

Name: _____

Date: _____

Per: _____

What Do You Hope to Get Out of High School?

BY HOLLY EPSTEIN OJALVO

AUGUST 19, 2011 5:14 AM August 19, 2011 5:14 am

A study found that attending New York City's highly competitive "exam schools" (where entrance is determined by a test) has little to no effect on students' SAT scores and other measures of achievement. How do you define achievement with respect to your high school career? What would you like to be able to achieve as a result of your high school experience?

In the ArtsBeat blog post "[Thinking Cap: Angst Before High School,](#)" Patricia Cohen describes the study:

THE QUESTION Each year millions of middle school students nationwide spend angst-filled months waiting to hear if they scored high enough on an entrance exam to attend a selective public high school. In New York City alone more than 27,000 students apply for precious spots in the three best-known schools: Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Technical and Bronx High School of Science. What Mr. Dobbie and Mr. Fryer wanted to know was just how much of a difference attending one of these high schools makes in the long run for students with similar equal admissions test scores. Some proponents say the benefits of an environment of high achievers, more advanced coursework and higher expectations are obvious. Skeptics counter that these gifted and motivated teenagers would have done well no matter where they went. Students in these schools with low class ranks may even be less competitive when it comes to college admissions. They might be better off in less competitive environments or in schools with a wider range of student abilities. Because there are so many applicants of similar ability and achievement who are not accepted to these New York institutions, the authors were able to compare the average outcomes of students who graduated from different high schools. "We provide the first causal estimate of the impact of attending an exam-high school in the United States on later outcomes," they write.

THE FINDINGS Mr. Fryer and Mr. Dobbie were surprised by their results: "The impact of attending an exam school on college enrollment or graduation is, if anything, negative. There is also little impact of attending an exam school on SAT reading and writing scores, and, at best, a modest positive impact on SAT math scores." The results were the same for both boys and girls, and for those who came from different types of middle schools. "Our analysis of exam schools suggests that students are encouraged or pushed to take harder course work, but that their actual human capital essentially remains unchanged."

The one exception, Mr. Dobbie and Mr. Fryer wrote, was borderline students: "Attending an exam school increases rigor of the marginal student's high school course work, and makes the marginal student more likely to graduate from high school with an advanced diploma." The authors pointed out that the only measures they looked at were SAT scores, college enrollment and graduation. "Without longer-term measures such as income, health, or life satisfaction," they note, "it is difficult to fully interpret our results."

Written Response

What you would like to get out of high school. Do you hope the experience improves your chances of achieving specific goals like graduating and attending college? Of being admitted to a selective college? Or perhaps improving your SAT scores? Or are the benefits of high school more nuanced than that, like an overall enriching experience or exposure to ideas and interesting people?