

October 2, 2014

EARLY ACADEMIC CENTER TESTING: HERE WE GO AGAIN

Chicago, IL – CPS has announced that it is providing earlier Academic Center admissions testing for 6th graders than it has in the past. CPS has said that it plans to start Academic Center testing by the end of October – and continue testing into January and February. CPS has announced that for dates up to mid-November, 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 “peace of mind” or an advantage in the admissions process or perhaps the ability to rank their Academic Center choices more accurately. However, it’s not clear that this *any* of these are true or that there really are any benefits to students of earlier testing. In fact, there are certainly costs to doing so.

Even though the Academic Center Admissions Test is only one third of the admissions total, how the test is scored gives it a disproportionate effect on whether a student is successful in getting into an Academic Center. For example, a student who gets a 99.0% on the Academic Center Admissions Test only receives 245 out 300 potential points since scores can extend to 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3% and so on. Students who receive a 99.0% on the Selective Enrollment Exam receive all 300 points. That’s why total points required to get into an Academic Center *seem* lower than those required to get into a Selective Enrollment High School. Students vying for a competitive Academic Center – particularly those from a higher Tier – must do extremely well on the Academic Center Admissions test to be successful in the admission process.

There are, however, drawbacks to taking the test early. We have found that the more time students have to sharpen their reasoning skills, the better they will perform on the Academic Center Admissions Test. Test preparation can help students to do so.

Some parents argue for earlier testing since they feel that it will provide them with “peace of mind”. Getting the score without the admissions results will likely tell you one of two things -- that your admissions chances are poor if your child bombed the test or solid if your child received a score in the top one half of one percent of scores.

Unfortunately most students get scores that are between these extremes. Given the tight

range of scores required to get into a top Academic Center, it's unlikely that the test data by itself will provide "peace of mind".

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 Academic Center testing. 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. So even if a student takes the Academic Center Admissions Test in November, he or she will not get the admissions results until March 2015.

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 Academic Center Admissions Test 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 student who does not have enough points to get into his or her top choice will be bumped into the 2nd choice, and then the 3rd choice and so on by the computer. Your ranking of the school is *not* a tie breaker in the applications process. 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.

We're unsure why CPS is promoting earlier testing since we don't see any clear benefits to applicants. Last year, CPS with great fanfare announced some earlier Selective Enrollment testing dates. However, it's likely that earlier testing makes test scheduling logistics much easier for CPS since it can reduce the number of students who send in their application just before the deadline. With most students applying to an Academic Center or Selective Enrollment High School waiting until right before the mid December deadline to apply, each year CPS is faced with slotting tens of thousands of students for testing over a short timeframe. Any reduction in this bump in applications will make the lives of CPS' test schedulers easier.

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.