

Predicting the Effect of Affirmative Action Plans in New York City Elite Public High Schools*

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Abstract

In recent years, there have been concerns about the lack of diversity in schools, especially elite schools that select students based on exams. This paper studies the impacts of two possible affirmative action plans in New York City by estimating students' underlying preferences and then simulating their actions under the two proposed plans. There is a trade-off between promoting diversity and maintaining student quality in elite schools. A tier-based plan similar to that in Chicago does little to increase the overall racial diversity of this sector, but it preserves the quality of incoming students. In contrast, the plan to guarantee elite school seats to students who placed in the top seven percent (by academic performance) of each public middle school causes substantial flows of students between the elite and regular sectors, thereby giving more access to Black and Hispanic students at the cost of lower student quality. The two plans also change the distribution of diversity across schools in different ways. The Chicago plan reduces the differences among schools within the elite sector while the Top 7% plan bridges the gap in diversity between the two sectors even as it increases within-sector dispersion. Both plans result in considerable changes in school assignments in the regular school sector.

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