
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

FROM: UHS SUBCOMMITTEE
SUBJECT: UHS ADMISSIONS 2014-2015
DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2014

In accordance with the USP and the directives of the Special Master, University High School (UHS) was charged with implementing several activities for UHS freshman admissions in 2013-2014. These were:

- Designing and implementing a short-answer essay (SAE) for students who fell just below the traditional criteria for freshman admissions in SY2015-2016
- Administering the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) to all 7th graders
- Piloting an assessment for student motivation/resiliency

A summary of these activities and their results are described below. The recommendations for admissions for the 2015-16 school year are the following:

- Re-allocating the admission points between GPA and the entrance test by increasing the points awarded on the CogAT. This would have the effect of reducing the pool of applicants who meet the minimum 3.0 GPA and the minimum stanine score of 7 but fall short of the 50 points required for admissions.
- Implementing the short-answer essay option for students who meet both the minimum test and GPA criteria and score between 45 and 49 points on the admissions rubric.
- Piloting a new student motivation/resiliency assessment – the ACT Engage – an online assessment that examines student motivation, social engagement and self-regulation.
- Offering an opportunity for all students to take the CogAT in the fall of 6th grade as a means for the district to implement targeted efforts to support student success for the 8th grade test, and provide the middle schools with an alternative assessment from which to identify areas for individual student improvement.
- Test all TUSD 8th grade students for admissions in the Fall of their 8th grade year.

Summary of 2013-2014 UHS admissions activities**Short Answer Essay**

One-hundred and six (106) students were invited to respond to the essay questions. These students met both the minimum CogAT stanine score of a 7 and the calculated minimum GPA of 3.0 but fell short of the 50 admission points on the matrix. The point break-down for these students were as follows:

Number of Students who qualified for Essay questions by UHS Admission points

Total Points	49	48	47	46	45	43	Total
Number of students	34	11	13	7	18	23	106
% of total number	32%	10%	12%	7%	17%	22%	100%

As the table shows, just under a third of the group missed the criteria by one point, and over 50% of the group were within three (3) points. Eighty-eight (88) students elected to complete the essays.

The following table provides a break-down by race/ethnicity for the 46 students in TUSD schools. Since race/ethnicity is not a factor in UHS admissions, this data was not collected for non-TUSD students. However, the 2014-2015 application form has been revised to collect demographic data (gender, race/ethnicity, and date of birth) for reporting purposes only.

Number of TUSD students invited to take the essay and who took the essay ("Essayists") by point distribution and race/ethnicity

	49	48	47	46	45	43	Total Invited	Total Essayists
Anglo	5	0	2	1	1	4	13	7
African-American	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Hispanic	12	4	5	2	5	9	37	31
Native American	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Asian	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	2
Multi-race	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2
Total	22	4	7	4	9	14	60	46

As the table shows, four (4) African-American TUSD students were invited and answered the essay questions. All of them were at the high end of the point distribution (49 points). The admission point distribution for Hispanic students was more wide-spread with 32% at 49 points, and 24% at the low end of the distribution (i.e. 43 points).

An admission protocol was developed based on the external readers essay scores. Students who received 6 or more points from the essay rubric were given admission regardless of admission points. Students who received 3 or fewer points did not receive an admission offer regardless of

admission points Students who scored a 4 or a 5 were offered admission if their total points (GPA points + test points + essay points) totaled 50 points or more). A total of 67 students (76% of the total number who took the essays) were offered admissions to UHS.

Student essay scores - number and percent of students who took essay

Essay Scores	n	% of essayists
Scored above a 6	45	51%
Scored a 4 or 5 and qualified	22	25%
Scored a 4 or 5 and did not qualify	10	11%
Scored below a 3	11	13%
Total	88	100%

Fifty-two (52) students are currently attending UHS (25 from non-TUSD middle schools). Of the TUSD students who took the essay, all four African-American students qualified and three are currently attending (the 4th student enrolled but left the district). Twenty-three (23) of the 31 Hispanic students qualified and 17 are currently enrolled in the school (six are attending other TUSD high schools).

Number of Essay Students enrolled in UHS by Ethnicity and School

School Type	TUSD	Non-TUSD	Total
Anglo	6	13	19
African-American	3	1	4
Hispanic	17	8	25
Native American	0	0	0
Asian	0	1	1
Multi-race	1	2	3
Total	27	25	52

Conclusion: The short-answer essay was designed to provide an opportunity for students to raise the number of admission points to the required 50 point threshold. Sixty-seven out of 88 students, or 76% of the essayists were offered admission, resulting in an additional four African-American students and 25 Hispanic students attending UHS. However, a review of the essay scores and admission point distribution indicates that the short-answer essay favored students at the high end of the point distribution. Of the five (5) African American students who qualified for admissions, four were within 1 point of the 50 points necessary. Similarly 17 of the 31 Hispanic students who qualified had 48 or 49 points, and only two (2) had admission points of 43. This suggests that the short-answer essay was highly correlated with the existing criteria and did not bring in an 'alternative' type of student. As a result, we are proposing that we adjust the point distribution for the test scores to capture these students through the traditional criteria (see proposal below).

In addition, the short-answer essay was problematic in several ways, including the time needed to develop appropriate questions, the essay questions used, finding and training readers, and the subjectivity of the scoring. Although we are recommending to implement a short-answer essay again, we are proposing that it be more limited in scope and its implementation improved (see recommendations below).

Student Motivation/ Resiliency Assessment - CAIMI

Over 2900 8th grade students took the Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI) in December 2013 with a total of 1692 completing the entire survey. The breakdown by ethnicity was close to the District's 8th grade ethnicity distribution with a slightly higher White/Anglo representation and a slight decrease in African-American and Hispanic.

CAIMI Respondents by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	n	% of 8th grade students in CAIMI sample	% of 8th grade students in District
White	387	23	19
African-American	125	7	9
Hispanic	1033	61	63
Native American	70	4	4
Asian/Pacific I	40	2	2
Multi-racial	37	2	3
Total	1692	100	100

The CAIMI scores were found to be significantly correlated with AIMS. The CAIMI scores were not significantly correlated with the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) with the exception of the quantitative sub-test.

A total of 561 students applied for UHS admissions. Overall, this group had higher mean scores on the CAIMI than for the group as a whole.

Mean Percentile Rank by Subject Area and Race/Ethnicity for UHS Applicants

Race/Ethnicity	n	reading	math	social studies	science	general
White	153	49	34	41	48	37
African-American	43	46	36	44	48	40
Hispanic	308	54	38	46	48	39
Native American	14	53	35	35	43	30
Asian/Pacific I	29	47	36	43	45	30
Multi-racial	14	38	38	38	38	38
Total	561	51	36	44	47	38

When broken down by total admission points, the mean percentile rank across subject areas for the group just below qualifying (from 43-49) was higher than any other group, but the difference was not significant. With the exception of a higher rank in reading, the mean percentile rank of students who made the required 50 or more admission points was basically the same as those who did not qualify for admissions.

Mean Percentile Rank by Admission points

Test-points	n	reading	math	social studies	science	general
50+ (qualified)	153	51	36	44	47	38
43-49	43	55	43	48	53	47
21-27 (met test criteria but not GPA)	46	47	35	44	46	35
0 (did not meet test criteria)	319	45	34	44	48	34
Total	561	51	34	42	45	34

A percentile score of 80 on the general scale was selected as a criterion to compare student performance on the CAIMI. Out of the 82 students who scored above 80, 44 (54%) received admission points from the CogAT (scored a composite stanine of 7 or higher). A breakdown by race/ethnicity shows that eleven students would have qualified for admission for UHS if this criterion had been used. This included 2 African-American students and 5 Hispanic students.

Race/Ethnicity	n	Met Traditional Qualifying Criteria	Met Test Criteria but GPA too low
White	23	18	2
African-American	11	2	2
Hispanic	42	11	5
Native American	0	0	0
Asian/Pacific I	3	1	1
Multi-racial	3	1	1
Total	82	33	11

Conclusion: The results of the CAIMI analysis do not rule out the use of adopting a resiliency/motivation scale as an additional assessment for UHS admissions, particularly for those whose grades may not accurately reflect a student's motivation to learn. Students exhibiting high motivation scores did not necessarily do well against the traditional qualifying criteria. Similarly, over 104 students who qualified for admissions through the traditional criteria received no benefit from the CAIMI. However, the CAIMI itself is a problematic instrument. Many students did not complete it - it was cumbersome to administer and items were repetitive. As a result, the UHS sub-committee would like to pilot an alternative motivation/ resiliency scale – the ACT Engage assessment - in January 2015 (see recommendation below).

7th Grade CogAT Testing

The USP required that the District test all 7th graders with the CogAT test. With support from the GATE department, 2409 7th grade students were tested in May 2014. This represented 79% of the District 7th grade population.

A total of 326 students met the test criteria of a composite stanine of 7 or higher. The table below shows the number of students who met the test criteria by ethnicity. For both Fall 2012 and 2013, students applied for UHS admissions and were tested.

Number and Percentage of students who met UHS test criteria by Ethnicity - Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Spring 2014

Test Date	8th grade Fall 2012		8th grade Fall 2013		7th Grade Spring 2014	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ethnicity						
White	146	42%	129	40%	134	41%
African American	15	4%	18	6%	12	4%
Hispanic	153	44%	143	45%	144	44%
Native American	3	1%	5	2%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Is	16	5%	15	5%	24	7%
Multi-racial	18	5%	11	3%	12	4%
Total	351		321		326	

The table shows that overall the percentage of students who met the UHS test criteria is consistent with previous years where students self-select or are recruited to apply. With respect to African-American students, however, both the number and percentage of those who met the test criteria fell. For Hispanic students, the percentage also did not increase.

Conclusion: The results of the 7th grade testing indicate that the current application process does not exclude potential students from applying for UHS, and in fact, suggest in terms of absolute numbers, that it may have ‘depressed’ numbers particularly among African-American students and Native American students. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that the early testing creates an uneasy school environment for 8th graders between students who are eligible for UHS admissions and those who are not. There have been suggestions that students who hoped to attend the school but did not meet the requirements may also be less motivated to do well because they know that it is not as important. To address these issues, the UHS sub-committee is proposing that we return to testing all UHS applicants in the Fall of 8th grade. We are also recommending that whole grade testing occur with the CogAT in 6th grade (see recommendations below).

Recommendations for 2015-2016 Freshman Admissions:

Comment [TM1]: Don't we mean for the 15-16 SY? If so, we should say so.

- Increase the number of points associated with a qualifying score on the CogAT test. This will result in 1) students needing a lower GPA to qualify for 50 points, and 2) reduce the number of students who meet the minimums but don't make 50 points, thereby decreasing the number of students completing the essay portion of the admissions process.

Test Score	Current points	New points
9	27	29
8	24	26
7	21	23

Applying this point distribution to the scores of last year's applicants would have resulted in 38 of the 88 essay students qualifying under the traditional criteria, including four of the five African American essayists and 20 of the 31 Hispanic students.

- Although the short answer essay was problematic for multiple reasons, we recommend that we use it again this year for students who meet the test/GPA criteria and score above 45 but are below 50 points on the modified matrix. We expect that fewer students will complete the assessment because of changes to the point distribution. The UHS sub-committee will work on finding or developing more appropriate essay questions for 8th graders, recruiting external readers, and releasing the schedule by December 1st. Two dates will be scheduled for students to respond to essay questions.
- Pilot a new Motivation/ Resiliency assessment – the ACT Engage - to all 7th graders in January 2015. Although the CAIMI was not successful in terms of the assessment process, the UHS sub-committee believes that an important component of UHS admissions should include a measure of student motivation/ resiliency to replace the short-answer essay option.
- Administer the CogAT to all 6th graders in Fall 2015 as preparation for applying for UHS as 8th graders, and to provide the middle schools with important information from which to identify areas for targeted support to increase the number of students who qualify not only for UHS but for Advanced Learning Experiences (ALE).
- Return to testing students for UHS admission in the Fall of their 8th grade year. This will prevent potential issues at school sites among students, as well as allow adequate time for recruitment and outreach as parents and students consider high school options. By testing all TUSD 8th grade students for admissions in the Fall of their 8th grade year we will assure that all qualified applicants are identified.