

Elite schools harm marginal students and benefit high achievers:

Evidence from admission lotteries

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Secondary-school students in Amsterdam who are placed in the highest academic track, can choose between comprehensive schools that offer multiple tracks and elite schools that exclusively offer the highest track and oblige students to take courses in the classical languages Latin and Greek. The elite schools are popular and therefore often oversubscribed. Assignment is based on admission lotteries, which we use to estimate causal effects. We find that elite schools have negative effects for some students and positive effects for others. For students who marginally qualify for the highest track, attending an elite school reduces the likelihood to graduate from the highest track. For students from the top of the pretreatment ability distribution, attending an elite school increases the likelihood to graduate from the highest track with a high GPA on the nationwide exit exam. These results reconcile contrasting findings from previous studies.