generally better resourced and funded than their neighborhood counterparts. They also enjoy the privilege of having newer facilities. Additionally, they have stellar teachers, at least on paper. These teachers are not guaranteed to be amazing at their job, but the fact that their

respective school has a plethora of tools means they are more likely to succeed at educating students. However, not all students receive the same amount of benefit by attending these schools. Higher income students tend to get the most benefit from attending a SEHS because they don't face the same challenges as their lower-income counterparts. Their lower-income peers face additional challenges when they attend these schools, such as long commutes to and from school. Therefore, the findings of this study are not meant to say that low-income students should not attend SEHS, rather these students have unique challenges that have not been addressed and require more support.

Further areas of research include looking into the discrepancies within SEHS. There is a divide within SEHS where schools located on the northside and loop tend to academically perform better than SEHS on the southside. Therefore, more research should be done to learn about the student experience in these schools and compare them to students from other SEHS. This study was limited in that it painted all SEHS as though they were the same and this is not true. Going forward, studies that try to evaluate the selective enrollment system in Chicago need to pay attention to the experience of the most disadvantaged that attend northside SEHS, and they must allow note the key differences between different SEHS.

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