

SelectivePrep Principal Discretion Notes, March 2009

As you can see from the chart below, the application of Chicago Public Schools' principal discretion policy varies widely:

Figure 1. Principal Discretion Selections (2008-2009)

Selective Enrollment High School	Freshman class size (2008-2009)	Additional principal picks
Brooks	198	0
Jones	214	11
King	244	9
Lane	1,106	56
Lindblom	176	11
Northside	257	2
Walter Payton	234	13
Whitney Young	504	27

Source: Chicago Board of Education

In March 2009, SelectivePrep asked parents about their experience with this process. Here's what we found:

Finding #1: Most parents were unaware of the principal discretion policy's existence.

- *"I was not even aware of it."*
- *"We did not know how to apply for it."*
- *"I don't have a favorable impression of this process."*
- *"We didn't use it and we don't like it. It jeopardizes the objectivity of admissions."*

SelectivePrep: Most parents did not know about the principal discretion option or process. Some had an unfavorable opinion of it.

Finding #2: Appeals should be considered only as a last resort.

- *"You need to be well within the ballpark of the mean score to be considered."*
- *"We got the impression that the principal didn't believe in this process."*
- *"We had everything queued up including letters of recommendation from his teachers in case he needed them."*

SelectivePrep: Regardless of your personal feelings about this policy, become familiar with the rules. Principals are allowed to fill at their discretion up to 5% of available seats with students that meet "threshold" qualifying criteria including a timely application, participation in testing, and 7th grade stanines of 5 or above in both reading and math. Qualifications for discretionary admission include extraordinary extracurricular activities, leadership, hardship/extenuating circumstances, or siblings already attending the school. The process begins after initial admissions decisions are made.

Prepare your documentation and strategy in advance. Know the mean score of an accepted student, since you'll probably need to be within range. Some schools are reluctant to use this process and admit few students through principal discretion guidelines. Ask the principal at your target schools about his/her attitude towards this policy to gauge your chances of success.