

CMRE Research Digest 2016-11 (7)

Editor: Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren

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Editor's Pick

Charter High Schools' Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings

By: Tim R. Sass, Ron W. Zimmer, Brian P. Gill, T. Kevin Booker

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (Summer 2016)

[Published version \(free\)](#)

The American charter school sector has attracted considerable research interest as it has expanded and matured in the last decades. In general, this research indicates mixed effects. Urban charter schools, employing the No Excuse paradigm – characterised by high behavioural expectations, strict discipline, and longer school days or years – appear to have positive effects on test scores, but other charter schools often have no or even negative effects.

Yet the evidence base on longer-term outcomes is still scarce. As discussed in last month's [digest](#), charter schools in Texas appear to have no positive effects in this respect. While No Excuse paradigm schools positively affect test scores and university enrolment, they have no statistically significant impact on labour-market outcomes when students are 24-26 years old. And regular charter schools were in fact found to have had a negative impact on all three types of outcomes.

In this paper, Tim Sass and colleagues provide new evidence on the longer-term educational and labour-market effects of charter school attendance, this time among upper-secondary schools in Florida. Similar to the paper discussed in last month's digest, the authors are not able to exploit experimental variation in charter school attendance to ensure that they compare 'like for like'. However, they use various other techniques to tease out the causal impact of charter school attendance. The principal strategy involves comparing only pupils who attend lower-secondary charter schools, some of whom switch to state upper-secondary schools while others remain in charter upper-secondary schools. In combination with matching pupils on predetermined variables, the hope is that any unobservable characteristics affecting both charter school attendance and outcomes can be captured.

The results display that upper-secondary charter school attendance in Florida has positive effects on the likelihood of obtaining an upper-secondary school diploma, college/university enrolment as well as persistence at college/university for at least two years. Furthermore, the authors find that charter school attendance also raises earnings by 12 per cent when students are between 23 and 25 years old. In other words, in Florida, the effects of charter school attendance on longer-term educational outcomes also appear to spill over in the labour market.

Interestingly, the same authors find that charter schools do not impact test scores. This is in sharp contrast compared with the results from the paper discussed in last month's digest, which found negative effects of regular charter schools in Texas on test scores, longer-term educational outcomes as well as earnings, while finding positive effects of No Excuse paradigm charter schools on test scores and longer term-educational outcomes – but no effects on earnings.

There are various potential reasons for these findings. Florida charter schools may simply be more effective in promoting non-cognitive outcomes – such as grit, persistence, self-control, and conscientiousness – that could matter more for promoting success in the labour market for young adults than test scores. However, the authors have no data to evaluate this hypothesis rigorously.

In any case, it is important to note that the effects on labour-market outcomes are evaluated when students are in their mid-20s. If charter schools in Florida are less likely to push students to pursue further studies – in, for example, law and medicine – compared with the No Excuse paradigm charter schools in Texas, positive effects on the labour market may show up earlier among students attending the former. Indeed, the fact that the former do not raise test scores, while the latter do, may indicate different academic focuses that spill over in the labour market at different times. Of course, it is also possible that the results merely capture different types of charter school quality in the two states – or methodological differences between the two studies.

Overall, therefore, using data from Florida, the study provides the first ever evidence of positive effects of charter schools on earnings when students are in their mid-20s. These charter schools, however, do not have a positive impact on test scores, indicating that they promote non-cognitive skills that are rewarded in the labour market among young adults. But we need more research to determine what explains these findings and the quite stark differences between the labour-market effects of these charter schools compared with those in Texas.

Effects of Policy and Practice – Developed World

Performance Standards and Employee Effort: Evidence From Teacher Absences

By: Seth Gershenson

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (Summer 2016)

[Published version](#)

[Working paper version \(free\)](#)

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) increased accountability pressure in US state schools by threatening to impose sanctions on Title-1 schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in consecutive years. Difference-in-difference estimates of the effect of failing AYP in the first year of NCLB on teacher effort in the subsequent year suggest that on average, teacher absences in North Carolina fell by about 10 per cent. The probability of being frequently absent similarly decreased. These reductions in teacher absences were driven by within-teacher increases in effort and by teachers in the bottom half of the effectiveness distribution. On average, only a modest amount of the achievement gains attributable to the increased accountability pressure are explained by the corresponding decline in teacher absences.

Improving Academic Performance through Conditional Benefits: Open/closed Campus Policies in High School and Student Outcomes

By: Shirlee Lichtman-Sadot

Economics of Education Review (October 2016)

[Published version](#)

[Working paper version \(free\)](#)

Open campus privileges in high schools can be conditional on students' academic (GPA, test scores, etc.) or behavioural (absences, probation, etc.) performance. The author evaluates the effectiveness of this incentive scheme in improving student academic outcomes using a dataset covering over 460 California high schools over a 10-year period and their open/closed campus policies, while distinguishing between conditional and unconditional open campus policies. The results show an increase of roughly 0.1 of a standard deviation in student test scores when a conditional open campus policy is in place, in comparison to an

unconditional open campus policy, thus suggesting that the incentive scheme intended by the conditional open campus policy is effective as a means for improving student test score outcomes. While the incentive scheme seems to improve test outcomes both for high and low-performing students, the magnitude of the effect is greater for lower-performing students, which is consistent with the fact that the academic thresholds under the conditional open campus policies are generally very minimal. The evidence also suggests that the incentive scheme is more effective for ninth and tenth grade students than it is for eleventh grade students.

The Effect of Breakfast in the Classroom on Obesity and Academic Performance: Evidence from New York City

By: Sean P. Corcoran, Brian Elbel, Amy Ellen Schwartz

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (Summer 2016)

[Published version](#)

[Working paper version \(free\)](#)

Participation in the federally subsidised school breakfast program often falls well below its lunchtime counterpart. To increase take-up, many districts have implemented Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC), offering breakfast directly to students at the start of the school day. Beyond increasing participation, advocates claim BIC improves academic performance, attendance, and engagement. Others caution BIC has deleterious effects on child weight. The authors use the implementation of BIC in New York City (NYC) to estimate its impact on meals program participation, body mass index (BMI), achievement, and attendance. While we find large effects on participation, our findings provide no evidence of hoped-for gains in academic performance, or of feared increases in obesity. The policy case for BIC will depend upon reductions in hunger and food insecurity for disadvantaged children, or its longer-term effects.

Effects of Policy and Practice – Developing World

Mainstreaming an Effective Intervention: Evidence from Randomized Evaluations of ‘Teaching at the Right Level’ in India

By: Abhijit Banerjee, Rukmini Banerji, James Berry, Esther Duflo, Harini Kannan, Shobhini Mukherji, Marc Shotland, Michael Walton

NBER Working Paper No. 22746

[Published version](#)

[Free version](#)

Previous randomised studies have shown that addressing children’s current learning gaps, rather than following an over-ambitious uniform curriculum, can lead to significant learning gains. In this study, the authors evaluate a series of efforts to scale up the NGO Pratham’s approach to teaching children according to their actual learning level, in four Indian States. While this approach was previously shown to be extremely effective when implemented with community volunteers outside of school, the objective of these new scale-up evaluations was to develop a model that could be implemented within the government school system. In the first two instances (Bihar and Uttarakhand), the methodology was not adopted by government schoolteachers, despite well-received training sessions and Pratham support. Motivated by the quantitative and qualitative analysis of these early attempts, the authors adapted the approach and designed large-scale experiments in the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to test two new scale-up models. In Haryana, teachers received support from government resource persons trained by Pratham, and implemented the approach during a dedicated hour. In Uttar Pradesh, Pratham volunteers implemented high-intensity, short-burst ‘learning camps’ for 40 days, in school and during school hours, with additional 10-day summer camps. Both models proved effective, with gains in language of 0.15 standard deviation in Haryana, and 0.70 standard deviations in Uttar Pradesh, on all students enrolled in these schools at baseline. These two models provide blueprints that can be replicated inside other government systems.

Does Access to Secondary Education Affect Primary Schooling? Evidence from India

By: Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay and Soham Sahoo

Economics of Education Review (October 2016)

[Published version](#)

[Working paper version \(free\)](#)

This paper investigates if better access to secondary education increases enrolment in primary schools among children in the 6–10 age group. Using a household level longitudinal survey in a poor state in India, the authors find support for their hypothesis. Using recent methods developed to assess the impact of omitted variable bias on the estimated coefficient, they show that correction for a bias emanating from endogenous placement of schools leaves our conclusions unchanged. Moreover, the marginal effect is larger for poorer households and boys (who are more likely to enter the labour force). They also provide some suggestive evidence that this effect may be quite widespread in India.

General Education

Long-Term Orientation and Educational Performance

By: David Figlio, Paola Giuliano, Umut Özek, Paola Sapienza

NBER Working Paper No. 22541

[Published version](#)

[Free version](#)

The authors use remarkable population-level administrative education and birth records from Florida to study the role of Long-Term Orientation on the educational attainment of immigrant students living in the US. Controlling for the quality of schools and individual characteristics, students from countries with long term oriented attitudes perform better than students from cultures that do not emphasise the importance of delayed gratification. These students perform better in third grade reading and math tests, have larger test score gains over time, have fewer absences and disciplinary incidents, are less likely to repeat grades, and are more likely to graduate from high school in four years. Also, they are more likely to enrol in advanced high school courses, especially in scientific subjects. Parents from long term oriented cultures are more likely to secure better educational opportunities for their children. A larger fraction of immigrants speaking the same language in the school amplifies the effect of Long-Term Orientation on educational performance. The authors validate these results using a sample of immigrant students living in 37 different countries.

The Influence of Height on Academic Outcomes

By: Devon Gorry

NBER Working Paper No. 22541

[Published version](#)

[Working paper version \(free\)](#)

This paper examines whether the height premium for academic outcomes is driven by unequal opportunities for tall individuals. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, this paper shows that taller individuals typically earn higher grades and attain more schooling, but the associations are not uniform across school size. Height is only associated with better outcomes for students attending large schools and these improvements

are concentrated among males. Data suggest that height contributes more to sports participation and school satisfaction in large schools where resources are more scarce. Thus, differential opportunities or treatment across height in large schools may drive the performance differences.