

EDUCATION

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## EFP Takeaways

Racial Diversity and Measuring Merit: Evidence from Boston's Exam School Admissions

### Background

The impact of admissions process design on the racial diversity of schools and colleges has sparked heated debates. In Boston Public Schools, nearly a quarter of all 7th-12th grade students attend one of three exam schools. However, the schools' student bodies do not reflect the city's diversity. Joshua Goodman and Melanie Rucinski explore racial gaps in test-taking rates, test scores, GPAs, preferences for the most selective school, and ultimate admissions rates to all three schools. They also simulate admissions to these schools under different potential changes in the admissions process. Their work is published in vol. 17 issue 3 of *EFP*.

### The Study

Applications for admission in the 7th grade to the three exam schools in this study require several components, including an admissions exam called the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE), 5th and 6th grade GPA, and preference rankings of the schools. The authors focus on the various places in the admissions process where racial gaps might arise.

#### For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in \*Education Finance and Policy\*](#).
- [Sign up here to receive future \*EFP Takeaways\*](#).
- Summary of:  
Rucinski, M. & Goodman, J. (2022) Racial Diversity and Measuring Merit: Evidence from Boston's Exam School Admissions. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (3): 408-431.

### Findings

The authors find that even among students with similar state test scores, Black and Hispanic students are less likely to apply and be admitted to Boston exam schools. Among alternative admissions mechanism simulations, the two with the largest effects are (1) replacing the admissions exam with state test scores and (2) using state test scores for admissions in combination with implementing school-based affirmative action.

However, even the simulation of changing the test and implementing school-based affirmative action fails to achieve Black and Hispanic representation at the exam schools that is more than two-thirds the district-wide enrollment of Black and Hispanic students. The results underscore the importance of systemic inequities driving the racial diversity gap between the exam schools and the district.

Figure 4. Exam School Invitations and Enrollment

