

“I Was Extremely Lucky.” Selective Enrollment High Schools and Educational Inequality

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Lia Kelly

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On my honor, I have neither given or received
any unauthorized aid on this thesis

Lia Kelly

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ABSTRACT

In Chicago, selective enrollment schools are elementary, middle, or high schools to which students must apply. Students are then assessed based on their grades, test scores, and sometimes attendance. This study focuses specifically on student and parent experience before, during, and after their selective enrollment high school experience through qualitative analysis of interviews. All students in this study had a positive experience academically and had satisfaction with their high school experience due to the opportunities that it gave them and regardless of race or class, students felt a sense of belonging within their selective enrollment high school community. But low-income students of color faced more barriers to selective enrollment during their application process and faced more challenges during their experience attending a selective enrollment high school. Additionally, only low-income students noted that they felt lucky to have attended a selective enrollment high school rather than feeling entitled or deserving of their selective enrollment experience.

In the late 1980s, Chicago Public Schools were failing: ACT scores ranked among the lowest in the nation, dropout rates were increasing, and Chicago teachers were repeatedly striking. To combat this, Illinois passes the Chicago School Reform Act in 1988 which created the local school council system. This system encouraged schools to set standards, manage budgets, and design engaging curriculums. Additionally, Chicago adopted the selective enrolment system as an option for high school students which gained momentum in the late 1990s (Chicago Magazine 2012). The purpose of these schools has been to combat education inequality by giving students alternatives to their local neighborhood high school.

This study seeks to understand student and parent feelings before, during, and after the selective enrollment high school experience. Understanding the emotional experience during the application process, academic and social experience during high school, sense of belonging during high school and satisfaction afterwards. Specifically, this study observes if background (race and class for example) affects any part of the selective enrollment experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education has commonly been seen as a tool that helps facilitate upward mobility, but it does not necessarily serve this function for everyone, or even most people. In fact, Bourdieu argues that education actually serves to reproduce the existing and current class structure (Swartz 1977.) Bowles and Gintis (2011) emphasize this argument by showing how the current education system reproduces class structure. Their book, *Schooling in Capitalist America* opens with a comparison of the new frontier to education; they state that the new frontier of the west was seen as the “Great Escape” and a place full of new opportunities. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a new factory system in place and “the folklore of capitalism was revitalized: Education became the new frontier.” (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 3) Theoretically, with more

access to education, low-income children would have an equal opportunity to become as economically successful as their wealthier peers. However, Bowles and Gintis go on to argue the opposite and state that purpose of the education system is to uphold capitalism which reproduces a stratified class structure.

In the United States, residential location typically determines the assignment of children to local K-12 public schools. This gives households with more capital greater access to higher-performing and well-resourced schools, of course, they also always have, the option of private school (Saporito 2003). The strong connection between residential location and educational opportunities contributes to the reproduction of existing class structure that Bowles and Gintis describe. This pattern of inequality in education is caused by broader economic and racial segregation which is seen throughout the U.S., particularly in major cities Chicago, Boston, and New York. To combat this pattern of class reproduction, policymakers have enacted many education reforms that attempt to reduce the connection between family background and educational opportunities. For example, the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002 focused on providing more educational opportunities for low-income students, students of color, students receiving special education services, and students who speak limited to no English (U.S. Department of Education 2002). And in 2012, the Obama administration launched the *Race to the Top District Program* which was an initiative that offered incentives to states that were willing to spur direct improvements in learning and teaching that would directly improve student achievement (U.S. Department of Education 2012). These acts encouraged parents to choose different public schools if their child was attending a low-performing school and encouraged districts to close low-performing schools based on test scores (Allensworth 2017). Additionally,

many school reform initiatives focused on districts opening new charter schools and selective schools that admitted students based on their academic performance.

In Boston and New York City, there are a few high schools known as few Exam Schools to which students must apply and test into. Each of these cities has three exam high schools which cannot serve even a small percentage of high school students in each city. Chicago began to adapt this system during the late 1990s and early 2000s. They opened more selective enrollment and charter high schools in attempt to combat the long history of racial, socioeconomic, and academic inequalities (Spirou & Judd 2016; De Voto 2018). In Chicago, selective enrollment schools are elementary, middle, or high schools to which students must apply. Students are then assessed based on their grades, test scores, and sometimes attendance. Due to the requirements and high level of competition, selective enrollment and exam schools are supposed to create academic community made up of the highest achieving student's in the city. The purpose of creating these selective enrollment or exam schools was to promote socioeconomic diversity within schools, provide a unique or specialized curriculum, and improve achievement for all students who attend them (Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, and Pathak 2014; Quick 2016). Ultimately, these schools provide more choices for students and parents, giving them the possibility of attending higher-achieving schools.

Chicago Public Schools serve over 100,000 high school students, and roughly half of these students choose to opt out of their assigned neighborhood high school and relocate to a different high school that has higher graduation rates (Cullen et al. 2004.) Overall, the demographics of the student body in Chicago Public Schools is poorer than the city's demographics. Additionally, there is an overrepresentation of black and brown students in the Chicago Public School district in comparison to the city. In Chicago, there are 11 selective

enrollment high schools, six located on the wealthier north side of Chicago. Those on the north side are the most competitive and desirable schools among students and parents who pursue a selective enrollment application. (Chicago Public Schools 2023). Students must be eligible to apply to a selective enrollment high school based on a point system, based on their seventh-grade GPA in math and science, Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) scores, and attendance. This point system leads to the exclusion of many students who are quickly determined ineligible to apply. After students are deemed eligible, they must take a selective enrollment entrance exam. During the application process each student is allowed to apply to and rank up to six selective enrollment high schools. The entrance exam policies recently changed in 2023; the exam is now one hour instead of two and a half and will be offered in five languages in addition to English (Issa 2023). The purpose of these changes was to create a more equitable application process and reduce the stress of students, specifically students for whom English is not their first language.

Each year, over 11,000 students apply to selective enrollment high schools but there are only 3,000 available spots. Since many students are not accepted into any selective enrollment high schools, they either must attend their neighborhood high school or opt into a private school, if their family can afford the tuition. During the selection process, each student is placed into a tier (1-4) based on their census tract. The purpose of creating these tiers was to make it more equitable for students who live in low-income neighborhoods. Each tier is supposed to relate to socioeconomic status; on average students in tier one come from lower-income families and tier four come from wealthier families. Each year, there is a different cut-off score for each tier and students who come from tier one neighborhoods need to score the highest. The first 30 percent of spots in selective enrollment high schools are filled by the top scoring students, and the final 70

percent of spots are filled by the top scoring students in each tier (Issa 2023). Typically, the students in the top 30 percent come from families who have high incomes (Illinois Report Card 2022-2023). On average, most selective enrollment schools had more white students than the district average and fewer students from low-income families than the district average. Three of the selective enrollment high schools are primarily low-income students of color but these three high schools are the least competitive and have the smallest enrollments.

One of the leading arguments in education reform is that giving parents and students increased agency over their school choice will improve educational outcomes (Gill et al., 2007; Berends et al., 2009). Choice allows families the opportunity to apply to or transfer into the best schools. And many scholars claim that increased agency over school choice provides the incentives needed for schools to efficiently turn resources into outcomes (Chubb & Moe 1990). School choice leads to increased competition among schools, the competition incentivizes schools to provide the kind of services that parents and students want. On the other hand, many scholars are worried that increased choice does not improve student experiences but rather leads to increased academic, racial, and socioeconomic segregation (Fiske & Ladd 2000). Additionally, households that face more geographic, social, and psychological constraints might be more limiting in the set of schools that they consider (Lauen 2007; Bell 2009). But the measures of the best or good schools is commonly equated with high test scores, high graduation rates, and high grade point averages (GPA). But there are many other factors like diversity, course offerings, school environment, and teacher engagement that are often overlooked when identifying good schools. McGhee (2021) in her book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, argues that the concept of good schools is driven by white racial hierarchy. She states that the absence of people of color largely defines our

schools and neighborhoods as good even though white students would also benefit from diverse schools. Despite their stated value for diversity, they choose to segregate themselves into white enclaves, "...choosing a path closer to their grandparents' racially restricted lives than the lives they profess to want for their children" (McGhee 2021: 176). Since public schools are funded by tax dollars, wealthier neighborhoods have more resources in their schools, meaning that "good" neighborhoods are synonymous with "good" schools. These identifying factors and measures of good schools is commonly accepted by most students and parents in the United States.

Many scholars are concerned that increased school choice does not necessarily have positive effects for many low-income students because of the challenges in accessing these schools and resources. For example, attendance often requires low-income students to travel long distances to school through dangerous neighborhoods on public transportation. There are simply additional obstacles for students who live at a distance from their school (Rosenbaum 1995; Reynolds, and DeLuca 2002; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2004; Rosenbaum, Angrist and Lang 2004). First, these students often get less sleep due to the long morning commute which could negatively impact their performance in school. Additionally, if these students want to participate in after school extracurriculars, they might be traveling home after dark, which could be unsafe. And finally, it can be challenging for working parents to travel to their children's school to attend events like parent teacher conferences and curriculum nights or sporting events in support of their children. Additionally, low-income students of color are less willing or able to know about higher achieving schools, which leads to high-performing schools being filled with white wealthy students. Another concern is that low-income students of color may not be accepted socially in their new school community, which can inhibit better academic outcomes (Quiroz 2015). In sum, school choice as a method of school reform may create some opportunities for

some students, but it's complicated. In Chicago, these complications can also be seen in the unequal allocation of students to charter, selective enrollment, and international baccalaureate schools.

Despite high competition to get into a selective high school and the general assumption that they are quality schools, very little evidence shows that students who attend these schools actually show better academic achievement. Some previous studies have found that attending a selective enrollment or exam school has no benefit to student test scores (Clark 2010; Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, and Pathak 2014; Dobbie and Fryer 2014). These studies conflict with each other and argue against the common assumption that these selective schools provide higher quality education that leads to higher student achievement. Perhaps these schools are sought out by many because of the prestige, competitiveness, and reputation rather than the true quality of the school. While students at selective schools might not have better GPAs, test scores, or college outcomes than if they attended a nonselective school, they might still experience positive outcomes due to the school environment. Previous studies have found that students who attend a selective high school are more likely to feel positive about their high school experience and have more positive outcomes later on in life (Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, and Pathak 2014), such as better employment opportunities and longer life expectancy. Additionally, some scholars have found that they tend to feel more positive about their peer relationships and some students note more personal safety (Allensworth 2017; Barrow 2020). These benefits might not stand true for all students who attend a selective school, but these scholars show that there are many non-academic reasons why students choose to attend and why they might succeed at a selective school instead of their neighborhood high school.

Low-income students might benefit from attending a selective high school because of the social capital that they gain while in a school community with upper-class peers. Jack's (2019) book, *The Privileged Poor*, shows the opportunities that some poor children get when they are able to attend prestigious high schools. Jack provides a comparison of two high schoolers who grew up in the same New York neighborhood. Patrice was accepted into a preparatory high school while Alice had to attend her neighborhood high school. They both ended up at the same small, private, and elite college but their high school experiences were extremely different. Patrice was surrounded by other students who would go on to attend elite colleges and found that her transition to college was smooth. Conversely, Alice went to a high school where the dropout rate was 40 percent and the majority of her peers would not attend college, even though she describes them as smart and capable. She describes a more challenging transition into college because she lacked the social capital that other students gained in high school (Jack 2019). Through these narratives, Jack highlights how school environment is a nonacademic factor that contributes to student success.

Although many scholars find that there are benefits to attending a selective high school (Abdulkadiroglu, Angrist, and Pathak 2014; Allensworth 2017; Jack 2019; Barrow 2020), others argue that selective schools only "promote educational advantage for upper middle class white children at the expense of poor black and Latino children" (Quiroz 2015: 379). Many middle and upper class white students benefit from attending a selective high school that has a diverse student body because they feel greater comfort interacting with peers from different backgrounds and learn to better understand the perspective of others. Studies have found that all students who attended a racially diverse high school had higher levels of civic engagement and felt prepared to engage with diverse groups of people (Ayscue, Frankenberg, and Siegel-Hawley 2017). But

while students of color may improve their test scores and grades at a selective school, they also face “everyday racism” (Lewis 2003) in their school environments which their white peers do not have to face. Patricia Hill Collins (2009) explains how schools are a way to constantly surveil certain groups of people even though they claim that this surveillance is not racially motivated. Quiroz (2015) conducted a study that looks at experiences of young black and brown men at selective enrollment high schools in Chicago and their experience with everyday racism. She highlights a time during the beginning of a school year when a series of thefts was occurring. Money was being stolen from teachers and the blame was immediately placed on the young black and brown students who had just started at this school. Quiroz (2015) highlights how selective enrollment high schools can serve as a way to increase surveillance of black and brown children.

Additionally, she shared stories of students who felt that they were treated differently by teachers and staff because of their socioeconomic background and/or race. One student, James said, “Honestly, I feel like she picks on us just because she knows where we come from and our background, just because she knows we are in a program with Mr. Johnston. I look forward to coming to school but as soon as I get in her classroom that big whole gray cloud come over my head.” (Quiroz 2015: 384) Although low-income students might improve their GPAs and test scores at selective schools, they sometimes feel less sense of belonging in their school community. For this reason, some scholars disagree that the solution to academic inequality is pulling low-income children out of their neighborhoods and moving them to “better” districts. Lipman (2009) argues that historically, this attempt at integration is the main strategy to combat poverty, but it destroys communities of color. Low income students of color are introduced to middle-class languages, values, and achievement ethics when they move to selective schools.

They are forced to adopt these new values in order to integrate into their new school community (Lipman 2009.) This idea of integration might force low-income students of color to shed parts of their culture and identity in order to fit into their school communities. Some other scholars argue that integration could lead to a lack of a sense of belonging or true connection to the school community which might negatively affect their overall experience in high school (Booker 2006). Rather than focusing on moving low-income students to better schools, it could be more beneficial to invest in low-income neighborhood schools.

Previous scholars have done extensive quantitative work that observes the educational outcomes that differ between selective and nonselective high schools. But very little qualitative research has been conducted on how the selective enrollment application process experience might emotionally affect students and parents before they even start high school. How do students and parents feel during the application process? Also, do students sense that they belong once there? Does being from a certain income bracket impact students' sense of belongingness once in school? And in the end, are students and parents satisfied with their experience attending a selective enrollment high school? This study will answer these questions with a focus specifically on Chicago Public School selective enrollment high schools through qualitative analysis of interviews with a small but diverse sample of students and parents.

METHODS

This project focuses on Chicago Public Schools selective enrollment high schools. It specifically investigates how applying to and attending one of these high schools affects students and parents during the application process, while attending high school, and after they graduate high school. The qualitative data included 11 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with former students who attended a selective enrollment high school and parents who have either had

children attend a selective enrollment high school or are currently attending. I recruited participants by email, using convenience sampling and then snowball sampling after I got an initial list of participants. Additionally, I posted in parent Facebook groups of selective enrollment high schools advertising my study. Prior to conducting interviews, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the interview guides and consent form determining that it qualified for IRB exemption. Interviews were conducted in-person or on Zoom and were audio recorded for the sake of transcribing afterwards.

Seven respondents were former students who attended a selective enrollment high school and four respondents were parents who had one or multiple children who attended a selective enrollment high school. The sample of student respondents was diverse in both socioeconomic class and race but not in gender (see Appendix A). The parent respondents were not very diverse in socioeconomic class or racial identity with majority of parent participants being upper-middle class white women. Socioeconomic class was defined by a mixture of self-identification, parents highest level of education, and occupation.

I designed this project to qualitatively compare how personal identity (race and class in particular) might impact the experience of students and parents during the application process, while attending a selective enrollment high school, and their satisfaction afterwards. The first component of the interview investigated experiences during the selective enrollment application process that occurred in seventh and eighth grade. Questions explored students' middle school experiences generally and as related to the selective enrollment high school application process. The second component of the interview focused on experiences while attending high school. Questions in this section explored students' academic and social experiences, specifically as related to their sense of belonging. And the final component asked students and parents about

their thoughts on selective enrollment, exploring student experiences after high school and their satisfaction with the selective enrollment experience (see Appendix B for full interview guides).

Each interview was transcribed using Otter.ai and then cleaned manually. The first round of analysis consisted of taking notes while listening to each interview, focusing specifically on how class affected student experience before, during, and after attending a selective enrollment high school. The second round of analysis consisted of coding each interview using NVivo 12. The coding frame focused on experiences during middle school, academic and social experience during high school, sense of belonging during high school, experiences after high school, and satisfaction after high school. Additionally, I reviewed demographic data and statistics (acceptance rate, school reports, and percentage of limited English learners) of each high school, using GoCPS.

FINDINGS

Drawing upon previous literature that education serves to reproduce and maintain the existing class structure (Swartz 1977), I hypothesized that the selective enrollment high school system was just another way to reproduce inequality. Specifically, I expected it to be a system that primarily benefits wealthy white students who have quality neighborhood schools and left low-income students of color feeling isolated while having to navigate a new community. In fact, I found that all students in this study had a positive experience academically and had satisfaction with their high school experience due to the opportunities that it gave them. Additionally, I found that regardless of race or class, students felt a sense of belonging within their selective enrollment high school community. Nonetheless, low-income students of color faced more barriers to selective enrollment during their application process and faced more challenges during their experience attending a selective enrollment high school. Additionally, only low-

income students noted that they felt lucky to have attended a selective enrollment high school rather than feeling entitled or deserving of their selective enrollment experience.

Application Process

To better understand the dynamics of the selective enrollment high school system, I began by asking participants how they first heard about selective enrollment as an option for high school. Majority of low-income students of color were from the south or west side of Chicago and said that they found out sometime during sixth or seventh grade when selective enrollment was briefly mentioned in school. They expressed that applying to a selective enrollment high school was not common in their neighborhoods and that their families weren't aware of selective enrollment as an option. Conversely, students from the north side of Chicago took a moment to respond and stated that they weren't really sure when they found out about selective enrollment because they had always just known of it. Their parents were aware of selective enrollment as an option before they attended kindergarten and selective enrollment was common and already part of their communities. Julie, a mom of two sons who attended Lane Tech, a high school on the north side, shared that their selective enrollment experience began before her children began kindergarten.

So, I had my first son tested for kindergarten and he scored very well. He was very well in the 98th percentile and didn't get a spot in Edison or Decatur. So, I was like, wow, what does it take to get into these schools ... Then my younger son went to pre-K at Armstrong, our neighborhood school, then I found out what it takes to test into Edison. And he tested into Edison for kindergarten. And he had like, an even crazier high score.

She highlights how students need to have nearly perfect scores in order to test into a selective elementary school and that in order to increase the chances of your child getting into one of these schools requires research. The benefits in attending one of these schools is that the quality of education goes up and students likely have a better chance at getting into a better high school.

Beyond the competitiveness of testing into one of these schools, many families are unaware that this is even an option. This puts many families at a disadvantage for future schooling, further creating inequities in education from an early stage in schooling.

The lack of awareness of selective enrollment as an option relates to the resources that are available to families in their neighborhood and schools. Students on the south side noted that there were no resources given to them during their middle school years that related to selective enrollment. Isabella, a Latina student from the west side of Chicago, mentioned that her family was unaware of selective enrollment as an option for high school and that it wasn't common for students in her community to apply. When I asked her about resources that her middle school had to help students apply for high school, she replied that the option of selective enrollment was rarely mentioned and she felt that her school didn't really encourage students to apply. She said "We weren't really told like what selective enrollment even was, I applied as a joke with my friends...I'm pretty sure during history class in the last 10 minutes, they were like let's work on your applications for high school and that's it." Her experience shows how the lack of resources and encouragement to apply to selective enrollment high schools directly relates to why many students from these middle schools don't apply to selective enrollment high schools.

Similarly, public schools on the north side have limited resources for high school applications but applying to and attending a selective enrollment high school is more common in those communities. Therefore, students who were unaware of selective enrollment as an option are more likely to feel encouraged to apply and know more about the application process because their peers are doing it too. Sasha, a low-income student from the north side, shared that she was raised by a single mom who was unaware of selective enrollment as an option. But selective enrollment was common among her peers which encouraged her to apply.

I call it the PTA moms squad. All of the moms have the athlete kids, you know, they were all in communication of when things needed to happen because they had access to that information. But my single parent had no idea when any of that was happening. So, I found out through my friends when, how, and where to take the test and how to apply.

She noted that she still felt that she found out about selective enrollment a bit too late which put her at a disadvantage when applying and taking the test. Despite feeling behind, Sasha was still able to apply to selective enrollment high schools because she attended a wealthier middle school where selective enrollment was the norm. Through her peers at this middle school, she was able to learn about what she needed to do to apply to a selective enrollment high school and was ultimately able to attend one.

Conversely, north side private schools had many resources that helped their students during high school applications. Additionally, it is common for students who attend private middle schools to leave private school and apply for selective enrollment high schools. Mia attended a private school on the north side for elementary and middle school. She shared that she thought private schools got special treatment from selective enrollment high schools and explained the resources they received during the application process.

We did have our own tour dates, so we didn't have to go in with the rest of the Chicago. I think when I went to tour Whitney Young, I remember it was just us, Parker kids, and other private schools ... And I'm sure there was more private schools there.

She explains that one of resources she received was being able to tour selective enrollment high schools prior to applying. Being able to tour schools prior to attending greatly benefits students because they are able to compare and contrast schools, deciding what school they believe will be the best fit for them. Additionally, students can learn about what the school has to offer which can lead to easier transitions and motivate students during the application process. Beyond the resources given to students who attend private school, there is also a culture of applying to selective enrollment high schools which encourages students to apply. Additionally, Chicago

Public Schools are funded using Student Based Budgeting, meaning that each school uses per-pupil funding. Therefore, there is a net increase in dollars if a student from private school transfers into the public-school system rather than simply moving a student from one public school to another. The greater attention given to private school students and the culture of knowing about applying to selective enrollment leads to a high percentage of private school students applying to and attending selective enrollment high schools.

Understanding the culture of their middle school matters in other ways as well because it gives insight into the emotional aspect surrounding selective enrollment. Some students stated that applying to high school was more stressful and challenging than applying to elite colleges. Many parents in particular remember the application process feeling extremely overwhelming and challenging emotionally for both them and their children. Interestingly, other students recall feeling no pressure at all during the application process. That is, wealthier students from the north side who attended private schools or well-funded public schools remember feeling particularly stressed because of the social pressure from families and friends. Conversely, low-income students of color in the south or west side remember feeling little to no stress during high school applications. Over time, too much stress can negatively affect one's mental and physical health. One of the most common critiques by respondents of the selective enrollment system is the immense stress that it puts on young children at such a young age.

Students from communities where applying to and attending a selective enrollment high school is less prevalent felt less stressed during the application process. Since many of their peers were not applying to selective high schools, they didn't experience competition among peers or friends and didn't mind the idea of a neighborhood school because that was the norm. Earlier,

Isabella mentioned that she applied to selective enrollment as a joke. I asked if her parents put any pressure on her during the application process.

No, not really ... I have an older sister and she went to Prosser [neighborhood high school]. But other than that, they just asked are you going to Steinmetz [neighborhood high school or Prosser? And I was just kind of, like, actually, I applied to this other school farther away. And they were okay with it. I think it's just that the drive was longer and so they asked how are you going to get there and I was like I'll figure it out. And they said okay.

Since her parents were not part of her high school application process she, didn't feel much outside pressure to get into the best high school. Since there wasn't pressure from her family or friends, she wasn't initially expecting to attend a selective enrollment. Similarly, Bree mentioned how there was not any grade pressure in her household.

The expectation was to do your best and my mom would always say it's not about the grades. And if you do get a D, then what does that mean? What do you not understand and how can we solve that.

She highlighted the support and lack of pressure she felt from her parents during the application process which led her to feel less stressed. These experiences of students in less competitive communities show that the emotional aspect of their lives is not as negatively impacted by selective enrollment applications.

On the other hand, there are low-income families who understood the importance of getting into a selective enrollment high school but were faced with challenges during the process. Lisa, a mom of three, had all of her children apply to selective enrollment high schools. English was not the first language spoken at home but Lisa was a teacher for Chicago Public Schools so she was able to find out about selective enrollment. Her older two children did not get into any selective enrollment schools and were placed on the waitlist. She attempted to appeal, using Principal Discretion, a process that allows principals of selective enrollment high schools to fill a designated number of spots for students who did not initially get in. Lisa believed that attending

a selective enrollment school would greatly benefit her children but she didn't understand how to advocate for her children and didn't want to participate in the school politics. She explained her emotional experience when her two older children were not admitted.

It was demoralizing. And I had always preached to my kids that I went to my local elementary school and local high school. And my dad, was an immigrant and I am too, I was 10 when I came to this country. My dad would always say that a good student will always thrive and that the school didn't make the student. And I think I was probably more bummed than my kids and I didn't want them to feel like they were failures. But had put so much pressure on them and myself to try to get them into good high schools.

Being an immigrant was a large part of Lisa's identity and she expressed that she was not raised with pressure from her parents to attend the best schools but overtime she has learned how important school rigor, resources, and environment are. Lisa explained that by the time her third child had applied she understood what she needed to do in order to get her in. She had to advocate for her kid during middle school years, help keep on top of her grades, and prepare her well for the exam. Her third child was able to attend a selective enrollment high school and Lisa felt proud and happy for her, but wished that all of her children had been able to experience selective enrollment.

Conversely, students and parents on the north side felt social pressure from peers and a lot of stress to get into the best selective enrollment high schools. Socially, there were many stressors that caused students and parents to feel pressure to attend the best selective enrollment high schools. Mia explained that the application process was an extremely stressful time, socially. A lot of her peers had the same top choice school which created competition among them and even their parents. She also explained that although there were 11 selective enrollment high schools, only five were considered acceptable in her community. She highlighted that the parents created a culture of competition during the application process.

I remember the day that the results came out. And the parents were the worst gossips. They were literally the reason why everyone had such issues ... The parents gossiped, as if this was about them, and made it all about themselves ... The day results came out, someone had to take the leap and say this is where I'm going to high school. But for people who didn't get in, it was a really big deal. And I remember three girls didn't get any of the schools. And so, they ended up going to Beacon, the private school. And that was a really big deal. And I feel like there was a lot of pride and shame from the parents which only perpetuated the anxiety.

She highlighted the unhealthy academic pressure that is put on twelve year olds to perform perfectly and the emotional weight that comes with that. Parents commenting on other children's deservedness or intelligence to get into a high school creates a culture of anxiety to be perfect in order to be good enough.

Not getting into any selective enrollment high schools is challenging socially for eighth graders. A seventh-grade teacher, Mrs. Anderson, at a north side middle school explained the stress that she's observed from decades of teaching. She teaches language arts and social studies, which are two of the four grades that count towards their GPA for selective enrollment points.

I mean the second these kids come in, they're just completely different students because they're worried every single time I'm teaching or I give a handout or describe a project. They're like, how many points is this worth ... but they're just so crazy about grades and that sort of thing. And you know, when a kid gets a B, or a C, these parents act like it's the end of the world. And, again, these are some strong powerful people [parents] and they will try to bully you. Bully me as a teacher to get the kid a better grade. It's so crazy. If that's what they're doing to me, I can't imagine what the kids going through at home ... And I do know that there are students who have lied about where they get in, that's one coping strategy.

Each year that she's been a middle-school teacher, she has had to experience her students going through this process while in her class. Mrs. Anderson explained that each year it gets as selective enrollment gets more competitive. She believes that it's wrong that these kids have to go through such an awful system. She shared that she understood how detrimental it was for a student to receive a B during seventh grade and explained that throughout the year, she offers eight percentage points worth of extra credit so that each student has an opportunity to get into a

selective enrollment high school. She used lenient grading to attempt to give every child an opportunity to apply for high school because she understood how essential their grades were.

On the other hand, some students from the north side didn't feel much pressure from their family or friends because they had a plan B, which would provide the same education as a selective enrollment high school. Maya, a wealthy student from the north side explained that she felt her options were not ideal if she didn't get into a selective enrollment school but her family put less pressure on her because they could afford to move to the suburbs or enroll her in private school if selective enrollment didn't work out.

I don't think she has a real preference or care where it [the high school] was. But, she did make the joke if I did really bad [on the exam] or if I had been someone who didn't get into a high school that she would move us to the suburbs. Because that's kind of your option if you don't get into the top 12 high schools that are in Chicago. The options are not very good [in Chicago] because the local high schools that are pretty underfunded. And then, you could go private but that's really expensive.

Wealthier families have an advantage because if they aren't able to secure a spot in a selective enrollment high school, they still have multiple quality options. But many students and parents still preferred selective enrollment because they provided great opportunities, were a cheaper option, and had diverse student bodies.

Experiences During High School

After gathering information about the context and culture of their middle school, I wanted to better understand the transition from middle school to a selective enrollment high school. All low-income students of color had more challenges during the transition because they were exposed to new cultures of wealth, struggled to make friends, and had long commutes to school. Ryan, a low-income student who attended Jones College Prep and explained that freshman year was the first time he was exposed to extreme wealth, beginning with seeing other kids getting dropped off.

There were a lot of Mercedes' and Range Rovers' and I was like, we're in downtown Chicago, I don't know how you're driving that downtown. And it was just tough. I was debating transferring but it [Jones College Prep] had so many resources. And I think transitions into high school are hard in general. But I think that was my first time being exposed to many different things all at once.

The challenging transition led Ryan to feel isolated from the student community but he was eager to stick with the selective enrollment experience because of the resources available. For Sasha, the long commute to school every day made the transition challenging. She would take two buses and a train to get to school each morning which took at least 90 minutes. She expressed that it was exhausting to spend three hours on public transportation every day in addition to the transition into a rigorous course load. Conversely, wealthier students from the north side had much smoother transitions because they had classmates from their middle school with them during the transition, had shorter commutes, and were more used to the rigor, not much greater than their middle school. Generally, the transition from middle to high school is challenging for most kids but lower-income students of color had additional challenges that many of their peers did not have to experience because they lived closer to school and were used to the academic rigor.

Although wealthier students who attended selective enrollment high schools on the north side had grown up attending rigorous schools, they had a much more negative experience with the academic culture. Many described the academic culture as intense or extremely competitive which only got worse during the college application process. It was the norm in these schools to take as many Advanced Placement (AP) courses as possible and to get A's in those classes because their ultimate goal was for their students to attend college after high school. Sasha shared that during her freshman year orientation, they held a seminar that explained to students how to be competitive applicant for college and explained what resources they needed to use at

Lane Tech in order to be successful. She said that, “it was impossible to not think about college, like, not going to college was not framed as an option for us at that school.” This set the precedent that she needed to take and get A’s in all AP and honors courses and additionally, join extracurriculars. Mia explained to me that no one she knew at Payton was satisfied with getting a B, and anything below that was unheard of. She shared her experience getting two B’s in her first AP course during her freshman year and shared that it made her feel terrible. She said, “I’ll never forget them. It was AP Human Geo freshman year as a first and second semester. I got beat. I never got over it. I’m still not over and freshman year.” Nearly seven years later, she speaks passionately about getting these two B’s which highlights the culture of these high schools and how fiercely the competition is engrained into these kids.

Since these high schools were extremely college prep oriented, there was sometimes a negative school culture around academics and extracurriculars. Maya, who attended Northside College Prep, shared to me that she thought the environment was insane and unhealthy, especially during junior and senior year. She remembers having to distance from peers who were extremely competitive because that environment wasn’t healthy for her. But she explained that it was hard to escape the culture because “not only were they gunning to get into Harvard, but they wanted you to know that they were going to getting in.” Conversely, students who attended selective enrollment high schools on the south or west side found their academic culture to be positive and collaborative. They shared that there was not pressure to attend an elite college from their peers, families, and schools. Bree spoke casually about her grades and explained that her ultimate goal was to graduate and attend college, but it was common for students to attend a community college and not elite colleges. She said, “I got a few C’s but I never got anything lower ... I was okay with not being a straight A student because I realized I could still graduate. I

just thought I can still get through without failing.” She didn’t have the sense that getting C’s and B’s were bad grades or something to be ashamed of, which is a stark contrast to what students from the north side felt. Bree focused on being able to learn and connect pieces of content that she learned during high school rather than comparing her success to her GPA. Similarly, Isabella, explained to me that her high school wasn’t competitive at all. Instead, she thought that everyone just helped each other out and were encouraging of their peers. The different expectations around college created two different academic cultures in selective enrollment high schools.

Socially, students who had long distance commutes to schools struggled to create a social community. Since many low-income students travel north to attend high school, they often lived extremely far from their high school friends. Additionally, students were exhausted and didn’t have energy to travel far distances to hang out with their friends or they had to travel through dangerous neighbors at night. Isabella explained to me her challenges when it came to hanging out with her friends. She said, “commute wise, I feel that was everything...I wanted to go home before it got dark. And it was definitely hard because everyone's spread around, it was hard say. Yeah, yeah, let's meet up here.” While high school is typically a challenging time socially, low-income students had extra barriers to participate in a social community, due to the fact that they live far away from their school and their peers.

Regardless of background and location of school, every student and parent positively commented on the resources that their high school had to offer. Many students noted that they had many options for classes and extracurriculars which created opportunities for them that they would not have had if they had attended their neighborhood high school. Bree shared that at Lindblom, “the class sizes got smaller, and there were more class options” which created a better

academic environment because with smaller classes, teachers could focus on their students more. Students are more likely to be engaged and invested in their classes if they are given the opportunity to pick their classes. Julia, shared with me that her children were able to specific electives that they were interested in which is uncommon for high school classes.

I know it's not a private school environment by any means. But they're having access to a lot of things. There are so many classes and so many opportunities. They had a lot of high school credit coming into freshman year and so their junior and senior years were primarily electives. It was great that they could just take classes of choice.

She explained that her two sons were very different academically. One really enjoy hard AP science and math classes while the other wanted to take more creative and nontraditional electives. She shared that they attended the same high school and the ample amount of resources allowed for both of her sons to thrive and take classes that work best for them.

Beyond academics, selective enrollment high schools had many opportunities for students to get involved in extracurriculars that interested them. Many students noted the endless sports and clubs that were available to them, and that it was always possible for them to create a new club if a staff member was willing to sponsor it. Mia explained an enrichment program that Payton had which required students to participate in an extracurricular but it was built in time during school hours.

Every single day, from 2:45 to 3:30, we had something called enrichment. At the beginning of the week on Mondays, enrichment opened and you just sign up as quick as you can for the best ones. There were clubs like Game of Thrones club, Cancer Club, or sports practice started. And that way, stuff was built into our days. So, people who lived in bad neighborhoods could maybe get home earlier, because sports practice was earlier in the day than it would be otherwise. And also, it was to bulk up our college applications.

Payton created enrichment as a response to some students having long commutes before and after school which would prohibit them from participating in extracurriculars that took place outside of school hours. This helped students become competitive applicants for elite colleges

and brought them into a larger community within their high school. Beyond academic reasons, students were also able to create a sense of self through clubs and activities. Many students shared that they were able to try something new in high school which helped them pick a college that had programs that interested them. Sasha, said that at Lane Tech, everyone was able to find a community through clubs and activities.

Even the weirdos, the nerds, and the geeks had a big community of weirdos, nerds and geeks. I was able to not only be myself, but also craft myself and find myself and you know, be bad at things and then pick a new thing and that was a lot of what high school was.

She explained how she was able to develop new parts of her identity and interests through trying many different activities. Having many options and opportunities available to students encourages and empowers them to engage with the school community beyond academics. All students benefit from this in multiple ways because they are given spaces to express themselves while simultaneously becoming attractive applicants for colleges.

Despite low-income students of color having more challenges socially and academically in high school, the amount of opportunities led all students, regardless of background, to find a sense of belonging within a community during their time in high school. Bree shared her experience on the swim team and how she was able to find a sense of community there.

In my swim team, specifically, I really felt a community there. It was, you know, separate between women and men. So, it was all black women and there were a couple of Hispanic women on the swim team. We all felt really comfortable and safe talking to one another. And we just had similar experiences in our swim world.

She explained that swimming isn't a common sport in the black community and being able to attend a selective enrollment on the south side meant that she was able to find a community of other black women who shared the same passion for swimming. This was a unique and empowering experience where she found her friends and felt a part of a community. Similarly,

Sasha, shared that she was able to find community through the debate team, an activity she was introduced to during high school.

It was my version of finding connection with my peers. It was sort of like a family. It was something I did all four years throughout high school. And that was the one aspect of stability in my life. Also, it was the first time where I was really a part of a team or a common cause, because I was never into sports or anything. I met all of my best friends through debate ... That was one of my favorite parts of Lane Tech, was that it was so big that we had a club for everything, and a space for everyone. There was a club or a structure for you to really grow and connect to people. And I think that was a really beautiful part of going to such a big high school.

She emphasized that attending a large high school creates outlets for all kinds of students regardless of background. I predicted that the challenges that low-income students faced during the transition into high school would have negatively affected their whole high school experience. But in fact, they were all able to find a sense of belonging within their high school and feel integrated without having to shed layers of their identity.

Satisfaction

To understand student and parent satisfaction with their selective enrollment experience, I asked what they thought about the system as a whole and how they think of their high school experience now. Many participants acknowledged the inequities in the application process, the extra barriers that low-income students of color face and general critiques of the selective enrollment system. But all students were grateful for the education that they received and said that selective enrollment helped guide them to the path they are on now. Sasha, ended up at a small elite liberal arts college and shared her holistic thoughts on selective enrollment as a system.

I think the selective enrollment process is deeply messed up. I think, you know, not only very, white supremacist, and you know, classist, and abusive to the mental health of young people. But I think it's also just fundamentally misinformed. But where I ended up, like my actual high school, I was extremely lucky to be there, and overall, had a great experience.

Despite the inequities and challenges that persist through the selective enrollment system, Sasha's experience highlights how selective enrollment does give students opportunities which benefits them. Being able to attend Lane Tech, she was able to find stability through debate, enjoy a sense of community, as well as independence, and was eventually able to attend an elite college. Similarly, Mia expressed that attending Payton guided her towards the path she took for college. She explained that she had wanted to attend a large state school during middle school and early high school but she learned about other types of colleges during high school. Ultimately, she ended up attending a small elite liberal arts college. She said, "I never considered myself a small school person. I want to say in another life I would have applied here [current college] but I don't think I would have. I feel like Payton gave me the creative impulse." Mia acknowledged that she still would have gotten a quality education at a large state school, but being able to attend a selective enrollment high school showed her other opportunities that she never knew were available to her. These opportunities helped lead her to the path that she is on today.

Beyond giving students opportunities, attending a selective enrollment high school also gave students confidence as they transitioned into college. Many students and parents compared the selective enrollment application to their college application process. And many had the mentality that if they could survive selective enrollment, they could easily take on the college application process. Students thought that attending a selective enrollment high school well prepared them for college. Bree told me that attending Lindblom gave her confidence when she began college.

And just my mindset of being at a certain caliber. My motivation for myself, was like, I already tested at this certain caliber, and this is somewhere where I want to maintain for myself. Not just for the people around but just for myself, so, I know I can reach this

level. And just having those different class experiences and academic experiences through high school, I feel, definitely helped me transition well into college.

Bree believes that attending a selective enrollment high school well-prepared her for the environment in college. She gained confidence from being accepted into a selective enrollment high school and eventually graduating from one. Similarly, all parents expressed their understanding of how unfair the selective enrollment system is, but that ultimately they wanted the best education for their children and that selective enrollment was the best choice for high school. Despite the challenges, limitations, and inequities that the selective enrollment system perpetuates, it does benefit the students who are able to attend, at least according to these respondents. Students are given agency to choose their classes, they are able to find a sense of belonging, and go on later in life to be successful.

DISCUSSION

While previous studies connect student outcomes with the type of school they attended, selective or nonselective, this study highlights the emotional experience of students during the application process, as well as high school. Additionally, it shows student and parent satisfaction with their selective enrollment experience. Low-income, students of color had a more challenging time during the transition into high school due to the long commutes, unfamiliarity with their new school culture, or due to the new academic rigor. But not all low-income, students of color experiences at a selective enrollment high school experience the unfamiliarity and isolation that attending a selective high school can bring (Quiroz 2015). In fact, all students in this study felt a sense of belonging within their high school and were successful after high school due to their selective enrollment experience. Students were able to find a sense of belonging due to the many extracurricular opportunities that their high school provided.

Previous quantitative studies found that attending a selective school had many academic benefits and student achievement was higher at a selective school. Similarly, this study found that students who attended selective enrollment high schools were faced with strong academic rigor preparing them to attend elite colleges. Selective enrollment schools are doing their job in providing all students with concrete tools to be successful. They provide a quality well-rounded education and many opportunities to participate in various clubs and activities. And they give students social capital through interacting with diverse students, learning how to connect with teachers, and learning how to take advantage of all the resources provided.

Although the main focus of this research was on feelings during the application process and experiences during high school, it was also interesting to note that only low-income students mention feeling lucky to have attended a selective enrollment high school. Annette Lareau's research on how social class makes a difference in family life, specifically in children, could help us understand *a sense of entitlement* or *a sense of constraint* that students felt about their high school experience. In her book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Lareau (2003) introduces the concepts of *concentrated cultivation* and the *accomplishment of natural growth*. She explains that, "by making certain their children have these and other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of concerted cultivation. From this a robust *sense of entitlement* takes root in children. This *sense of entitlement* plays an especially important role in institutional settings, where middle-class children learn to question adults and address them as relative equals." (Lareau 2003:2). On the other hand, low-income families facilitate the *accomplishment of natural growth*, giving their children more power over their leisure activities, but instilling a *sense of constraint*. These concepts are relevant to education because they explain how children from different class backgrounds interact with central institutions, like schools.

Lareau argues that children raised with concentrated cultivation are taught skills that are beneficial in educational settings. She calls these skills, “the rules of the game” that govern interactions with institutional representatives. For example, through these extracurricular activities, these children learn how to work on a team, manage a busy itinerary, and social skills like shaking someone’s hand. Additionally, they learn to think of themselves as special and entitled to receive certain kinds of services from adults which leads to more negotiating and reasoning done by middle-class students in the classroom. Conversely, children raised under the facilitation of the *accomplishment of natural growth* are taught that there are very clear boundaries between children and adults (Lareau 2003: 238). They were taught by their parents to listen and agree with adults have to say, leading them to keep their heads down in class and trying to not draw attention to themselves. Lareau argues that both parenting strategies have their faults, *concerted cultivation* leads to a *sense of entitlement* among middle-class students and the *accomplishment of natural growth* creates in students a *sense of constraint*. But in educational settings, children raised with the *accomplishment of natural growth* are at a disadvantage because they don’t advocate for themselves. During the application process, middle-class families feel more deserving of a selective enrollment education in comparison to their peers, which leads to middle-class families advocating for themselves throughout the application process.

Many elite schools promote *concerted cultivation* through encouraging students to engage in as many extracurriculars as possible, negotiate with teachers, and speak up for themselves. These two concepts were evident in this project between low-income students and middle or upper-class students. Low-income students were primarily raised with the facilitation of the *accomplishment of natural growth* but were able to learn the concrete skills that *concerted*

cultivation promotes, like joining extracurriculars and building relationships with teachers. But throughout their selective enrollment experience, they didn't feel entitled to a selective enrollment education, they felt lucky instead. Although these high schools gave low-income students of color concrete tools to thrive in elite schools, they did not cause an identity shift that causes low-income students of color to internalize a sense of themselves as deserving or privileged.

One more obvious critique: these schools are not able to reach enough students. Currently, there are only 11 selective enrollment high schools and thousands of children in Chicago Public Schools. There are many low-income students of color who apply so that they don't have to attend their neighborhood schools but are unable to get placed in a selective enrollment high school. These students are left with little to no other options because they cannot afford a private school or can't afford to move to the suburbs. Before students can even get to a selective enrollment high school, they have to go through the problematic application system. But once students are able to attend a selective enrollment high school, they are given a quality education, resources, and many opportunities. Further investigation is needed to understand why all students, regardless of social class and race felt that they had a sense of belonging at a selective enrollment high school. Was it simply the extracurriculars they were involved in? Or was there something greater that led to this shift during high school. Additionally, future research should investigate why low-income students don't have an identity shift that changes their sense of privilege. Is the messaging they receive from their families at home simply too powerful to overcome through education?

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APPENDIX A

NAME	GENDER	RACE	SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS	HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED
Bree	Female	Black	Lower-middle	Lindblom
Sasha	Female	White	Lower	Lane Tech
Mia	Female	White	Upper-middle	Payton
Maya	Female	Asian	Upper	Northside
Isabella	Female	Latina	Lower	Westinghouse
Ryan	Male	Black/Latina	Lower-middle	Jones
Luke	Male	White	Middle	Whitney Young
Ms. Anderson	Female	White	Upper-middle	Teaches at Lincoln Middle School
Julie	Female	White	Middle	2 children, Lane Tech
Lisa	Female	Latina	Lower-middle	1 child, Lindblom
Jess	Female	White	Upper	4 children, 1 Payton, 2 Lane Tech, 1 applying

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hi, the goal of this project is to learn more about the experiences of students and parents who applied to selective enrollment high schools in Chicago. And if they enrolled in one, what their experiences were like. All names and identifying information will be kept confidential. All names will be given pseudonyms and I will remove any identifying information in the final paper. Do you mind if I record this interview for transcription purposes?

Application to Selective Enrollment

- Thinking far back, can you describe your middle school to me?
 - How did you decide to attend this middle school or why do you think your parents chose this middle school for you?
 - Did most of your classmates come from the same neighborhood as you?
 - Was it in your neighborhood?
 - Was it an academic center program?
- Do you remember any resources your middle school had that helped students during the selective enrollment high school application process?
 - Did representatives come to your school?
 - Did school counselors help you understand the application process, etc?
- Can you tell me about the first time you heard about selective enrollment high school as an option?
 - How did you hear about it?
 - Do you remember how you felt when you heard about selective enrollment?
 - When you heard about selective enrollment did it change how you participated in school?
 - Did your study habits change?
 - Did you engage with tutoring centers at school?
 - Did your feelings about attendance change?
- Can you tell me about when you decided to apply to a selective enrollment high school?
 - Can you describe your attitude towards applying to a selective enrollment high school? Did you feel excited, nervous, etc.
 - What was the number one factor when you decided to apply to a selective enrollment high school?
- Was there anyone else involved in your application process besides you?
 - If yes, can you tell me who? And how were they involved?
 - Can you tell me about your parent's expectations for where you attended high school?

- Do you remember teachers, friends, or family emphasizing how important grades and test scores were during your middle school years?
 - If yes, how did it make you feel?
 - Probing for stress.

Experience During Selective Enrollment

- Thinking back to high school, can describe your high school to me?
 - Where was it located in the city?
 - Were most of your classmates from the same neighborhood as you?
- Can you tell me what was most challenging during high school?
- Now specifically, can you tell me about your academic life in high school?
 - Tell me about the classes you took throughout high school?
 - How did you decide to take these classes?
 - Were you thinking about college at this point?
 - Can you tell me about a teacher who was important during your high school experience, one who you found supportive or inspiring?
 - And then, could you tell me about a negative experience you had with a teacher?
- Do you remember feeling stressed during high school?
 - Can you tell me more about that?
 - Can you tell me about a specific time you felt particularly stressed?
- Can you tell me about your social life in high school?
 - Were your best friends at the same high school? How did you maintain friendships with people who didn't go to your same high school?
 - How often did you hang out with your friends outside of school? Were these friends in close proximity to you?
 - Tell me about what you did when you hung out with friends.
- Can you tell me about any extracurriculars you participated in during high school?
 - Why did you choose these activities?
 - How would you describe the environment in these extracurriculars?
 - Did you feel included by the group?
 - Were they competitive?
 - Were they diverse?
- Can you describe the sense of community or lack thereof in your high school?
 - Do you feel that you were a part of this community? Why or why not?
 - Did you feel like you could be yourself at school?
- Can you tell me about your relationship with your parents and family during high school?
 - Did you feel pressure from them?
- If you didn't get into a selective enrollment high school, where were you planning to attend?

Feelings After Attending Selective Enrollment

- Can you tell me what you have been up to post high school?

- Do you feel like going to a selective enrollment high school helped guide you toward this path? Why or why not?
- Are you on a completely different path than what you expected?
- Tell me how you feel about your high school experience now. What aspects do you remember fondly? And what aspects do you remember in a more negative way?
- Do you feel satisfied with your selective enrollment high school experience? Why or why not.
- Looking back, can you tell me what you think about the selective enrollment high school system?
- What advice would you give to someone in your shoes when they're 12. What advice would you give a student and parent?
- Is there anything you want to add that we haven't talked about yet?

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Is there a pseudonym that you would prefer to use in this project?
- What tier were you located in?
- What is your gender?
- When you identify your race, what do you say?
- What is the highest level of education your parents received?

How would you describe your socioeconomic background or social class?

PARENTS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hi, the goal of this project is to learn more about the experiences of students and parents who applied to selective enrollment high schools in Chicago. And if they enrolled in one, what their experiences were like. All names and identifying information will be kept confidential. All names will be given pseudonyms and I will remove any identifying information in the final paper. Do you mind if I record this interview for transcription purposes?

Application to Selective Enrollment

- Thinking far back, can you describe your child's middle school to me?
 - Was the middle-school located in your neighborhood?
 - Was it an academic center program?
 - How was it decided for them to attend this middle school?
 - Were most of your child's classmates come from the same neighborhood as them?
- Do you remember any resources the middle school had that helped your student during the selective enrollment high school application process?
 - Did representatives come to the school?
 - Did school counselors help your child understand the application process, etc?

- Can you tell me about the first time you heard about selective enrollment high school as an option?
 - How did you hear about it?
 - Do you remember how you felt when you heard about selective enrollment?
 - When you heard about selective enrollment did it change how you thought your child's engagement with school?
 - Did you notice better study habits, use of school resources, attendance, or excitement about going to school from your child?
- Can you tell me about the decision for your child to apply to a selective enrollment high school?
 - Can you describe your attitude towards your child applying to a selective enrollment high school? Did you feel excited, nervous, etc.
 - What factored into your opinions on whether or not your child applied to a selective enrollment high school?
- Was there anyone else involved in your application process?
 - If yes, can you tell me who? And how were they involved?
 - Can you tell me about your expectations for where your child attended high school?
- Can you tell me about the kind of messaging you gave your child regarding grades? Were there incentives or punishments or were grades discussed at all?
 - If yes, how did it make you feel?
- As a parent, can you describe the number one important factor that you wanted for your child when attending high school?
 - Diversity, quality and engaged teachers, location, school reputation, access to resources, etc.

Experience During Selective Enrollment

- Thinking back to high school, can describe your child's high school to me?
 - Which high school was it?
 - How was the decision made for them to attend this specific school?
- From your perspective, can you tell me what was challenging about your child's high school experience?
- Now specifically, can you tell me about your child's academics in high school?
 - Tell me about the classes that they took throughout high school?
 - How did they decide to take these classes? How involved were you during their class selection process?
 - Were they thinking about college at this point? As a parent, were you encouraging college at this point?
 - Tell me about your relationship with the teachers at this school? Or with the administration as a whole?
 - Do you remember your child feeling stressed during high school?

- Can you tell me more about that?
 - Can you tell me about a specific time that they felt particularly stressed?
- Can you tell me about their social life in high school?
 - Did you live close to their friends?
 - Did you know their friends in high school? Did you like them?
 - How often did they hang out with your friends outside of school? Before they could drive, would you have to help with transportation, etc.
- Can you tell me about any extracurriculars that your child participated in during high school?
 - Why did they choose these activities?
 - Can you tell me about how/if you encouraged them to participate in these activities?
 - Were you able to attend sporting events, concerts, or any other events relating to your child's extracurriculars.
 - Can you tell me about the environment in these extracurriculars?
 - Did your child tell you they inviting, competitive, diverse?
- Can you describe the sense of community or lack thereof in the high school your child attended?
 - Did your child feel that they were part of this community? Why or why not?

Feelings After Attending Selective Enrollment

- Can you tell me what your child has been doing post high school?
 - Do you feel like going to a selective enrollment high school helped guide your child toward this path? Why or why not?
 - Are they on a completely different path than what you expected?
- Tell me how you feel about their high school experience now. What aspects do you remember fondly? And what aspects do you remember in a more negative way?
 - Do you feel satisfied with their selective enrollment high school experience? Why or why not
- What advice would you give other parents about the selective enrollment system?
- Looking back, can you tell me what you think about the selective enrollment high school system?
- Is there anything you want to add that we haven't talked about yet?

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Is there a pseudonym that you would prefer to use in this project?
- What tier were in?
- What is your gender?
- When you identify your race, what do you say?
- What is your occupation?

- How would you describe your socioeconomic background or social class?