

Education Policy Chair Session

Title: Evaluating Strategies to Support Student Success

Chair: A. Brooks Bowden

AUTHOR: Kevin Gee, University of California Davis, kagee@ucdavis.edu

TITLE: What contributes to the variation in chronic absenteeism across the early elementary years? Understanding the role of children, classrooms and schools

ABSTRACT: Across the early elementary years, chronic absenteeism patterns can vary considerably between different schools as well as between children within the same schools. However, to date, we have limited knowledge of the extent to where variability in chronic absenteeism lies (e.g., how much variability is between children versus schools?) as well as how much of that variability can be explained by factors we often associate with chronic absenteeism like children's health. This knowledge is critical as it can serve as a useful benchmark to gauge the relative importance of particular factors. By understanding which factors are more relevant than others, practitioners and policymakers can better prioritize which types of factors they should focus on when developing and investing in strategies to address absenteeism. This presentation examines the extent to which variation in chronic absenteeism in children's early elementary years can be attributable to schools, classrooms, and children and offers new descriptive evidence of how certain ecological factors help explain the variation. It draws upon data from the Early Child Longitudinal Survey, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K: 2011).

AUTHOR: Dennis Kramer, University of Florida, dkramer@coe.ufl.edu

TITLE: Increasing Response to National School Lunch Program's Income Verification Requests: Results from a Multiple School District Field Experiment

ABSTRACT: There is a growing discourse on the role of the food insecurity on students' academic, disciplinary, and social behaviors. During fiscal year 2017, an average of 30 million students participated in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). NSLP requires that three percent of recipients be selected for income verification. The proportion of students and families not responding to NSLP verification requests has increased over the past five years to 40 percent. Failure to respond means removal of all lunch benefits and access to discounted school lunch prices. This study examines the impact of timing on income verification submissions. Results indicate mixed effectiveness of reducing the lag time between annual application submission and request for income verification. Additionally, results suggest that the mode of communication may influence responses to income verification requests. Given the complete benefit removal associated with non-response, developing incentives to reduce barriers to submit is crucial to ensure all eligible students have access to affordable meals while enrolled in school.

AUTHOR: Rekha Balu, MDRC, Rekha.Balu@mdrc.org

TITLE: What supplemental services and supports help high school students attend school? Learning from mixed findings of multiple field experiments.

An increasing number of supplemental services and support programs in high schools focus on boosting attendance. Yet the strategies they employ vary on multiple dimensions: who is the

target (parent or student), timing and duration, whether financial or other incentives are used, level of staff involvement, and whether the intervention is part of whole school reform. These variations make it difficult for practitioners to conclude what program is appropriate for their school and students. This paper presents lessons from four different programs, each evaluated in a multi-site randomized field trial by MDRC. We discuss implementation lessons as well as guidance for interpreting findings to shape new programs and future research.

AUTHORS: Marianne Bertrand, Kelley Hallberg*, Kenny Hofmeister, & Emma Shirey, University of Chicago Poverty Lab, hallberk@uchicago.edu

TITLE: Increasing Degree Attainment among Low-Income Community College Students: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial

ABSTRACT: Community colleges have the potential to be powerful vehicles for social mobility in the United States. They enroll nearly half of all post-secondary students in the U.S. and graduates who earn an associate's degree increase the family's income by more than 30 percent over a lifetime (Carnevale et al., 2014; The White House, 2015). However, the vast majority of students who enroll in community colleges do not receive a degree within three years. The barriers to degree attainment are multi-faceted and interconnected, spanning the financial, academic, personal, and professional domains of students' lives. We present the preliminary findings from a randomized controlled trial studying a comprehensive program designed to address each of these barriers. One Million Degrees (OMD) is a non-profit organization serving community college students in the Chicago metro area that supports students financially, academically, personally, and professionally through last-dollar scholarships, skill-building workshops, advising, and coaching. These early findings add suggestive evidence to the growing body of literature suggesting that comprehensive support programs can substantially and cost-effectively improve outcomes for community college students.