SREE Symposium Spring 2013

Can At-Risk Students Get Back on Track? Results from a Rigorous Study of Online and F2F Algebra for Credit Recovery

Chair:  Kirk Walters, American Institutes for Research, kwalters@air.org

First choice of conference section: Transitions for Youth

Second choice of conference section: Education Policy

Discussant:  James Kemple, Executive Director of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools, james.kemple@nyu.edu
Symposium Justification

The proposed symposium includes four papers based on an IES-funded efficacy trial of online Algebra I for summer credit recovery that is being conducted by the symposium participants in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The broad aims of the study are to (1) test the efficacy of online algebra for credit recovery, compared with standard face-to-face (f2f) algebra, (2) determine the supporting conditions in the classroom under which online algebra potentially yields higher efficacy, (3) gauge the effects of expanding summer credit recovery options, and (4) gauge the extent to which credit recovery helps at-risk students get back on track to graduation, relative to students who passed algebra in the ninth grade.

At the core of the study is a randomized control trial in a subset of CPS high schools with assignment of students to either online or f2f algebra credit recovery courses. Key outcomes include more immediate indicators of student success (e.g., summer algebra credits recovered, grades, end of course assessment, PLAN assessment scores) and longer term measures (e.g., ACT mathematics scores, high school math/science credits, graduation status). To achieve the broader aims of the study, outcomes for students in schools participating in these “expanded credit recovery options” are compared with students in schools not included in the experimental trial.

The four papers in the symposium are aligned with Aims 1-3, which correspond with data collection activities to date. The first paper addresses Aim 1 and presents the study design and impact results for both cohorts. The second paper addresses Aims 1 and 2 and examines the supporting classroom conditions under which the online course was implemented and compares the instructional experiences of the online and f2f students. The third paper addresses Aim 2 and describes the characteristics of the students who participated in the RCT and compares them with students who did not show up or need to attend summer school. The fourth paper addresses Aim 3 and examines the effects of expanded credit recovery options for ninth grade students relative to the business as usual (i.e., summer programming options schools offer without push for credit recovery). The discussant will synthesize major themes from across the papers and draw on insight from other relevant rigorous investigations, providing an engaging forum for participants.

The symposium is well-aligned with the focus of the 2013 Spring SREE conference, Capitalizing on Contradiction: Learning from Mixed Results, in two key ways. First, the study was powered to detect impacts separately for each summer cohort, allowing for the examination of results of the online intervention across both cohorts and the impact results may prove to be mixed, due to technological difficulties associated with the course that occurred only in summer 2012. Second, as previously described, the study design includes multiple short and long-term indicators of student success in credit recovery. The papers will compare differences in these outcomes within and across cohorts, providing opportunities to discuss “consistencies and contradictions in robust research studies” and see how rigorous designs do not necessarily produce unambiguous results.