A Data-Driven Framework for Fair High School Comparison: The Acceptance Efficiency Index (AEI)

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Abstract

As competition for elite college placements continues to intensify, the demand for a fair, data-driven, and universally applicable ranking system for U.S. high schools has grown significantly. Existing rankings often focus on surface-level outcomes such as Ivy League or top-college matriculation rates, without accounting for variations in student academic strength or school selectivity. Moreover, current systems tend to segregate schools into narrow categories: boarding, charter, public, or exam-based, making cross-type comparison unreliable and often misleading. This study addresses these limitations by introducing a new evaluation framework centered on the Acceptance Efficiency Index (AEI), a metric that measures how effectively a school converts student academic strength, represented by average SAT or PSAT performance, into elite college admissions. Unlike traditional performance-based rankings, which reward sheer outcomes, the AEI approach normalizes results against input quality, offering a fairer measure of institutional effectiveness across all types of schools. The research begins with a critical review of the most widely used U.S. high school ranking systems, analyzing their methodologies and inherent biases. It then presents the AEI model as an alternative that unifies comparison across different school structures and admission policies. Finally, comparative case studies of leading U.S. high schools demonstrate how AEI rankings reveal deeper insights into true educational impact, highlighting schools that deliver exceptional college placement results relative to their student profile strength.

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