

November 15, 2012

MYSTERIOUS TIER TWEAKING PRESERVES A FLAWED SYSTEM

Chicago, IL –Even though CPS just made a major change to its Tier system in February 2012, this past Friday the Tier system was revised yet again. The most recent changes were made without *any* explanation. It's not clear why these changes were made, whether any new data was available, or whether the model's various factors were "re-weighted".

Three years ago, CPS introduced a socio-economic Tier system to select students for its test-in schools. The Tier system places every school age student in the City of Chicago into one of four socio-economic Tiers – with students whose socio-economic factors judged as more favorable grouped into the higher Tiers. Students living in higher Tiers need to get significantly higher scores (often 50 points or more) to get into higher ranked schools. Since CPS' Tier system is used to select 70% of all students for every test-in school in Chicago including Selective Enrollment High Schools, Academic Centers and Selective Enrollment Elementary Schools – any Tier system change affects thousands of applicants.

So who won and who lost in this latest round of changes? "Winners" are neighborhoods with census tracts that moved to a lower Tier – thereby increasing a student's chances of getting into a competitive Selective Enrollment school – while "losers" are neighborhoods with census tracts that moved to a higher Tier – making it more difficult for its residents to get into a competitive Selective Enrollment school.

Big winners (nearly the whole neighborhood moved to a lower Tier) included Deering, West Lawn and Marquette Park; while small winners (a few tracts moved to lower Tiers) included the Near Northside, Belmont/Cragin, and Chinatown.

Big losers (nearly the whole neighborhood moved to a higher Tier) included Logan Square and Avondale, while small losers (a few tracts moved to higher Tiers) included Buena Park, Uptown, Edgewater, Humboldt Park, Ukrainian Village, Bronzeville, and South Shore.

Because CPS did not change the fundamental structure of its Tier system in its latest tweak, this admissions system continues to limit the access of middle class and

lower middle class students to the best schools. Most of Tier 4 is still a lower middle class area of modest bungalows – including Edison Park, Portage Park, Beverly, Mount Greenwood, and Garfield Ridge/Clearing – the area surrounding Midway Airport. Fully 86% of CPS students are low income – so Tier 3 and 4 students are not wealthy – just less poor. In fact, 84% of Tier 3 and 4 students are *lower* middle class – unable to afford private school should a high quality public one not be available. These minor revisions to the Tier groups did nothing to alleviate the problem that many students in these areas face when searching for realistic Selective Enrollment schools to attend.

Let's look at a hypothetical example. Jane is an intelligent 8th grader who lives in Edison Park. She gets 3 A's and a B for her final 7th grade grades. She scores at the 90th percentile on both her ISATs and her Selective Enrollment Exam. Though her neighborhood is far from wealthy, it has been designated a Tier 4.

Even with these high scores, Jane has no chance of getting into the two Selective Enrollment High Schools within reasonable commuting distance to her house – North Side College Prep and Lane Tech. These scores also prevent her from getting into Jones, Whitney Young and Payton; three schools that are further away but can be reached within an hour via CTA trains. She does have a good chance of getting into four lower ranked Selective Enrollment High Schools that are prohibitively far from her house – Brooks, King, Lindblom and Westinghouse. Each of these options is impractical – requiring at least a three hour round trip commute. Unfortunately there are hundreds of students in Jane's predicament – high achieving Tier 4 students -- who are locked out of competitive Selective Enrollment schools within reasonable commuting distance.

According to Matthew Greenberg, partner of educational services firm SelectivePrep, “Selective Enrollment schools provide choice – and school choice empowers parents to get the best education for their children. However, the scarcity of Selective Enrollment seats available in areas that are accessible to Jane and students like her greatly restricts choice.” Greenberg continued, “It is also not clear why CPS continues to pursue a policy that is both discouraging to high achieving students and damaging to the city's tax base.”

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 both of the standardized tests needed to gain admission to a Selective Enrollment High School and the Academic Center Admissions Test. SelectivePrep knows what it takes to train and motivate students who are intent upon gaining admission to one of the nine 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.