The Effect of Incentivizing Career and Technical Education Course Taking on Educational & Employment Outcomes

Shaun M. Dougherty, University of Connecticut
Michael A. Gottfried, University of California, Santa Barbara
Cameron Sublett, University of California, Santa Barbara

Most research on the effect of participation in career and technical education (CTE) in high school cannot make strong causal claims, and most studies have looked exclusively at labor market outcomes, overlooking potential educational benefits that might also accrue to participants. In this paper we capitalize on rich administrative data and an exogenous change in graduation requirements in Arkansas to estimate the effects of increased CTE exposure on student outcomes including, high school graduation, college going, and initial employment and wages. Under this policy shift, students are required to take six elective courses in high school that are aligned with career readiness, a category that includes all CTE courses. We document that in response to this policy, schools change their course offerings, and that change in offerings induced subsequent changes in CTE course taking. Using instrumental variables and difference-in-differences approaches we estimate the effects of CTE course taking on student outcomes and find that being induced to take more CTE coursework in high school positively impacts high school graduation, and initial employment, and has no effect on college going. We also provide estimates for traditionally marginalized groups of students who are disproportionately represented in CTE; youth from lower-income families and students with disabilities.