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The Impact of the Idaho Direct Admissions Program on Institution Selectivity

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional college admissions employ a selection process that assesses students on a myriad of factors such as high school academic achievement, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, and personal essays. In addition to this multi-step process, costs associated with these activities, such as college application fees, application assistance tools, and supplemental materials, pose additional barriers for high school students and families. Direct Admissions policies gained momentum in the mid-2010s against the backdrop of broader discussions on educational equity and efficiency. Direct Admissions policies, first pioneered by Idaho in 2015, aim to simplify the path to college for high school students by proactively admitting students to state colleges and universities. Since 2015, the policy has spread to Hawai'i, Minnesota, and Washington, which operate statewide "direct" and "proactive" admissions programs. While South Dakota began its Direct Admissions program in 2018, it was discontinued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individual systems of higher education, such as the University System of Georgia, The City University of New York, the State University of New York, and the Universities of Wisconsin implemented Direct Admissions programs in fall 2023.

Idaho's decision to implement Direct Admissions was motivated by a desire to boost its relatively low college-going rates and ensure that more of its high school graduates pursue higher education, particularly at state institutions. Idaho's Direct Admissions system automatically qualified all 2016 public high school seniors for admission to participating colleges and universities based on their academic performance such as standardized test scores, GPA, and high school course credits, without requiring them to undergo the traditional application process. Using the student's SAT score and GPA, the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE) proactively admits high school students to the "Letter of 6" or "Letter of 8." Students receiving the Letter of 8 are admitted to all of Idaho's public higher education institutions, while students receiving the Letter of 6 are admitted to all except Boise State University and the University of Idaho, the two more selective institutions in the state. Once a student is guaranteed a seat at any of the colleges listed in their Direct Admissions letter, students then apply to the institutions of choice to verify their enrollment intentions.

Direct Admissions is designed to demystify the college application process, reduce barriers to entry, and encourage a higher rate of postsecondary enrollment. Since its implementation, the policy has garnered attention for its role in increasing postsecondary applications and enrollments. It has also emerged as a potential model for other states considering similar reforms. Previous research on Direct Admissions policies in Idaho has examined the policy's effectiveness on institutional applications and enrollment outcomes. This paper uses data on the receipt of a Letter of 6 and receipt of a Letter of 8 to understand how Direct Admissions policies influence student choice in institutional selectivity.

DATA AND METHODS

DATA

Data for this study come from the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education and include roughly 60,400 students graduating from a public or private Idaho high school in 2018, 2019, and 2020.[1] The Idaho high school database includes students' high school GPA, SAT or ACT scores, high school graduation status, number of high school credits earned, gender, race/ethnicity, economic hardship status, indicator for receipt of Letter of 6 or Letter of 8, and higher education enrollment status (including institution attended).

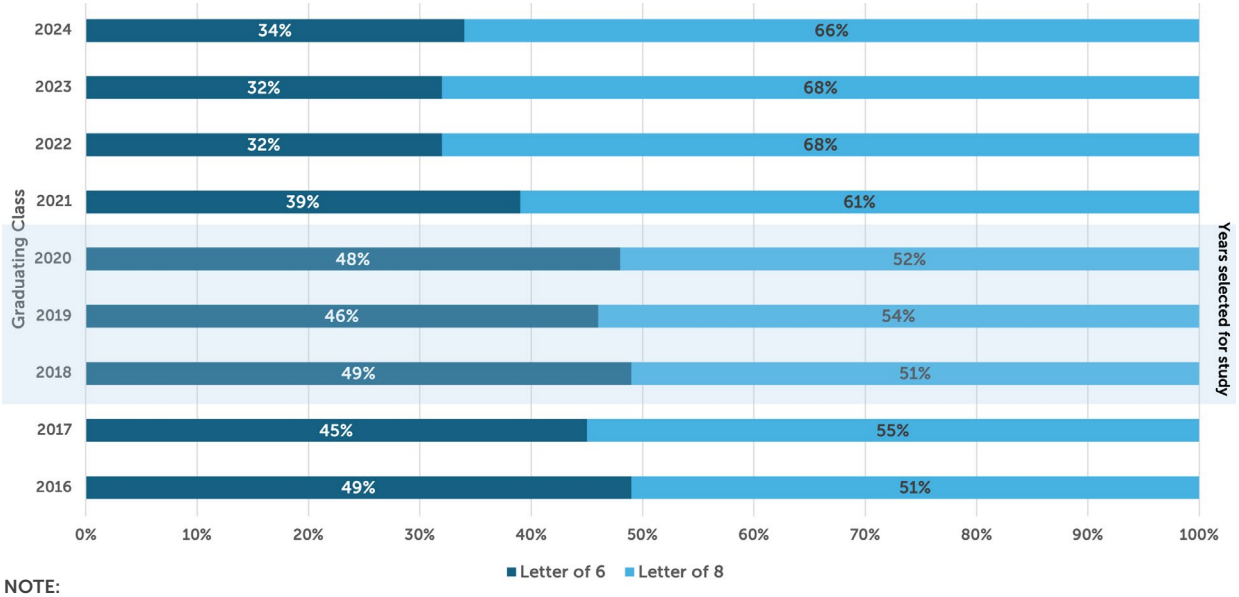
All graduating high school seniors with at least 12 high school credits were eligible to receive the Letter of 6. The Direct Admissions program used high school GPA and a combined high school GPA and SAT (or ACT)[2] index to determine which students would receive a Letter of 8. Students with a GPA greater than or equal to 3.0 received a Letter of 8, regardless of SAT (or ACT) score. Students could also receive a Letter of 8 if the product of their GPA and SAT score was greater than or equal to 2835.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Idaho data began with a descriptive summary of the students in the three graduating classes. As shown in *Figure 1*, between 51% and 54% of students graduating between 2018 and 2020 received a Letter of 8, compared to 61% to 68% between 2021 and 2024. This increase in Letter of 8 eligibility can be attributed to a change in the Direct Admissions program during the COVID-19 pandemic, which eliminated the standardized test requirement and lowered the GPA threshold to 2.8 in 2021 and 2.6 in 2022-2024.

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVING LETTER OF 6 AND LETTER OF 8, 2016-2024



NOTE:

1. idaho eliminated the act/sat component of its direct admissions program in 2020 and lowered the gpa threshold for the letter of 8 to 2.8 In 2021 and 2.6 In 2022-2024.

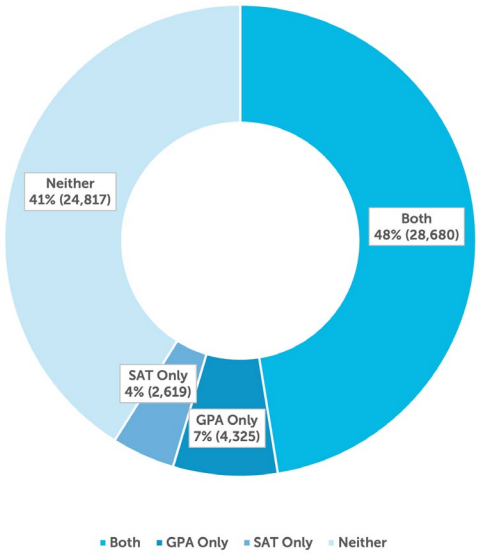
SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

1. Due to changing eligibility requirements as well as environmental changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, data were limited to 2018 through 2020. These years share the same eligibility requirements and letters were sent before the pandemic began. However, the class of 2020 would have their fall enrollment impacted by the pandemic.
2. ACT scores were converted to SAT scores using concordance tables for students who took the ACT.

Within the 2018 through 2020 graduating classes, 55% of students (33,005) received a Letter of 8 because their GPA was greater than or equal to 3.0. Another 4% of students (2,619) had a GPA lower than 3.0 but received the Letter of 8 because of their SAT score. The remaining 41% of students did not qualify and received the Letter of 6. *Figure 2* shows the distribution of students across the GPA and GPAxSAT thresholds.

FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVING LETTER OF 6 AND LETTER OF 8 BY GPA AND SAT THRESHOLDS, 2018-2020



NOTE:

1. Idaho eliminated the ACT/SAT component of its direct admissions program in 2020 and lowered the GPA threshold for the Letter of 8 to 2.8 in 2021 and 2.6 in 2022-2024.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

Demographic comparisons were limited to students with a GPA between 2.81 and 3.19 to capture students with similar academic achievements who differ only in their receipt of the Letter of 8. Within this subset, placement into each eligibility "bucket" (see *Appendix A*) for the Letter of 8 does not vary to a statistically significant degree across race/ethnicity or gender, but does vary by economic disadvantage for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts. When demographic comparisons are not limited to academically similar students, there are significant differences in Letter of 8 receipt across race/ethnicity, gender, and economic disadvantage (see *Appendix B*).

As shown in *Table 1*, students above and below the 3.0 GPA threshold were demographically similar: 21.7% of students with a GPA between 3.0 and 3.19 were non-white, as were 23.3% of students with a GPA between 2.81 and 3.0. This 1.6 percentage point difference is not statistically significant (p=0.071).

Similarly, differences by gender are not significant. Among students with a GPA between 3.0 and 3.19, 47.9% were female, as were 46.4% of students with a GPA between 2.81 and 3.0. This 1.5 percentage point difference is not significant (p=0.2).

Eligibility for the Letter of 8 across thresholds does vary by economic disadvantage status. Students with a GPA between 2.81 and 3.0 are more likely to have economic disadvantage status (53.7%) than students with a GPA between 3.0 and 3.19 (49.4%). This 4.3 percentage point difference is statistically significant (p<0.001).

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS ABOVE AND BELOW GPA THRESHOLD FOR LETTER OF 8 ELIGIBILITY

DEMOGRAPHIC	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH 2.81 TO 3.0 GPA	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH 3.0 TO 3.19 GPA	PERCENTAGE POINT DIFFERENCE	T-Test P-Value
RACE/ETHNICITY				
WHITE	76.7%	78.3%	1.6	0.071
OTHER RACE	23.3%	21.7%	1.6	0.071
GENDER				
MALE	53.6%	52.1%	1.5	0.200
FEMALE	46.4%	47.9%	1.5	0.200
ECONOMIC STATUS				
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	53.7%	49.4%	4.3	<0.001
NOT ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	46.3%	50.6%	4.3	<0.001

NOTES:

1. Race/ethnicity categories were chosen to provide a large enough sample size for comparison.
2. Economically disadvantaged status is determined by Direct Certification, receipt of Free or Reduced National School Lunch program, or a qualified household income survey.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY

Following descriptive analyses, a more thorough investigation of the impact of the Letter of 8 on enrollment patterns was warranted. Because students are assigned the Letter of 6 or the Letter of 8 based on sharp thresholds, this study is appropriate for a regression discontinuity design (RDD). The RDD is a quasi-experimental approach that measures the impact of an intervention by comparing students just on either side of the eligibility cutoff.[3] By selecting students who are otherwise very similar (i.e., similar GPA and SAT scores, race/ethnicity and gender demographics, and economic disadvantage status) but receive different treatment (in this study, receipt of the Letter of 8), the RDD can eliminate selection bias and identify causal effects.

The running variable in an RDD is the variable that is used to determine eligibility: if students have a value of the running variable above the threshold, they are assigned the intervention; otherwise, they do not receive the intervention. The Direct Admissions program in Idaho is constructed such that two different metrics determine eligibility for the Letter of 8: high school GPA and the product of high school GPA and SAT score. Because either or both scores can determine a student's eligibility, there are two running variables in the construction of the RDD. In this case, a regression discontinuity with multiple scores (RDMS) is appropriate.[4]

In an RDMS design, the treatment effects of the intervention are measured across the boundaries determining eligibility.[5] That is, students who are just above and below the cutoff for each eligibility variable

3. Thistlewaite, D.L., & Campbell, D.T. (2017). Regression-discontinuity analysis: An alternative to the ex-post facto experiment. *Observational Studies*, 3(2): 119-128.
4. Cattaneo, M.D., Titiunik, R., & Vazquez-Bare, G. (2020). Analysis of regression-discontinuity designs with multiple cutoffs or multiple scores. *The Stata Journal*, 20(4): 866-891.
5. Cattaneo, M.D., Idrobo, N., & Titiunik, R. (2024). A practical introduction to regression discontinuity designs: extensions. *Elements in Quantitative and Computational Methods for the Social Sciences*.

are compared to measure the effects of the treatment on a given outcome. For this study, treatment is receipt of the Letter of 8, eligibility is determined by GPA and the product of GPA and SAT, and the outcome is student enrollment in a more selective postsecondary institution.[6]

Several assumptions must be met in order to proceed with the RDMS design.

1. The **assignment mechanism** assumption requires that treatment is based on an observed continuous variable.[7] In this study, the observed continuous variables that determine treatment are high school GPA and SAT score.
2. The **continuity** assumption requires that there are no jumps in the outcomes around the boundary points that are unrelated to treatment.[8] In the absence of treatment or intervention, we do not anticipate any jumps or changes in college-going rates across the boundaries for Letter of 8 eligibility.
3. The **compliance** assumption requires that there are no treatment outliers who defy eligibility criteria.[9] In this study, there are only 29 students who defy treatment eligibility, representing just 0.05% of the total sample.[10]

Because the values of the two running variables (GPA and the product of GPA and SAT score) are in different units, this analysis used normalized values of the running variables in the RDMS model. The normalized variable is measured as the perpendicular or Euclidean distance from the point to the boundary for eligibility[11] and is used to measure the pooled treatment effects of the Letter of 8.[12]

In a standard RDD model, researchers choose a bandwidth for inclusion in the model based on other observable characteristics about students; students included in the model should be otherwise similar in observable characteristics (i.e., GPA and SAT scores, race/ethnicity and gender, and economic disadvantage status) and should differ only in their receipt of treatment.[13] In the RDMS model, the bandwidth is automatically selected for each cutoff point specified. The cutoff-specific bandwidth in this analysis ranges from 0.108 to 0.352 units, with a pooled bandwidth of 0.148 units.[14] The number of students included in the analysis ranges from 3,755 students to 24,479 students, with a pooled population of 17,408 students. These bandwidths include students on either side of the boundary, so include both treated (Letter of 8) and untreated (Letter of 6) students.

Because the RDMS model has two boundaries for eligibility, treatment effects can vary at different points along each threshold. This analysis measures the treatment effects of the Letter of 8 at 51 points along the GPA and GPAxSAT boundaries. Points were chosen to represent students with high GPA and low SAT, low GPA and high SAT, and high GPA and high SAT. A pooled result that averages the treatment effects of the Letter of 8 across all points on the boundary was also calculated.

6. "More selective" institutions include the two institutions that appear in the Letter of 8 but do not appear in the Letter of 6 (Boise State University and University of Idaho).
7. Branson, Z., & Mealli, F. (2019). The local randomization framework for regression discontinuity designs: A review of some extensions. *arXiv: Methodology.*
8. Bor, J., Moscoe, E., & Barnighausen, T. (2015). Three approaches to causal inference in regression discontinuity designs. *Epidemiology, 26*(2): e28-e30.
9. Imbens, G., & Lemieux, T. (2007). Regression discontinuity designs: A guide to practice. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, Working Paper 13039.*
10. The defiers are due to misalignment in the timing of sending letters and receiving all of a student's credits to determine GPA.
11. The choice of perpendicular or Euclidean distance is determined by whether one, both, or neither points are below the threshold for eligibility.
12. Cattaneo, M.D., Idrobo, N., & Titiunik, R. (2024). A practical introduction to regression discontinuity designs: extensions. *Elements in Quantitative and Computational Methods for the Social Sciences.*
13. Thistlewaite, D.L., & Campbell, D.T. (2017). Regression-discontinuity analysis: An alternative to the ex-post facto experiment. Observational Studies, 3(2): 119-128.
14. Bandwidth units are the perpendicular or Euclidean distance in units of the normalized GPA and GPAxSAT score variables. Pooled result bandwidths are depicted in *Appendix C*.

DATA LIMITATIONS

The years of data in this study were limited by changes to the Idaho Direct Admissions program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The graduating cohorts of 2018, 2019, and 2020 were chosen to minimize differences in eligibility for the Letter of 8. However, the graduating class of 2020 had their immediate postsecondary enrollment impacted by the pandemic that began in March of 2020. Some students may have elected not to enroll in postsecondary education immediately following high school graduation or may have chosen to enroll in a different type of institution (see *Appendix D*).

The analyses in this study are also limited by the variables collected in the Idaho high school students database. Because income data is not included, an economic disadvantage indicator is included as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Economic disadvantage status is determined by Direct Certification, receipt of Free or Reduced National School Lunch program, or a qualified household income survey.[15] This precludes more thorough analyses by different income levels. An inherent limitation of the data comes from the structure of the Idaho Direct Admissions program: all students are eligible to receive the Letter of 6 (barring insufficient high school credits or failure to graduate). There is no counterfactual group of students who did not receive a Direct Admissions letter, meaning there is no way to compare the ability of a Direct Admissions letter to induce college enrollment. This study can only measure the impact of a Letter of 8 in comparison to a Letter of 6.

15. https://boardofed.idaho.gov/resources/22-23-intro-to-student-reporting/

RESULTS

IMPACT OF DIRECT ADMISSIONS PROGRAM ON COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Given that the purpose of Direct Admissions programs across the country is to encourage enrollment in postsecondary education, a natural research question to examine is the extent to which receipt of a Direct Admissions letter encourages postsecondary enrollment. The structure of the Direct Admissions program in Idaho precludes an analysis of this sort using data from the same year. All students who graduate from Idaho high schools are eligible for the Letter of 6, meaning there is no counterfactual of students who receive no letter. Consequently, there is no mechanism for testing the treatment effects of receiving a Direct Admissions letter within a single cohort. Cohorts across years (before and after program implementation) could be compared to assess the impact of the program on college enrollment.

Prior research suggests that the Direct Admissions program in Idaho has been effective in increasing postsecondary enrollment.[16] Researchers found that first-time undergraduate enrollment increased by 4-8%, while in-state enrollment increased by 8-15% following the implementation of the Direct Admissions program in 2015. Enrollment gains occurred primarily in open-access two-year community colleges. These findings suggest that students who otherwise would not have enrolled in postsecondary education were encouraged to apply and enroll due to receipt of a Direct Admissions letter.

IMPACT OF DIRECT ADMISSIONS PROGRAM ON INSTITUTION SELECTIVITY

Another natural research question that emerged during the examination of Idaho's Direct Admissions program is the extent to which receipt of a Letter of 8 incentivizes student enrollment in one of the two more selective institutions in Idaho (Boise State University and the University of Idaho). Since the Letter of 8 signifies guaranteed admission to Idaho's two most selective institutions, studying students on either side of the minimum GPA required to receive the letter helps to determine whether the promise of admission to these more selective univdersities serves as an incentive for students to ultimately enroll at these institutions. The RDMS design was used to assess this question.

Analyses found that the promise of admission to selective universities does not serve as an incentive for enrollment when students hold both a high SAT score and a high GPA. The treatment effects between students just above and below the GPA and GPAxSAT thresholds are not significant, meaning there was no impact of the Letter of 8 on high performing students' likelihood to enroll in one of the more selective Idaho institutions. As shown in *Table 2*, when both GPA and SAT scores are close to the thresholds of 3.0 and 2835 (cutoff ID #13-34), the RDMS model shows no significant treatment effects. This may arise from the fact that more academically gifted students have the option to enroll in more selective private institutions or out-of-state institutions, or may have been more likely to enroll in a more selective institution regardless of receiving the Letter of 8.

16. Odle, T., & Delaney, J. (2022). You are admitted! Early evidence on enrollment from Idaho's direct admissions system. *Research in Higher Education,63*: 899-932.

TABLE 2

REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY WITH MULTIPLE SCORES RESULTS FOR SELECTED POINTS AND POOLED EFFECTS

Cutoff ID	GPA	Score	Coefficient	P-Value	Bandwidth	Sample Size - Left	Sample Size - Right	Total Sample Size
1	2.25	2835	0.068	0.018**	0.352	16,234	8,245	24,479
2	2.28	2835	0.066	0.019**	0.336	15,581	7,865	23,446
3	2.31	2835	0.057	0.023**	0.346	15,857	9,017	24,874
4	2.34	2835	0.047	0.030**	0.381	16,946	11,618	28,564
5	2.37	2835	0.044	0.038**	0.371	16,536	11,558	28,094
6	2.40	2835	0.042	0.050*	0.360	16,066	11,406	27,472
7	2.43	2835	0.041	0.088*	0.342	15,302	10,901	26,203
8	2.46	2835	0.039	0.110	0.326	14,651	10,496	25,147
9	2.49	2835	0.037	0.130	0.324	14,453	10,899	25,352
10	2.52	2835	0.035	0.128	0.313	13,893	10,727	24,620
11	2.55	2835	0.033	0.158	0.292	12,909	10,052	22,961
12	2.58	2835	0.030	0.196	0.281	12,297	9,968	22,265
13	2.61	2835	0.027	0.237	0.264	11,382	9,407	20,789
14	2.64	2835	0.024	0.314	0.243	10,310	8,678	18,988
15	2.67	2835	0.022	0.375	0.240	9,965	8,975	18,940
16	2.70	2835	0.019	0.445	0.232	9,443	8,991	18,434
17	2.73	2835	0.017	0.535	0.224	8,908	9,011	17,919
18	2.76	2835	0.014	0.617	0.214	8,285	8,877	17,162
19	2.79	2835	0.013	0.669	0.215	8,141	9,363	17,504
20	2.82	2835	0.012	0.698	0.217	8,058	9,941	17,999
21	2.85	2835	0.011	0.748	0.216	7,770	10,241	18,011
22	2.88	2835	0.009	0.917	0.211	7,320	10,406	17,726
23	2.91	2835	0.005	0.907	0.215	7,257	11,012	18,269
24	2.94	2835	0.001	0.698	0.201	6,418	10,590	17,008
25	2.97	2835	-0.002	0.565	0.199	6,040	10,789	16,829
26	3.00	2835	-0.006	0.445	0.196	5,617	10,879	16,496
27	3.00	2798	-0.004	0.520	0.196	5,907	10,565	16,472
28	3.00	2762	-0.003	0.587	0.196	6,221	10,193	16,414
29	3.00	2725	-0.003	0.621	0.196	6,496	9,789	16,285
30	3.00	2689	-0.003	0.646	0.199	6,918	9,599	16,517
31	3.00	2652	-0.002	0.682	0.206	7,474	9,563	17,037
32	3.00	2616	-0.002	0.776	0.216	8,143	9,637	17,780
33	3.00	2579	0.002	0.716	0.193	7,357	7,989	15,346
34	3.00	2543	0.020	0.164	0.155	5,763	5,364	11,127
35	3.00	2506	0.037	0.034**	0.135	4,910	3,764	8,674
36	3.00	2470	0.041	0.025**	0.131	4,837	3,213	8,050
37	3.00	2433	0.031	0.098*	0.121	4,230	2,321	6,551
38	3.00	2396	0.023	0.214	0.115	3,803	1,900	5,703
39	3.00	2360	0.020	0.278	0.110	3,315	1,598	4,913
40	3.00	2323	0.026	0.191	0.108	3,013	1,390	4,403
41	3.00	2287	0.036	0.112	0.114	3,222	1,344	4,566
42	3.00	2250	0.045	0.066*	0.120	3,396	1,299	4,695

REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY WITH MULTIPLE SCORES RESULTS FOR SELECTED POINTS AND POOLED EFFECTS CONTINUED

Cutoff ID	GPA	Score	Coefficient	P-Value	Bandwidth	Sample Size - Left	Sample Size - Right	Total Sample Size
43	3.00	2214	0.059	0.029**	0.119	3,107	1,127	4,234
44	3.00	2177	0.060	0.024**	0.128	3,424	1,127	4,551
45	3.00	2141	0.058	0.030**	0.139	3,888	1,174	5,062
46	3.00	2104	0.054	0.061*	0.145	3,998	1,127	5,125
47	3.00	2068	0.049	0.112	0.148	3,859	1,035	4,894
48	3.00	2031	0.044	0.167	0.152	3,827	962	4,789
49	3.00	1994	0.038	0.231	0.154	3,610	844	4,454
50	3.00	1958	0.031	0.327	0.155	3,369	746	4,115
51	3.00	1921	0.028	0.420	0.157	3,100	655	3,755
52	0	0	0.015	0.273	0.148	8,794	8,614	17,408

NOTES:

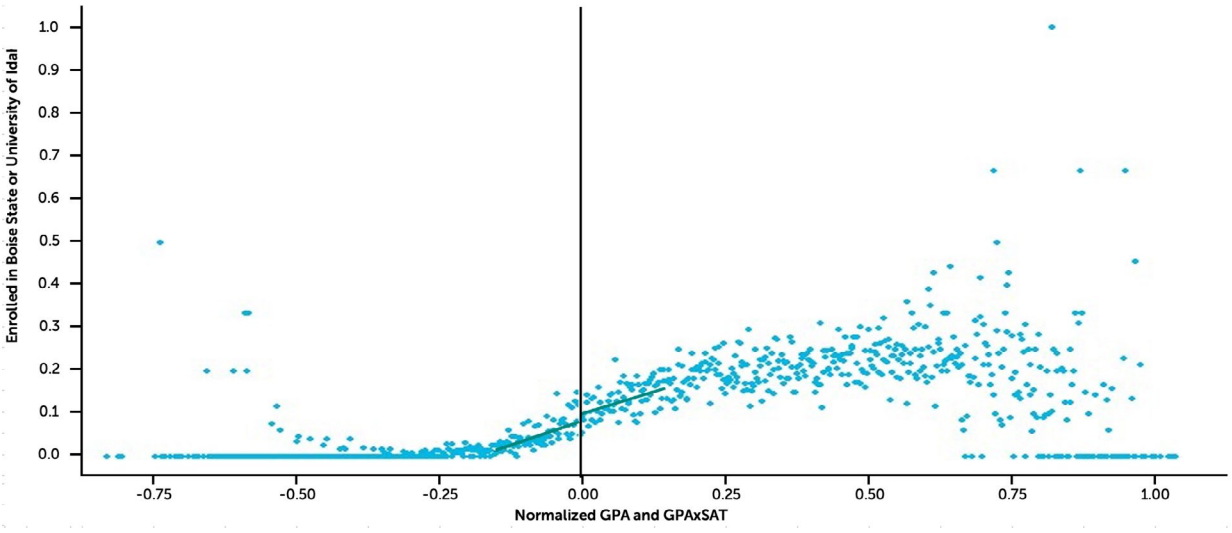
1. * p<0.10, **p<0.05
2. Cutoff points are chosen along the GPA and GPAxSAT boundaries for eligiblity for the Letter of 8. Cutoff point 52 shows the pooled results of the RDMS model.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

On average, the Letter of 8 has no impact on inducing enrollment in more selective institutions. The pooled results in *Table 2* show there is no significant treatment effect of the Letter of 8 on all students within the bandwidth for inclusion in the analysis. Although *Figure 3* does show a discontinuity across the boundary for Letter of 8 eligibility, this difference is not statistically significant when pooled across all students.

FIGURE 3

REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY WITH MULTIPLE SCORES RESULTS FOR POOLED EFFECTS

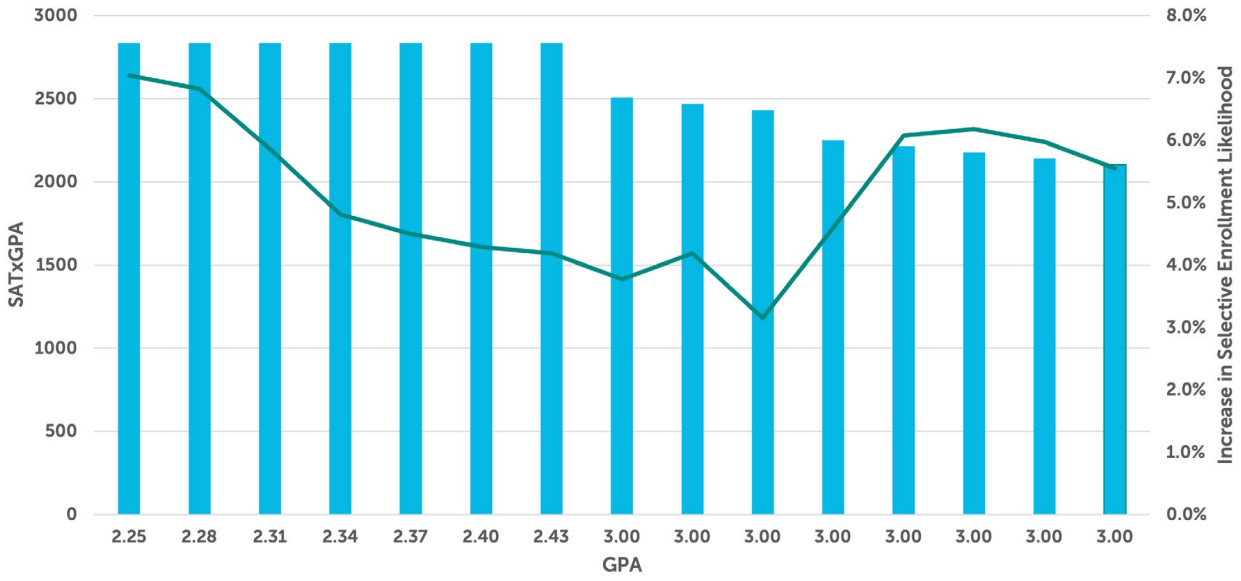


SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

The difference, however, lies at the tail ends of the threshold where students have a low SAT score and/or a low GPA. Students with a low SAT score and/or low GPA are less likely to attend one of the more selective institutions based on academic performance alone, but receiving the Letter of 8 encourages their enrollment at these selective institutions. As shown in *Table 2*, when either GPA or SAT score is farther from the eligibility thresholds (cutoff ID #1-12 and #35-52), the RDMS model shows some significant treatment effects of the Letter of 8. That is, students who receive the Letter of 8 are significantly more likely than their close peers to attend one of the more selective Idaho institutions. *Figure 4* demonstrates this effect for all boundary points with significant effects. When students have either a high GPA and low SAT score or low GPA and high SAT score, and they receive the Letter of 8, they are 3.1-7.0% more likely to enroll in a selective Idaho institution than their peers with similar GPA and SAT scores that were not eligible for the Letter of 8. This suggests that Direct Admissions policies not only simplify the admissions process but also potentially steer students toward institutions that may better match their academic profiles, thus influencing institutional selectivity and student body composition within the state.

FIGURE 4

INCREASE IN SELECTIVE ENROLLMENT LIKELIHOOD INDUCED BY LETTER OF 8 RECEIPT, BY GPA AND GPAXSAT



NOTE:

1. The green line shows the increase in the likelihood of enrolling in a selective institution for students who received the Letter of 8 compared to their peers who were not eligible for the Letter of 8.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

DISCUSSION

Direct Admissions programs are a popular, effective, and low-cost tool for encouraging postsecondary enrollment. The design of a Direct Admissions program can be tailored to suit different state goals, including promoting college-going ambitions, encouraging in-state enrollment, and optimizing institution fit. While prior research has confirmed that the Idaho Direct Admissions program has been successful in promoting college-going among graduating high school seniors, this study is the first to empirically assess the impact of the Letter of 8 on institution selectivity.

This study examined whether receipt of a Letter of 8 would encourage students graduating from Idaho high schools between 2018 and 2020 to enroll in one of the more selective Idaho institutions (Boise State University and University of Idaho). While this study found no significant treatment effects on average for all students, the findings did reveal heterogeneous effects by students' GPA and SAT scores. Students with lower GPA or SAT scores who qualified for the Letter of 8 were significantly more likely to enroll in a more selective institution.

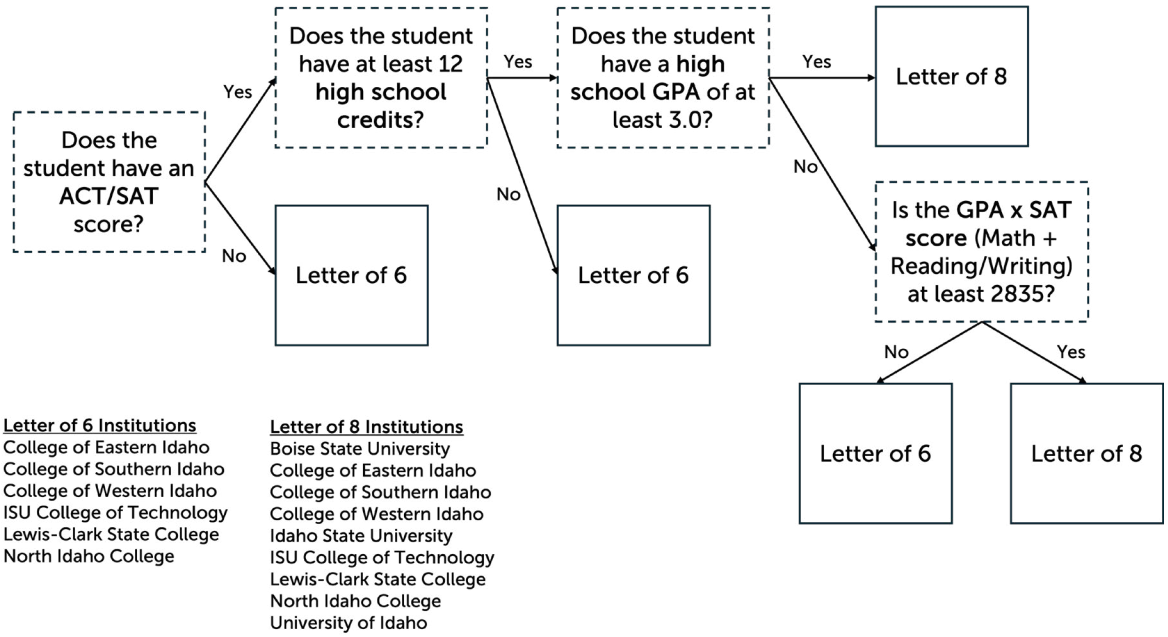
Direct Admissions programs are less effective for students whose scores are well above the eligibility threshold, as these students have many postsecondary pathway options, including private and out-of-state institutions. The Direct Admissions program guarantees these students a place at a selective in-state institution and simplifies the process for admission. The convenience of direct admissions and streamlining of the admissions process may encourage some high-achieving students to remain in-state at a selective institution that matches their academic profile. The retention of high-achieving students at in-state institutions has positive implications for the state workforce and economic development[17] and encourages students to remain in-state after graduation.[18]

While enrollment in postsecondary education is a positive outcome of the Direct Admissions program regardless of institution selectivity, there are several reasons why promoting enrollment in more selective institutions may be positive for students. In the absence of the Letter of 8, some students may feel unprepared or unqualified for a more selective institution and may enroll in an institution that is "undermatched" for their academic capability. Undermatching can result in lower student satisfaction,[19] lower degree attainment,[20] and lower post-graduation earnings and employment.[21] Especially for students right around the cutoff for eligibility, receipt of the Letter of 8 could induce students to view themselves as more capable of seeking enrollment in a selective institution than they previously thought possible.

17. Rogers, K.R. & Heller, D.E. (2004). Moving on: State policies to address academic brain drain in the south. *Institute for Higher Education Law & Governance Monograph 04-06*.
18. Ishitani, T.T. (2011). Exploration of interstate college and post-graduation migration in the United States. *Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research*.
19. Muskens, M., Frankenhuis, W.E., & Borghans, L. (2019). Low-income students in higher education: Undermatching predicts decreased satisfaction toward the final stage in college. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48*: 1296-1310.
20. Campbell, S., Macmillan, L, & Wyness, G. (2019). Mismatch in higher education: prevalence, drivers and outcomes. *UCL Institute of Education*.
21. Ovink, S., Kalogrides, D., Nanney, M., & Delaney, P. (2017). College match and undermatch: assessing student preferences, college proximity, and inequality in post-college outcomes. *Research in Higher Education, 59*: 553-590,

APPENDIX A

IDAHO DIRECT ADMISSIONS FLOWCHART FOR LETTER OF 6 AND LETTER OF 8 ELIGIBILITY



Letter of 6 Institutions
College of Eastern Idaho
College of Southern Idaho
College of Western Idaho
ISU College of Technology
Lewis-Clark State College
North Idaho College

Letter of 8 Institutions
Boise State University
College of Eastern Idaho
College of Southern Idaho
College of Western Idaho
Idaho State University
ISU College of Technology
Lewis-Clark State College
North Idaho College
University of Idaho

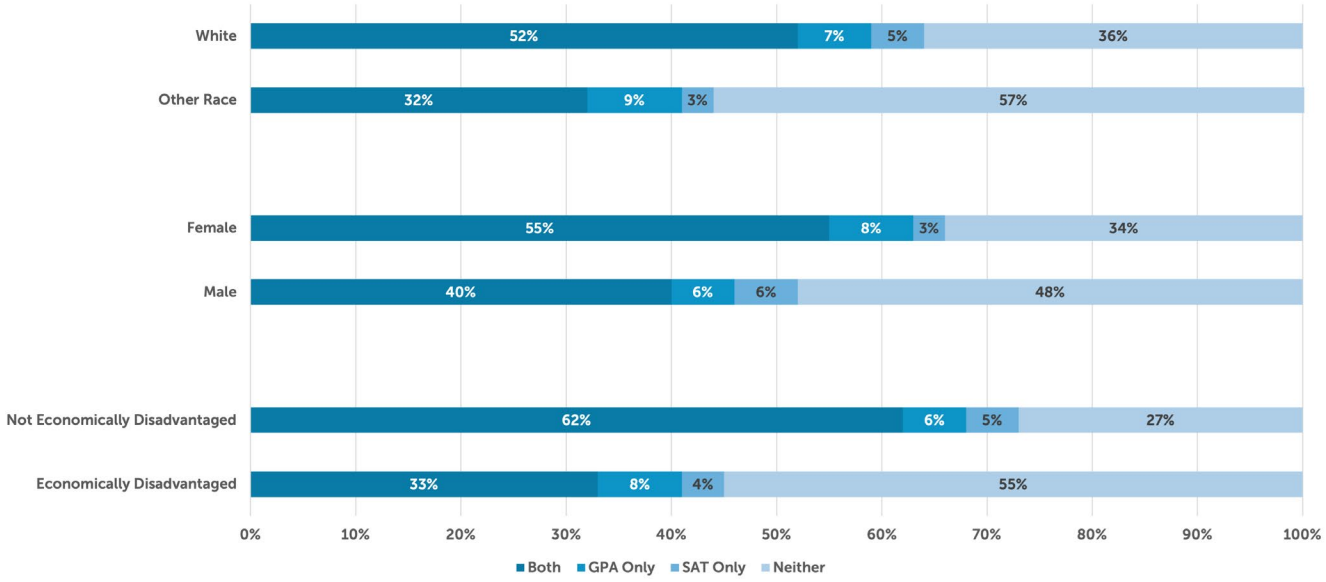
NOTE:

1. Idaho eliminated the ACT/SAT component of its direct admissions program in 2020 and lowered the GPA threshold to 2.8 in 2021 and 2.6 in 2022-2024. These years are beyond the scope of this study.

SOURCE: Adapted from Odle, T., & Delaney, J. (2022).

APPENDIX B

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVING LETTER OF 6 AND LETTER OF 8 BY GPA AND SAT THRESHOLDS ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, 2018-2020



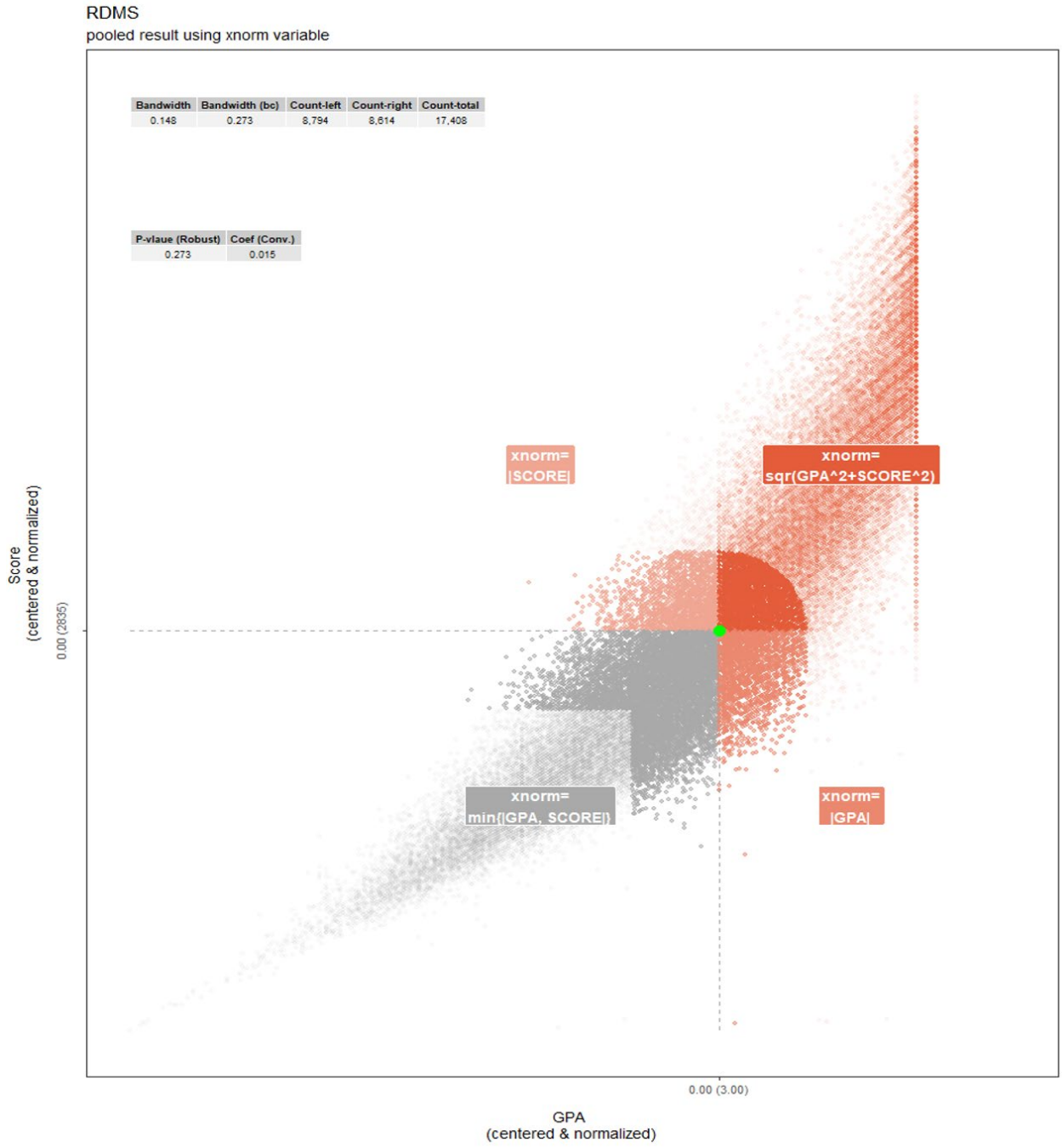
NOTES:

1. Race/ethnicity categories were chosen to provide a large enough sample size for comparison.
2. Economically disadvantaged status is determined by Direct Certification, receipt of Free or Reduced National School Lunch program, or a qualified household income survey.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

APPENDIX C

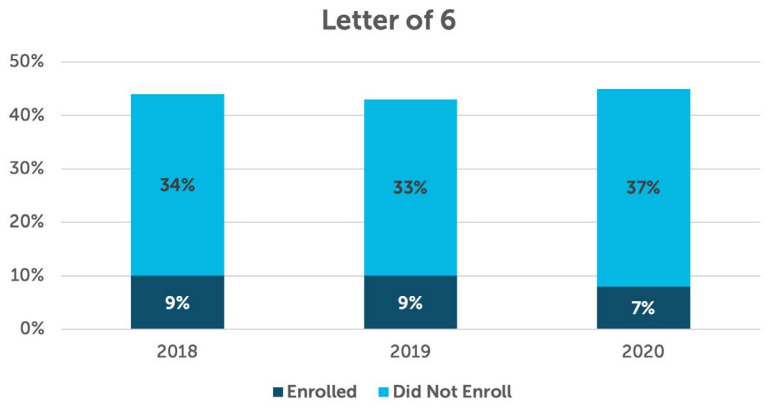
REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY POOLED RESULT BANDWIDTHS APPENDIX C

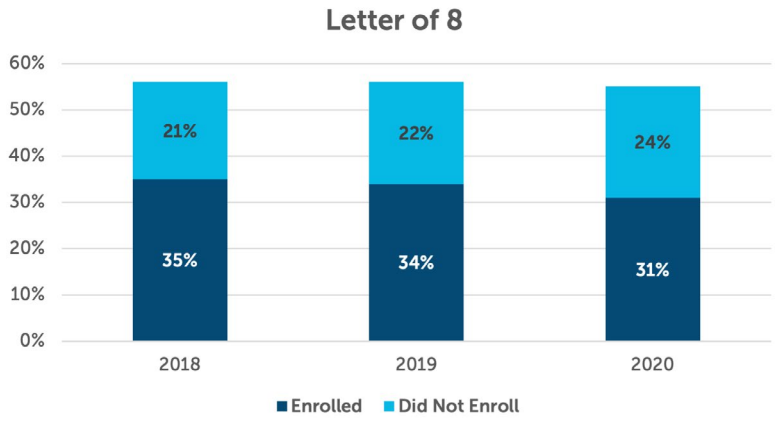


SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

APPENDIX D

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT RATES BY LETTER OF 6 AND LETTER OF 8 ELIGIBILITY, 2018-2020





NOTE:

1. Percentages across Letter of 6 receipients and Letter of 8 receipients total 100.

SOURCE: Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.