

The New York Times

SHSAT Predicts Whether Students Will Succeed in School, Study Finds

By Tyler Pager

Aug. 3, 2018

In the debate over the test for New York City's elite high schools, one question had seemed to be unanswered: Whether there was evidence that the exam was a good predictor of how well students would do at the schools.

But on Friday, the city's Education Department released for the first time a study it had commissioned in 2013 that showed a strong positive relationship between doing well on the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test and high school academic performance.

Metis Associates, a research firm, studied five groups of eighth graders who took the test from 2005 to 2009 through their first two years of high school, using metrics such as grade point average and scores on the Regents examinations and Advanced Placement tests to measure performance.

The study found the mean G.P.A. for students who scored high enough on the test to be accepted to one of the specialized high schools was 3.036 in their first year compared with 2.387 for students who were not accepted to the specialized schools. Similarly, the mean scores for accepted students on Regents examinations ranged between 82.59 and 93.41 across various subjects. The mean scores for students not admitted ranged from 68.69 and 79.16.

A spokesman for the city's Education Department said the study was commissioned after the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc. and other groups filed a civil rights complaint in 2012 saying the city lacked evidence showing the SHSAT was "a valid test of skills and knowledge."

While it shared the results of the study with the Office of Civil Rights and with city officials, it was not given to the legal defense fund or made public, the spokesman said.

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Rachel Kleinman, a lawyer for the legal defense fund, said, “While it’s nice to hear that filing our complaint did at least make them look at whether the test was testing anything, it doesn’t change the overall contention that using a single multiple choice test for admissions to these schools is bad educational policy and has a discriminatory result.”

Ms. Kleinman said she had not seen the study, in part because there is not an ongoing discovery process for an administrative complaint as there would be in a court proceeding.

The study first came to light last month, when The New York Times asked about research establishing the validity of the test. At the time, the Education Department declined to release the study. The Education Department spokesman said on Friday that because it had been part of an ongoing legal complaint, the city had to determine whether it could be released.

Metis study

The Specialized High School Admission Test and High School Academic Achievement



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April 23, 2013

The Specialized High School Admission Test and High School Academic Achievement

Abstract

To determine the relationship between the Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT) and subsequent high school performance from the first two years of high school, the relationship between the SHSAT and three selected high school achievement metrics was examined. Five annual cohorts of 8th grade SHSAT takers were followed into their first two years of high school to obtain their performance on measures such as GPA, Regents examinations and Advanced Placement (AP) examinations.

Correlation and regression analyses pointed to a strong positive predictive relationship between the SHSAT and high school achievement. These findings are consistent across all cohorts – as well as for all cohorts combined – irrespective of the academic rigor of the high schools ultimately attended by students. Of particular note were the strong relationships observed between the SHSAT and the mathematics and science subject areas. Further, strong relationships were also exhibited between the SHSAT and achievement on college level metrics for history as measured by the AP exams. The consistency of these results over the observed five-year period suggests that the results were not spurious and accurately reflected the true nature of the relationship between the SHSAT exam and subsequent high school achievement.

Introduction

Each year more than 20,000 students sit for the Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT) as the sole admissions criterion to NYC's specialized high schools. These students are competing for approximately 3,800 seats – in other words, fewer than 20% of the test takers will gain acceptance to these schools. The NYC DOE has asked Metis Associates to conduct a predictive validity study to determine the extent to which the SHSAT is a reliable predictor of future academic success in high school.

Data from the SHSAT and select high school academic outcome metrics (described below) were compiled and analyzed for a seven year period from school year 2005-06 to school year 2011-12 comprising five annual cohorts of 8th grade SHSAT takers from fall 2005 to fall 2009. Five cohorts of test-takers were selected to ensure that any connection found between the SHSAT and the selected outcome metrics was consistent over time.

Analyses point to a consistent strong positive predictive relationship between the SHSAT and high school academic achievement for each cohort as well as all cohorts combined. This relationship exists even when controlling for the clustering effects of students within schools and

Metis Associates is an employee-owned company

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17 pages, 4.63 MB

During his first campaign for mayor in 2013, Bill de Blasio vowed to overhaul the admissions process for the city's specialized schools, pushing for the inclusion of factors other than just an admissions test.

In June, after years of inaction, Mr. de Blasio announced plans to scrap the test.

Mr. de Blasio said the new method of selecting students would be based on class rank and scores on statewide standardized tests. The eight specialized schools that use the test, including Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science, are overwhelmingly made up of white and Asian students, and changing to Mr. de Blasio's proposed admissions process would help diversify the schools. His proposal sparked widespread controversy, particularly among Asian communities.

Even though 67 percent of New York public school students are black or Latino, last year only 10 percent of students who are black or Latino received offers to attend a specialized school.

However, Mr. de Blasio's proposed changes could face an uphill battle in the State Legislature, which must approve any change to the specialized schools admission process, because of a 1971 law.

The schools chancellor, Richard A. Carranza, had questioned the test's validity in a recent interview, saying that the exam "is not necessarily valid or reliable in terms of identifying student competencies to be successful in the specialized high school environment."

On Friday, Toya Holness, a spokeswoman for the city's Education Department, said in a statement, "It's not at all surprising that a kid who did well on the test turns out to be good high school student. What the validity study misses is the kid who didn't do as well on the test, or didn't take it, but still stands an excellent chance of being successful in these high schools if they had the opportunity."

However, Larry Cary, the president of the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation board, disagreed, saying the study demonstrates the test is a good metric for admission. Mr. Cary strongly opposed the mayor's proposal to eliminate the SHSAT.

"I think it's a scandal that the City of New York sat on a predictive study for four or five years and hid it from the public as part of an effort to insist that the test has no value and should be eliminated," he said.

Jonathan Taylor, a research analyst at Hunter College who conducted his own research on the test's validity, said the study mostly confirms his own findings that the test is predictive, but he said there are better measures to predict performance. G.P.A.s from seventh grade, he said, are much more effective in predicting achievement than SHSAT scores.

"I have never said the SHSAT doesn't predict," Mr. Taylor said. "It's just not sufficient."