School Choice and Competition in the New York City Schools

Sean Corcoran (NYU)
Henry Levin (Teachers College, Columbia U)
New York City has long been a laboratory for school choice...

... but under Bloomberg and Klein, school choice and competition have taken on a prominent new role
“We are giving parents more quality choices for their children, along with timely information to help them make good choices.”
- NYC Dept of Education Children First narrative, 2008-09

“It’s not about a great school system; it is about a system of great schools.”
- Klein keynote, National Charter Schools Conference, June 23, 2009
Reforms on the “demand” side
- Information, accountability, transparency
- Common applications
- High School Applications Process, “forced” choice

Reforms on the “supply” side
- Elimination of high school attendance zones
- Closure of large comprehensive high schools
- New small high schools
- Charter schools
1. Opportunities for students in low-performing, racially and/or economically isolated schools
2. Better match of students to schools
3. School incentives for high performance
4. Encourage innovation
5. Parental empowerment and engagement
6. Freedom to choose
Our Chapter’s Goals

- Context: history of school choice in NYC

- Current school choice options and recent reforms under Bloomberg & Klein — especially HS admissions system

- Descriptive analysis of the high school choice process

- Evidence on the effectiveness of school choice, in particular charter schools and small high schools
School Choice Options by Level

- **Pre-K**: 3rd year of centralized admissions, where parents rank up to 5 public programs (community organizations manage their own admissions)

- **Elementary**: primarily zoned schools with choice opportunities governed by community district; G&T programs, charter schools

- **Middle school**: primarily zoned schools with choice opportunities governed by district; G&T, charters
School choice options by level

- **High school**: centralized applications process, charters, specialized high schools

- Vibrant private school sector — though has diminished over time with loss of Catholic schools
Gifted and Talented Programs

- **G&T: 3rd year of centralized admissions (KG)**
  - Common application, test score cutoff
  - District and citywide programs (>130)
  - 90th percentile+ eligible to apply
  - 97th percentile+ eligible for 5 citywide programs

- Increased transparency through test-only admissions criteria (since 2008) — with some unintended effects
High School Choice

- Significantly revised in 2004
  - All 8th grade students must apply to high school programs, ranking up to 12 choices
  - Centralized matching system and one offer

- Old system: default zone school, with option of applying to up to 5 schools
  - Could receive multiple offers
BEGIN: Summer/Fall of 8th grade: review the Directory of the New York City High Schools

SEPTEMBER
HS choice fairs

OCTOBER
specialized HS exam

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER
open houses, tours, interviews, auditions

DECEMBER: submit up to 12 ranked high school programs

FEBRUARY
specialized HS offers

Accept
Reject or no offer

FEBRUARY
apply for new high schools

MARCH: main round matches

Finalized

Matched

Unmatched

APRIL: supplementary round

Matched

Unmatched; new students

MAY/JUNE, SUMMER
appeals, over-the-counters
GLOBAL ENTERPRISE HIGH SCHOOL

Address: Christopher Columbus Educational Campus
925 Astor Avenue, Bronx, NY 10469
Tel: (718) 944-3548
Fax: (718) 944-3584
E-Mail: 72x541@nycoe.net
Website: None listed

Subway: 2, 5 to Pelham Pkwy.
Bus: DX8 to Williamsbridge Rd. & Astor Ave.; BX12 to Bronwood Ave.; BX26 to Allerton Ave. & Boston Rd.; BX39 to Boston Rd. & Astor Ave.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Global Enterprise High School is a business-themed academic high school. We prepare our students for a future of entrepreneurship – independence in organizations; in business or in service to humanity – by teaching them to recognize opportunities in a wider world. Global Enterprise is a community of students, parents, educators, and community partners who understand that teaching young people to be leaders of tomorrow requires them to see far beyond what any of us would imagine and to understand diverse international societies, to imagine the future of science and technology, to see deeply into people’s hearts. In order to foster these habits, we work collaboratively to encourage students to engage authentically in their originality, in reflecting the standards of each academic discipline, and in going beyond the minimum of the teacher’s assigned assignments.

COURSES & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Entrepreneurship, Marketing. Extended-day program with Advisory. Students prepare and present portfolio of their academic work across the core content areas.

PARTNERSHIPS

■ Community Based Organization: South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

I: art, dance, Hip-Hop dance, drama

PSAL SPORTS TEAMS

■ Boys: Baseball, JV basketball, JV volleyball, bowling, golf, outdoor track, soccer, tennis, volleyball, wrestling
■ Girls: Basketball, bowling, cheerleading, cross country, gymnastics, tennis, volleyball, JV and varsity volleyball

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO HIGH SCHOOL – STUDENT PROGRAM CHOICES

Specialized High Schools: Specialized High Schools Choices are in addition to your 12 choices.

- Fill in the bubble(s) below for the program(s) to which you are applying.
- Auditions are required.

- Art
- Dance
- Drama
- Instrumental Music
- Technical Theatre
- Vocal Music

Other High School Programs: Print in priority order the program code, program name and school name for up to 12 choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Program Code</th>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>School Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>X40A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#8</td>
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<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>#10</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important Information:

- Our school observes a uniform dress code.
- Students must take four years of business education.

PROGRAM(S) OFFERED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM(S) OFFERED</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>SELECTION METHOD</th>
<th>PROGRAM SEATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Enterprise High School (Business)</td>
<td>X40A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Unscreened</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unscreened</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student’s Signature
Parent’s Signature
HIGH SCHOOL CHOICE

Student decisions / actions:
- Apply to specialized (exam) school?
- Size and selectivity of choice set — how many choices? What types of schools? Location?
- First choice?
Students apply to programs, not schools per se
- 2010: 377 high schools, 678 programs

Each program has:
- Admissions priorities
- Admissions method
# School Types and Selection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Selection Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialized (exam) schools</td>
<td>Screened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small high schools</td>
<td>Educational option (16 – 68 – 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large high schools</td>
<td>Limited unscreened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small learning communities (SLCs)</td>
<td>Audition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and technical education (CTE)</td>
<td>Zoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools</td>
<td>Unscreened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoned schools</td>
<td>Test (SHSAT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing / visual arts schools</td>
<td>Charter school (separate lottery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection Methods
HS CHOICE: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

- Broad overview of the high school admissions process using student-level data from DoE
- Four years of data 2005-06 to 2007-08
- Focus primarily on 2008
HS CHOICE: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

- Who participates in HSAP? Who does not?

- How many choices do students make?
  - Does the # of choices “matter?”
  - What explains variation in the # of choices?

- What are the characteristics of programs that students’ rank as their first choice?
  - How does this vary across salient student characteristics?

- When and where are students placed?
## Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; graders</td>
<td>88,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of applicants from private schools</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent applying to specialized HS</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with at least one main round choice</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent in supplemental round only</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent “non choosers”</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of choices

Number of choices - main round

Percent of applicants

Percent finalized in main round (right axis)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th># of choices</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th># of choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All public</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 1/3 math</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 1/3 math</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 2% reading</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch eligible</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special ed</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Recent immigrant</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Excess demand for popular programs: not everyone is likely to get their first choice...

Programs sorted from highest to lowest number of 1st choice rankings.
FIRST CHOICE PROGRAMS

Programs: number of first choice rankings per seat
FIRST CHOICE PROGRAMS

Location
- 81.5% in same borough
- 13.8% closest to home zipcode
- Average distance of 2.5 miles
- Willing to travel further:
  - *High* achievers, black students, girls, Bronx residents
- Willingness to travel less than average:
  - *Low* achievers, white, Asian, and ELL students, Brooklyn and Staten Island residents
**First Choice Programs**

*Selection method*

- Greatest share of students rank a screened program first (38%); next: *educational option*
  - True for most subgroups, except *low achievers* (who prefer EdOpt), and Hispanic / ELL students

- 8.5% ranked a *zoned* program first
  - Especially true in Queens and S.I.
  - 10% of *low achievers* and 13% of ELL students ranked a zoned program first
FIRST CHOICE PROGRAMS

- **School characteristics**
  - **Size**: 48.6% of HS are *small*; 22% ranked a small HS first (40.5% in the Bronx)
  - **Race/ethnicity**: on average, and for all subgroups, the predominant race/ethnicity in the first choice school is the same as the chooser
    - Black: 43.9% black (vs. 40.9 city)
    - White: 39.7% white (vs. 8.0 city)
    - Hispanic: 49.0% Hispanic (vs. 42.8 city)
    - Asian: 31.1% Asian (vs. 7.8% city)
## Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent matched in specialized round</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent matched in main round</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent matched in supplementary round</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent received first choice (main round)</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Placement: Main Round

![Bar chart showing choice finalized to]

- **Percent**
  - X-axis: Choice finalized to
  - Y-axis: Percent

The chart illustrates the distribution of choices finalized during the main round, with the majority of choices being finalized at option 1.
## Placement in First Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Received 1st choice (%)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Received 1st choice (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All public</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 1/3 math</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 1/3 math</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 2% reading</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch eligible</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does the HSAP process promote greater segregation by race, income, achievement?

- Preliminary analysis suggests not
- But final placement looks a lot more like students’ 8th grade school than their 1st choice
## PREFERRED VS. ACTUAL PLACEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading z-score in feeder school</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>-0.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading z-score in 1st choice high school</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading z-score in finalized high school</td>
<td>-0.067</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent black in feeder school</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent black in 1st choice high school</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent black in finalized high school</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charter Schools

- Bloomberg and Klein have promoted the growth of charter schools and encouraged charter-friendly legislation at the state level.

- NYC currently has 125 charter schools.
Effectiveness: evidence suggests that NYC charters perform better than charter schools nationally, e.g.

- Hoxby et al. (2009), CREDO (2010), Dobbie and Fryer (2009) vs.
- Zimmer et al. (2009) and CREDO (2009)

Hoxby results may be overstated (Reardon 2010)
Ultimately, charter schools enroll only 3% of NYC students.
**DISCUSSION**

- DoE now operates as a kind of market facilitator
  - Providing information
  - Coordinating and standardizing enrollment
  - Aiding in the creation of new schools

- High school admissions: empowering but complex
  - Systematic differences across students in choices – why?
  - Depends heavily on students access to information and knowledge of the process