

Presenters

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Title

Multiple partners, multiple goals: Researchers, school staff and a not-for-profit partnering to examine the effects of a teacher home visiting program

Background

HOME WORKS! The Teacher Home Visit Program (HW!) is operated by a not-for-profit by the same name that has been in operation in the greater St. Louis area since 2007. Through a Low-Cost, Short-Duration Evaluation grant from IES, the research team partnered with HW! and the Saint Louis Public Schools to examine the effects of HW! on student academic outcomes. Each partner was motivated by similar, but slightly varied goals in engaging in this collaboration. In the proposed presentation, we will discuss these varied motivations and implications for how the study was implemented and how the results will be used.

The HW! program aims to bridge the gap between school and home, reverse distrust, foster partnerships between teachers and families, and provide parents with specific guidance about their child's academic achievement to improve success at school. Having been in operation for over a decade, the HW! organization was eager to move beyond anecdotal stories of students' educational experiences changing due to their participation in the program. After engaging in implementation and quasi-experimental analyses, HW! was eager to take part in a more rigorous test of program effects both to understand whether their model is working as intended and to help generate strong evidence to support further expansion or refinement of home visiting programming.

The participating school district was interested in being involved in this study as it provided them with the opportunity to examine whether they were using their very limited Title I funds wisely. They also had developed a strong relationship with the not-for-profit over the years and were eager to support their efforts in learning more about the program model.

The research team had developed a relationship with HW! and were eager to further their research goals. Also, the research team and the HW! founder were motivated to fill a gap in the literature base. Although teacher home visit programs have become increasingly popular in urban school districts as part of critical school reform efforts funded largely by Title I funds, to date, no rigorous RCT evidence had been published examining the effects of stand-alone teacher home visiting programs targeting families with students older than kindergarten age (rigorous research on home visiting programs has previously focused on youth from birth through kindergarten).

Study purpose

The study was designed to assess program effects over the course of one academic year. The main research question explored in the study is:

Do students enrolled in classrooms assigned to HW! condition score higher on 2018 standardized reading assessments, miss fewer days of school, and experience fewer disciplinary incidents over the course of the 2017- 18 school year than students in non-HW! classrooms?

Setting and study participants

The study took place in 11 elementary schools in the Saint Louis Public School District. All participating schools receive federal Title I funding and serve high needs youth. The study included 56 teachers and approximately 700 students in grades 1 to 3.

Intervention description

The HW! program model in this study used a “2-2-2-2-2” structure, which includes teacher participation in two mandatory training sessions, up to two home visits per student per academic year (two teachers attend each visit), attendance at two annual Family Dinners, and two paid teachers per school acting as site coordinators. Teachers receive a stipend for each home visit completed.

Comparison group teachers did not participate in the HW! trainings or in the intervention and used traditional methods of parental outreach including participating in regular parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school events.

Research design, data collection and analysis

The study uses a blocked, cluster randomized controlled trial (RCT) in which, within each participating school, volunteer teachers were randomly assigned to the HW! or the comparison conditions.

Given the nature of the research grant, which required relying on existing administrative records, the study uses data regularly collected by the school district and by HW!. The key outcomes include 2017-18 attendance rates, reading assessments, and disciplinary referrals. The school district also provided 2016-17 baseline measures of outcomes as well as information on race and ethnicity, gender, grade level, classroom assignment, and gifted, English learner and disability status. HW! also provided the research team with detailed home visit log information.

2017-18 school records data have recently been received and are in the process of being analyzed. The research team is estimating program effects using both an intent-to-treat (ITT) and treatment-on-the-treated (TOT) framework. All analyses employ multilevel mixed-effects models in which students (the unit of analysis) are nested within classrooms (the unit of random assignment) that are nested in grade levels within schools. This analysis considers blocking characteristics (grade level school and district) as fixed effects and adjusts standard errors for clustering at the classroom-level (the level of random assignment). Additional individual-level covariates include the background characteristics discussed above.

Because teachers traditionally have not had the capacity to reach all students in their class, a planned TOT analysis was considered in advance of study implementation. Results from the TOT analysis will give the school district and HW! a better sense of how students who received

home visits fared. To conduct the TOT analysis, we are employing two stage least squares (TSLS) analytic methods to obtain the complier average causal effects (CACE) estimates.

Findings and Conclusions

The final report is scheduled to be completed in December 2018. The proposed presentation will discuss these findings and implications for the district, the not-for-profit, and further research in the field. The presentation also will discuss the strengths and challenges of a research team entering into an existing relationship between a school district and a not-for-profit to conduct a RCT study. Benefits include support for school and teacher recruitment and data collection and on-the-ground assistance for study implementation. Challenges include assigning roles and responsibilities, ensuring that everyone understands and can fulfill these roles, managing competing priorities, and appropriate and relevant messaging of results.