SREE Symposium Fall 2014

Can At-Risk Students Get Back on Track? Results from a Rigorous Study of Online and Face-to-Face Credit Recovery in Algebra I

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First choice of conference section: Addressing Achievement Gaps & Persistently Low-Performing Schools

Second choice of conference section: Promoting Student Engagement & Persistence in College & Career Readiness

Discussant: Julie Edmunds, Program Director for Secondary School Reform at SERVE Center at University of North Carolina, Greensboro
Symposium Justification

The proposed symposium includes four papers based on an IES-funded efficacy trial of online Algebra I for summer credit recovery 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) examine the supporting conditions under which online or f2f algebra credit recovery yields higher efficacy, (3) gauge the effects of expanding summer credit recovery options; and (4) examine whether credit recovery helps at-risk students get back on track to graduation, relative to students who passed algebra in their freshman year.

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 short-term measures of student success (e.g., algebra credits recovered, grades, end of course algebra assessment, PLAN assessment scores) and longer term measures (e.g., high school math and science coursetaking and eventually, graduation status). To achieve the broader aims of the study, outcomes for study students are compared with those of other students, including students in schools not included in the experimental trial.

The four papers in the symposium are aligned with the aims of the project. The first paper presents the study design and impact results to date for the two study cohorts. The second paper examines whether online or f2f credit recovery is differentially beneficial for students with different levels of risk for failure or other characteristics, and presents gaps between study students and “on-track” students over time. The third paper examines the conditions under which the online course was implemented, with an emphasis on the relative content and rigor of the credit recovery courses. The fourth paper 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 Fall 2014 SREE conference, Common Ground for Practice and Research: Targeted Improvement Initiatives, in two key ways. First, the study fits squarely within multiple challenging problems of practice of interest for the conference, including addressing persistent achievement gaps and promoting student engagement and career and college readiness. The research questions were co-created by the study team and the district partner. Second, the study provides a practical example of a randomized trial designed to address broad and specific questions that are relevant to both policy (e.g. Should online courses be used to expand access to credit recovery?) and practice (e.g. How should credit recovery courses be implemented? Which types of students should be targeted for early credit recovery?). As such, the proposed symposium provides opportunity for rich discussion about the use of rigorous research for informing continuous improvement in practice and policy.

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