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EARLY SELECTIVE ENROLLMENT HIGH SCHOOL TESTING: ELUSIVE BENEFITS AND CLEAR DRAWBACKS

Chicago, IL – There has been much fanfare lately regarding CPS’ addition of some earlier test dates for the Selective Enrollment Entrance Exam. Although the actual dates have yet to be announced, CPS has said that it plans to start high school testing by the end of October – and continue testing into December and January. (Dates for Academic Center testing are expected to remain as in prior years – primarily in December and January). CPS has announced that for these earlier test dates, students will be able to take their exam and get back the results before they fill out their applications. According to some, this will benefit students by giving them the opportunity to rank their Selective Enrollment High School choices more accurately. However, it’s not clear that this is true or that there really are any benefits to students of earlier testing. In fact, there are certainly costs to doing so.

Some colleges have something called “rolling admissions”, where a student who applies early can secure a spot before the rest of the applicant pool does. This is not the case with Selective Enrollment High Schools. Even if a student takes the test earlier, he or she must wait until the last student takes the test for any admissions decision to be made.

It’s not true that students who test early will take an easier test than others – or will be “graded on a curve”. While it is true that early testers will be normed differently than the later testers, such norming does not convey any advantages. Moreover, CPS has been using these norming techniques on the Selective Enrollment Exam for years. [Click here to read more about norming.](#)

Some insist that the real benefit of testing early is that having the score allows students to rank their schools more intelligently on the application. *However, this is also untrue, provided students list their desired schools from most competitive to least competitive on their applications.* A few examples will make this point clear.

Assume the process is like last year; that is, students must fill out their applications before taking the test. Let’s say a Tier 4 student (call him Jim) has 600

points from his grades and 7th grade test scores. Jim really wants to attend Northside but isn't feeling particularly confident, so he fills out his application with Lane first and Northside second. If Jim gets a perfect 300 on the exam (for 900 total points) he would be selected by Lane, even though he scored well enough to get into Northside, because he listed Lane as his first choice. Obviously, if he had known his score ahead of time, Jim would have chosen Northside first and Lane second. This is a scenario that CPS is pushing as a benefit of early testing.

However, Jim should *not* have chosen Lane first under any scenario. Suppose he listed Northside first and Lane second. If he gets 300, he's going to Northside. But let's say he really scored a 250, making his total score 850. Obviously, he's not going to Northside. But even though Lane was his second choice, he still would have gotten a spot at Lane. Another student who listed Lane first and got 849 points would *not* have gotten a spot over Jim. Even someone who listed Lane first and got 850 points would not have any edge over Jim, *since the ranking of the schools on the application is **not** one of the tie-breaking factors.*

According to the Office of Access and Enrollment, if a student gets the same point total, then they will look at the scores on the components of the Selective Enrollment Exam, starting with the math section. In other words, it's all about performance on the Exam.

Our hypothetical student Jim should have ranked Northside first and Lane second whether or not he knew his score beforehand. In general, assuming a student's top school is also the most difficult to get into, that school should always be ranked first whenever the test is taken. Accurate ranking of schools is no reason to take the test early.

There are, however, drawbacks to taking the test early. We have found that the more time students have to sharpen their math and verbal skills, the better they will perform on the Selective Enrollment Entrance Exam. Test preparation can help students to do so.

We're unsure why CPS is promoting earlier testing since we don't see any clear benefits to applicants. However, it's possible that earlier testing may make test scheduling logistics much easier for CPS since earlier testing may reduce the number of students who send in their application just before the deadline.

In conclusion, we at SelectivePrep feel there is little if any benefit to testing early for applicants; but there may be a significant cost---a lower score from inadequate preparation.

About SelectivePrep

SelectivePrep was founded by test prep veterans with over 25 years of test preparation experience – and extensive backgrounds in both classroom teaching and curriculum development. SelectivePrep offers the *only* classroom program that prepares students for all of the standardized tests needed to gain admission to a Selective Enrollment High School or Academic Center. SelectivePrep knows what it takes to train and motivate students who are intent upon gaining admission to one of the ten Chicago Selective Enrollment High Schools or one of seven Academic Centers. SelectivePrep's programs provide a thorough and rigorous review of test content, so students can approach these competitive admissions processes with confidence.

For additional information and registration go to www.selectiveprep.com or call (312) 409-8411.