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“Just Get it Done”: How the New York City High School Admissions Process is Re-defining the Work & Identities of Professionals in Screened High School-Programs

Heather Rippeteau
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“Just Get it Done”: How the New York City High School Admissions Process is Re-defining the Work & Identities of Professionals in Screened High School-Programs

By

Heather Rippeteau

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
The City University of New York

2017
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

“Just Get it Done”
How the New York City High School Admissions Process is
Re-defining the Work & Identities of Professionals in Screened High School-Programs

by
Heather Rippeteau

Advisor: Professor Nicholas Michelli

The implementation of the high school admissions process in the New York City Public schools, has re-defined the work and identities of professionals working the screened high school-programs. This study uses descriptive statistics culled from the Directory of New York City High Schools for 2007 and 2017, and interviews with school personnel from three screened school-programs, to review the impact of the implementation of this process during its first full decade in existence. These data establish the fact that screened school-programs are experiencing the phenomenon of marketization by way of their admissions process. Further, the implementation of this process generates additional labor for those professionals working at screened school-programs who are tasked with coordinating the admissions process, but in some cases, for all professionals working in screened school-programs however far removed their work may appear to be from the admissions process. This research finds that, especially for those in the position of “director” or “coordinator” of admissions, the work challenges traditional professional identities, shifts the work of these educators towards customer service-related tasks, is overwhelmingly performed by women and is largely unacknowledged by formal pay structures, budget lines or job titles within the Department of Education nor its accompanying unions (for example, “Director of Admissions” is not an official Department of Education job title and there is no formal line in a school’s budget to compensate for admissions-related costs or labor). This research provides a foundation for those interested in further examining the New York City High School admissions process or other education policies that may be referred to as “unfunded mandates,” particularly those who are interested in the dilemmas of front-line workers and policy implementation.
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Although I cannot name them due to confidentiality, I am grateful to the participants in this study, who placed their trust in me and were willing to enthusiastically share about their work in admissions; I remain overwhelmed by your commitment to this part of your daily work and to the integrity of the process. I hope that this research begins
an important conversation about ensuring that your contributions to this process are acknowledged and valued more broadly.

Heather Rippeteau
September 2017
DEDICATION

Maison, Odette & Elsie-- I dedicate this work to you with all of my love and energy
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I. Overview of the Dissertation Research

The way an individual school reacts to, interprets and implements a policy handed down by the larger school district can cause the work of the administrators, staff and teachers to be redefined. This study examines how the implementation of the high school admissions process has redefined the work of teachers, administrators and staff in screened high school-programs in New York City, since its implementation in 2006. The study examines trends in the admissions process across all screened high school-programs, and through interviews, explores how faculty, administrators and school staff, experience their work around the admissions process.

A similar study to this has been conducted in law schools by scholars Wendy Espeland and Michael Saunder, in evaluating how the phenomenon of public rankings have redefined the work of law school deans, professors and admissions staff. Saunder and Espeland used a similar publication to the Directory of New York City High Schools to compile initial data, which concluded that the phenomenon existed and provided descriptive data on programs that were impacted, and, like this study, they triangulated their findings with interviews of those whose work was affected by the larger phenomenon. Most of the existing literature on the high school admissions process in New York City public schools focuses on the experience of students and families navigating the process. There is only one other U.S.-based study that looks at the impact of this system on the practices and attitudes of public high school professionals tasked with designing, implementing and managing a school's admissions policy, largely on their own with little to no guidance or regulation from the school district-- that study focused on the gaming strategies employed by high school principals navigating the high school choice arena.

This study adds dimension to the school choice and school labor literature by examining the work lives of those tasked with implementing high school choice in New York City screened school-programs. I conclude from the research that marketization has indeed been deeply enacted in the New York City’s screened high school-programs and
that individuals working within the admissions system of their school-program have, in many cases, internalized and normalized the importance of this phenomenon by validating the importance of the admissions system, even as they simultaneously embrace and reject it. This study establishes the ways the work of school professionals in screened school-programs has been redefined and the impacts of those redefinitions. For those professionals most deeply involved in admissions work, the impact has been an intensification of work, by way of the school-program increasingly using labor-intensive admissions requirements, increasing participation in marketing and customer-service related tasks, and going largely unpaid for doing that work. For those professionals working in screened school-programs who have limited involvement in the admissions process, they also may experience an intensification of marketing and customer-service related work or shifts in professional culture that cause them to amend their professional identities in order to continue working at the school-program.

While this research provides a strong foundational entry point to examining the impact of marketization, there are several ways this research could be improved and other areas of the school system that need a similarly structured interrogation to demonstrate the extent of the impact of this redefinition of the work of school professionals.

The Screened School Program

It has been nearly 15 years since former mayor Michael Bloomberg, and his schools chancellor Joel I. Klein, put high school choice policy at the forefront of their education reform movement in New York City. As such, we can now reflect on this decade of experiences and begin to draw some meaningful conclusions about its impact, not just on students and families, but on the schools themselves and the people who work in them. The goal of this study is to find out how the marketization of public schools has redefined the experience and understanding of school for administrators, faculty and staff and finally, whether marketing has helped NYC public high schools better match themselves with appropriate 8th grade applicants. The bigger question, above all else, is what can these elements tell us about equity of access and opportunity in New York’s public high schools?
As school choice policies have become more deeply enacted and internalized in New York City public high schools, schools are moved to engage in marketing strategies and more complex admissions processes in order to compete for applicants. Like a college whose public profile is raised by its low percentage of acceptance rates, public high schools in New York City are compelled to better market themselves and manage their admissions processes. In particular, New York City has stratified its public high school system by admissions method, where schools with the most selective methods have the ability to cull the highest performing students from the pool of applicants. The most selective of these are the “specialized high schools” that require students to perform well on the Specialized High School Admissions Test, followed by “screened” schools.

Screened high schools are those high schools, or programs within a high school, which require student applicants to rank their school or program and do something else or a combination of “something else”— over the years, these have included attending a school tour, providing a writing sample, submitting a supplemental application or a variety of other actions— which are designed by each individual school or program and made available to the public (Corcoran & Levin, 2010). In 2017 there were one hundred and sixty-one public high school programs in New York City fall into the category of a “screened” program (excluding those screened for language and a students’ recent arrival in the United States). Students applying to these schools are taking a risk: screened schools do not automatically accept students based on the Specialized High School Admissions Test scores nor do they just accept any student that applies to attend. Every screened school has to develop its own process for selecting applicants and learn how to market their school to students, guidance counselors, and families that are going through the high school application process. Additionally, all schools undergo highly publicized accountability measures, which pressure schools to maintain or raise their reputations (Siskin, 2010; Corcoran & Levin, 2010). Which students a school accepts may be a factor in how well the school can maintain its reputation in the competitive high school marketplace, making the admissions process very high-stakes. With the exception of their first year of existence, schools do not typically receive a designated portion of their budget to offset the costs associated with these processes.
Every year these screened schools have the added high-stakes responsibility of choosing their students. Each year they may need to train faculty or staff on how to participate in the process, many provide tours, hold auditions, interviews or on-site writing sample days that require staff and space. Further, each year schools must decide if their chosen process is meeting their needs, if it is attracting the applicants they want, and how to adjust the process if it doesn’t.

The goal of this study is to illuminate the ways that screened high schools have handled the process of becoming marketized; to examine the ways this process has impacted their daily work and the implications these findings have for equity in New York City’s public schools.

Language: “School” versus “Program”

The language of “school” versus “program” is important to this study, as the Department of Education allows different admissions methods to be used within the same school for different programs. For example, Automotive High School in Brooklyn has five different programs within the larger school, serving 372 students. The programs at Automotive use three different admissions methods to fill their seats: one program uses the “screened” method, two use the “ed-opt” method and two use the “limited unscreened” method. These five programs together make up one school with its own faculty, leadership and budget. On the other hand, there are single programs that represent an entire high school, like Marble Hill High School for International Studies in the Bronx, which is one high school of 447 students that only offers one Humanities & Interdisciplinary focused program, using the “screened” method for admissions. For this purpose, I choose to use the language “school-program” to describe each program because high schools in New York City fall into one of these two categories: either a stand-alone high school or a program within a school. To preserve the accuracy of the research of others, I simply use the word “school” or the words that the authors use that are often describing schools more broadly than those in New York City. In the parts of this publication that include my own research, I use the phrase “school-program,” which is specific to New York City’s high schools.
Research Questions

This study began with the question: How has the work of school professionals been redefined by the implementation of the high school admissions process? How has redefinition impacted the nature and role of the work of school professionals, if any redefinition exists? Since the inception of the study, however, the research questions have expanded to understand more nuanced versions of this question that were guided by the current literature described above, quantitative data analysis on the Directory for New York City High Schools, and interviews with professionals in the field. Such extended questions have uncovered the relevance of a school-programs established history, the relevance of the institutional history of individuals navigating the admissions process, and the impact on individual professionals as they express the burdens and rewards of taking on the responsibility of admissions at their school-program.

II. My Stake & Interest in this Study

In the Fall 2007 I entered the school system as a new teacher at two critical points in New York City Public Education: first, the admissions process as it currently stands, was in its second year, making it an established policy that users on all sides were becoming more adept at; and second, a recent union contract had been enacted that made union issues, and talk of the contract, a common talking point amongst colleagues. These two elements shaped how I came to understand the admissions process, my investment in it, and my curiosity about personnel work in this process, which ultimately prompted this study.

I have continued to teach and work in a screened school-program since that time and what I saw, in both principals who led my school during the last ten years, were school leaders who were essentially trying to cobble it together every year; to make this process happen in a way that treated every child who submitted an application fairly, to make the school accessible to those who wanted to see it without disrupting the learning of our current students, and to get and pay the personnel needed to pull off this feat every year.
As I became more invested in my school’s admissions process by participating in tours and reading admissions material, I began to suspect that there must be a protocol, a more organized or regulated way of doing this work-- surely there was a formal system. As I spoke to other educators, former classmates and friends, I realized that no, there was no one system; that each school that, like mine, was a screened school-program, had to develop its own system and figure out how to make it work for them. On one hand I thought, how wonderful to have such autonomy, but on the other hand, how could there be no formal process or support in such an otherwise highly regulated industry?

I wanted to know more. I wanted to know why it seemed that our annual choices for implementing this process were unpredictable, why school leaders couldn't reasonably predict whether there would be money to pay people to participate in admissions processes at school-programs, why so many personnel had daily and annual tasks related to the admissions process that were not part of their formal job descriptions, even though they did those jobs every year. I wanted to know if the DOE knew about this, if the union knew about this, and how much it all would really cost if it all was being paid for; what sacrifices would a budgeting principal have to make in order to make this process more equitable to the applying 8th grade students and to the high school personnel who were tasked with carrying out each part of the process?

My curiosity led me to this study. Now a seasoned teacher with a decade of classroom teaching under my belt and a greater understanding of the New York City Public School System thanks to experience and graduate studies, I have produced a body of research that begins to uncover possible answers to the questions that baffled me a decade ago.

III. Organization of Dissertation Chapters

The chapters of this dissertation are organized to help the reader build their understanding of the admissions process for screened school-programs, to richly describe screened school-programs as they are presented in the Directory of New York City High Schools and through the public school-quality data provided by the New York City Department of Education, to demonstrate the phenomenon of marketization in New York
City’s screened high school-programs and then to illustrate how this phenomenon impacts the daily and annual work of the admissions process in screened school-programs. Finally, I discuss the greater picture that is painted by the collected data, its possible implications and limitations, and places where the next body of research should look to enhance and expand the research presented here.

Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the research literature that brought about this study and supports its framework. Here I discuss literature on marketization of the public sector, public high school choice and high school admissions processes, college selectivity and high school admissions, rankings and accountability in public schools, and the medical school match model. Within each category of literature, I layout a narrative of the creation of the screened school-program admissions process and show how the current literature, which is mostly focused on higher education, is relevant to the high school admissions process in New York City public schools and its impact on the adult professionals working in those school-programs. Together, this literature establishes my use of Foucauldian governmentality as the appropriate theory for understanding the impact of marketization on the work of the adult professionals in screened school-programs. This chapter also discusses Foucauldian governmentality and the research of scholars who have theorized this idea into both the neoliberal world and, specifically, into the world of public education.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of each phase of data collection and analysis, the literature that supports the selection of these strategies and limitations of the dataset and selected strategies for analysis. This chapter first discusses the collection and analysis of the quantitative dataset, built from the New York City Directory of High Schools for the years 2007 and 2017, and datasets available through OpenNYC, which informed the data collection and analysis in phase two: interviews with professionals who work in three screened school-programs in New York City.

Chapter 4 examines the findings of the descriptive statistics of screened school-programs and establishes the existence of the phenomenon of marketization in New York City’s screened high school-programs. This data is organized in the same order as the current literature was presented. The chapter demonstrates the relevance of each piece of literature and where I accept or reject the conclusions of other scholars, as their ideas
relate to the admissions process for screened-school programs and the work of the professionals who implement it.

Chapter 5 examines the findings of participant interviews, where I interviewed ten school-program personnel across three screened school-programs in New York City. Here the findings are organized first, according to the coding categories that were used to analyze the interviews, then by school-program and individual’s ideas within the same school-program, and then there is a brief discussion of the ways that this coding category illuminated similarities and differences between school-programs. Finally I address the unexpected patterns that emerged from the interviews, which serve as the basis for Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 brings together the analysis of findings from both the descriptive statistics in Chapter 4 and the interviews in Chapter 5. Here I discuss an analysis of the whole picture, implications of the research at the local and national levels, recommendations for changes and improvements to the admissions system, and areas for further research on the impact of marketization in New York City’s public school system as it relates to the work of the professionals tasked with implementing it.

Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter provides the research questions, historical background, and my personal interest in the completion of this study. The chapter discussed the basic overview of the research, including earlier studies that I drew from to create my study, the brief review of what screened high school programs are, a note about how the study changed my language when referring to school-programs, and a bit about my experience working on admissions at a screened high school-program. Lastly this chapter provides an explanation of how the chapters are organized to create a coherent overall research document, but also shows how each chapter is internally organized to support the reader in understanding the phenomenon of marketization, as it relates to the screened school-program’s admissions process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I. Unifying Ideas from Relevant Literature

This research brings together several areas of inquiry including literature on the marketization of the public sector, school choice policy, college selectivity, rankings and accountability literature, and the medical school-matching model. I also draw deeply on literature that marries neoliberalism to Foucauldian theory and public schools in the Theoretical Framework section of this paper. It is the concepts presented in this body of literature that formed the basis for my initial phase of data collection, to establish the existence of the phenomenon of marketization in screened school-programs, the factors and practices that define marketization in screened school-programs, and then to select participants whose lived work experience would further describe the impact of the phenomenon.

Marketization of the Public Sector:

Marketization can be broadly defined as a good or service that is undergoing the process of becoming a free-market version of itself. This process is often linked with, but does not necessarily have to include, the process of privatization, the selling off of public goods and services to the private sector. Three authors have explored this phenomenon most closely in public education providing clear definitions of marketization (Whitty & Power, 2000), how marketization works in the public sector (Levaçic, 1995), and an ethnographic study of the impacts of marketization in public education (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011).

Geoff Whitty and Sally Power’s work deeply examined the meaning of marketization as it relates to the emergence of this phenomenon in public education. Whitty and Power state that:

marketization most often refers to the development of ‘quasi-markets’ in state funded and/or state provided services…quasi-markets in education [involve] a combination of
parental choice and school autonomy, together with a greater or lesser degree of public accountability and government regulation (Whitty & Power, 2000).

New York City’s high school choice system certainly meets the criteria of a quasi-market by implementing parental choice, school autonomy, greater public accountability and government regulation. I detail ideas about school choice policy in the next section of this literature review, but school autonomy and increased public accountability and regulation are hallmarks of marketization that can be discussed here and will be revisited in later sections.

During former mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration, New York City’s public high schools were given greater accountability and regulation through two major reforms, the first being the implementation of two system-wide performance management tools: the annual school Progress Report and the Quality Review. The second major reform for accountability and regulation was greater autonomy and regulation for principals.

School Progress Reports and the Quality Review were implemented in 2006 and 2007, respectively, and based on the work of then chief accountability officer at the Department of Education James Liebman (Childress et al, 2010). The goal of these accountability tools was to sharpen the focus on student progress, emphasize capacity building within the school organization, and measure the success of the school leader (Hill, 2010). The Progress Report uses student achievement data such as student progress from year to year, student performance based on standardized exam scores, and school environment based on the annual Learning Environment survey distributed to parents, students and teachers, to calculate a letter grade for each school: A through F. Although this accountability tool was discontinued in 2013 with a change in administration, the effects of the tool are still relevant for the majority of the decade this research covers.

The Quality Review score qualifies a school as well-developed, proficient, developing or under-developed. The metrics for this tool have changed many times since 2007, but they generally evolve from a school visit of between one and two days, by a reviewer who observes instruction, meets with students, parents, and teachers, and seeks to understand the school as an organization, its culture, beliefs and the overall coherence of instruction from classroom to classroom (Hill, 2010).
Connected to the Progress Report and Quality Review, the second reform included shifts in leadership and school governance that allowed principals the ability to hire and fire teachers (within UFT contract guidelines) and increased principal’s control over their budgets and their buildings (Hill, 2010). These reforms also implicated the teacher’s union, in the form of mutual consent hiring, permitted through the 2005 UFT teachers contract and although it is not explicitly stated anywhere, likely gave greater control to principals over factors that affect the admissions processes in their schools. These factors might have included budgeting for marketing, allocating per-session for faculty and staff to participate in admissions activities, and/or creating the expectation that certain staff and faculty must participate in admissions activities, new student orientations, and school tours.

Rosalind Levaćic deepens Whitty and Power’s “quasi-market” by identifying the distinguishing characteristics of a quasi-market for a public service. Levaćic sees these characteristics as “the separation of purchaser from provider and an element of user choice between providers.” Further, she states that quasi-market are typically highly regulated, where the government controls “such matters as entry by new providers, investment, the quality of service, and price, which is often zero to the user” (Levaćic, 1995). This can be directly observed in New York City’s high school choice program in that the Department of Education (the provider) is somewhat removed from parents, students and schools (purchasers). The Department provides the element of user choice through the Office of Portfolio Management and Office of School Quality, both of which are tasked with ensuring that the Department is offering school choices that parents and students want, and that are of high quality, as defined by the performance metrics identified above.

An example of the effects of marketization in public schools is found in the work of Cucchiara, Gold and Simon’s 2011 study of Philadelphia public schools. Over the course of six years, the authors found that the marketization of Philadelphia public schools had a “major impact on the district's institutional structure and practices for interacting with local stake-holders.” They found that the process of marketization resulted in the limited “ability of individuals and groups to work with and influence the school district and hold officials accountable.” Most relevant to my study, the authors
cited an increased “focus on customer service… [and] the individual at the expense of collective forms of action and, more broadly, undercutting of the understanding of education as a public good” (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011). The focus on customer service and the individual is particularly important to my study, as it identifies the ways that schools must manage their accountability metrics and school quality in order to meet the needs of a customer base, in the form of students and families. This management is further discussed in the section on rankings and accountability.

*Public High School Admissions & School Choice Policies:*

When studying school choice policies, scholars in the United States have most often focused on the agency and power of families and students in the school choice setting (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Hastings, Kane & Staiger, 2005; Hemphill & Nauer, 2009; Perez, 2011). While this literature often highlights the struggles of families and children to navigate the school choice context, a more viable set of literature for this study includes European studies on the relationship between school choice and school climate, United States-based literature that demonstrates why New York City is the ideal place to conduct a study like the one proposed here, and one particular study on the school choice experience of schools in New York City.

Scholars studying schools outside of the United States have turned their attention to the agency of schools in choosing students in a school choice setting. These scholars have found that school agency is particularly important when accountability measures are in place, which incentivize schools to compete for students who will enhance their outcomes on those measures (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1993). British schools have been found to successfully attract the needed applicants to meet their accountability targets when they employed marketing strategies and crafted admissions policies to suit these ends (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). Swedish schools that are engaged in the competitive school choice process have been accused of imparting negative effects on individual teachers by intensifying their work, challenging traditional professional values and identities, and “making teachers’ tasks increasingly about marketing” (Lundstrom & Holm, 2011). These international studies encourage the need for a study like the one
proposed here, that focuses on school agency and the impact of marketization on the school itself in the United States.

New York City is an ideal location to perform a research study that turns its attention to school marketization in the U.S., particularly focusing on school agency in the school choice setting. During Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration, a set of sweeping school reforms were put in place, beginning with the leadership Joel Klein, as chancellor of schools from 2002 through late 2010 and carried out by subsequent chancellors including Cathleen Black and Dennis Walcott, who led the schools from 2011 until Bloomberg’s transition out of office at the end of 2013. Bloomberg’s reforms are commonly referred to as the Children First Initiatives and are widely regarded as his most important legacy. Among these reforms, a major overhaul of the public high school system was implemented starting in 2003, including a sharp increase in the number of high schools in the city and the implementation of a mandatory school choice system for all public high school students (Siskin 2010). In the mandatory high school choice system, “high schools post descriptions and admission criteria on their websites and in [the Directory of NYC High Schools], students rank up to twelve choices and then a complex algorithm, managed at the central office, matches students with programs or schools” (Siskin, 194). Siskin’s overview of the high school choice system agrees with the international findings of Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe and Lundstrom and Holm when she identifies the fact that schools must be “‘in the business’ of recruiting students and marketing [themselves],” and acknowledges the fact that these processes add responsibilities for staff that may shift their priorities and practices.

The existing literature places a focus on the importance of accountability measures as a motivator for school agency, which only further illuminates the need for a U.S.-based study like the one proposed here. Siskin establishes the fact that admissions statistics have an impact on the accountability measures that are used to rate schools each year:

The data on numbers of applicants per seat for each school are published, and factored into the [Department of Education’s] assessment of schools. Seeing ‘five or ten students for every seat,’ staff say, is considered a sign of demand that indicates a ‘healthy’ school (Siskin, 195).
According to this statement, the admissions process is not only used for accountability but also reinforces the market idea that demand indicates a “healthy” school. To support Siskin, Jennifer Jennings is one of the few scholars who has studied the issue of school agency not just in the United States, but specifically in New York City. Her findings take Siskin’s facts further and bolster those found in British schools, by proving that accountability measures influence the kind of admissions processes and marketing strategies that schools implement to raise their accountability profile. After studying three principals who lead schools that use the “limited unscreened” admissions method, Jennings found that when principals felt pressured by the strong accountability measures in New York City, they employed a variety of less-visible strategies to attract applicants that they believed would enhance their performance on those measures.

Jennings argues that in New York City the lack of regulation of the choice system allows principals to create admissions policies that “game” the system. These gaming techniques can include emphasizing the school uniform policy to undesirable applicants or targeting marketing materials towards middle schools that send strong candidates, all which produce a student population that aims to strengthen a school’s performance on accountability measures. The limited unscreened admissions method is supposed to be a less-competitive method for gaining entry to a high school however, Jennings’ work proves that these school leaders are finding ways to manage their competing needs that do not exemplify the ideals of equity that the Department of Education hoped to create with the high school choice policy.

In Europe, scholars have developed a school agency lens in reviewing school choice policies that appears to be largely absent from the literature on United States education, let alone places like New York City that have been held up as models of market-reform by the federal government under President Obama and his Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Siskin’s work is informative, but it’s only an overview of the Children First high school reforms. Jennings provides and on-the-ground look at the work that principals do to manage the competing priorities of educating children and meeting accountability measures. The next step is to take the school agency lens to school personnel and review how admissions processes and marketing strategies impact the
administration, faculty and staff of a high school in New York City, where school choice is mandatory.

While Jennings found it helpful to review the practices of principals in a limited unscreened school, I choose to study screened schools because they are actually charged with the responsibility of creating and implementing their own admissions processes in addition to utilizing, or not, marketing strategies. If Jennings’ findings that a lack of regulation of the choice system allows limited unscreened schools to use “less-visible” or under-the-radar strategies to attract more desirable applicants, what are schools that have been given the right to create their own admissions criteria doing in this unregulated setting? The participant selection methods that I have designed, will allow me to study the experiences of individuals in screened schools that have both successfully met the Department of Education’s market-criteria of a “healthy” school and those who have fallen short of this ideal. Healthy schools are labeled as such because they have a high rate of applicants in contrast to the number of seats available and have maintained or exceeded their accountability measures. Contrastingly, an unhealthy school has a lowered rate of applicants in contrast to the number of seats available and has scored low on accountability measures. I hope to contribute to the next layer of literature that will explore how admissions processes and marketing strategies have redefined the work and daily experiences of school for administrators, faculty and staff; to review how personnel manage, as all of the literature identifies, the “added responsibilities” of school choice.

*College Selectivity & High School Admissions:*

The research on college selectivity is useful for understanding admissions processes on both sides of the coin: the school and the applicant. I’ve focused here on the work of Caroline Hoxby, and the role of students in generating greater college selectivity, and the work of Ernest Pascarella, and the role of college selectivity as a measure of institutional quality.

In her working paper, *The Changing Selectivity of American Colleges* (2009), Caroline Hoxby found that the perceived increase in college selectivity is only a true increase in some schools, while in others selectivity has actually fallen. Looking at
college acceptance rates, SAT/ACT scores, spending per student and tuition between the 1960s and early 2000s, her findings suggest that the increasing selectivity that exists among a smaller group of institutions is due to two elements that fuel each other, creating a sort of Catch-22 that favors institutions that have been more selective since the 1960s.

The first element driving increased selectivity is an applicant issue. Hoxby finds that “students preference for college with respect to its proximity to home has fallen substantially over time,” because applicants are more “sensitive to a college’s resources and student body,” than its proximity to home (p. 22). This finding demonstrates that students are casting their college nets geographically wider, considering national options rather than just local ones. This first element also drives the second element, which is an institutional issue: institutions where selectivity has increased are also colleges that have greater resources per student and the amount of resources per student they have is rising faster than at other colleges. Essentially there is a double feather in the cap for colleges that have been historically more selective: they receive greater endowments for spending per student and the demand among first-time freshman applicants is for schools that have increased resources per student. By being highly selective in the 1960s a college’s ability to be even more selective in the 2000s is exaggerated because of the market forces of providing greater resources per student and students wanting to be at a college that has greater resources per student.

Hoxby’s overall findings are important to this study because they demonstrate that high schools that were selective in the early days of high school choice are more likely to continue to be successful in matching themselves with applicants who are highly qualified now, a decade since high school choice has been in place. Further, Hoxby’s findings also bring the factor of location into my study. As knowledge of the high school choice system increases, eighth grade students can become more strategic about their options. They are no longer focused on their zoned or local school, rather they cast the net wider, making the marketing of a high school’s resources and opportunities key in attracting top applicants.

Hoxby’s findings also help to justify my participant selection criteria. Although public colleges do discriminate tuition costs based on residence, acceptance is not based on residence. Similarly, I have included in my criteria that my participating schools must
be open to all New York City residents. Residential location is a widely used tactic of screened schools; for example, Eleanor Roosevelt High School, a highly sought screened school, gives admissions priority to students who live in District 2 where the school is located. However, my study focuses on the impact of marketization in screened high schools when all other things are equal; allowing schools in the study that prioritize admissions through residence would create an additional layer of advantage and disadvantage between the participating schools.

To bolster Hoxby’s findings, another piece of important scholarship on college selectivity relevant to this study is Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini’s book *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* (2005). Relevant to this research is their finding that selectivity in college matters as a measure of institutional quality and that the opportunities facilitated by a college environment have positive impacts on job satisfaction, earnings, and preparation for the professional world. In their research on “between college effects” Pascarella and Terenzini find that “institutional quality, particularly student body selectivity, has a statistically significant positive net impacts on subsequent earnings” (p. 538). In their review of the literature, the authors found that when institutional quality is measured by selectivity, “attending a college with a 100-point higher SAT score or ACT equivalent is associated with a net increase of two to four percent higher earnings later in life” (p. 538). Institutional quality can also be measured by expenditures per student, tuition costs, number of faculty members with doctorates, faculty-student ratios, and reputational rankings, which I discuss in the next section. However, none of these measures are as positively statistically significant for student earnings as college selectivity.

In their examination of “within college effects,” Pascarella and Terenzini also found that college grades, affiliation with extracurricular or social groups, student-faculty interaction, work or internship experiences, and academic experiences also have a statistically significant positive net impacts on earnings, preparation for the professional world, likelihood to enter an academic field, employment immediately after college, and career development, respectively.

Pascarella & Terenzini’s findings when combined with Hoxby’s work are relevant to this study because they illuminate the ideas that a school’s selectivity, and how it
manages its resources make the school an attractive candidate for an applicant. However, those characteristics are enhanced when a school can demonstrate its ability to facilitate experiences like extracurricular activities, academic experiences, work or internship opportunities, and heightened student-faculty interaction. These elements can all potentially serve as variables in our quantitative analyses of each participating school. For example, a quantitative analysis of the Directory of NYC High Schools data will allow me to test combinations of school quality and/or experiential variables against selectivity—sort of a Pascarella/Terenzini versus Hoxby analysis. In the case of New York City’s screened public high schools, these variables might include the applicant to seat ratio, as a measure of selectivity, versus measures of school quality or experiences such as average admit GPA, state test scores in English and Math, affiliated partner organizations, extracurricular activities, Advanced Placement course offerings, graduation rates and college acceptance rates.

**Rankings & Accountability In Public Schools:**

The advent of the standards and accountability movement, most heartily pushed forth in the United States under the administrations of George H. Bush and Bill Clinton, a new form of school measurement was developed for public consumption: the school ranking. The emergence of school rankings has been accompanied by “political spectacles,” as Murray Edelman calls them: strategically timed, highly publicized announcements of the rankings that cast winners and losers and frame narratives about a given school or group of schools. Nowhere are school rankings more sensationalized than in cities with K-12 public school choice landscapes like New York City, where these rankings are based on public accountability measures and actually have a measurable impact on the ways that school choice is enacted.

Michael Sauder and Wendy Espeland’s research illuminates the complex nature of ranking systems, using the Foucauldian notions of discipline, surveillance in the form of bio-power, normalization and internalization to explain how rankings of law schools act a form of governmentality (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). In their study, Sauder and Espeland used a mixed method approach that included analysis of documentation related
to law school admissions both on the applicant and institution side, analyses of law school rankings over the last fifteen years and interviews with law school administrators who manage elements of their schools’ ranking. From this work the authors found that:

Analyzing rankings as a form of disciplinary power reveals that rankings, through processes of surveillance and normalization, change how internal and external constituencies think about the field of legal education. These new understandings of legal education, in turn, encourage schools to self-impose the discipline that rankings foster (Sauder & Espeland, 2009)

They go on to say that rankings compel law schools to meet the demands of outside audiences, while also illustrating how “coercive disciplinary pressures devolve into forms of ‘self-management’,” where school officials simultaneously reject and embrace the rankings.

A hallmark measurement embedded in law school rankings is selectivity, as measured by number applicants versus seats available for the incoming class. Like the colleges described in Hoxby’s work, the emphasis on this particular definition of selectivity distracts from other positive attributes of these law schools and their programs. The rankings impose a specific discourse about law school quality and obstruct any other display of programmatic strengths, improvements, nor do they give programs the opportunity to address perceived weaknesses. The authors found that even when schools were rewarded with a positive increase in their ranking, the celebration was only brief before they began to panic about the possibility of falling from their new perch (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). The most important takeaway from Sauder and Espeland’s work is that what the rankings really do is show us the “capacity [of schools] to internalize external pressures, whether because of the anxiety they produce or the allure they possess” (Sauder & Espeland, 2009).

Sauder and Espeland’s work is particularly relevant for my study because the experience of law schools rankings is most nearly replicated, perhaps even exaggerated, in New York City high schools; they are worth quoting at length to make a clear connection between the law school and NYC high school experience:

By imposing a shared metric on law schools, rankings unite and objectify organizations, reinforcing their coherence as similar objects… erod[ing] the boundaries that define law
schools’ specialized niches, while at the same time establishing precise differences among schools based on an abstract, universal scale. This research expertly exposes the contradiction inherent in ranking systems that force schools to adhere to similar standards even as they demand and reward extraordinary difference. Schools that question this obvious contradiction risk the favor of the organizations that ranks schools, thus risking their school’s reputation, ranking metrics, like selectivity and, perhaps even at the individual level, their job. Saunder and Espeland’s work in law schools provides a framework for this study, which may serve as a foundation for a larger scale study that more closely follows their methodology of deeply examining individual schools.

In applying their findings to New York, we begin in the Directory of NYC High Schools, where information about each high school is meant to take up only one page; this page follows a uniform format and provides the audience with the same pieces of information about each school. Some schools receive an additional page if they provide multiple program options that each have their own application process. From 2009 to 2013, a major feature of the Directory of NYC High Schools is each high school’s Progress Report and accountability rankings. These pieces became more prominently displayed over the years on the schools directory page, moving from a less visible place on the page in the 2009-2010 application year to the top right corner of each page in the 2012-2013 school year. Over the years the accountability measures have included the school’s overall Progress Report letter grade, letter grades for each of the subcategories within the Progress Report (student progress, student performance, school environment, and college and career readiness), followed by the school’s graduation rate and post-secondary enrollment rate, both displayed as percentages. The Progress Report is an accountability tool on the part of the Department of Education, but it also serves as a ranking tool for the public. The Progress Report and other accountability tools, like the Quality Review, as public documents, are utilized by major rankings publishers nationally, U.S. News and World Report, and more locally, the New York Post’s and New
In this way, the annual ranking of New York City high schools has become a political spectacle, while also effecting change through Espeland & Saundar’s concept of “reactivity” (Edelman, 1996; Espeland & Saundar, 2007). Each year when the school rankings are released there is a great deal of pomp and circumstance. In New York City the local rankings are typically released within two weeks of the first round of high school fairs, a major event covered by local news, where eighth grade applicants have an opportunity to meet and greet faculty and students from every New York City public high school. The rankings draw a great deal of media coverage and school principals are contacted with press releases of their ranking. The spectacle is political in the sense that it provides legitimacy to the accountability measures imposed on schools by the Department of Education and thus the government, while also lending fodder to other political agendas that implicate schools: union contracts, shifts in leadership, which schools have risen or fallen in the ranks and speculation about why etc. In the case of a rising rank, schools may choose to broadcast their newfound status to parents, students, donors, and partner organizations, but in the wake of a falling ranking, principals may face a school community looking for answers.

In an earlier study conducted by Espeland & Saundar, they found that the release of rankings caused schools to develop a sense of “reactivity--the idea that people change their behavior in reaction to being evaluated, observed, or measured” (Espeland & Saundar, 2007). They argue that “…reactions to rankings are best understood as the evolving responses of an assortment of actors who struggle to reconcile their sense of themselves as professional educators with an imposed market-based logic of accountability.” Their work in reactivity to rankings asks the field to more closely and systematically examine how these public measures effect change, both intended and unintended, in individual schools and in the larger system.

While Saundar and Espeland’s work clearly gives weight to the need for my study in the high school choice landscape of New York City, their methods also make the case for

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1 Ms. Hemphill is the founder of insideschools.org, which provides information about NYC public schools. She is the Director of Education Policy at the New School’s Center for New York City Affairs.
the overall framework of my study, both the qualitative and quantitative portions. They prove that it is necessary to examine data on rankings and to “look inside organizations to understand how meaning is negotiated and sense-making takes place” in the face of a rankings culture.

*Medical School Match Model Literature:*

The medical school match model, officially called the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), is used to help hospital residency programs match with medical school graduates. This is a two-sided market where graduates can list their preferences for a residency and residency-training programs can outline their criteria and preferences for candidates. Both sides of the market submit their preferences to a computer-based algorithm that matches graduates with residency programs, ensuring that matches continue until nearly all graduates have been matched and residency-training program spots have been filled (NRMP, 2015). The algorithm for computing these matches was developed by economists Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, Parag A. Pathak, and Alvin E. Roth. Although there have been lawsuits brought against the NRMP, these lawsuits do not reflect a critique of the match process, but rather what happens to residents once they are in their residencies.

As part of the Children First Reforms, the Klein administration implemented a new high school admissions process in 2002. After one year, however, it was clear that the process needed revision: the first round of matches matched only approximately half the 8th grade population, leaving 30,000 students unmatched, necessitating additional rounds of matches with equally poor rates of success. To manage this issue, in May of 2003, the then NYC DOE Office of Strategic Planning leader, Jeremy Lack, contacted the creators of the medical school match algorithm to see if their algorithm could be used to match eighth graders with high schools in New York City. Together, they established the process that exists today and in its first year of operation narrowed the number of students without a match after the first round, down to 3,000.

In today’s process, like the medical school match, both students and schools record their preferences. Students complete a form that requires them to rank up to twelve
high school programs they would like to attend, placing their first preference in the number one slot, second preference in the number two slot and so on; the preferences listed on this form are manually entered into a computer system called the Program Candidate List (PCL) by the student’s guidance counselor. The PCL provides receiving schools with a host of information about the student-applicant including their grades, designation as general or special education, standardized test scores, and attendance record. If a student is applying to a screened school or program the program will have the ability to review application materials and then rank students in the PCL; schools can rank up to seven hundred student-applicants.

The creators of the NYC high school matching program have written extensively about the development of the process (Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak, & Roth, 2005), as well as the alterations made to improve matches, dealing with oversubscription to particular schools, reducing the number of unmatched students, and designing a more efficient appeals process for unmatched students (Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak, & Roth, 2009). The NYC DOE has stated that the Children First high school admissions process is a “work in progress” (Hemphill & Nauer, 2009). The process has undergone minor revisions over the years that do not necessarily alter the process itself, but have attempted to improve the inner workings of the process.

The most groundbreaking changes to the high school matching process have come in the form of transparency of process on the school-side of the market, in reaction to a 2013 audit by the then Deputy Comptroller, Tina Kim (2013). The audit made nine recommendations that were mostly about internal practices, but the most publicly visible recommendation that was put into place, was about screened school ranking criteria and rubrics. In the 2013-2014 school year, screened schools were required to submit to the DOE, the rubric they use to rank student applicants, per the Deputy Comptrollers report. It was anticipated that those rubrics would be vetted by the Department and included in the high school directory, in some way, for the use of middle school students beginning the high school application process. While vetting of the rubrics and periodic audits of screened programs, have been enacted, making rubrics accessible to student applicants has been uneven. In 2014 the Directory of NYC High Schools began to include a section called “Selection Criteria” for screened school program pages; this selection criteria list
aligns with the rubric criteria schools submit and internal data generated by the DOE, but if a student, counselor or parent wants to see the school’s ranking rubric, they are still left on their own, to make this request of individual schools. This is a degree of regulation in the process that has heretofore not been seen and reflects the changing values put forth by a new Department of Education chancellor, as well as a new mayor, although we need more time to see how these changes impact the process.

It should be noted that a major difference between the medical school match process and the high school admissions process is one of maturity, access to information and strategy. The participants in the medical school match process are all adults making mostly rational choices for themselves that hopefully include honest self-appraisals and strategic planning; medical school graduates also input their own preferences into the algorithm. As graduates of medical school and administrators of hospital residency programs, the adults participating are all highly educated individuals who are likely to be successful in life even if no match is made. To contrast, the high school admissions process dictates the future for thirteen and fourteen year old students, the vast majority of whom come from low-income backgrounds, have varying levels of interest and motivation to complete the process and have limited access to information about each of the four hundred high schools with over seven hundred programs. Unlike their medical school counterparts, these eighth grade students require the support of an adult to navigate the process and input their preferences; adults who, themselves may have varying degrees of understanding of the process and ability to provide meaningful support.

II. Theoretical Framework

Theorizing Foucauldian Governmentality into the Neoliberal World

In creating this study I am interested in uncovering how the implementation of the high school admissions process, in screened school-programs, has reshaped the daily and annual work of school personnel. The implementation of this process is one example of how the work of school-program personnel is changing, as public education becomes
increasingly marketized. We are at a critical point in the history of U.S. public education as neoliberal reforms struggle to fully take hold of the system. As such, there are adults involved in the U.S. public education system who have experience with the school system prior to the implementation of market strategies and those for whom marketization has been the way of life. My understanding is that as market-model reforms are implemented in public school systems, administrators, faculty and staff must adjust their understanding of school and, if market reforms are to be successful, these participants must also internalize the values and goals of market reforms. I glean these ideas from scholars who have theorized Foucault’s concept of governmentality into the neoliberal era. Although I could discuss Foucault’s ideas at length here, I will just review the scholars who have theorized on neoliberal governmentality and discuss how that relates to my proposed study.

The leading scholar on neoliberalism, David Harvey demonstrates the ways that neoliberalism introduced new discourse and discursive practices into American society. Harvey cites that “neoliberals redefined democracy as choice in the marketplace and freedom as a personal freedom to consume… Private property is sacrosanct. Competitive individualism is a virtue and personal accountability replaces government responsibility for collective social welfare… the neoliberal project is not only to change how we think, but who we are” (as cited in Lipman, 2011, p. 11). The ideas of democracy as choice and freedom to consume, when matched with personal accountability speak largely to the way that governmentality works in the neoliberal society and the kind of school that is shaped by and succeeds in the neoliberal economy.

Nancy Fraser, a scholar who has attempted to expand Foucault’s governmentality into the neoliberal economy, claims that neoliberal governmentality creates a worker who is an “actively responsible agent… who is obligated to enhance her quality of life through her own decisions [and is] responsible for managing her own human capital to maximal effect” (Fraser, 2009, p. 127 emphasis added). Similar to Harvey’s quote above, personal accountability for one’s own economic survival is key in the neoliberal economy as competition becomes deeply entrenched. In New York City public high schools, this survival and competition is expressed through accountability measures such as progress
reports and quality reviews but is also controlled by the schools through their admissions and marketing strategies.

Peters & Besley (2007) label the worker that Fraser and Harvey describe as the “enterprising-self,” an idea that can also be applied to schools undergoing marketization. The enterprising self is a worker who learns to be flexible in the economy and is able to easily refashion their skills for the needs of the market place “through various forms of personal investment and insurance in a range of welfare fields—health, education, retraining—that are necessary both as a safeguard against risk but also as the preconditions for participation in a competitive society” (p. 142). These discursive actions place all accountability for success in the marketplace on the shoulders of individual workers; or in our case, on the shoulders of individual schools. The emphasis on individualism and competition eliminate criticism of the process because there is no acknowledgement that individual workers have unequal opportunities or access to education that will inhibit their ability to be competitive.

School choice reforms encourage schools to develop an enterprising-self that can create and engage in marketing practices, and develop and implement an admissions process (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). As per neoliberal policies, both of these key elements are largely unregulated (Jennings, 2010) and are high-stakes in that they contribute to a school’s accountability measures and therefore survival in the market (Siskin, 2010; Gewirtz, Bowe & Ball, 2005). To cultivate a school-wide enterprising-self also requires the administrators, faculty and staff to internalize the goals of a marketized school: meet or exceed accountability measures and attract and select applicants that will help meet those goals. As discussed above, there is no acknowledgement that schools have unequal opportunities to compete in the market; schools do not typically have a line-item in their budget for marketing or admissions work, nor do they all have principals or staff that can expertly market the school or evaluate the effectiveness of admissions processes. Further, the system does not acknowledge that school communities may be internalizing or rejecting this process unevenly both within and between schools.

Screened school-programs in New York City are particularly likely to develop a strong enterprising-self since they are given full control over their admissions processes and have as much control over their marketing strategies as other school-programs, both
of which create their ability to survive in the market. This enterprising-self can manifest through faculty and staff willingness to take on additional tasks outside of their collectively-bargained contract, sometimes for free (also outside of the contract) and always “for the good of the school,” as one interview participant described to me. As discussed earlier, there is a lack of scholarship that reflects the school-agency perspective in a school choice setting. The goal of this study is to answer a version of Saunder & Espeland’s call to action that we create new scholarship that seeks to systematically understand how developing an enterprising-self is experienced and understood by administrators, faculty and staff, as they do or do not internalize the values and goals of the marketized school system; leaving some to thrive and others to wither in this new system.

To reflect this framework for understanding the ways that marketization has reshaped the work of school-program personnel, as it relates to the implementation of the high school admissions process in New York City, I have incorporated Foucauldian elements into my research design, relying most heavily on discourse analysis. I use discourse analysis from participant interviews with screened school-program personnel to understand how they construct their understanding of school with special regard to market reforms. Further, I use discourse analysis as a way to uncover how school personnel experience the phenomenon of admissions processes and marketing strategies as they become of growing importance to their accountability measures.

**Summary of Chapter 2**

This chapter reiterates the research questions and provides the relevant research and theoretical framework used to establish the need for this study. Here I outline five areas of literature that solidified my understanding of the stakes of high school admissions process for “screened” school-programs in New York City and the impact of marketization on individual labor. These are expertly captured by Foucault’s concept of governmentality, especially by those scholars who have theorized Foucault’s governmentality into the neoliberal economy. This theory, along with the research of
Saunder & Espeland, has helped me to establish a methodology for conducting the research, discussed in the next Chapter.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Upon beginning this study, I sought to answer the questions: How has the work of school professionals been redefined by the implementation of the high school admissions process? How has redefinition impacted the nature and role of the work of school professionals, if any redefinition exists? Based on my own experiences working in screened school-programs and talking with colleagues from other screened school-programs, my hypothesis was that the work of administrators, teachers, and other staff in screened high school-programs has been redefined as a result of the implementation of the admissions policy. Their daily work now includes tasks related to the admissions process that are not directly related to supporting the education of students who currently attend their school and that they would not be engaged in, if not for the admissions policy. The effects of redirecting staff energy and work towards the admissions process may reach beyond the individuals who actually complete the admissions work and may divert these staff from serving their current students and families. To test my hypothesis, I used the research design and methods described below.

I. Research Design: An Overview

To mirror the framework set forth by Saunder & Espeland (2009), I gathered data in two parts: first, a quantitative analysis of the public data provided by the New York City Department of Education on OpenNYC, and drawing most heavily from The Directory of NYC High Schools on screened school-programs; and second, using the quantitative data to guide participant selection and interview questions, a qualitative analysis of one-on-one interviews with ten personnel working in three screened high school-programs across New York City. By collecting data in two parts, I was able to establish that the phenomenon of marketization, as it is described in the literature, does exist in screened high school-programs, analyze larger trends among screened school-programs as they develop an enterprising-self, while also contextualizing those trends using the lived experiences of ten personnel who participate in the admissions process at their high school-program as part of their daily and annual work. Further, the quantitative
findings of the admissions criteria for each school-program are illuminated as the professionals in these programs describe the ways that their work life is impacted by having to engage in tasks associated with the admissions process; the goal was to humanize those processes so that the real labor of the admissions process was no longer obscured.

II. Data Sources and Data Collection

*Part I: Analysis of the Directory of New York City High Schools, 2007 & 2017*

Data sourcing and collection for the first phase of this research involved a thorough examination of all screened school-programs from two high school directories: the *2008 Directory of New York City High Schools* to examine 2007 data on screened school-programs and the *2017 Directory of New York City High Schools*, to examine 2016 data on screened school-programs, heretofore identified as the Directory or Directories. The Directory is a phone book sized book given to all seventh grade students in New York City public schools in the spring of seventh grade. Each student receives one copy of the book and the book provides a one-page description of every high school-program that they can apply to in the fall semester of eighth grade. Each description includes many pieces of data on the school-program and its admissions process, and is uniform from page to page, despite the many differences among school-programs. The use of the 2008 and 2017 Directories is important because for each school-program, the Directory provides statistics from the previous year’s admissions process. I chose to use 2007 and not 2006 data because the version of the admissions process that largely exists today was solidified in 2006, in time for the 2007 school year admissions process. This makes my analysis just shy of a decade’s worth of data on screened school-programs in New York City. To fill gaps in the Directory data, I also used public data from OpenNYC, which provides datasets from many city agencies, including the NYC Department of Education, for public use. The data collected from OpenNYC was the Progress Report and Quality Review scores of all screened school-programs from 2007 to 2017, where available; this data was not always provided in the Directory but had
important implications for the study, as these scores often play a role in attracting applicants and competing with other school-programs.

From these two directories and the OpenNYC data, I created a dataset of the 210 screened school-programs that existed between the two school years. Only school-programs using the “screened” admissions method were entered into the dataset; school-programs that were “screened for language,” “audition” or a student’s length of time living in the United States, were excluded from the dataset. The dataset variables include basic identifying information and information from each school-program’s page that is relevant to examining the work that professionals in those high school-programs do once an applicant submitted an application package or began to engage in the application process beyond simply ranking a school-program. For example, if a school-program requires that students submit a writing sample as part of their application, that writing sample has to be collected and evaluated and a score for that writing sample has to be added to the student’s application file, all completed by personnel from the high school-program; as such I created a variable called “REQ1_07” and “REQ1_16” to denote if the school-program had a particular admissions requirement listed on its Directory page. Each variable included a 2007 version of the variable and a 2016 version of the variable to show the differences over the span of the existence of the school program.

Aside from basic identifying information about each school-program, the variables for this dataset include: whether the school-program existed in 2007 and 2016, its admissions method (only screened school-programs were considered for the dataset, although some changed their admissions method between 2007 and 2016), whether it had a website separate from the DOE provided “School Portal,” if the school-program allowed visits for applicants and the posted frequency of those visits, its geographic priorities and preferences for continuing 8th graders, the number of freshman seats open the previous school year, the number of applications the school received the previous school year, the admissions requirements for grades in each of the four core subject areas and preferred scores on the state 7th grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Math exams, the types of application materials or tasks a school-program required that year, the most recent Progress Report grade and Quality Review score for the school-program in each of those years.
Using these basic variables, collected directly from the High School Directory page of each school-program or OpenNYC, I was able to create new, descriptive and analytical variables. For example, using the variables that identified the number of freshman seats available the previous year and the number of applicants to the program that same year, I was able to create the new variable: “PCT_SEL_FRSH07” and “PCT_SEL_FRSH16,” by dividing the number of seats by the number of applicants to each school-program and multiplying by 100 to uncover the school-program’s percent selectivity for that year. This variable allowed me to test the concepts presented in both Hoxby and Pascarella and Terenzini’s work, demonstrating the importance of such a measure in attracting applicants and measuring institutional quality, perceived or real. This variable proved to be very useful. From this variable I was also able to create additional variables that linked selectivity to a school-program’s geographic priorities, scores on accountability measures, use of a website, allowance and frequency of visits, and the kinds of grades, state test scores and admissions requirements or tasks applicants need to engage in.

There were some challenging aspects of compiling this dataset that warrant further discussion: the size of the dataset, missing data, discontinued programs, new programs, composite scores, and changes in the information provided by the Directory of New York City High Schools from year to year. Although there were 167 screened school-programs in 2007 and 161 in 2017, the size of the dataset for each year made the use of any statistical tests beyond data description, univariate, and some bivariate tests, challenging in terms of reliability and validity. When I created new variables that represented a subset of school-programs, the number of cases was often too small to be generally accepted as valid or reliable; the typical threshold for number of cases when using tests of significance is 121 cases or more, while many of my attempted statistical tests had between 40 and 80 cases (Healy, 2009). In several instances, I attempted to use SPSS to conduct statistical testing, but even when variables were standardized and usable for such tests, the number of cases simply made the concluded statistical significance unreliable. This was an unanticipated challenge of the dataset, and as a result, the data are purely for descriptive purposes of screened school-programs rather than for testing statistical significance.
Missing data was most consistently a challenge on determining the availability of visits and their frequency, where frequency of visits was the least often provided piece of information of the two; in 2007, 25% of screened school-programs did not provide information about the availability nor the frequency of visits and in 2017, that percentage increased to 59%. Additionally, in 2007 and 2017, 2.4% of school-programs did not identify a preferred grade range and/or state exam score and/or some combination of the two for potential applicants. Although the percentage of school-programs falling into this category remained the same between the years, it was not the same school-programs each year.

Programs that existed in 2007 also did not necessarily exist in 2017. A part of the Children’s First Initiative that was not mentioned in the literature review, was Bloomberg and Klein’s desire to dismantle and reconfigure large high schools into smaller schools, funded largely by the Gates Foundation; 96% of the screened school-programs that were lost from 2007 to 2017 were from large high schools (n=46). In their place, 43 new programs were created, some of which returned to those large high schools, but many of which were actually new, small, screened school-programs. At times, this loss made comparisons between years challenging, although the overall number of screened-school programs remained stable, where there were 167 screened school-programs in 2007 and 161 screened school-programs in 2017.

To compensate for changing and sometimes infrequent accountability measures, I had to either yield to missing data or create composite scores for the Quality Review variables, which sought to provide the most recent Quality Review score for each school-program for 2007 and 2017. For the 2007 Quality Review variable, it was DOE policy at the time, that the period between Quality Reviews was contextual; if a school had a Quality Review the previous year, they may be exempt from having one the next year; however, if a school received a lower rating the previous year, they may have at Quality Review the following year. Since the presence of a Quality Review ratings depended on a variety of factors, I chose to enter “Missing Data” for these schools that did not have Quality Review data for 2007.

This is similar to the challenge presented by the 2017 Quality Review score, which I chose to make a composite score, a variable created just for this piece. In 2007,
the DOE provided an overall average Quality Review score for each school-program. However, as of 2013, this practice was discontinued in favor of providing school-programs the scores they earned in each category of the Quality Review. I created a composite overall score by averaging the scores earned in each of the five areas that are evaluated, and rounding up or down, to allow for comparison between the 2007 rating and the 2016 rating. The categories that are rated, and the process for rating the Quality Review, has changed between 2007 and 2017, rendering the category scores for 2007 different and therefore, incomparable. Providing a single rating for both years by creating a composite rating for 2017 was the closest I could come to making a comparable accountability measure. If a school has a rating of zero, it is because that school did not have a Quality Review from 2013-2016.

This is also similar to the challenge of the 2017 Progress Report variable. The practice of providing every school program with a letter grade via the School Progress Report, was discontinued in 2013 with a change in the mayoral administration. However, this accountability measure was widely used for the majority of the years this study covers. As such, the Progress Report score used for 2017 was the most recent Progress Report score provided to the school in the 2013-2014 school year. Although this score is somewhat dated, for this study, it still demonstrates another measure of accountability that spanned several years and can be used to measure the school-program against its admissions processes.

Another change in the data from 2007 to 2017 was the breakdown of Freshman applicants and seats by special education and general education status. In 2007, the Directory page for each school-program identifies the number of Freshman seats available in the program and the number of applicants to that school-program. However, the 2017 Directory provides the number of Freshman applicants and seats to each school-program broken out by General Education students and Special Education students. To make comparable variables, I allowed the 2007 data to stand and made the 2017 data similar by combining the number of General Education seats with the number of Special Education seats, to get a total number of Freshman seats available for the year and then doing the same for the total number of Freshman applicants for the year.
The final challenge of this data was presented to me during the second half of data collection in interviews: accuracy of information provided in the Directory. Four of the interview participants discussed misleading or inaccurate information in the Directory about their school-program. These issues included inaccurate applicant numbers from the previous year and incorrect or changed admissions tasks. Two participants cited the lag time between when information was collected and when the Directory was published, as much as 12 months in advance of publication, as part of the problem. At a Fordham Law School Conference in November 2016, Office of Enrollment staff, who assemble the Directory, cited that information is collected as early as 18 months in advance of publication and publication often happens in February of the school year of distribution, with translated versions printed by May of that same school year.

The goals of compiling this dataset were as follows:

1. Test the hypothesis that indeed screened school-programs meet the foundational criteria of becoming marketized, as the process is described in the literature, and that this process is specifically happening within the admissions process. This occurred by examining the presence of the factors of marketization and developing an enterprising-self that were described in the literature in New York City’s screened high school-programs. These factors include a focus on “selling” the school-program, and working to support all of the factors that have an impact on the selectivity of the school and perceived institutional quality, which may include rankings and accountability measures.

2. Provide descriptive statistics on screened school-programs as they relate to the process of being marketized and identify patterns and trends in the high school admissions process of screened school-programs that may generate tasks for the professionals working in these high school-programs, outside the normal boundaries of their job description. This included testing the relevance of particular variables that were derived from the literature that I relied on to design the study. While the challenges discussed above did require skillful maneuvering
of data, I believe that the steps I took to ensure the validity of the data still yielded accurate descriptive statistics about those variables.

3. The third and most important use of this dataset was to establish criteria and then the selection process for eligible candidates to interview, who would be able to discuss the widest possible array of marketization processes within their school-program. The dataset was also intended to support the development of interview questions for the second part of the data collection: interviews with professionals who work in screened-school programs and have some hand in their school-program’s admissions process.

Part II: Interviews with Personnel in Screened High Schools

Using my analysis of the dataset described above in conjunction with my review of relevant literature that examines how admissions processes, and similar policies, can cause changes in the defined work of professionals in academic institutions, I developed inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in interviews and questions that would contextualize the Directory dataset. To be eligible to participate in the study, potential participants had to be currently working in, or formerly working in, a screened high school-program in New York City public schools with no geographic priority for admission. They must have been employed in that high school-program anytime from the 2006-2007 school year to the 2016-2017 school year. Participants could be teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, office staff or other school personnel, but needed to have some knowledge of their school-program's admissions process.

Three key informants at three screened school-programs were recruited initially as respondents to a “call for participants” which was distributed to education list-servs throughout higher education institutions in New York City, and provided an entry point into each school-program. Each respondent to the “call for participants” was screened for eligibility and, if eligible, invited to an interview. This sample of school personnel was recruited using a snowball sampling strategy in which the key consulting personnel at each school-program (Peaches, Jane and Chip) facilitated recruitment. Ultimately, the
interview portion of this study examined the work of ten professionals across three screened school-programs, who each have intimate knowledge of their school-program’s admissions process and whose daily, seasonal and annual work is altered by the implementation of the process. Participant information can be found in Table 3.1; they, for the most part, reflect the broader population of NYC public school employees (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2016). All three school-programs are screened, have been in existence since 2007 and all three school-programs have no geographic priority for admission, meaning students from all five boroughs may apply to the school-program.

This part of the data collection included ten one-on-one, semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with teachers, administrators and school staff who work(ed) in screened high school-programs across New York City, sometime in the designated time frame, 2007-2017. The interviews took place either at the CUNY Graduate Center or a private location selected by the interviewee and lasted between 50 and 80 minutes each. The interviews focused on their daily work, their work in the admissions process and/or how the work of the admissions process has impacted their day-to-day tasks. The interviews were then transcribed, coded and analyzed using fourteen categories. These categories reflect behaviors and attitudes identified by Espeland and Saunder's (2007) understanding of governmentality in academic institutions and general trends in the experiences of those working in screened school-programs.

The focus of these coding categories was how these professionals interpret the admissions process in their school-program, but also the extent to which they have internalized and normalized the process, its accompanying competition and workload that may otherwise not be part of their professional work. I approach the concepts of internalization and normalization from the example set forth by Espeland and Saunder (2007) and Saunder and Espeland (2009). In their studies, they allowed, and argued, that the behaviors and attitudes of professionals are an indicator of normalization and internalization of law school rankings. As regarded and peer-reviewed studies, I felt that this was an appropriate standard to hold my own work to, by using certain types of behaviors and attitudes to define normalization and internalization of both the admissions process, the competition it engenders and the work it has redefined. In both studies, the scholars looked at behaviors and attitude that exemplified the allure and anxiety behind
being part of law school rankings as evidence of internalization and normalization. Following their example, I chose to examine the changes in daily work, professional culture and school community to point to shifting identities and demonstrate how individuals have internalized and normalized aspects of admissions and competition.

I do not claim to be an expert in psychology nor the discipline’s definitions of internalization and normalization. Rather, I have approached these concepts, like Saunders and Espeland, using the theoretical framework of neoliberal governmentality that demands that individuals, or in this case school-programs and professionals, take on the responsibilities and burdens accompanying the development of their own capital around any given process that may have otherwise been the burden of the government, or Central DOE, in previous policy periods. In this case, my use of these concepts is to demonstrate how professionals in school-programs take on the responsibilities of admissions and competition, and reconcile their traditional professional identities against the need to compete in a system that will allow them to fail if they do not successfully internalize and normalize the process. I can appreciate a criticism of my use of the concepts of internalization and normalization, however they do fall in line with the literature on marketization and how that process has impacted the functioning of public goods and services in the neoliberal economy.

My goal in this portion of the data analysis was to uncover how the administrators, faculty and staff construct and experience the phenomenon of admissions processes and marketing strategies and how that has challenged their professional identities, daily work, and professional cultures; ultimately trying to examine the re-definition of their work. In using an embedded case study, I aimed to honor the contextual quality of actual school-program communities while allowing for an examination of commonalities among and between participants (Fishman, 1999; Watanabe, 2007). Descriptive statistics on each school-program community, derived from the Directory dataset, can be found at the start of Chapter 4.

The goals of this data were as follows:

1. Richly describe the admissions process of each school-program and the work of personnel who are tasked with implementing the admissions
process in their school-program; this process simultaneously matched their work to the factors of marketization described in the literature.

2. Examine the ways that personnel involved in the admissions process interpret, internalize, normalize or resist the process of marketization and the changes in the daily and annual work that are specific to the admissions process.

3. Humanize the process of admissions away from the algorithm developed out of the medical school-matching model, to theorize the impacts of this process on school-program communities, the hidden labor of the admission process and how traditional professional identities are challenged by participation in this process.

Table 3.1. Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-Program (High School or Program)</th>
<th>Participant Name*</th>
<th>Official Position** (Number of Years in this Position at this School-Program)</th>
<th>Main Participation in School’s Admissions Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established Individualist (High School)</td>
<td>Mango</td>
<td>Volunteer (7)</td>
<td>Admissions Committee Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peaches Isabel</td>
<td>Administrator (15) Director of Admissions (3)</td>
<td>Selecting Final Applicants Coordinating Entire Admissions Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet Secret (High School)</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Former Administrator (7)</td>
<td>Reviewing Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>Personnel (8)</td>
<td>Coordinating Entire Admissions Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Former Teacher (8)</td>
<td>Admissions Committee Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daenerys</td>
<td>Administrator (10)</td>
<td>Reviewing Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate Underdog (Program within a High School)</td>
<td>Chip</td>
<td>Administrator (3)</td>
<td>Admissions Committee Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lulu</td>
<td>Administrator (5)</td>
<td>Coordinating Entire Admissions Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junot</td>
<td>Teacher (5)</td>
<td>Reviewing Applications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All participant names are pseudonyms and positions are generalized to protect the privacy of participants and their schools.

**All participants were an active part of the school community at the time of data collection in Spring/Summer 2017, unless denoted as “former.” Those who are “former” members of the school community worked in the school community at some point from 2007 to 2016.
Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 reiterates the research question and hypothesis, and goes on to describe the processes by which data were collected for this study. Part I provides an overview of the data collection process and its origins in the literature. Part II describes the process I used for creating a quantitative dataset on screened high school-programs in New York City, descriptions of the variables included in the dataset and how certain missing variables were created; this section also describes some limitations of the dataset and how those impacted the use of the dataset. Lastly, Part II lists the goals of the creation of the dataset. Part III describes the methods for creating the qualitative portion of this research—interviews with personnel at screened high school-programs in NYC. Here I demonstrate the ways that the Directory dataset guided the framework and questions for the interviews, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, and the coding categories used to analyze the interview data. I also include an important difference between the psychological concepts of internalization and normalization against the ways these concepts have been used to understand the impacts of neoliberal governmentality and then a list of the goals of this data. Finally I include Table 3.1, which describes each of the participants in the interviews.
CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings Overview

Despite the challenges and limitations of this dataset, presented in Chapter 3, the Directory dataset does provide many interesting insights that support the literature on marketization of public goods, selectivity, rankings and accountability measures, and school choice policy. From this dataset, I conclude in Part I of this chapter, that screened school-programs are increasingly experiencing the phenomenon of marketization and engaging in practices that move them towards developing an “enterprising-self” (Fraser, 2009; Peters & Besley, 2007). In Parts II & III of this chapter, I conclude that overall selectivity of screened school-programs has increased from 2007 to 2017 and that with selectivity, a whole host of other measures have meaningfully changed to increase the workload of the personnel in screened school-programs. Among these changes are the increased use of labor-intensive admissions processes, and an increase of scores on formal accountability measures for the most highly selective school-programs. These findings show that Hoxby (2009) and then Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005) assertions that colleges with longer established histories of selectivity benefit most from the competition between school-programs, is also true in screened high school-programs in New York City. Additionally, using interview quotes to contextualize the dataset findings, I show that the labor of the admissions process and maintaining selectivity pushes personnel towards competing, and sometimes conflicting, professional identities (Lundstrom & Holm, 2011).

One area of the literature that was not illuminated by this dataset was the literature on the medical school-matching model, as it relates to the high school admissions process. This is partly due to the fact that the dataset focuses on Directory data that influences the work of professionals in the receiving high school-programs, rather than the inner workings of the algorithm that ultimately matches students and school-programs or the choice process of individual students. The medical school match model literature did come to bear on the results of this study, but were exclusively in the data from participant interviews, discussed in Chapter 5.
Table 4.1 shows that the number of screened programs has decreased slightly, by seven programs, in the decade since the admissions process was implemented; there have been several programs that have started and ended in the time between 2007 and 2017, but overall, the number has only slightly decreased. Of the 161 screened school-programs that exist in 2017, 119 of those programs have been in existence since, or prior to, 2007, nearly 75% of the screened school-programs have remained stable in their existence. Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens have had the most consistent supply of screened school-programs; proportionately, Manhattan has the most screened school-programs to stay intact, relative to the overall number in 2017.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Number of Screened Programs in 2007</th>
<th>Number of Screened Programs in 2017</th>
<th>Number of Screened School-Programs That Remained in Place from 2007-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COUNT</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Marketization

According to Peters & Besley (2007), the process of developing an enterprising-self includes the development and acquisition of resources that will allow one to be flexible and dynamic in the new neoliberal economy. Three examples of screened school-programs developing an enterprising-self that can be concluded from the Directory dataset are: the creation and maintenance of a website, allowing visits to the school-program, and exercising greater control over the admissions process by using admissions requirements that are more labor intensive.
Website Maintenance

Although the Department of Education (DOE) provides all school-programs with free access to a “School Portal” webpage through the main DOE website, since 2007 many screened school-programs have found it necessary to create a website separate from the School Portal page, as seen in Table 4.2. The School Portal page has a standard format that is used by all schools, with limited flexibility in terms of layout and organization of information, and includes some non-negotiable information that appears regardless of whether the school-program wants to include it. The Portal page often has a long web address that includes the “District, Borough, Number” or DBN, of the larger school, a number that is unlikely to be known by most students and parents and is not necessarily specific to the program. Unlike the School Portal page, a customized website allows the school-program to present itself in the way it would like to be perceived, organize information in a way that is relevant to its current students and families, and may have the capability to provide greater access to admissions processes by allowing the school-program to post images, videos, documents and even receive admissions materials from applicants. However, customized websites come at both a financial cost and a human cost. The various platforms for creating websites often have “educator” discounts, that provide access at a lower annual cost for schools than they charge for individuals, but there is also the labor involved in building and maintaining the website. These separate websites often used the same logos, headings, and language as that of the greater school-program, maintain calendars, announcements, links to relevant websites, detailed admissions information, specific contact information and school culture information ranging from the academic to the extracurricular.

Interview participants pointed me to the fact that all of their School Portal pages now direct audiences to their separate website, which in all cases, had significantly more information on the school-program than the Portal page. In Angelica’s description of how applicants find her school-program, she states “they’re just doing their research on the school. I think the website plays a big part ‘cause those families have been on our website…they’ve checked it, they’ve checked Inside Schools. These parents are doing their homework.” Lulu echoed a similar sentiment when she discussed the importance of
including the website address on give-away items for school fairs, such as “key chains, pens, trinkets, like ‘swag,’ stuff that they walk away with and go ‘oh yeah, [that school], the website is on the pen.’” But Chip, from the same school-program as Lulu, discussed the cost of professional website design stating that they’ve “done it the cheapest way possible, relying on my basic visual arts skills,” but that “professional website design is expensive, but yields a better site that brings kids in.” Similarly, Jane discussed the use of an independent website to allow applicants to sign up for school visits, “we developed a way that you could actually sign up online right on the website… and it was really nice to have because in the absence of that, you had a whole lot of clerical time devoted to answering phones and making those appointments.”

The motivation to create a separate website that allows for greater control over their school-program’s image, is a hallmark of the enterprising-self. However, in a public system that should provide equal access and opportunity for all, the school-programs that find a way to finance a separate website are able to distinguish themselves from the crowd; two out of the three school-programs where I interviewed participants, told me that they have a teacher, staff member or a parent, or some combination of those folks, working on their school website. These adults often complete the job for a price that does not actually meet the number of hours they spend on the work, sometimes simply volunteering to do the work.

Table 4.2. Percentage of School-Programs Maintaining a Website by Borough, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Maintained a Website* in 2007</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Maintained a Website* in 2017</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Maintained a Website* from 2007-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In this case, a website only counts if it's a website other than the DOE provided “School Portal” website.
Visits

In the case of school-programs, another example of the development of an enterprising-self is the willingness to open the school for visits and take on all the labor and resources that requires. According to participant interviews, hosting visits presents several unique challenges. This was an especially challenging logistical feat for my participants, as all three school-programs where participants work(ed), are in buildings that are now called a campus or complex—a former large high school that now houses several small high school-programs. For example, Jane from the Quiet Secret school-program described the need for at least four personnel to be available for the start of every visit to manage the entry of attendees into the building: registering with front-desk security, walking to the part of the building that houses the school-program since they are located in an educational complex rather than a stand-alone building, and then ushering attendees to the classroom where they would welcome prospective students and families; all that before the visit even started. Junot and Lulu, from the Passionate Underdog school-program, cited similar logistical challenges for hosting visits, but also stated that it was important that the detailed choreography of those initial entry-into-the-building-steps went smoothly, because they were an essential part of “selling” the school to applicants.

Table 4.3 shows the number of screened school-programs that explicitly identified, on their Directory page, if they host any visits in 2007 and 2017. As was mentioned in the Chapter 3’s discussion of challenges with the dataset, this particular variable does have limitations, but is still worth examining since interview participants discussed the need for visits with such fervor. In 2007 this information was frequently provided on the Directory page in a special badge labeled “Tour” or “Open House” information, but in 2017, those badges no longer existed on the Directory pages. School-programs only identified if they host visits by listing so in their admissions requirements. However, all three of the case study school-programs presented in this study host visits in 2017, either open houses, tours or both, but did not require them for admission. As a result, their 2017 Directory page does not list visits as an option, even though they are available; the assumption is that interested candidates will go to their website for this information. This is a limitation of the 2017 data—it appears that the number of school-
programs hosting visits has decreased from 127 to 66, but in reality this may not be accurate, especially when we take the demand for visits into account at more established school-programs. “We do three open houses and get about 900 people at each and that’s because we cap it, we’d probably get more…” states Isabel from the Established Individualist school-program, which had 45 Freshman seats available in the 2016 admissions process. John from the Quiet Secret school-program recalled that “it seemed like there were always tours coming through my classroom, maybe as many as four days a week with twenty or so families in each.” From the same school, Daenerys recounted two open house events that “had a little over a thousand attendees for each, maybe four hundred and fifty families at each—they filled the auditorium.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3. Screened School-Program Visits 2007 &amp; 2017, by count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hosts Visits &amp; Requires Visits for Admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosts Visits &amp; Has No Geographic Priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosts Visits, Has No Geographic Priority &amp; Requires Visits for Admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Hosts Visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use of Labor Intensive Admissions Requirements**

Lastly, school-programs also demonstrate the development of an enterprising-self by exercising greater control over their admissions process through the use of more labor-intensive admissions requirements. These admissions requirements are indeed laborious for the student applicant, but they also generate a tremendous amount of preparation and labor for the high school-program as well. In the participant interviews, I asked participants to rank admissions processes by those that took the most time and labor. I provided fifteen admissions process tasks and an “other” category for them to rank. Based on these rankings, I determined that the three most labor-intensive admissions requirements for screened school-programs are: interviews, writing samples and demonstrated interest (attending an open house or school tour).

In Table 4.4, I show that the percentage of screened school-programs using these kinds of requirements has increased from 2007 to 2017. In 2007 a quarter of screened
school-programs used these kinds of admission requirements, but by 2017 that percentage increased to 36%. “The most tiresome part of the job is opening all the applications, like, physically opening them and sorting the papers; I enlist my daughters to help, I pay them to help me just, like open the envelopes and log them,” states Isabel, showing that before we even discuss the evaluation of application material, the very act of requesting materials from applicants has its own labor. John “really enjoyed leading tours, but sometimes that would be quite a bit of strain on time, [and] a very, very large amount of time was devoted to speaking about the admissions process and ranking [student writing samples] at our full faculty meetings.” To get to the interview process, Mango stated that at Established Individualist, they “read close to a thousand essays” and after two months of interviews, five days a week, the admissions committee spends three to four hours a day for a week or two further narrowing the applicant pool as a group, before turning the selection process over to the principal.

Table 4.4. Percentage of Screened School-Programs Using Labor Intensive Admissions Tasks, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required one of the following for admission: demonstrated interest, an interview or a student work sample (math or writing)</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required a combination of the following for admission: demonstrated interest, an interview and/or a student work sample (math or writing)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total School Programs Requiring Labor Intensive Additional Step(s) by the High School in order to Evaluate Applicants</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these three examples: maintaining a website, allowing visits and using labor-intensive admissions requirements, I concluded that indeed screened school-programs are moving towards developing an enterprising-self. From the interviews, I gathered that part of the motivation for implementing these behaviors was to set them apart from their competition, which they could often name without hesitation, and to give them greater control over the process. These ideas are further discussed in Chapter 5, which looks at the qualitative data collected in interviews.
II. Establishing Selectivity

The Directory dataset variable that proved to be the most useful in marrying relevant literature with the workload of implementing an admissions process was a screened school-program’s percent selectivity. This variable is easily established by calculating the number of applicants per seat, which was provided in the 2007 Directory and was easily calculated using the data provided in the 2017 Directory (see Chapter 3 for how these variables were created). Percent selectivity is widely reported in rankings publications and accountability documents, often weighing the most in calculating media-produced rankings when combined with scores on formal accountability measures. Here in Part II, I only examine selectivity by reviewing the applicant-to-seat ratio and percent selectivity in 2007 and 2017. Part III uses the work of other scholars to determine additional variables that impact, or are impacted by, selectivity. Part III first reviews geography in admissions processes and types of admissions requirements, but then I present descriptive statistics on selectivity and other variables that the literature, and later, my interviews, suggested I compare. These comparisons are focused on selectivity as it relates to the work of personnel in screened school-programs who implement the admissions process.

Table 4.5 shows that the median number of applicants per seat has increased from 2007 to 2017. Corcoran and Levin (2010) cited that the DOE felt a school had a “healthy” demand if it had six applicants per seat. We can see that both the median and the average number of applicants per seat is higher than that in both years. However, the range of applicants per seat has increased by 28 applicants per seat from 2007 to 2017, which may be interpreted as an indication that the process is becoming more competitive.

Table 4.6 shows that the median percent selectivity has decreased from 2007 to 2017, which may be a further indication that screened school-programs are becoming more competitive to get into, even though the average percent selectivity has only risen by 1% which suggests some stability of competition. We can also see that, while in 2017 every program had at least one applicant per seat, the range of selectivity in 2017 indicates that some programs were not able to fill all of their seats, as there could be a 122% chance of an applicant getting accepted, as opposed to a 1% chance of getting
accepted into the school-program. This may also be interpreted as support for Pascarella and Terenzini’s findings that, as this process stays in place, students become more likely to expand their options for which programs they apply to, perhaps taking a leap and pursuing programs that are further away from home or out of their comfort zone in some way. This increases the need for programs with no geographic priority to expand their reach, in terms of marketing themselves to middle school students who had previously been unlikely to apply. It also prompted me to look at the changing relationship between selectivity and accountability measures, as well as the relationship between selectivity and geographic priority.

In Tables 4.5 and 4.6, as well as in nearly all the descriptive statistics in Part III, I prioritize the median applicants per seat or the median percent selectivity, as there are some school-programs that are extreme outliers within the dataset that impact the mean or average, yielding it a less accurate descriptor of trends within applicant-to-seat ratios and percent selectivity. For example, if a school-program was being phased out or was slated for closure, it was not able to fill all of its seats and therefore had a very high percent selectivity. Similarly, in 2007 there were twenty-five screened school-programs and in 2017 there were thirty-six screened school-programs, with a percent selectivity of 5% or less, making them extraordinarily competitive; in each year, these were screened school-programs with forty to sixty applicants per seat. These kinds of outliers, at the top and at the bottom make the median the more appropriate number to use in comparisons, rather than the average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Median Applicants per Seat</th>
<th>Mean Applicants per Seat</th>
<th>Range of Applicants per Seat</th>
<th>Number of Programs at or Below the Median (more selective)</th>
<th>Number of Programs Above the Median (less selective)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1-107</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1-135</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Percent Selectivity</td>
<td>Mean Percent Selectivity</td>
<td>Range of Percent Selectivity</td>
<td>Number of Programs Below the Median (more selective)</td>
<td>Number of Programs Above the Median (less selective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%-92%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%-122%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. Selectivity & Other Variables that Further Establish Selectivity

Hoxby and Pascarella and Terezini’s work on college selectivity demonstrates that a few key factors can be relied on to determine not only selectivity but also institutional quality, which impacts selectivity. These factors include a school’s: geography, types of admissions requirements or tasks, performance on accountability measures, and minimum course grades and exam scores of applicants. To examine these ideas in screened school-programs, I have included tables that provide descriptive statistics of the population of screened school-programs for each of these factors. I have also provided tables that describe relevant comparisons of these factors as they were relayed to me in interviews; for the most part, these comparison tables present the percent selectivity against one of the factors listed above.

**The Geographic Priority**

Among the ways a screened school-program can admit applicants is by geographic eligibility; this means that the school-program will prioritize applicants based on where they live as a way to keep the student population “local” in some form, most often by borough, but also by district. Any changes to a school-program’s geographic priority for admission are ultimately made by the Central Department of Education, but programs that have no geographic priority have a hefty task in the admissions process: they cannot simply screen out candidates who do not meet the geographic priority. They must review the applications of every applicant according to the more qualitative application materials that they require in the screening process. Most often these include
a review of course grades, attendance and/or punctuality, state exam scores and elements such as a writing sample, interview, portfolio or other task.

There are five boroughs and thirty-two districts in New York City; in both 2007 and 2017, four of the districts had no screened school-programs: districts 28, 23, 18 and 75, although district 75 is not a geographic district, but rather one that is specially designated for school-programs that support particular types of special needs students. From the 2007 and 2017 Directories I created a variable that determined if a school-program uses a geographic priority to determine applicant eligibility. In 2007, the geographic priority was listed explicitly, but in 2017, the geographic priority was expressed as the percentage of students in the previous freshman cohort who came from a given borough or district. In both 2007 & 2017, if the school-program was open to students from all of New York City, then it stated exactly that in the admissions criteria: “Open to all New York City.”

Table 4.7 shows the percentage of screened school-programs using a geographic priority or not, in both 2007 and 2017. Overall, the use of a geographic priority has become more popular among screened-school programs, increasing from 55% of all screened school-programs in 2007 to 60% in 2017. Manhattan and Brooklyn were the only boroughs where screened school-programs increased their use of the “Open to all of NYC” category, making them more accessible to students from all over the city from 2007 to 2017. On the contrary, screened school-programs in the Bronx, Staten Island and Queens have increased their use of the geographic priority from 2007 to 2017.

Table 4.8 shows the number of screened school-programs that fall above or below the median percent selectivity for the year (2007 or 2017) and whether or not they used a geographic priority to screen applicants. In 2007, programs that were more selective were more likely to have a geographic priority in the form of requiring applicants to live in the district or borough where the school is located. Only 33, or 39% of the highly selective school-programs had no geographic priority. The number of less selective programs with no geographic priority was fairly even in 2007 at 51%. In 2017, the overall number of programs that allowed students from all five boroughs to apply decreased for both highly selective and less selective programs. Similar to 2007, in 2017, the most selective schools were more likely to have a geographic priority built into their admissions criteria.
As Lundstrom & Holm (2011) pointed out in their findings about the impact of marketization on professional identities, I concluded that the geographic priority illuminates a similar impact on screened school-program personnel in New York City. All three screened school-programs where I drew participant interviews from, have no geographic priority, their admissions criteria state that they are “Open to all New York City.” Junot, Mango and Angelica, from all three school-programs, raised the issue of accepting students from all of New York City as a challenge in the admissions process. Each participant framed the lack of geographic priority as a challenge to some part of their professional identity; Junot saw it as a moral high-ground against a competing school-program, stating “well, we’re not like [name of a competing school], where they can just filter students out by district and suddenly they go from 5,000 applicants to 600.” Mango noted a similar kind of frustration in stating that their open status had an impact on the school community that made participation more difficult for students, even as the school-program attempted to fill its mission of serving all of NYC for the sake of equity: “not all kids can stay late to work on a project or participate in sports if they have to commute ninety minutes each way to get to us,” but “we’re glad they have the chance to get the education they choose, that they choose us and the quality of our classrooms, over other less-attractive options closer to home.” Angelica lamented how the “fabulous diversity” her school-program relishes due to their open geographic priority, is lacking in many other screened school-programs, to their detriment: “the other schools just say ‘oh, wrong district,’ and just dismiss them!”

Hoxby noted the shifting geographic pattern of college applicants applying to schools further from home in exchange for programmatic quality, we can see the rationale behind the increasing use of a geographic priority for screened school-programs in New York City. Having a geographic priority may reduce the number of applicants who require a review of supplemental application materials, whereas school-programs that accept students from all over New York City, have the responsibility of reviewing supplemental application materials from all applicants, without a filter that allows them to quickly sort applicants. This in turn generates more labor for the high school-program, forcing them to develop competing professional identities that pit access to quality education against a need to reduce their own workload.
Table 4.7. Percentage of School-Programs Using the Geographic Priority, by Borough, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough/Category</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of Screened School-Programs that Maintained a Geographic Priority for Admission (District, Borough or otherwise)</td>
<td>Percentage of Screened Programs that Had NO Geographic Priority for Admission (“Open to All NYC”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. Selectivity & Geographic Priority, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Selectivity for the Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity At or Less Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that Have a Geographic Priority</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that Have NO Geographic Priority</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity Greater Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that Have a Geographic Priority</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that Have NO Geographic Priority</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Impact of Admissions Requirements/Tasks, Geography & Selectivity On Labor

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) assert that admissions requirements are also measures of institutional quality that impact the way students apply to colleges and therefore impact their overall selectivity. To test this idea in screened school-programs, I looked at the types of admissions requirements or tasks students were asked to complete.
Based on the Directory dataset in Tables 4.9 and 4.10, I identify the most frequently used admissions requirements and I present those requirements against the use of a geographic priority for both 2007 and 2017. Finally, in Table 4.11, I identify the most labor-intensive admissions requirements, as they were established by participant interviews, against the median percent-selectivity for each year. From these tables, I conclude that there is a relationship between using particularly labor-intensive admissions requirements, geographic priority, and selectivity, where the most selective screened school-programs use the most labor-intensive admissions requirements in conjunction with a geographic priority to increase their selectivity.

Table 4.9 shows that in 2007, screened school-programs that had no geographic priority were more likely to use multiple admissions tasks to assess candidates. Although only 77% of screened programs in general, used attendance and/or punctuality to determine eligibility, that percentage increased when a program had no geographic priority; 85% of programs with no geographic priority used attendance and/or punctuality as their number one screen in 2007 and an additional 15% used this requirement as a subsequent indicator of student eligibility; meaning 100% of the screened school-programs with no geographic priority, used attendance and/or punctuality as an admissions requirement.

Table 4.10 shows that in 2017, programs that had no geographic priority were less likely to use multiple admissions tasks to assess candidates. Although only 91% of screened programs in general, used attendance and/or punctuality to determine eligibility, that percentage increased when a program had no geographic priority; 95% of programs with no geographic priority used attendance and/or punctuality as their number one screen in 2017. Using attendance & punctuality to evaluate applicants has been cited as a controversial requirement (Perez, 2011), but as Daenerys stated in her interview that in the absence of a geographic priority, attendance and punctuality could be used as an initial filter for applicants that can be “easily sorted in excel” and further rationalizing this controversial requirement by stating that “it matters because if you’re not here, we can’t teach you.” Again, this demonstrates the competing professional identities that personnel are forced to reconcile when public education undergoes marketization.
Tables 4.9 and 4.10 show that in both 2007 and 2017, other popular requirements for screened school-programs with no geographic priority were demonstrated interest (a visit to the school or expressed written contact), an interview or a writing sample, all of which were rated as being among the most labor-intensive admissions tasks for high school-program personnel to implement by my interviewees. To further illuminate, I provide Table 4.11, which shows that all screened school-programs saw an increase in the use of additional tasks to evaluate applicants, tasks that all require the support of personnel at the high school level. In 2007, 41 or 24.5% of screened school-programs engaged in applicant evaluation tasks that required additional work from the high school level. In 2017, that number rose to 59 or 37% of screened school-programs that engaged in some sort of additional applicant evaluation tasks. The use of additional applicant tasks rose most significantly from 2007 to 2017 in the most selective programs, whereas the less selective screened programs only increased their use of these tools by one or two school-programs between 2007 and 2017. The labor involved in these kinds of admissions requirements is further discussed in Chapter 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admissions Requirement/Task</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as their Number 1 Requirement (n= 167)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as a Subsequent Requirement (n=167)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as their Number 1 Requirement and have NO geographic priority (n=75)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as a Subsequent Requirement and have NO geographic priority (n=75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and/or Punctuality</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated Interest (school visit or written contact)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview (general)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Sample (general)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based test taken on-site</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Admissions Activity</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Portfolio</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special to the School</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 or More Required Tasks</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>12%</strong></td>
<td><strong>--</strong></td>
<td><strong>--</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.10. 2017 Admissions Requirements & Geographic Priority, by percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admissions Requirement/Task</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as their Number 1 Requirement (n=161)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as their Number 1 Requirement and have NO geographic priority (n=65)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as a Subsequent Requirement (n=161)</th>
<th>Percentage of Screened Programs that Use this Requirement as a Subsequent Requirement and have NO geographic priority (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and/or Punctuality</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated Interest (school visit or written contact)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview (general)</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Sample (general)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Sample (general)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based test taken on-site</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Admissions Activity</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Portfolio</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special to the School</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language Course Grade</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Requirements Beyond Grades and State Exam Scores</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or More Required Tasks</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.11. Selectivity & Use of Labor Intensive Admissions Tasks, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Selectivity for the Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Selective Screened School-Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity At or Less Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that required either demonstrated interest, an interview or a student work sample (math or writing)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that required a combination of demonstrated interest, an interview and/or a student work sample (math or writing)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Selective Screened School-Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity Greater Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that required either demonstrated interest, an interview or a student work sample (math or writing)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that required a combination of demonstrated interest, an interview and/or a student work sample (math or writing)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Screened High School-Programs Requiring Additional Steps by Personnel, in order to Evaluate Applicants</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selectivity & Formal Accountability Measures

Saunder and Espeland (2009) argued that in the process of becoming marketized, standardized accountability measures often had a substantial impact on the selectivity and subsequent ranking of law school programs by major media outlets. This finding complements that of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), who argue that any published measures of a college program has an impact on perceived institutional quality and therefore the number of students who apply and thus the college’s percent selectivity, as well as Hoxby (2009) who demonstrated that a history of selectivity yielded positive benefits for colleges. For Saunder and Espeland, the publicized rankings had a measureable impact on the work of personnel in the law school, whose jobs revolved around any of the elements that were used to rank the law school, creating both anxiety and allure in their individual work. To test whether these concepts were at work in screened high school-programs in New York City and what, if any questions I might ask in interviews, I used my Directory dataset to create Table 4.12, which shows the median
scores on formal accountability measures for the most selective screened school-programs and the least selective screened school-programs in both 2007 & 2017.

Table 4.12 indicates that the selectivity of a screened school-program may have an impact on formal accountability measures. In each year, the more selective school-programs had a higher median recent Progress Report; in 2007, the more selective school-programs also had a higher recent Quality Review score, although in 2017, this score was equal between the most selective and least selective school-programs. The number of programs in this particular table do not equal the exact number of screened school-programs for each year because in 2007, there were five new screened school-programs opening and in 2017 there was one new school-program opening, none of which had data to offer on selectivity nor accountability measures, since they were only then beginning to accept students.

From this table, I conclude the findings of Saunder and Espeland, Pascarella and Terenzini and Hoxby in the following ways. As Saunder and Espeland and Pascarella and Terenzini revealed, table 4.12 shows that there is a positive relationship between selectivity and accountability measures which impact perceived institutional quality; I cannot conclude whether that relationship is causal due to limitations in my dataset described in Chapter 3. I also conclude some support for Hoxby’s findings that the longer a school-program is highly selective, the greater its chances of maintaining that selectivity, and being rewarded for their selectivity by higher scores on accountability measures. From these descriptive statistics, and establishing that selectivity may have a positive impact on accountability measures over time, I was able to develop interview questions that followed those of Saunder and Espeland (2009) and Espeland and Saunder (2007), who interviewed law school personnel whose jobs were closely linked to measures that impacted their ranking.
Table 4.12. Selectivity, Formal Accountability Measures 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Median Selectivity for the Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More Selective</strong></td>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity At or Less Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Screened School Programs</strong></td>
<td>Median Recent Progress Report Score</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Recent Quality Review Score</td>
<td>Well-Developed</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Selective</strong></td>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity Greater Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Screened School Programs</strong></td>
<td>Median Recent Progress Report Score</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median Recent Quality Review Score</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selectivity & Selection Criteria**

Another element of Pascarella and Terenzini’s findings on perceived institutional quality and selectivity was that the average accepted student grades and SAT scores had an impact on perceived institutional quality and selectivity; they also show that increased average entry grades and SAT scores had a measureable impact on career and salary gains for college graduates. This again, works in tandem with Hoxby’s idea that the longer a school maintains high selectivity, the greater its benefits are over time. To test this idea in screened school-programs, I used my Directory dataset to create Table 4.13. This table presents the median course grades of accepted students in English and Math, as well as the median scores on the state English Language Arts (ELA) and Math exams; these grades and scores are divided by the most selective school-programs and the least selective school-programs for both 2007 and 2017.

The 2007 grade and exam score requirements for entry into all screened school-programs, regardless of selectivity, were higher than in 2017. Although the median grades and scores lowered from 2007 to 2017, there are a few key ideas to keep in mind. First, 2007 was among the first years the admissions process was implemented in its current form, and second, the most selective screened school-programs lowered their grade and exam score requirements from 2007 to 2017, but not nearly as much as the least selective screened school-programs did. By showing that indeed, the more selective screened school-programs maintained higher applicant grades and exam scores, I can
conclude Pascarella and Terenzini’s findings that these elements have a positive impact on perceived institutional quality and selectivity.

Looking back at Table 4.12, the findings from Table 4.13 allow me to further conclude Hoxby’s findings. Comparing both tables, it is clear that programs that were more selective in 2007 benefitted from attracting higher performing students because these same programs earned a median score of “A” on their most recent Progress Report and a recent Quality Review score of “Well-Developed,” as opposed to their less selective screened peers who earned a median score of “C” on their most recent Progress Report and a recent Quality Review score of “Proficient.” Those scores may have attracted lower scoring applicants in subsequent years, whereas the more selective schools, whose median recent accountability measures did decrease in 2017, had the benefit of years of stronger students to continue requiring stronger applicants. These findings are further supported by findings from the interviews with more established screened school-programs, who specifically discussed the need to scale back and lessen their presence in the high school market place, because their reputations had become amplified over the last ten years.

Table 4.13. Selectivity & Admissions Criteria for Course Grades and State Exam Scores, 2007 & 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Selective Screened School-Programs</th>
<th>Median Selectivity for the Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity At or Less Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median course grade required for English</td>
<td></td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>70-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median course grade required for Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>80-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median State Exam score required for English Language Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median State Exam score required for Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less Selective Screened School Programs</th>
<th>Number of Programs with Selectivity Greater Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</th>
<th>78</th>
<th>75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median course grade required for English</td>
<td></td>
<td>70-100</td>
<td>60-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median course grade required for Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>70-100</td>
<td>60-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median State Exam score required for English Language Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>1.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median State Exam score required for Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>1.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As mentioned in Part I of this chapter, the process of marketization leads to a belief that continued investment in oneself will yield greater outcomes in nearly all measures of economic life (Fraser, 2009; Peters & Besley, 2007). In that section, I discussed the increase in the number of screened school-programs that host a website outside of the DOE provided School Portal page and concluded that this was an example of screened school-programs developing an enterprising-self in the face of increasing marketization. My next step was to demonstrate that not only were screened school-programs developing an enterprising-self, but that it was indeed having a positive impact on their admissions process.

In Table 4.14 I present the number of screened school-programs that are above and below the median percent selectivity, against the number that are operating websites outside of the DOE provided School Portal page, for both 2007 and 2017. The overall percentage of screened school-programs operating a website outside of the DOE provided School Portal, increased significantly from 2007 to 2017- from 50% of screened school-programs in 2007 to 83% of screened school-programs in 2017. This is not surprising given the time period, but both the most and least selective screened school-programs increased their use of outside websites at about the same rate. Even still, the most selective screened school-programs were more likely to operate a website separate from the DOE School Portal, than their less selective peers in both 2007 and 2017.

As I stated in Part I’s discussion on websites, this conclusion is significant because operating a website requires budgeting. Each website includes, at minimum, the cost of maintaining a domain, a person to create the website to begin with and a person to regularly update information on the program. Per my interviews with administrators at case study school-programs, this is a cost that is not accounted for in school budgets, making it a cost that requires principals to navigate their fiscal responsibilities gingerly. In two out of the three school-programs that served as case studies, participants discussed the importance of having a website for ensuring “a clean, professional look” (Lulu) as a way to dispel negative myths about their school-program or to easily “disseminate information and reduce clerical tasks like answering questions over the phone” (Junot).
One element that may be misleading about these numbers is that 74% of screened school-programs are programs within a larger high school. This may skew the total count of school-programs in favor of having a website, which in their case is a cost spread out over several programs within a school rather than coming out of the budget of one single program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.14. Selectivity &amp; Website, 2007 &amp; 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Selectivity for the Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Selective Screened School Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity At or Less Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that operate a website outside of the DOE provided School Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Selective Screened School Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs with Selectivity Greater Than Median Chance of Getting into the Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs that operate a website outside of the DOE provided School Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number/Percent of Screened School-Programs operating a website outside of the DOE provided School Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the findings of this dataset, I conclude that screened school-programs are experiencing the phenomenon of marketization and developing an enterprising-self, as it was described by Fraser (2009) and Peters and Besley (2007). I also conclude that, like colleges that stand to gain or lose because of their selectivity and its cascading implications, screened high school-programs in New York City face similar, sometimes mirror, challenges connected with selectivity and perceived institutional quality (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Hoxby, 2009). Because selectivity is uniquely connected to the admissions process, I also conclude that as Saunders and Espeland found with law school personnel, the personnel working screened high school-programs face similar challenges to their workload that are related to the admissions process and its impact on selectivity (Lundstrom & Holm, 2011). To further examine this redefined workload and the stressors involved in implementing the admissions process, I used the findings from this chapter to support the creation of interview questions and to select three screened school-program communities to study, with the experiences of ten personnel across the three screened school-programs.
**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 draws from the Directory dataset and concludes that screened high school-programs in New York City are indeed experiencing the phenomenon of marketization, and that they experience much of challenges presented by selectivity that colleges face. The challenges of keeping up with selectivity are also contextualized using quotes and information from interview participants and show how personnel navigate the complexity of their professional identities around the admissions process. In Part I of this chapter I use three examples from the Directory dataset to show that screened high school-programs are developing an enterprising-self and engaged in the process of becoming marketized. From that conclusion, in Part II, I establish the increasing selectivity of screened high school-programs, and Part III examines several ways that selectivity impacts, or is impacted by, other admissions processes and requirements. These include the increased use of a geographic priority or attendance and/or punctuality as admissions requirements for the most selective screened-school programs; that screened school-programs with no geographic priority have increased their use of more labor intensive admissions tasks; selectivity has a slightly positive relationship with performance on accountability measures, the academic performance of applicants, and the use of a separate website. The findings of this chapter guided the interview questions and participant selection that generated the data presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

Qualitative Data Findings Overview

The descriptive statistics in Chapter 4 provide the foundational conclusion that indeed, screened school-programs possess the factors of marketization, as they were described in the literature. From those findings, I also concluded that screened school-programs have been thrust into the process of developing an enterprising-self because of the imposition of the admissions process and their status as “screened” school-programs within that process. These findings also established an increase in labor-intensive admissions tasks that increased the workload and, at times, challenged the professional identities of those engaged in admissions at screened school-program. These conclusions allowed me to move onto the next phase of data collection. Part II of my data collection examined, on both the individual level and on the school-program-community level, how the reality of marketization and developing an enterprising-self, has redefined the work of school-program personnel. Unlike Chapter 4, which was focused on reviewing the Directory dataset according to the literature, this chapter focuses on the individual and school-program community’s interpretation, internalization, normalization of and resistance to the admissions process. In examining the interview data this way, I show how much of the admissions process is dependent on the individuals involved, some of the impacts of this process on the overall school-program community, and the shifts in daily work and professional culture around the admissions process that challenge the traditional professional identities for those working in public education (Lundstrom Holm, 2011).

This chapter demonstrates the power of leadership in shaping the interpretation, internalization and normalization of the admissions process, as well as any resistance to the process and its competition. Further, I conclude that the reputation of the school-program and the extent to which its admissions process is collaborative, have an impact on interpretation, internalization and normalization as well. At the end of this chapter I discuss unanticipated findings that emerged from these interviews, but present new unique questions of the implementation of the admissions process: how to compensate
workers, the role of professional women in this process, the role of institutional history and knowledge in this process and more.

Table 3.1 at the end of Chapter 3 provides descriptions of the interview participants and below, in Table 5.1, I provide descriptive statistics from the Directory dataset on each school-program to contextualize the screened school-programs where interview participants work(ed). The factors listed in Table 5.1 are related to the process of marketization and developing an enterprising-self; this also displays the factors that link the process of marketization to the intensification of work, work related to marketing and the development of competing professional identities as a result of this work (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011; Lundstrom & Holm, 2011; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

The findings of the interviews are organized first by coding categories: implementation of the admissions process, interpretation of the process and competition, internalization and normalization of the process and competition, resistance to the process and competition, and changes in daily work, professional or school-program culture around the admissions process. Second, I provide school-program examples of each coding category: the Established Individualist school-program, the Quiet Secret school-program and the Passionate Underdog school-program; this examines individual expressions of the coding category as well as similarities and differences within and between school-programs. Third, I examine overall patterns that emerged from the interviews that demonstrate the process of marketization, the development of enterprising-self and challenges to professional identities that were not necessarily captured by the coding categories.
Table 5.1 School-Program Descriptive Statistics, Rounded Where Possible to Protect Anonymity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Program / Categories</th>
<th>Established Individualist</th>
<th>Quiet Secret</th>
<th>Passionate Underdog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>Under 500</td>
<td>Under 500</td>
<td>Under 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Selectivity, 2007</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Selectivity, 2017</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained a Website, 2007</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained a Website, 2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed Visits, 2007</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed Visits, 2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Report, 2007</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Recent Progress Report, 2017</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Review, 2007</td>
<td>Well-Developed Proficient</td>
<td>Proficient Well-Developed</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Recent Quality Review, 2017</td>
<td>None Listed</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>80-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Course Grades Used to Determine Admission, 2007</td>
<td>None Listed</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>80-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Course Grades Used to Determine Admission, 2017</td>
<td>Will review but no preference listed</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>80-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA State Test Scores Used to Determine Admission, 2007</td>
<td>None Listed</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA State Test Scores Used to Determine Admission, 2017</td>
<td>Will review but no preference listed</td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>Will review but no preference listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math State Test Scores Used to Determine Admission, 2007</td>
<td>None Listed</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
<td>2.0-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math State Test Scores Used to Determine Admission, 2017</td>
<td>Will review but no preference listed</td>
<td>3.0-4.0</td>
<td>Will review but no preference listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Admissions Tasks Listed, 2007</td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
<td>Attendance &amp; Punctuality</td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Admissions Tasks Listed, 2017</td>
<td>Visit to School</td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
<td>Visit to School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Admissions Tasks Listed, 2017</td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
<td>Attendance &amp; Punctuality</td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit to School</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit to School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Sample</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Implementation of the Process

In coding interview data for “implementation of the admissions process,” I sought to be able to richly describe each school-program’s admissions process—not just the version of the process that is published for applicant use, but rather the admissions process that happens once an applicant has submitted their materials or met the required tasks for admission. My focus, again, is on the labor performed at the high school-program level by personnel tasked with implementing the admissions process. In Tables 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4, I provide an overview of the admissions process at each school-program by using the information provided to me from all participants at that school-program.

*Established Individualist’s Admissions Process*

From interviews with Isabel, Mango and Peaches from the Established Individualist school-program, Table 5.2 describes the process that is in place to admit eligible students.
Table 5.2 Established Individualist’s Admissions Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING/ SUMMER</th>
<th>Reflection: Looking Back and Looking Ahead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Admissions meets with admissions committee to reflect on the year’s process and make changes deemed necessary for the year ahead; meetings with administrative team to determine any new Central DOE requirements that will necessitate changes to the current process; updating public-facing venues that communicate admissions process to potential applicants; administration may also evaluate over-the-counter students* and admit them to incoming class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>Admissions Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Open House events are held in the afternoons to provide information about the school and admissions process—coordinated by the Director of Admissions; includes teachers and student volunteers to discuss the curriculum and their experience, respectively; attendance at each open house is capped at 900 attendees. Administration attends city-hosted events to represent the school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>Receiving Application Packages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Admissions opens all application packages, sorts application materials, logs application materials into a database; Administrative team fields communication from VIPs and professional colleagues seeking admission for a specific student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>Review of Application Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Admissions assigns materials to review to each member of the admissions committee (8-9 volunteers), including reading a student writing sample and ranking it against a rubric; this includes 800-1,000 applicant writing samples; admissions committee meets to narrow down the pool of applicants for interview process to less than 300 applicants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WINTER</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Admissions invites eligible applicants to interview; assigns interview slots to each member of the admissions team; each interview lasts one hour, includes a tour of the school to active classrooms, a conversation with the student, another writing sample and a conversation with parents. Administrative team and Director of Admissions field communications from students and families who did not make it to the interview round</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATE WINTER/ SPRING</th>
<th>Narrowing the Pool of Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions committee meets to discuss and narrow the pool of applicants down to the incoming class; 3-4 hours a day for 1-2 weeks of meetings; admissions committee presents final group to Principal to make the final selections—provides the principal with all rubrics, notes and rationale for each student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Matching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who are selected to be part of the incoming class are notified per city-wide system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions team and whole school community host an orientation that includes teacher-speakers, students, and team-building activities for incoming class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Over-the-counter students are those students who are entering the New York City public school system for the first time or after a period of being away from New York City public schools. These students are not able to participate in the regular admissions process because they were not part of New York City schools when the process would have taken place. These students are sent to individual school-programs by the borough or city-wide enrollment office, and the school-program evaluates them for admission, which is often an on-the-spot process that results in an offer or a rejection. All school-programs, screened and otherwise, deal with this phenomenon, as it is part of the regular ebb and flow of students in and out of New York City and the public school system.
Quiet Secret’s Admissions Process

From interviews with Angelica, Daenerys, Jane, and John from the Quiet Secret school-program, Table 5.3 describes the process that is in place to admit eligible students. It should be noted that Table 3.1 shows that Jane and John are both former members of the personnel at Quiet Secret; that fact has implications for the information in Table 5.3.
### Table 5.3 The Quiet Secret’s Admissions Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMER</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admissions Coordinator stores away previous year’s application materials in case of audit; makes new application cover sheets relevant for the new school year and that comply with any new Central DOE requirements that will necessitate changes to the current process; communicates with website manager to update public-facing venues that communicate admissions process to potential applicants; select dates and create online sign up for Open House event. Administration may also evaluate over-the-counter students* and admit them to incoming class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>Admissions Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two Versions of this process were recounted to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Version 1 (from former personnel):</strong> School-program hosts tours during the school day up to four days a week during the Fall; these include approximately 20 families per tour and include a tour of the school in up to three active classrooms; and an information session on the admissions requirements and Q &amp;A with students and a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Version 2 (from current personnel):</strong> Two Open House events are held on a day when school is closed; coordinated by the Admissions Coordinator—events provide information about the school, the admissions process; includes guidance team, administrators and student volunteers; attendance at each open house is capped at approximately 1,000 attendees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>All Agree:</strong> The Special Education team and guidance staff host a special Open House event just for special education applicants; an administrator, teacher and guidance counselor attend city-hosted events to represent the school at city-wide and borough fairs; Admissions Coordinator attends several meetings with Central DOE to ensure that process is happening as its supposed to and develop understanding of new admissions-related compliance requirements that will be enacted in the following school year.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WINTER</th>
<th>Receiving Application Packages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admissions Coordinator opens all application packages, sorts application materials, logs application materials into a database; Admissions Coordinator completes initial screening of applicants materials and follows up with middle school personnel regarding incomplete application packages and issues of attendance. School-program receives close to 1,200 application packages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Review of Application Materials</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two Versions of this process were recounted to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Version 1 (from former personnel):</strong> All school-program personnel are invited to engage in ranking student writing samples and other application materials against a rubric and sorting students into levels of acceptance; each writing sample must be read by two readers with a third for those who warrant large discrepancies or were evaluated by personnel who couldn’t be counted on to evaluate fairly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Version 2 (from current personnel):</strong> Administrator, with the help of Senior student volunteers, reviews all application packages a second time after the Admissions Coordinator completes initial screening; administrator ranks applicants in city-wide computer system.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Matching</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students who are selected to be part of the incoming class are notified per city-wide system.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admissions team, Freshman teachers, guidance staff and student volunteers host an orientation for incoming Freshman class that includes completion of paperwork, a placement test, purchasing of school-logo gear, and opportunity to walk around the school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Passionate Underdog’s Admissions Process

From interviews with Chip, Junot and Lulu from the Passionate Underdog school-program, Table 5.4 describes the process that is in place to admit eligible students.

Table 5.4 The Passionate Underdog’s Admissions Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING/ SUMMER</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator stores away previous year’s application materials in case of audit; ensures that admissions process will comply with any new Central DOE requirements that will necessitate changes to the previous process; communicates with other administrator about website and brochures to update public-facing venues that communicate admissions process to potential applicants; select dates for Open House events and other visits; publish those. Administration may also evaluate over-the-counter students* and admit them to incoming class.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>Admissions Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four Open House events are held in the afternoons coordinated by administration-- events provide information about the school, the admissions process and collection of a student writing sample; includes at least four teachers, at least one administrator and student volunteers. At least one administrator, one teacher and a few students attend city-hosted events to represent the school at city-wide and borough fairs. Administrator who coordinates admissions attends several meetings with Central DOE to ensure that process is happening as it’s supposed to and develop understanding of new admissions-related compliance requirements that will be enacted in the following school year.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATE FALL/WINTER</th>
<th>Review of Application Materials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrator gives all writing samples collected at Open Houses to a teacher who evaluates them against the writing sample portion of the overall rubric; Administrator then rates each applicant against the overall rubric using both the writing sample and school-data provided on the city-wide application system; this rating goes into an Excel spreadsheet. Only students who attend an Open House provide a writing sample.**</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WINTER</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator sorts applicants in Excel by score on the rubric and then enters ranking onto city-wide admissions system.</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Matching</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who are selected to be part of the incoming class are notified per city-wide system.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRING</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration, teachers, guidance staff and student volunteers host an orientation for incoming Freshman class that includes completion of paperwork, school tour and team-building exercises.</td>
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</table>

**Number of attendees at Open Houses was not revealed, but several times Lulu, the administrator who coordinates admissions, used the phrase “we don’t get enough kids,” to describe the dearth of applicants the school battles with. Since only students who attend an Open House provide a writing sample, it appears that there may only be small numbers of writing samples to rate.

Implementation of the admissions process at all three school-programs shows how each school-program must simultaneously navigate homogenization by a system eager to make the process simple for applicants, while also demonstrating their difference through
these standardized procedures (Saunder & Espeland, 2009). All three school-programs host admissions related events, and all three identify these as “Open Houses,” that occur between two and four times in the fall; all three school-programs use the summer to do some measure of tweaking to their system; all three school-programs undergo a process of reviewing student application materials against a rubric; all three school-programs contend with the summer-time movement of accepted students around the system by dealing with over-the-counter students; all three programs must use the city-wide admissions computer system to cull information about students and to enter their final rankings of students.

Despite the similarities in their implementation of the process, there are many differences in the ways each school-program enacts the process. For example, while all three school-programs use the summer to tweak their admissions process, only Established Individualist hosts a specific meeting with the admissions team to reflect on the previous year’s process; Isabel cited that they use the meeting to “look forward and look back, look over the questions that we ask in the interview process and having done it for a whole season, we all talk about, like, ‘what doesn't feel right, what do we want to change, take out, adjust the wording?’ We're really very particular about every step, trying to make it comfortable for the child and trying to make it clear for us to get the information that we really want.” This demonstrates a level of reflection on the process that was not evidenced in the other two school-programs. This may be interpreted as resistance to the imposed homogenization of the process and strategic use of the lack of regulation for the parts of the process that are conducted solely at the individual school-program, beyond the surveillance of Central DOE staff, as was demonstrated by Espeland and Saunder’s concept of ‘reactivity’ in implementing a highly surveilled process (2007).

As Levačic (1995), noted in her concept of marketization that separates purchaser and provider, the implementation of each school’s process also shows that each is involved to greater and lesser degrees with the Central Department of Education. This is seen in both the Quiet Secret and Passionate Underdog’s processes which include regular communication with the Central Department of Education about their process and upcoming processes. Being tasked with coordinating the admissions process at their respective school-programs, Angelica and Lulu both expressed their insistence on staying
in contact with Central DOE citing that relationship building with members of the Office of Enrollment made it possible for them to access greater information about applicants and troubleshoot issues in a process that both women described as “stressful.” This is in contrast to Established Individualist’s approach where admissions committee member, Mango, told me “I don’t know if I should say this out loud…. Um. We try not to think about the DOE at all,” a sentiment that was echoed by other Established Individualist participants as well.

The number of people involved in conducting each of these individual processes within the larger process varies from school-program to school-program, but again the Established Individualist school-program seems to stand apart. Both Passionate Underdog and Quiet Secret employ many personnel and students at large scale events like Open Houses and Orientations, but the vast majority of their work is conducted by a small group of personnel—one overall coordinator and someone to rate writing samples, sometimes an additional person to participate in one of those activities; all of those involved are members of the school-program’s staff. Again, in contrast is Established Individualist, which uses a coordinator and an admissions committee of eight to nine volunteers, the administrative team and, in some years, one or two teachers who “have a lighter teaching load” as was recalled by all three participants from the school-program. By this measure, Established Individualist has fully internalized and normalized the importance of the admissions process. As Harvey and Fraser explain, in the neoliberal economy the individual, or in this case the school-program, takes on all the personal accountability for developing their capital, in place of the governments responsibility for social welfare (Harvey, 2011; Fraser, 2009).

II. Interpretation of the Process and/or Competition

The coding category “Interpretation of the Admissions Process and/or Competition,” for interview data was derived from the categories for discussing marketization provided by Saunder and Espeland (2009). This category analyzes the way each participant and each school-program community generally interprets the process and the competition affiliated with the process: do they regard the process and competition as
positive? Negative? Empowering? Exhausting? What kinds of words and phases did participants use to describe their experience of the process, the competition it engenders, and its impact on their work life?

*Established Individualist’s Interpretation of the Admissions Process and Competition*

The Established Individualist’s general interpretation of the admissions process is that at the school-program level the process is quite collaborative and something to feel proud of, but there is definitely a sense of secrecy about their process. Their general interpretation of competition is that it is a distraction that deserves little to no attention. Peaches, Mango and Isabel all discussed the process with enthusiasm and all three stated the importance of the screened status and how grateful they are that they get to choose their students, “the screened status is great because we get to engage in this wonderful process of meeting terrific kids who want to be with us, who want to sit in our classrooms, and we get the privilege of getting to know them,” Mango asserts.

The collaborative nature of the process and the camaraderie amongst the admissions committee members was clearly described by Isabel and Mango in recounting the tone and discussions had during the selection of applicants for interviews and then for the final class. Both members expressed a sense of secrecy about the process due to the school’s well-established reputation; Mango stated that “they try to keep [the process] kind of separate because it opens up a lot of questions like ‘can you do this for us?’” At first I was unclear on what that meant until interviews with Peaches and Isabel revealed more. Isabel stated that they do not really try to promote the school due to the high number of applicants and went on to say that the process and who is involved is “all very secret…we don't announce it, it's not written down anywhere,” because by the late fall the administration gets “bombarded with emails and phone calls from people who know someone, who knows someone, and we get a lot of people asking for favors.” This was confirmed by administrator, Peaches, “I get probably, anywhere from 50 to 100 solicitations from people who know people, or people who just want their kids to be given priority, and that includes people such as my superintendent, the chancellor, yes.” For those engaged in the admissions process at Established Individualist, the process,
which is can be described as positive and collaborative, is also mired in the challenges of being a highly regarded school-program that has many potential applicants.

The process was also interpreted as time-consuming, but worth it, due to the added pressures associated with interviewing and touring students: “we’re spending an hour, an hour, with these kids, one-on-one—that’s more than some private schools do!” mused Peaches. “I’m so glad my kids are older now, because admissions season is hectic! It really requires a lot of my time, because you have to really be thoughtful and listen to the students,” Mango described. Director of Admissions, Isabel, who described in Chapter 4 the laborious nature of opening application materials, also stated how consuming the process is, as she is in constant communication with the administrative team and admissions committee members about their progress; as we’ll see with all three school-programs the mantra of each person who coordinates admissions is something along the lines of “just get it done.”

When asked about their sense of the competitive school-program marketplace, participants were able to identify competition, but often resisted doing so. All three stated that they had never really thought too much about it and required a moment of pause to consider the question; for all three their answers ended with some iteration of, “but I don’t really know,” a way to brush off and move to the next question. Only Peaches challenged the notion by identifying the fact that Established Individualist is part of several competitive markets within the school choice setting and all of them place Established Individualist towards the top of the heap.

*Quiet Secret’s Interpretation of the Admissions Process and Competition*

Quiet Secret’s interpretation of the admissions process deeply depended on the testimony from former personnel and current personnel. In general, the former personnel, Jane and John, viewed the process as collaborative, as an all-hands-on-deck experience and as one that allowed the professional community to constantly engage in conversations about the school-program’s mission and vision. John spoke of “full staff discussions” on the process, describing how if a personnel member was asked to do something admissions-related “the answer would usually be ‘yes,’ and that was because
we knew that it needed to happen,” and that he “felt very, very invested in being a part of the process of making sure that we matched with students who would benefit from our school community.” Similarly, Jane recalled the camaraderie of teachers rating writing samples together who would “sit and read [writing samples] for a couple of hours and then go and get something to eat, and those were lovely things to see, because it's a high, high pressure time with the complete other layer going on, of the regular work.” Both talked about the dignity of supporting students who were brave enough to put themselves out there for evaluation, by actually reading their application materials and the importance of such an act.

The current personnel, Daenerys and Angelica, generally viewed the process on an individual level and as somewhat isolating, citing that part of their reasons for wanting to participate in the study was the fact that they love talking about the admissions process but never have anyone else to talk to about it, “I don’t ever really get to talk about it. Its an isolated thing, like, I do it alone, and I’ve been doing it alone,” recounted Daenerys. Both participants discussed the late nights, weekend and holiday work that are required to “just get it done.” However, they both also shared the sentiment that they knew no one else would do it or it would be done poorly without their work. Again this shows a sense of internalized personal responsibility that is so clearly expressed in the definition of a worker in the neoliberal economy.

Despite their differences, all four participants from Quiet Secret did share similarities in their interpretation of the process regardless of status as current or former personnel: the importance of the process and the competition embedded in the process. Like the participants from Established Individualist, all four participants described the importance of the work as John did above, and going further to state that the work is “important to me” and “an opportunity to allow all applicants to have a voice.” In all four of the interviews, it was clear that the school-program community fosters a commitment to a fair process that honored applicants, because “you’re changing someone’s life. And at the same time, I’m also saying no to somebody, so I try not to get all in my head about it ‘cause then I would accept everyone and we can’t accept everyone.”

Another similarity between participant’s interpretation of the process was the ease with which all four could identify their school-program’s competition: those who they
were competing with for students and those who they were certainly beating in the quasi-market of screened high school-programs. All four described the school-program as a kind of “safety-school” for those seeking admission to the city’s specialized high schools, and all four noted the school-program’s rising profile against historically well-known school-programs, including the Established Individualist school-program.

**Passionate Underdog’s Interpretation of the Admissions Process and Competition**

Passionate Underdog’s interpretation of the admissions process was more focused on the element of competition than engaging in the actual process. While they discussed their admissions process, our interviews felt more like a reflection on the challenges of competing with similar or more highly regarded school-programs, setting themselves apart and trying to raise their profile, even as they discussed the importance of educating all types of students. This is where their earlier comments from Chapter 4 seem to resonate more greatly: the importance of the website, the importance of how visits are experienced and implementing labor-intensive admissions tasks may be a way to increase their presence in the quasi-marketplace of screened high school-programs.

Early in our interview Chip stated “you’re always thinking about where you fall relative to other schools, because we don’t get enough kids. You always think, the better the class, the greater the chance we will rise in the informal understanding of how school’s like ours rank in the city.” Lulu echoed a similar sentiment, without prompting, identifying school-programs they compete with and how the fact that “we sit at the lower end of the spectrum” causes the system “to run out of kids to screen when they get to our school.” Although Passionate Underdog clearly cares about their admissions process and is invested in making it transparent, the sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for getting to know students was more in the background of their experience, as opposed to the experiences of participants at Established Individualist and Quiet Secret. Junot’s description of the process was straightforward, and shows how the school makes the process transparent for applicants: “at the Open House, we review the rubric with them, we tell them exactly how they’ll be rated in each category and what we’re looking for; we
also tell them about things they need to be on top of with their guidance counselor and we try to make clear how we’re different from [school-programs that are similar to ours].”

In this section we can see that interpretation of the process and competition is impacted by the reputation of the school-program and the degree to which the process is conducted collaboratively. At Established Individualist, which boasted both a strong reputation and a collaboratively conducted admissions process, the process was interpreted more positively, competition more negatively and there was greater similarity in messaging across interviews. At Quiet Secret, which has recently experienced a positive shift in its reputation, but a less collaborative admissions process per current personnel, the process was interpreted more neutrally and competition was often a consideration. At Passionate Underdog, which has a struggling reputation and an isolated admissions process, the process was interpreted as one where they had to be as transparent and explicit as possible with applicants, and participants focused more on the aspect of competition that they perceived as a constant challenge to overcome. Each school-program’s prevailing professional culture, which became more apparent when I analyzed internalization and normalization below, also impacted the interpretation of the process and competition.

III. Internalization & Normalization of the Admissions Process and Competition

The coding category “Internalization and Normalization of the Admissions Process and Competition” for interview data was again derived from the categories for analyzing marketization provided by Saunder and Espeland (2009). Like these scholars, I used this category to capture the extent to which those whose work in admissions, have ultimately come to internalize and normalize the process and its accompanying competition through changes in their daily work, school community and professional culture. In coding this category, I often re-listened to interviews or re-read interview transcripts through the lens of cognitive dissonance, where participants presented evidence of both their embrace and rejection of the admissions process and its competition. The moments when participants embraced the process and competition could then be evaluated for whether or not they were examples of internalization and
normalization and in which of the sub-categories: changes in daily work, changes in school community and changes in professional culture. In this case, internalizing the process and competition means that the participant had fully integrated the process into their understanding of school and their work; normalizing the process and competition means that the participant speaks about these as if they are a part of normal work life, that is, perhaps, not to be questioned and may actively spread their internalization to others or to the greater school-program community.

Established Individualist’s Internalization & Normalization of the Admissions Process and Competition

At Established Individualist there seems to be greater resistance to internalization and normalization of the admissions process and competition, as was uncovered in their interpretation of the process. They seem to have a culture of resistance to standardization that is detailed further in the next section, but there are a few places where their daily work, professional culture and school-program community seem to have internalized and normalized the admissions process and its competition.

Both Mango and Isabel spoke with enthusiasm about how the admissions process at Established Individualist has impacted their daily work. Both participants are volunteers, although Isabel receives a small payment that Peaches described as an “honorarium,” for her role as the Director of Admissions. Mango stated that after three years of participating in the admissions process, she sees “it as a hobby” and Isabel is “really interested and fascinated by it.” As volunteers in the process, they are not employees of the Department of Education, but became involved because of their belief in the mission and work of the school-program and a desire to keep a labor intensive admissions process without adding to the labor of school staff, if possible. Mango agreed that participation in the admissions process is a form of service to the school. As such, their daily work is changed dramatically during admissions season because both participants have other professional work outside the school-program, but both communicated feelings of positivity about taking on the additional work of admissions. Peaches, on the other hand experiences few changes in his work during admissions
season that were discussed in the section on Established Individualist’s implementation of the process and competition. He attends city- and borough-wide events to represent the school-program on weekends, and “fields near-daily communications” from folks who are interested in seeking priority admission for particular students, some from the upper echelons of the Department of Education and the education research community. Peaches agreed that these changes in his daily work during admissions season are part of his job description as an administrator and stated that he “loves meeting new people, families and kids, and telling them about how great our school is.” For these participants it appears that the changes in daily work associated with admissions have been internalized and normalized at Established Individualist, but since two of the three participants are volunteers, it is difficult to assess whether this is true of all who are employed by the school-program.

To further assess internalization and normalization of the process and competition, I tried to understand the professional culture around admissions at Established Individualist. According to my participants there is a clear professional culture that is expected of teachers and personnel who work at Established Individualist, and a separate culture for volunteer admissions committee members. For those who work at Established Individualist as teachers and other personnel, there is an expectation that teachers with “lighter teaching loads” will consider joining the admissions committee. Peaches shared that all staff “get a blanket per-session (overtime) check, basically with the understanding that we’re going to ask you to do stuff because we want the atmosphere to be ‘lets work because we want to make a great school and we’ll all be taken care of.’” As such, looking for the contributions of teachers with lighter course loads to participate in particularly laborious processes is part of the accepted professional culture at Established Individualist.

For admissions committee members, the professional culture is one of responsibility and some secrecy. Isabel demonstrated that the school-program has internalized the Department of Education’s messages about accountability in admissions, even though she framed it almost as a resistance effort: “all the accountability measures we’ve put in place, are really for us,” she claimed, when explaining the ways the committee has crafted its rubrics and documentation process. Further, the politics of
being a volunteer in charge of the admissions process of a highly-regarded school-program was not lost on Isabel. As was discussed in the section on Established Individualist’s interpretation of the admissions process and competition, Isabel expressed an unwritten culture of secrecy in the admissions process “a lot of people don’t know that I’m in charge, because the more people who know who’s doing this, the harder it is for us.” This culture among admissions committee members was also voiced by Mango.

A final vehicle for examining the internalization and normalization of the admissions process and competition at Established Individualist was to look at shifts in the school-program community. For teachers and current students at Established Individualist, they experience the changes in the community most emphatically by way of the interview process. During the interview process, the admissions committee completes as many as eight interviews per day, five days a week for about two to two-and-a-half months. These interviews include tours to active classrooms where Mango stated that “teachers have figured out how to maneuver through the tours and for the most part teachers embrace it and it’s really cool to see what the kid will be like in the classroom.” None of the participants felt that the school community was negatively impacted by the classroom visits, but again, with only one participant who is employed by Established Individualist, this should not be taken as an accurate conclusion. As such my understanding of the shifts in the school-community are limited to simply knowing that classrooms visits take place, and it is likely that they present some small level of disruption at the very least.

All three participants, however, messaged a clear belief that the admissions process can be used a vehicle for changing the school-program’s community. All three participants discussed their commitment to pull away from the school-program’s highly regarded profile that is attracting a shifting demographic of applicants. The participants at Established Individualist all expressed interest in using admissions as a way to return to the demographic of students that it traditionally served, which predominantly included groups from historically underserved communities. “We’re a choice and we’re one of the better choices, but we know that a lot of the kids applying to our school have really good options in their districts” stated Isabel. “Perhaps its because the other school’s are fairly new relative to us and don’t have the same reputation, but we’re trying to get that mix
back and understand what will help parents from those communities get their kids to us,” explained Mango.

*Quiet Secret’s Internalization & Normalization of the Admissions Process and Competition*

Quiet Secret provided some of the most interesting examples of internalizing and normalizing the admissions process because all four participants spoke about the unique level of commitment and investment they had in the process. This interpretation of the process and competition lent itself to easily re-defined boundaries for daily work, professional culture and the school-program community that participants acknowledged, but perhaps did not realize the extent of. All four participants seemed to share a belief that this redefinition is key to the mindset that is needed for successful implementation the admissions process, a full normalization of the process. Additionally, participants from Quiet Secret had internalized the competition endemic to the admissions process, but had not outright normalized it, as exemplified from their discomfort in speaking about the rising profile of their school-program.

Changes in professional culture seemed to be ground zero for internalization and normalization of the admissions process and competition at Quiet Secret; these changes had ripple effects on the daily work of those engaged in admissions and the school-program community. For Jane, as a former administrator, she saw participation in the admissions process as mandatory for all personnel and modeled that belief for all staff by attending all fairs, tours, and reading “every application that came to our school.” Recounting her challenges with garnering participation, she stated that there “were people who you sometimes thought should [participate] as part of their professional obligation and you gotta pull, kicking and screaming… and there were people who were really committed to the profession and this was part of working in our school.” However, a major challenge to this change in professional culture was the issue of compensation: a further normalization of Jane’s internalized behavior was that this work was primarily voluntary. She goes on to say that “those teachers did an awful lot of stuff on a voluntary basis… but we evolved into a tradition as a school, of believing that that it was critically
important that professional staff be secure about having a position and folks understood that when the DOE started slicing budgets and there wasn't money…” she trails off, but the implication is hanging in the conversation: from her supervisory position, those staff who resisted participation in the voluntary work of admissions were more vulnerable to budget cuts than those who did not resist.

The normalization of Jane’s attitude— that participation in admissions was part of everyone’s job description—had far reaching effects on professional daily work and the school-program’s community. Jane described the changes in her own work, citing “I probably spent less time during the regular school day going through application materials, than I did after the regular school day or on weekends,” a sentiment vehemently echoed by both Angelica and Daenerys. “I’m so enmeshed in it, all of us are spending our weekends, December holiday, MLK Day, doing this work,” cited Angelica. “It all gets done after 3:00pm, anything I do for high school admissions is after-school time” stated Daenerys. Angelica provided a strong example when she spoke about the challenges with the city-wide computer system where school-programs rank applicants, describing her relationship with Daenerys as one that requires constant communication about who is logged into the system: “we always say ‘don’t go on when I’m on,’ but during those times, [Daenerys] is up until midnight, 1:00, doing it at off hours, weekends. And then, you know, we’re not getting paid for that time, ok? We’re not getting paid, but its just so we can get our rankings in there and save them.”

In Chapter 4, John described the need to take on the work of leading tours, despite other professional obligations as a teacher because “they just had to happen.” In fact, he could not recall a single staff member who had not led a tour or at least accommodated a tour in their classroom. John, Angelica and Daenerys all stated that admissions work was not part of their official job titles or descriptions, but Angelica noted that she “just added [Admissions Coordinator] to my title for communication purposes,” citing that it helps to smooth out the differences between her actual job title and the work that she’s doing during admissions season. Jane, on the other hand, very much felt that admissions was part of her job description, as exemplified by the way she re-shaped professional culture at the school-program.
The internalization and normalization of the admissions process exemplified by changes in daily work also spread to the greater school-program community. Jane is worth quoting at length here, when speaking about tours:

everybody knows people are coming in [from this hour to this hour]. So those are the hours when you may be doing a show, you may be waving at people, and you know one of the wonderful things about the school is that, I think kids and staff, got very comfortable, very quickly with the idea that there are other people who are gonna walk in and out of your classrooms.

Daenerys described this same process as “disrupting” to the classrooms, but also spoke about how she “had a bunch of kids alphabetizing and sorting” application materials after school, to support her in the work she does for admissions. In terms of student participation, there seems to be no shortage at Quiet Secret: all four participants spoke about the participation of students in tours, open houses and city- or borough-wide fairs and the need to “prep kids to be tour leaders,” which consumes its own amount of time and labor from personnel.

Competition is unevenly internalized and normalized at Quiet Secret. There seemed to be consensus that the school-program’s profile was on the rise and having an impact on the admissions process, but it was not fully embraced by the participants. On media-produced rankings, Daenerys stated they “make me nervous because, its like if you’re going to go so high, you can only go down,” and that she feels the staff does not embrace them. Similarly, Jane stated that to her “they never felt like particularly valid or important measures of anything,” even though she later stated that, as Peaches from Established Individualist agreed, “they were nice medals to wear on your chest when you needed them.” Contrastingly, Angelica’s statements indicated at least some internalization of the competition. Throughout the interview she wove-in enthusiastic quotes from middle school personnel, visitors and Central DOE staff that had confided in her that the school-program was a rising star. She spoke about these comments with enthusiasm and easily identified the elements of the school-program that were objectionable in the eyes of desirable applicants.
**Passionate Underdog’s Internalization & Normalization of the Admissions Process and Competition**

At Passionate Underdog, the admissions process involves very few personnel and therefore its internalization is limited to those who are engaged in admissions and normalization of the process is limited to a few key areas, mostly focused on compliance. Competition, on the other hand, has been fully internalized and normalized by the participants at Passionate Underdog; this is where the real changes to daily work, professional culture and school-program community were focused, as opposed to normalizing admissions itself. Interestingly, this gave participants at Passionate Underdog a type of unity in frustration with “the system of admissions” rather than the school-program’s or individual’s experience.

The changes daily work around admissions at Passionate Underdog are limited to administration and the small number of teachers and students who participate in open house and city- or borough-wide events. Lulu, who is the administrator tasked with coordinating the admissions process, experiences “high levels of stress” in the early fall semester and, especially in January when the process is finalized. In the fall, Lulu with some help from other personnel, directs and plans all of the open house events, city- and borough-wide events, and coordinates all of the rubric ratings and ultimate rankings of students. Her colleagues Chip and Junot cited limited involvement in these events other than to be a part of them when they happen. They cited their most important contributions as updating literature that publicizes their admissions process and its events, and evaluating the applicant writing samples, all of which take direction from Lulu.

In terms of professional culture, it appears that those who are not involved in the admissions process are completely disconnected from it. Because all of Passionate Underdog’s open houses take place after school, only the students and teachers who participate are impacted by these events. Essentially no one at Passionate Underdog knows that an admissions process is happening, unless they are a part of it. Both Chip and Junot were unable to answer quite a few of the interview questions despite their involvement in the process and often referred me to Lulu. Lulu agreed that admissions is part of her job description and does not look for additional compensation for the work she
does to complete the job. Rather, she described a myriad of work that culminates at the time of admissions that brings up feelings of resentment towards the Central DOE. She cited that she also “support[s] guidance in college applications, I’m the testing coordinator which includes January Regents exams, I have to flip the programs from the Spring semester, and I coordinate admissions, all of which have to get done in the same three week window and there’s no wiggle room!”

Competition was something that all three participants were able to speak about with ease; all were able to identify the school-programs they compete with for students and the ways that the system of admissions made it difficult for them to attract candidates. Interestingly, while they all cited challenges with attracting applicants due to elements beyond their control, like the reputation of their campus building, they were also able to identify the ways that the Central DOE has helped them become more competitive, like when they were approved to amend their programming in a way that would attract higher performing applicants. My analysis of this embrace and rejection of the little oversight that does exist in screened admissions processes, led me to conclude that indeed the professionals at Passionate Underdog have internalized and normalized the competition associated with admissions, perhaps more so than the process itself.

Although these three school-programs have varying levels of internalization and normalization of the admissions process and competition, the women who coordinate or direct admissions at all three school-programs best exemplify the attitude most that piqued my curiosity ten years ago when I began working at a screened school-program:

Lulu: “For me personally, the whole season can be an intense moment of ‘can we do it?’”

Isabel: “I just have to make this happen- there is no formal job description other than ‘get it done, just get the work done.’

Angelica: “You know, what it is, is we just do more than our job expects us to do. It's the only way it works… it really takes someone who is willing to go beyond the normal boundaries because you’ve got to make it work, its our responsibility.”
IV. Resistance to the Admissions Process and Competition

Like the others, the coding category “Resistance to the Admissions Process and Competition” for interview data came from the work of Saunder and Espeland (2009). Using their framework, I coded participant statements for resistance to the admissions process and competition, ultimately deciding on three levels of resistance: individual resistance, school-program resistance, and system-level resistance. When combined these elements paint a picture of professionals who have a complex relationship with the admissions process and competition: even those who have internalized and normalized them struggle to reconcile the need to thrive in a system that will allow them to fail against more altruistic, and traditional, professional identities (Lundstrom & Holm, 2011; Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011). Resistance was exemplified by attitudes and behaviors that gave the participants or their school-program community agency in pushing back against the implementation of the admissions process. At times this looked like school-program level policies that guarded against perceived negative tendencies of the admissions processes, individual actions they took when participating in the admissions process or the cultivation of professional cultures that reject aspects of the process.

Established Individualist’s Resistance to the Admissions Process and Competition

As I have mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, Established Individualist exhibits the most unified message of resistance to standardization by Department of Education policies. When I asked questions that may have illuminated their participation in events, relationships and communication with Central DOE, all three participants consistently responded with a desire to limit their interactions with Central DOE as much as possible when it came to admissions. Isabel summarized this sentiment best when she said that Established Individualist “has historically always kind of fought against trying to fit into any box that the DOE was trying to put them in.”

Although all three participants presented a unified message on school-program level resistance, only one participant, Peaches, demonstrated individual resistance to the process and its competition. Peaches provided several examples of ways that she resisted
the admissions system by trying to leverage it to the advantage of the school-program. Like Jane from Quiet Secret, Peaches talked about using accountability measures to “get the highest rating we can possibly get, so we can flash it when we need to.” But the best example she provided was using the requests for priority admission from upper level DOE officials to counter-request the admission of minority, low-income students who were struggling in other school-programs and wanted to transfer to Established Individualist; according to Peaches, this counter-request was met with a disciplinary action against her.

This particular example has had an impact on the school-program community. In response to the incident described above and its subsequent disciplinary action Peaches has committed to ending the policy of priority admission for what were previously called “VIPs:” children of colleagues in the school-program or children of colleagues from within Established Individualist’s network of similar school-programs. As a school-program community, ending this practice may also give them leverage to refuse prioritizing the admission of those with systemic clout and give them even greater independence in their admissions process. Isabel and Mango also echoed sentiments of pushing back against the admissions process, but they often framed their resistance as thoughtfulness and thoroughness in their admissions process. Both participants talked about the need to “really listen closely” to applicants and to make every attempt to make the applicant comfortable so that committee members could “really get to know them.” In both interviews, these participants consistently expressed a desire to humanize the admissions process at as many levels as they could.

This school-program level resistance has implications for systemic resistance too. All three participants were somewhat put-off by my questions about competition. As I described earlier, the general interpretation of competition at Established Individualist is that it is a distraction not to be concerned with; in fact, this very attitude is an act of resistance. Refusing to buy into the rhetoric or normalization of competition in public schools makes it easier for the school-program to set policies that question and resist systemic norms which may in turn, support other school-programs in questioning and resisting the norms that make the system fertile for competition. Peaches exemplified this in her description of the high school fairs saying that, relative to other schools-programs,
Established Individualist’s presence at the fairs was minimalist because Peaches feels that attendees “don’t give a shit about pamphlets. They don’t need swag. They need a human being telling them good things about the school.” This refusal to “sell” or “market” the school-program challenges the internalized competition of other school-programs, but it also shows that Established Individualist’s long-standing reputation has benefitted it in the competitive screened high school-program marketplace.

**Quiet Secret’s Resistance to the Admissions Process and Competition**

Quiet Secret’s resistance to the admissions process and competition was present at all three levels of resistance and best illustrated by Daenerys and Jane’s experiences. John and Angelica gave no clear examples, attitudes or behaviors that could be defined as resistance; this does not lead me to conclude a full embrace of the process on their part, but the main evidence of resistance came from Jane and Daenerys.

On an individual level Daenerys talked about two ways she participated in admissions and competition that could be defined as resistance. First, when asked about participation in events to attract applicants she voiced staunch dislike of the city- and borough-wide high school fairs—she is not alone in this, all ten participants talked about the difficulty of the events, but she actively resisted participation in the events: “I hate them. I hate them. I hate having to sell the school. I don't do the fairs anymore because it never felt dishonest, but I personally didn’t like how it made me feel.” Second, as an admissions committee member who rates application materials, she shared all the ways she’s trained herself to be thoughtful about reading student writing samples: “its not the kid’s fault that they got a form letter of recommendation, you can’t blame a kid for handwriting an essay or not having anyone to spell check or edit their essay, you just can’t hold it against them and have to see them more holistically, read between the lines.” Along with other comments, it was clear that Daenerys, like those at Established Individualist, sought out the humanity in the process to the best of her ability. With her position in rating and ranking applicants, this attitude, constitutes an act of resistance against a process that would likely be easier if she did not take the time to “read between the lines.”
This attitude of humanity was also part of Jane’s resistance. She cultivated the school-program’s resistance by implementing two strategies for the admissions process: the use of tours and caution about budgeting for the admissions process. Recall that Jane is a former employee and during her time at the school there were tours during the school day that required much labor. However, she framed this process as a form of resistance to the admissions process because tours “allowed kids and families to see the work we do, and to better evaluate if our school was the right environment for the student.” She went on to describe how this helped the school-program answer questions for families about what Quiet Secret offered without having to explicitly answer those questions—it was, in her eyes, a way to empower them, so she always encouraged applicants to come on tours. Interestingly, this same act was also part of the internalization and normalization of admissions for those on staff, so resistance to support applicants meant a new professional identity for personnel.

Jane also cultivated a form of systemic resistance at Quiet Secret, when it came to budgeting for the admissions process. Although running the process and participating in the competitive screened high school-program market can be costly, “we’d always find a way to do it that had zero to do with the DOE,” she stated. She further explained that asking for additional revenue to fund the admissions process, may inadvertently put other priorities, like keeping class sizes small or maintaining a more experienced and therefore costly faculty, at risk. By figuring out how to budget for the annual expenses associated with the admissions process and creating a professional culture that expected staff participation in admissions as a given, she walked the thin line between resistance to the potential erosion of her school-program’s altruistic vision, while also embracing elements that pushed professional staff towards a new professional identity. Her discussion of this issue will be examined further in the next section of this chapter.

Passionate Underdog’s Resistance to the Admissions Process and Competition

Resistance to the admissions process and competition at Passionate Underdog was difficult to find. As a school-program that often is unable to fully use the benefits of being a screened school-program, their resistance, again, was more focused on the
competitive aspect of the very existence of the admissions process. Recall that the participants from Passionate Underdog often cited the lack of applicants to screen due in part to competing with more established, highly regarded and similar school-programs. Both Junot and Chip, were well-versed in the challenges that the admissions process and school choice present to middle school applicants and their families; they easily demonstrated how those challenges ultimately impacted their applicant pool. For them, their frustration was about the ways the process seemed to homogenize and exclude their school-program, but did not yield any specific forms of resistance.

Resistance to the admissions process and competition was most fertile at the Established Individualist, both on an individual and school-program level, while at Quiet Secret, resistance was more sporadic and specifically targeted; Passionate Underdog seemed to be the least resistant to the process, although their lack of resistance does not equate to a full embrace of the process as it is. From the ways that resistance unfolded across the three school-programs, it seems that Established Individualist, which has the longest history, is best able to resist elements of the admissions process and competition that do not fit with their school-program’s culture, but maintain their status as a well-regarded, high performing school-program. Similarly, Quiet Secret has been able to navigate some resistance with mixed results: some the resistance to the admissions process was intended to benefit applicants, but those same acts of resistance had consequences for the labor of professional staff employed by the school-program. This issue of established history is discussed further in the next section.

V. The Development of an Enterprising-Self Beyond the Coding Categories

The following paragraphs discuss patterns that emerged from the interviews but were not necessarily aligned with the coding categories. Aspects of these patterns emerged in nearly every participant interview and further demonstrate the development of an enterprising-self and the challenges to traditional professional identities that come with marketization by way of the admissions process. These patterns include: the role of an established school-program history, institutional knowledge of admissions personnel, how admissions is paid for, the way admissions is connected to accountability measures,
the role of professional women in the admissions process and the challenges of talking about adult labor in public education. The patterns are discussed in this order and build on one another.

**How long a school-program has been established matters, as does the length of time it has had a history of selectivity or a strong reputation.** All three of these allow a school-program to engage in less marketing over time and place more focus on conducting a quality admissions process that includes reflection and even opportunities to resist elements of the admissions system that it has the clout to. John from Quiet Secret pointed out that “there is something to be said for a school that has made it to its 10th or 15th year—there are schools that have opened and closed in that time, so just being around longer provides more opportunity to develop a record of success and just, like… existence.” This was further demonstrated in the actual coding categories themselves, where Established Individualist and Quiet Secret are both highly selective school-programs, while Passionate Underdog’s personnel discussed the need to be constantly dispelling myths about their school that they’re “not as focused” of a school as their competitors, or needing to clarify changes in programming that are in clearly stated in newer literature on the school-program, but applicants may be looking at outdated literature, like an old High School Directory.

In a similar vein, **institutional history and knowledge matters for those who participate in admissions.** Admissions work seems to attract personnel who have a longer history in the school, have a working knowledge of the school’s mission and purpose and have a clear vision for what makes for a strong applicant to the school. All three participants who claimed the title “director” or “coordinator” of admissions have been active in the school-program community for several years. Angelica and Lulu have both worked at their school-programs for nine years, although not always in the role of admissions coordinator/director and Isabel, who has spent three years as director of admissions, was also a member of the admissions committee at Established Individualist for two years prior to taking on the role. Of all participants, eight of the ten had five or more years of experience in their position in that school-program, but may have many more years of experience in another position or another school-program. In a school system that reports a loss of 50% of its teachers within five years of beginning their
career at the NYC DOE, the fact that all three school-programs have admissions members with this length of service is noteworthy (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2016). All participants were able to recall historical changes to their school-programs admissions process, to greater or lesser significance, but their knowledge allowed them to speak in great depth about their school-program’s admissions process and, with the exception of Chip and Junot, were able to speak confidently to all of my interview questions.

**Volunteering and working a variety of off-hours is the norm for those participating in their school’s admissions process.** How to pay for the costs and labor associated with admissions and competition was a voluminous part of every interview. When asked if they were aware of any budget lines or funds set aside by the Central DOE to support this process, all ten participants said that there was no funding provided by the Central DOE to offset the costs of this process. Half of my participants are administrators with access to the budgets of their school-programs; to quote Jane “there was nothing. Absolutely nothing.” Participants consistently reported that the work of admissions cut into preparation periods, lunches, after-school time, weekends, holidays, and even their sleep in the final days before rankings have to be completed.

Each school-program has its own way of coping with this challenge. As discussed in earlier sections on Established Individualist, all eight to nine members of their admissions committee are volunteers. Their Director of Admissions is provided an honorarium for her work, which is raised by the Parents Association. Teachers who are asked to join the admissions committee do so because they have a lighter teaching load and, like all staff at Established Individualist, they are provided with a blanket per-session, or overtime, pay that is equal to that of their colleagues who perhaps run clubs or do other additional tasks for the school-program. At Quiet Secret, there is no payment for admissions work because it has been established as part of the professional culture of the school. The only person who is paid for admissions work at Quiet Secret is Angelica, but her official title in the DOE does not reflect that admissions is part of her work and therefore it’s difficult to know if that work is acknowledged by the Department of Education. At Passionate Underdog, the primary architect of their admissions process is Lulu, who, again, subscribes to the notion that this work is part of her job description as an administrator; teachers who participate in the open houses, weekend events, or the
rating of applicant writing samples are paid per-session, or overtime pay, but those costs are kept to a set number of hours.

There is a cognitive dissonance about how the admissions process impacts accountability measures and the perceived standing of screened school-programs. When asked about whether or not they considered accountability measures when they rated applicants or an incoming class, all participants except for Chip and Peaches, replied that they did not and their responses were often absolute: “No,” “never,” “not that I’m aware of,” “not on my watch.” Where the participants in Saunder and Espeland’s work clearly saw the cycle of admissions patterns leading to selectivity leading to perceived institutional quality, leading to rankings, which led to the next cycle of admissions, this connection did not seem as clear to most of my participants.

Chip and Peaches, on the other hand, articulated the connection well, but both qualified their statements with the fact that accountability measures were never an explicit part of the admissions process when considering applicants; Peaches replied:

I think they are in a way, that they are probably one in the same. Like, everything that we're doing as a school, like, results in this rating and so how we make a school, how we make a student body has something to do with it.

Similarly, Chip stated:

I guess you always think the better the class—it's a chicken and egg thing- the greater the chance that we will rise in the informal understanding of how schools rank in the city. I guess in the back of your head, all the time, given that we’re a screened school with these set criteria that are given by the system, you’re always thinking where you fall relative to the other schools.

The labor of admissions is overwhelmingly performed by women. My call for participants and eligibility screening only allowed for candidates that had involvement and a working knowledge of their screened school-program’s admissions process, and my participants reflect the approximate sex breakdown of the NYC DOE’s larger workforce: seven out of ten of my participants are women (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2016) and all three participants who direct or coordinate admissions at their school-program are women. Although the local and national workforce of public education is overwhelming
female, and not a new idea, the fact that the implementation of the admissions process is primarily run by women but is largely unpaid for recalls the work of Dorothy Smith. Smith theorized that women’s work, when performed well, is invisible to their male counterparts and supervisors; such that their work is often taken for granted, underpaid and under-resourced, even though those men of authority have their own reputations and work bolstered because of women’s work (Smith, 2010). Isabel stated “this is not a formal job position through the DOE—the DOE doesn't recognize that we need somebody to do this.” Given the extraordinary boundaries that have been pushed by the women who perform the work of admissions, Smith’s idea begs us to consider, at the very least, an established official job title for this work.

**How do we talk about adult labor related to the admissions process, when it is not politically viable to do so?** As was discussed in the introduction to this study, there is a wonderful body of research on the impact of this process on middle school applicants and their families, which concludes that kids and families are hurt by this process. That literature alone begs for a change in the process and provides excellent political justification to do so. But there is also an adult labor cost to the implementation of this process that is not being discussed in American education research literature. European scholars, by comparison, have been bold to discuss the adult labor cost of implementing market strategies into public education systems and the same needs to be discussed in the United States. Participants in this study, upon reflection through the interview, seemed to arrive at the conclusion that the admissions process is a lot of work. They were eager to talk about how much they loved the process and how important it is to them and their school-program, but that enthusiasm was somewhat deflated by reflecting on how much work they were doing that was going unpaid and, by definition of being unpaid, unrecognized, despite how important they feel it is. Some participants estimated for the cost of the labor associated with admissions and came up with dollar amounts ranging from $200,000 to $10,000 per year, if the process at their school-program was fully funded. It seems that at the very least a more established salary line or a conversation about a collectively bargained position for screened school-programs tasked with implementing the process, is called for.
Chapter Summary

This chapter illuminated the human layer of the process of marketization and developing an enterprising-self. I conclude that the school-program’s reputation and the degree of collaboration in implementing the admissions process impacts each participant’s interpretation and internalization and normalization of, and resistance to, the admissions process and its competition. It's clear that part of the process of the school-program developing an enterprising-self has to do with the ways that professionals embrace or deny their individual responsibilities in implementing the process, as expressed by their resistance and reflection on the process and competition. In school-programs where individuals enacted greater resistance and reflection on the process, the school-program was able to develop an enterprising-self, but on its own terms, constantly checking their involvement in the process and its alignment with school-program values. In school-programs where there was less resistance and reflection on the process, the development of an enterprising-self was almost uncontrollable—they were more likely to follow directives from Central DOE, but also take on greater personal responsibility for the outcomes of their admissions process and place in the competitive high school marketplace. Further, this chapter shows how the leadership of each school-program can dictate the individual work, professional culture and school-community attitudes about the admissions process. Leadership has the power to cultivate compliance and thoughtful resistance at a variety of scales, as well as shaping the power of competition the system tends to inflict on school-programs.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, & FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion of Findings

How has the work of school professionals been redefined by the implementation of the high school admissions process? How has redefinition impacted the nature and role of the work of school professionals, if any redefinition exists? These were my initial research questions based on my experience working as a teacher in screened high school programs in New York City public schools. From my research I conclude that indeed the work of school professionals has been redefined by the implementation of the high school admissions process, outlined in Table 6.1, and that the redefinition has impacted the work of school professionals in the ways described in Tables 6.2. For each table I divided my conclusions into two categories: those who are engaged in the admissions process and all professionals in the school-program community. I did this to show that there is a difference between those who are fully engaged in the admissions process and those who may be experiencing effects of the admissions process simply as a result of working in their school-community, a type of secondary experience; the extent to which work has been redefined depends on this difference.
Table 6.1 How the Work of Professionals in Screened High School-Programs Has Been Redefined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Those who are engaged in the admissions process at their school-program</th>
<th>All professionals in the school-program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Experience a deepened sense of importance as they take on the responsibility of shaping the school-program’s community by way of admissions (Fraser, 2009)</td>
<td>• Experience a shift in their work that moves their daily, seasonal or annual work towards marketing practices (Lundstrom &amp; Holm, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop an enterprising-self geared toward successful completion of the admissions process (Peters &amp; Besley, 2007)</td>
<td>• Experience an intensification of their work due to the admissions process (Lundstrom &amp; Holm, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience an increase in work related to customer service (Cucharria, Gold, Simon, 2011)</td>
<td>• Experience the need to compete for student applicants (Gerwitz, Bowe &amp; Ball, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience an intensification of their work due to the admissions process (Lundstrom &amp; Holm, 2011)</td>
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Table 6.2 Impact of the Redefinition of Work on Professionals in Screened High School-Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Those who are engaged in the admissions process at their school-program</th>
<th>All professionals in the school-program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• May or may not be aware of the impact of competition on accountability measures (Gerwitz, Bowe &amp; Ball, 2011)</td>
<td>• Intensification of work may challenge traditional professional identities by asking professionals to do more and more work beyond the realm of educating students in the classroom (Lundstrom &amp; Holm, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competition may be internalized and normalized to the point where these professionals accept the competition and its implications as a normal part of public school life (Gerwitz, Bowe &amp; Ball, 2011)</td>
<td>• May need to reconcile competing professional identities as educators in order to remain in the school-program community (Lundstrom &amp; Holm, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May or may not be aware of the ways that selectivity is impacting their admissions process and the competition it engenders (Hoxby, 2009; Pascarella &amp; Terenzini, 2005)</td>
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From Tables 6.1 & 6.2 we can see that there is more redefinition of work and impacts of that redefinition on those who are specifically engaged in the admissions process. Because the work of admissions is not written into any particular official job description in the Department of Education, it is unclear how many school professionals this redefinition may be impacting. As Isabel stated in Chapter 5, there seems to be no
formal recognition by the Department of Education that screened school-programs need an employee who’s job is explicitly to manage admissions. Since the high school admissions process is largely unregulated, there may be a sense that school-programs are making it work, and they are, but at a real human cost.

As the data in Chapter 4 showed, screened school-programs are increasingly using more labor-intensive admissions tasks to screen applicants, such as visits, writing samples and interviews; these tasks increase the selectivity and competition of their school-program as we saw in Tables 4.11 and 4.12. In Chapter 5 Angelica, Daenerys, Peaches, Isabel, Lulu, John, Jane and Junot all spoke about the labor involved in these processes and how much preparation and time they require. They described working without pay, as DOE employees, John even mentioned that he recalls “there being pizza, but no per-session that I can remember.” Additionally, as school-programs become more established and selective, we know that they develop the privilege of moving away from marketing practices, but take on the burden of dedicating themselves to an ever higher quality admissions process which may increase clerical tasks, require greater communication and/or relationship building with middle school personnel, and generally intensify their workload, despite the fact that they often have other official responsibilities that are affiliated with their designated job title, such as administrator, teacher or guidance counselor.

Further, there is a sense of responsibility that is engendered in all the participants who take on the role of “Director” or “Coordinator” of admissions. As scholars of neoliberal policy and neoliberal governmentality have described, nearly all of the participants believed that admissions was among the most important work the school-program was engaged in. John, Peaches, Mango, Junot and Chip, all of whom had limited roles in their school-programs admissions process, talked about how invested they felt in the process and were able to speak fluently on what they believe the implications of the process are. But their sense of responsibility for those outcomes was far out-weighed by that of their colleagues who were more deeply entrenched in the admissions process. Jane, Angelica, Lulu, Isabel and Daenerys all exhibited traits of the neoliberal worker, where personal responsibility for the success or failure of the process rests, almost solely on them (Fraser, 2009; Harvey, 2011). As Saunder and Espeland found with their
participants, those who were more deeply engaged in the admissions process seemed to self-impose adherence to the discipline of the admissions process by internalizing and normalizing the actions and attitudes associated with admissions, to greater extents than those whose involvement was limited to one or only some of the aspects of admissions.

The difference in those professionals engaged in the admissions process is an exhibition of Espeland and Saunder’s concept of reactivity, where those more deeply involved in the process may “struggle to reconcile their sense of themselves as professional educators with an imposed market-based logic of accountability” (p. 66). As Lundstrom and Holm (2011) found with Swedish school professionals undergoing marketization, all the participants in this study had moments of reflection where they acknowledged the ways that the admissions process had thrust them into a changed version of their professional roles. John spoke of willingly giving up preparation and lunch periods to support tours or rate application materials; Junot talked about his personal fall and winter schedule needing to accommodate admissions related events; Jane and Daenerys explicitly stated how they completed nearly all admissions related work during off-hours; and Isabel and Mango are not employed by their school-program, but volunteer to do the work, beyond their own personal and professional responsibilities. With these actions, each of the participants is normalizing an increased workload affiliated with admissions and establishing new professional expectations, a process which is a direct product of the marketization of the entire public education system in New York City.

The increased workloads and the new professional expectations affiliated with the implementation of the admissions process require that professionals expand their work to include competing for applicants and fostering a sense of customer service in their everyday work (Cucchiara, Gold, Simon, 2011; Gewirtz, Bowe & Ball, 2011). Tables 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11 show an increasing volume of screened school-programs using the more labor-intensive admissions processes and that those school-programs that are more highly selective are more likely to be using those processes; reflective of these findings is the fact that all three of the screened school-programs I used in my case study employ two or more of the three most labor-intensive admissions tasks: visits, evaluating writing samples and interviews. Any school professional working in a school-program that uses
visits or interviews during the school day as a method of admissions, is suddenly engaged in customer service and competing for student applicants. Jane described the hours when tours were happening as “a show,” where the tone of was for “everyone to feel welcome;” Mango described the classrooms and hallways as “being on display;” while Lulu described the importance of visits going smoothly as a show of organization and professionalism on the part of the school-program. During these events, every teacher and staff member who is teaching in a classroom, walking down the hallway or completing a task in the main office, may be observed or engaged by a prospective student and their family. The heightened stakes of these interactions put all staff members in a position to potentially do the work of customer service. This work is further intensified for all professionals if, as at Quiet Secret, the professional culture expects all school professionals to be a regular part of the process of rating applicant materials.

*Implications Of Findings*

At The Local Level

In New York City public schools, the implications of this research are far reaching. Since the implementation of the current iteration of high school admissions in 2006, school choice policies and similar processes have been implemented at all levels of schooling, including entry into kindergarten and transitioning from kindergarten to middle school. If the findings of this study are to be relied upon, then the same redefinition of the work of school professionals in screened high school-programs, may have spread to a much wider group of school professionals at every level of schooling. Refocusing just on the high school level, screened high school-programs may not be the only types of school-programs affected by the redefinition of work. Visits are a widely used tool of the high school admissions process and are available at school-programs that use admissions methods other than “screened.” Just the use of visits, especially those conducted during the school day, creates a shift in professional culture that increases customer service work and spreads it to all staff in the building during the visits. In the sections below, I discuss recommendations and future research to examine this issue.
In screened school-programs there is an entire semester of the school year where the attention and labor of professionals engaged in the admissions process is divided between their actual job responsibilities and the work of admissions. For administrators this may mean forgoing the completion of teacher observation reports in favor of managing the more time-constrained ranking of student applicants in the citywide computer system. For teachers this may mean forgoing a more thoughtful grading of current student writing, knowing that after school they’ll also be rating applicant-writing samples. In either case, we know from this research that those who are expected to participate in admissions processes are taking on additional work that makes them less available for the education of their current student body. All compliance initiatives take time and energy and often to the benefit of students, but this is not a compliance initiative; it is an unfunded mandate that places school professionals in a position to increase their workload without formal acknowledgement, participate in a cycle of competition, and make their work less about educating students and increasingly about marketing their school-program.

At The National Level

The most challenging aspect of uncovering the human and, essentially hidden, costs of the implementation of the high school admissions process in New York City, is that our current federal administration and its Secretary of Education, seek to expand school choice policies. Although the current administration often finds itself at odds with New York City, the previous administration often held New York City’s public schools as an exemplar of many policies, including school choice. As such, several of the blueprints for implementing school choice in New York City have been used in a variety of other cities across the nation such as Chicago, Denver and New Orleans, where former NYC DOE staff are now or were recently employed, to help roll out school choice policies. For the current administration, the creation of “choice” outweighs the need for accountability—accountability that supports students and accountability that supports the needs of school professionals when implementing school choice policies (Devega, 2017).
The current Secretary of Education has a record of supporting policies that destabilize public education systems and then using that destabilization as a way to demonize the public schools and garner support for privatization (Strausse, 2016). These actions include support for policies that undermine the work of school professionals and their unions, making it difficult to complete the primary task of educating students and maintaining a qualified, committed workforce (Henderson, 2016). Considering the implications of this research, it’s clear that the current federal administration poses a considerable threat to the workload and professional identities of school professionals who are already working to reconcile their traditional identities, associated with “helping kids,” against the marketization reforms that require them to “go beyond the normal boundaries” of their work.

Recommendations

In every interview I asked participants if they thought the admissions process needed to be improved or changed, and if so, how. The suggestions of these participants are worthy of consideration and I have folded some of their ideas into my suggestions for future research. Interestingly, participants provided recommendations at a variety of scales—some for the entire system, others directed recommendations to the admissions process itself and still others made recommendations at the school-program level. To protect the privacy of participants and their school-programs, I’ve declined to identify which participants made which recommendations, on the chance that their recommendations may reveal their identity or school-program.

Recommendations for the Entire School System:

Some participants felt strongly that the current admissions system is not working and even cited it as a motivation for their participation in the study; others recommended an expansion of guidance staff at the middle school level and more extensive training for them in their certification programs, or by the DOE, about supporting seventh and eighth
grade students in navigating high school choice. Finally, two participants recommended that we simply end the current system and switch to a policy of controlled choice.

For those who felt the current system is not working, they cited a lack of preparation for navigating the process, conflicts with their own moral compass, and the need for a return to confidence in the humans who choose to work in public schools. Those participants are worth quoting at length here:

I guess, I think that people who move into the private school sector understand that admissions and PR around admissions, is an important part of the school and the school’s life. But public schools and folks who’ve committed themselves to public schools… I certainly wasn't prepared for this, and I wonder if others are…perhaps, they love it, love the competition.

I don't think there is a Central fix. We're living in under the Central fix, right, this is supposed to be the one-- the computer program that like, solved racism and school choice, and its clearly not doing that. So if the computer can't do it then why not let people do it? And why not trust that it is in the best interests of every school, that every school serves a very diverse group of students?

Participating in admissions makes me feel weird, but I also see how its connected to every aspect of our school community, so I want to be a part of it because I’m a team player. But every time I have to give the ‘what’s special about our school’ talk, I want to hide in my classroom and teach for all six hours, but I can’t escape it because every kid in my room is a product of that system, so I don’t have a choice about which to pay attention to. They’re the same.

Recommendations for the Admissions System:

Participants recommended, broadly that the city-wide computer system for gathering data on, and ranking applicants, needs an overhaul; they recommended revising the timelines for admissions, and recommended either the creation of a DOE title for
admissions or at the very least, a line in the budget to accommodate the costs of admissions.

Any participant who completed the ranking of students in the city-wide computer system, known as the Pupil Candidate List (PCL), felt strongly that it was not meeting their needs. They reported issues with “saving” entries once they were entered, not being able to have multiple users entering rankings, and frequent inability to use the system during school hours because of the volume of users, which forced them to have to use the system at off-hours. This particular issue exacerbates the need to work beyond the boundaries of their normal workday and incurring unpaid hours of labor.

Another recommendation was that high school-programs be given January Regents week, an additional seven-day period, to finalize rankings for applicants. Although taking the recommendation may push back the “match day” experience for middle school students, the rationale was that it would be better to support screened high school-programs trying to conduct a quality admissions process, by not rushing the final steps of the process.

A final recommendation for the admissions system was that the admissions process and its accompanying work be more formally acknowledged by the Department of Education with the creation of a line in the budget to at least off-set the costs of conducting admissions processes (marketing materials, websites, labor) in conjunction with any of the following: have the UFT fold admissions work into the possibilities for Circular 6 or professional responsibilities in the current contract; add admissions work to the job description of an existing title with an accompanying salary increase; create a new salaried position for an “Admissions Coordinator,” perhaps under DC37 or UFT contracts.

Recommendations at the School-Program Level:

Screened school-programs need a way for the enrollment office to help them get a better mix of students; several participants were concerned about the fact that their school-program does not educate a representative sample of the student body of New York City, including ability, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, neighborhoods and
more. Participants felt that they did not know how to attract, and/or might be fearful of what happens to their standing if they attract, a more balanced mix of students that better reflect the educational needs of the city. Still other participants are having difficulty moving their school-program’s reputation towards a school that is just “fine” when there is a negative history associated with their campus building and/or the school, that seems to be inescapable, especially with accountability histories and parent/student reviews everywhere on the internet.

Recommendations for Further Research:

It is my opinion that this research only provides the foundational understanding that the admissions process in screened-school programs in New York City has redefined the work of school professionals and that redefinition has had a variety of impacts. However, I see this research as the jumping off point for several other avenues of research, some of which I hope to conduct myself and some of which should be left to those with greater expertise in areas like labor unions and women’s labor. Additionally, I’ve included areas for future research that attempt to correct some of the limitations of my study, including sample size and challenges with the dataset I created.

With school choice policy being expanded to all levels of schooling in New York City and a federal administration eager to further expand this policy, a study is needed to further examine the redefinition of school professionals at the middle school level and perhaps even at the elementary school level. As elementary school professionals prepare students to apply to middle school and middle school professionals prepare students to apply to high school, we need to know the extent to which their workload is being expanded, redefined and, perhaps, even detracting from the education of the student-body who are not yet approaching this transition.

An extension of the above-discussed study would be an examination of labor. In New York City, public school professionals all work under collectively bargained contracts, but the work of professionals who are employed by the DOE and are engaged in their school-program’s admissions process, goes beyond the boundaries of those contracts. There is an entire body of research literature on labor unions and, specifically,
on the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Council of School Supervisors & Administrations (CSA). One avenue for research that this study warrants is to examine how these labor unions understand the work of school professionals engaged in admissions processes.

Continuing on the topic of labor is the finding that women, most often perform the invisible work of the admissions process. For those engaged in scholarship on feminist theory, sociology and women’s labor, this finding may be fertile ground for an examination of whether this finding is accurate across the world of school admissions and if this finding can be further established, in terms of acknowledgement of labor, pay for labor, and how women construct their experience to rationalize the invisibility of their work.

Two participants in the study are fairly recent graduates of administrator certification programs and one participant is an adjunct-lecturer in an administrator certification program; all three told me that there was no part of their training programs that prepared them for participation in the admissions process. Although this was not a major part of my findings, one decade into the high school choice system in New York City, does seem warrant a need for certification programs in the city to prepare those who seek to become administrators for this process. What, if any preparation, is provided for those applying for certification as school building and district leaders, on how to navigate the school choice process in New York City? If no preparation exists, what would an effective unit of study on the process look like?

To correct for the limitations of my study, I feel that the quantitative portion of my research needs to be conducted again, with access to more specific data from the Department of Education. While the publicly available Directory of New York City High Schools and accountability measures provided by the OpenNYC initiative are strong foundations, my participant interviews led me to believe that these data sources are at times inaccurate or do not provide the full picture of a school-program that would make for a more accurate dataset. Further, the variables I created had limitations on tests for statistical significance. As such, the only responsible step to take was to use those variables to provide descriptive statistics in Chapter 4 and use those descriptive statistics to guide my interview selection and questioning. Another round of analysis on an
improved, more malleable dataset, would allow me to provide conclusions with statistical significance.

A final limitation of this work that may be corrected with a renewed version of this study is to have a greater pool of interviewees across a greater number of school-programs or to be able to conduct surveys of larger portions of professionals in screened school-programs. While three school-programs and ten participants certainly provided me with a wide range of experiences, I feel strongly that there is more to be culled from this portion of the research. A follow up study would hopefully include more voices from teachers, clerical and guidance staff working in screened school-programs; I found these interviews to be the most insightful and surprising, but they were also the most hesitant to participate in the research, as opposed to administrators.

Final Word

The work of professionals in the high-school admissions process is impacted by a variety of factors that are sometimes within or beyond their control. The interpretation, internalization and normalization of, or resistance to, the admissions process is impacted by a school-program’s reputation, how collaborative its admissions process is and most importantly, how its leadership shapes norms around all elements of the admissions process and its competition. Those who work in the admissions process in screened high school-programs encounter similar challenges to those who work in admissions in higher education: the allure and anxiety of raising their profile, the fear of falling in rankings or perceived institutional quality, a constant need to reconcile amendments to their admissions process that help lessen their workload or increase the quality of the process for applicants. It appears that with each addition to the admissions process that might help the school-program feel more aligned with its own values or more professional or more competitive, there is a human cost to that work. Every change creates more work for someone, whether that work is temporary, like building the infrastructure of a website to accommodate sign up for tours, or more permanent, like taking the title of Admissions Coordinator and all the accompanies that title.
This study demonstrates that the implementation of the high school admissions process in New York City public schools has increased and redefined the work of professionals in screened school-programs. That redefinition has impacted the individual work, professional culture and entire community of screened school-programs unevenly, most often weighing the heaviest on a few key individuals whose additional work load due to this process, is frequently without formal acknowledgement from the Central DOE or the contractual work of any labor union that operates in the DOE. This work is primarily conducted by women who accept and see this work as an important responsibility, worth taking on regardless of the acknowledgement. As such, their professional identities, at times, require them to switch back and forth between their ascribed job title work and the work of admissions; in some moments they are able to step back and see the connections between all of their work, but the pace and volume of the work of admissions does not permit them to linger in reflection. Rather, they open the envelopes, enter information, answer phones, coordinate events, and finalize the process while repeating a mantra of “just get it done, just make it happen.”

Chapter 6 Summary

This chapter brings together all of the research to examine both the bigger picture and the nuanced picture. Here I discuss the kinds of redefinition of work that the high school admissions process has engendered and the impact of that redefinition. Further, I highlight several areas where the quantitative and qualitative data tell a rich story of professional educators navigating their way around a mandated system that they implement with a fierce sense of responsibility, which sometimes challenges their professional identities and seeps into their personal time beyond their true professional obligations; they do all of it in service of their school-program, to which they often have a strong sense of loyalty. The chapter also provides policy recommendations for the Department of Education, from participants regarding ways that the admissions system could be changed or improved at three scales: individual school-programs, the admissions system itself and the entire Department of Education. I also identify areas for future research that include possible studies to correct the limitations of this study.


