

March 24, 2015

TOUGHER MAP TEST EXPOSES CHASM BETWEEN TIER ADMISSIONS AT ACADEMIC CENTERS

Chicago, IL –In the most recent round of admissions, average scores were flat at the most competitive Academic Centers and fell noticeably at less competitive ones as CPS replaced the ISAT with the more rigorous Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test as the 5th grade standardized test. This is the first time that CPS has used a Common Core aligned test in the Academic Center admissions process. The MAP accounted for 300 points of CPS’ 900 point admissions scale.

Scores of Tier 1 students at nearly all Academic Centers were hit hard – opening up huge gaps in the points required for admissions for students from different Tiers. For example, Tier 4 cut-offs were nearly 100 points more than Tier 1 students at Young, about 150 points higher at Lane Tech, nearly 200 points higher at Lindblom, and nearly 300 points more at Taft as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Academic Center Admissions Scores (2015-2016)

	2015-2016 average admission scores	change in points	2015-2016 “gap” between Tier 4 & Tier 1 cut-off scores
Young	862	+1	83 points
Lane Tech	833	-4	151 points
Taft	766	-13	294 points
Kenwood	731	-17	69 points
Lindblom	721	-17	197 points
Morgan Park	649	-30	69 points
Harlan	580	-56	NA

¹In calculating the average score, we assumed the ratio of seats as determined by the Tier admissions formula, e.g., 30% for Rank and 17.5% for each Tier, except for Harlan where T2-T4 were allocated 23% each since no qualified T1 students applied.

Despite the tougher MAP test, Tier 4 mean and cut-off scores – already stratospheric, *rose* at Young (+6 points for the mean; + 8 points for the cut-off) and Lane Tech (+ 7 points for the mean; + 7 points for the cut-off) to means of 875 and 861 respectively. Tier 3 mean and cut-off scores rose at these schools as well. The fact that Tier 3 and Tier 4 scores rose, not fell, despite the use of a tougher test underscores the

high level of demand for seats at top Academic Centers among middle class students. More seats at the top Academic Centers would be one way to meet this demand.

North side Academic Centers, located in areas far from most Tier 1 students, continue to have difficulty finding qualified Tier 1 applicants. This can be seen in the spread within each Tier. For example, at Lane Tech this year there was only an 11 point difference between the highest (867) and lowest (856) Tier 4 score, meaning that all of these students were equally qualified. However, there was a 122 point difference between Lane’s highest (828) and lowest (706) Tier 1 score, indicating the top Tier 1 student was much more qualified than the lowest Tier 1 student.

These large gaps have several implications. First, it means that a student’s “socio-economic” status as defined by CPS, has come to overshadow academics in the Academic Center admissions process. Second, a disparity of this consequence means that students enter Academic Centers with dramatically different knowledge levels. This difference could impact the programs that Academic Centers offer as they choose between serving all students and maintaining the rigor that they promise to their highest achievers.

As shown in Figure 2, Tier 4 scores also climbed in less competitive Kenwood and Lindblom. The continued squeeze on Tier 3 and 4 students at Young may have helped trigger this increase as these schools become acceptable alternatives.

Figure 2. Tier 4 Mean Scores (2015-2016)

	Young	Lane Tech	Kenwood	Lindblom
Change in Tier 4 scores (15-16)	+6 points	+7 points	+9 points	+9 points
Tier 4 mean (15-16)	875	861	727	737

Students who are successful in getting admitted to Whitney Young or Lane Tech must continue to achieve top scores. On average any student accepted to these schools is in the top 1-3% academically. To reach Lane Tech’s 833 or Whitney Young’s 862 composite score, a student would need to get all A’s in 5th grade, 5th grade test scores in the top 1% in both Reading and Math and Academic Center Admissions Test scores in the top 2-3% for Lane Tech and in the top 1% for Whitney Young. To put it another way, the high level of these scores puts these Academic Center students at the same level

academically as admitted students at Walter Payton or Northside College Prep, the two most competitive Selective Enrollment High Schools.

While other Academic Centers flourish, Harlan and Morgan Park continue to struggle, calling into question the potential of these schools as viable “Academic Centers” – e.g., schools that offer high caliber programs to high caliber students. The 56 point decline in Harlan’s composite score to 580 and the lack of any qualified Tier 1 applicants is a symptom of a school that is struggling to attract students with sufficiently high academic performance.

It is likely that CPS’s use of the Common Core aligned MAP test has simply revealed already existing discrepancies in academic performance between students from different Tiers. These differences probably existed in the “old” system that used the much easier ISAT test – they were just not measured as clearly.

While the MAP test is still one third of the total score – the use of a tougher test has dramatically increased the importance of the 5th grade test in the admissions process. Performance on this test matters more since it better differentiates between students. While the Academic Center Admissions Test will remain the primary differentiator, students who do well on the MAP test will have a greater chance for success in the admissions process.

According to Matthew Greenberg, partner of educational services firm SelectivePrep, “Students who excel on the 5th grade exam, now Common Core aligned, will have an advantage in the Academic Center admissions process since this tougher test will better measure their performance. Now, students who get into the top Academic Centers will have to be mindful of both the Academic Center Admissions Test and the 5th grade exam.”

Greenberg continued, “Demand for seats at the top Academic Centers has exploded. Highly qualified Tier 3 and Tier 4 students are being excluded while students from lower Tiers with scores 100 to 300 points lower are getting in. One way to help improve this situation would be to increase the number of seats at Whitney Young and Lane Tech.”

About SelectivePrep

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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.

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