

SY DOAN, JOHN ENGBERG, SAM MORALES, HEATHER L. SCHWARTZ, LYNN A. KAROLY

Evaluation of Delaware's Opportunity Funding and Student Success Block Grant Programs

Third and Final Year

In the 2019–2020 school year, Delaware school districts and charter schools had access to two state-funded weighted pupil funding initiatives—the newly expanded Opportunity Funding program and the Student Success Block Grant (SSBG)—designed to improve educational outcomes for students experiencing poverty (SEPs) and multilingual learners (MLs).¹ Both programs direct

additional funds to public schools based on the number of SEPs and MLs that they enroll.

This is the third and final report in a three-year independent evaluation of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs. Because the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused first the cancellation and then serious disruption of state-wide testing in spring 2020 and spring 2021, this report is the first time we have examined the relationship between Opportunity Funding and SSBG and student achievement.

This report is intended primarily for the Delaware

KEY FINDINGS

- Delaware local education agencies (LEAs) have been allocated over \$100 million in Opportunity Funding and Student Success Block Grant (SSBG) funding and have expended roughly \$86 million since 2019–2020. Although the sum is large, the two funding streams still total about 1 to 3 percent of schools' total expenditures each year.
- Given flexibility about what to invest in, LEAs persistently used flexible Opportunity Funding to hire staff to provide individualized academic and social and emotional supports to students experiencing poverty (SEPs) and multilingual learners (MLs).
- Gaps in proficiency rates between student groups targeted by the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs have narrowed since 2018–2019. The gap in proficiency rates between SEPs and students who are not experiencing poverty narrowed by roughly 5 percentage points in 2021–2022. Gaps among MLs and students who are not MLs were largely similar, narrowing by less than 1 percentage point.
- However, we did not find evidence that these gaps narrowed specifically because of Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding. We found that academic performance among MLs declined more in Delaware than in comparison states, with mixed patterns among SEPs. Moreover, we found no relationship between proficiency rates among SEPs and MLs and the amounts of Opportunity Funding and SSBG that schools expended in 2021–2022.

Department of Education (DDOE) and the Delaware state legislature. It is also intended for policymakers in other states and education researchers who study or design school finance programs.

In this report, we first describe how Delaware’s 42 school districts and charter schools (also known as local education agencies [LEAs]) spent their Opportunity Funding and SSBG dollars, what portion of their allocations they spent, and what LEA leaders deemed their most effective investments with those dollars. We then examine whether both the allocation of the funds and the actual expenditures were associated with improved performance on spring 2022 math and reading tests. The pandemic forces us to place serious caveats on our achievement analyses, as we explain later in the report.

Overview of Opportunity Funding and the SSBG Funding Programs

As shown in Figure 1, SEPs and MLs have been a slightly declining or steady portion of Delaware’s public school students over the past five years, making up 29 and 11 percent, respectively, of the overall Delaware public school population in the most recent completed school year, which was 2021–2022.²

However, state funding that LEAs receive for these student groups has grown substantially, as shown in Figure 2. The growth is due to the Octo-

ber 2020 legal settlement between Governor John Carney, Delawareans for Educational Opportunity, and the Delaware NAACP to make Opportunity Funding permanent and to increase the amount that the state allocates each year. Table A.1 in Appendix A provides the state appropriations for each program from inception.

Below, we summarize how the Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding programs allocated funds as of the 2021–2022 school year; Table A.1 and our year 1 report (Doan et al., 2021) detail how these programs have changed since their inception.

- The first of two streams is called **flexible Opportunity Funding**, which provides LEAs an extra \$524.25 per SEP and \$600 per ML during the 2021–2022 school year, with total allocations summing to \$30 million, substantial increases from per-pupil allocations in prior fiscal years (FYs). The DDOE derives the number of SEPs and MLs served by Delaware LEAs in a given year.³ The total flexible Opportunity Funding allocation (\$30 million during the 2021–2022 school year) is then divided proportionally among LEAs according to their total enrollment of SEPs and MLs. LEAs must annually submit spending plans to the DDOE that specify the intended uses of these funds. The LEAs can use the funds to pay for staff, curriculum, or other services that the LEAs identify as being most needed to serve their SEPs and MLs, subject to state approval based on a written plan.
- The second stream, called **mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding**, provides school-based grants for mental health services and/or additional reading supports in

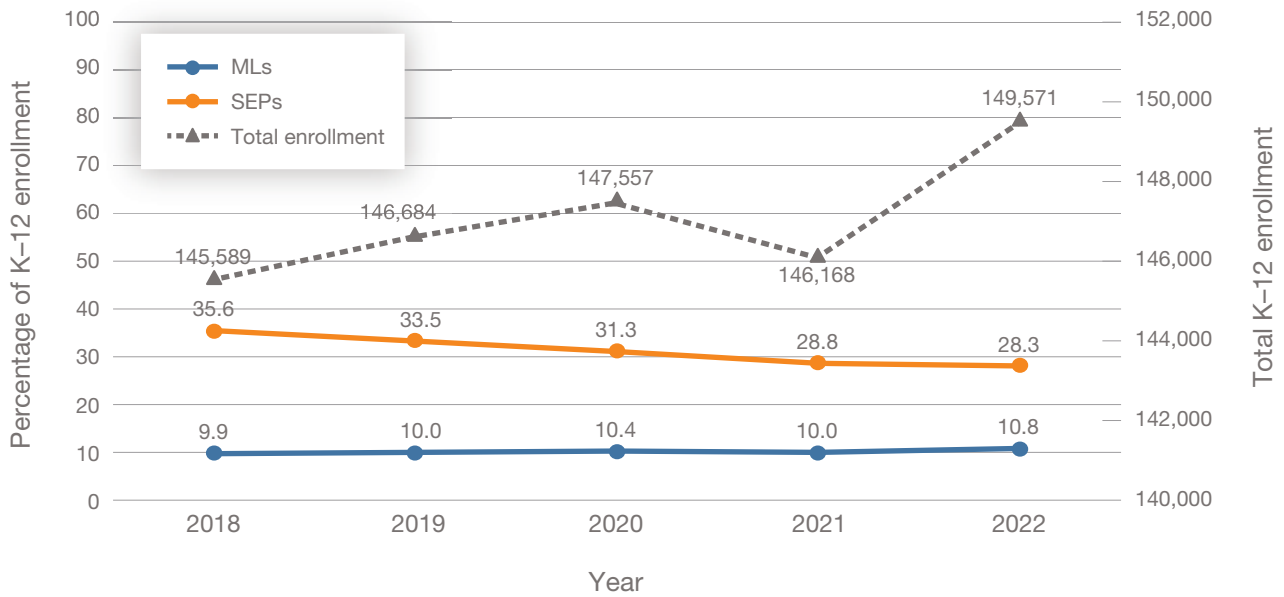
Abbreviations

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DDOE	Delaware Department of Education
ELA	English language arts
ESSER	Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief
FY	fiscal year
LEA	local education agency
ML	multilingual learner
SBAC	Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium
SEP	student experiencing poverty
SSBG	Student Success Block Grant

A Note About Terms

We collectively refer to Delaware’s 16 traditional school districts, three vocational-technical districts, and 23 charter school networks as LEAs throughout this report. And we refer to FYs, which run from July to June in Delaware, throughout this report. For example, FY 2022 corresponds to July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022.

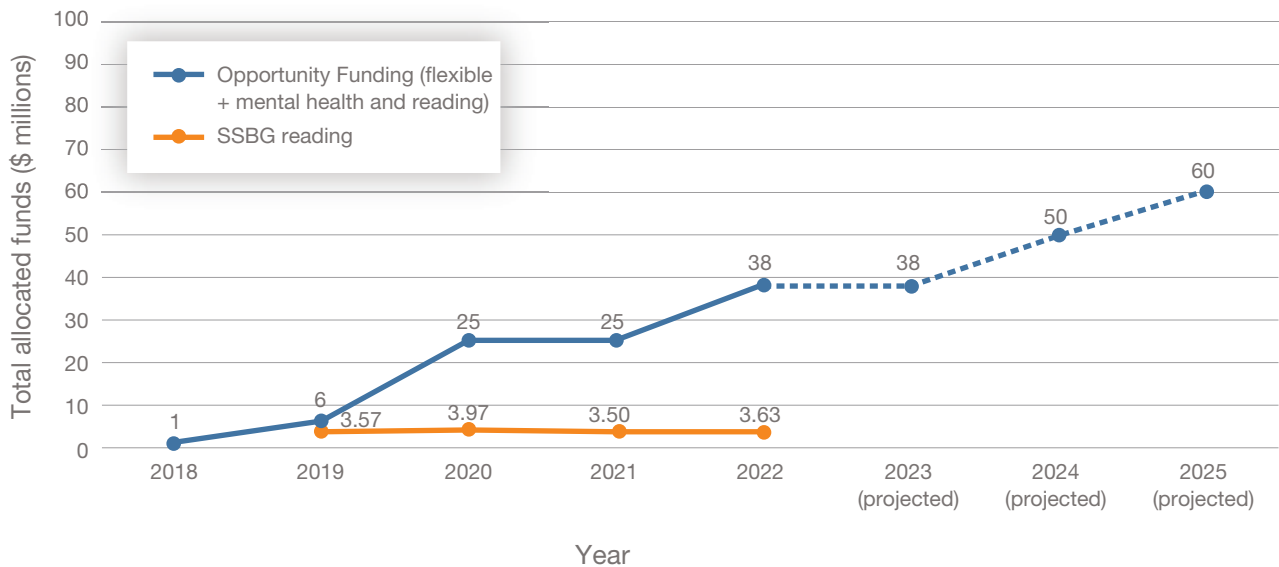
FIGURE 1
SEPs and MLs as a Share of Total Public School Enrollees in Delaware



SOURCE: Features information from Delaware Open Data, 2021.

NOTE: This figure plots the total K-12 enrollment in Delaware public schools (gray) and the percentage of that enrollment that is classified as an ML (blue) or an SEP (orange).

FIGURE 2
Growth in Opportunity Funding and SSBG



NOTE: Opportunity Funding combines the flexible and mental health and reading support funds, while SSBG shows funding for reading interventionists. In October 2020, Governor John Carney, Delawareans for Educational Opportunity, and the Delaware NAACP reached a legal settlement to make Opportunity Funding permanent and to increase the amount that the state allocates each year until it reaches \$60 million by FY 2025.

high-need elementary schools. For the 2021–2022 school year, elementary schools with at least 30 percent SEPs and/or at least 10 percent MLs qualify for these funds; 87 schools were eligible for these funds during the 2021–2022 school year. Among qualifying schools, the DDOE prorates the total allocation (\$8 million in 2021–2022) based on the elementary school’s enrollment of SEPs and MLs as a share of total state-wide enrollment of SEPs and MLs. These school-based grants can cover school counselors, social workers or licensed clinical social workers, psychologists, and/or additional reading supports for grades K–5.

- As of the 2021–2022 school year, the SSBG program allocates funds through one program, the **SSBG reading interventionist** program.⁴ The SSBG reading interventionist program funds one reading interventionist per school (at the rate of \$82,537) for elementary schools whose enrollments are either at least 60 percent SEPs or 20 percent MLs. A total of 44 schools were eligible for SSBG reading interventionists during the 2021–2022 school year.

Both the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs fund provide valuable support for needed investments in Delaware schools, particularly in the form of staffing to support student mental health and the state’s ML population. However, these funds collectively provide for a relatively small proportion of overall LEA spending (Figure 3). Of the \$2.9 billion expended by Delaware’s LEAs during FY 2022, only 1 percent of total expenditures was composed of funds allocated through the Opportunity Funding or SSBG programs. By comparison, federal COVID-19 relief funds accounted for roughly five times as much spending from Delaware LEAs.

RAND’s Evaluation of Opportunity Funding and SSBG

The DDOE contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct an independent evaluation over three years to understand how LEAs use Opportunity Funding and SSBG and whether the two initiatives

are having their intended positive effects on SEPs and MLs. This report is the last of three annual reports, as shown in Table 1. As a companion to this report, we are also publishing a best practice guide intended for Delaware district and school leaders about the use of Opportunity Funding (Lawrence et al., 2023).

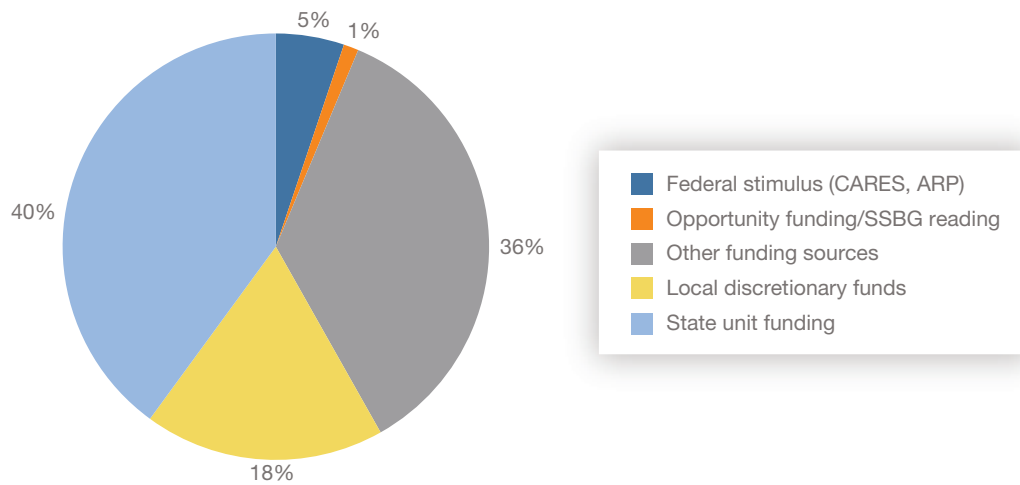
In the sections that follow, we address each of the questions shown in Table 1 for the final, third-year evaluation. To do so, we draw on DDOE fiscal and administrative data about Opportunity Funding and SSBG implementation, as well as LEAs’ midyear conference reports regarding progress with Opportunity Funding and SSBG implementation submitted to the DDOE. (We provide more details about our methods in Appendix B.) Where possible, we compare patterns across the three years of this evaluation in the text below. We offer our conclusions and a discussion of the implications of the results in the final section.

Limitations of This Report

Of our three annual reports, this is the only one that analyzes the relationships between Opportunity Funding and SSBG and student achievement. This is because the 2021–2022 school year is the only school year during our three-year evaluation period in which student participation in the state’s standardized test, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment, was above 95 percent. SBAC testing did not take place during the 2019–2020 school year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and testing participation was limited to only 60 percent of eligible students during the 2020–2021 school year.

Even with comprehensive student achievement data from spring 2022, the disruptions to schooling and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic complicated our evaluation of these programs in several ways. First, the expansion of the Opportunity Funding program coincided with COVID-19 during the 2019–2020 school year, likely confounding any potential positive effect of these funds with the detrimental effects that COVID-19 has had on student learning and well-being. Remote instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic was found to be a primary driver of the widening of achievement gaps in the United States, especially for math achievements in middle- and higher-poverty schools (Goldhaber

FIGURE 3
FY22 Shares of Total School Expenditures in Delaware’s LEAs



NOTE: This figure shows the allocation sources of the total Delaware LEA expenditures in FY 2022. State unit funding includes all Division I (personnel), Division II (other and energy), and Division III (equalization) spending. The local discretionary funds category includes all funds allocated under appropriation code 98000. Opportunity Funding/SSBG reading includes all expenditures from funds allocated to flexible Opportunity Funding, mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and SSBG reading interventionist funds. The “Other funding sources” category includes any sources of local, state, or federal funds not explicitly listed in the figure. ARP = American Rescue Plan Act of 2021; CARES = Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

TABLE 1
Overview of the Questions That Each RAND Report Answers

Questions	Year 1 Report (Doan et al., 2021)	Year 2 Report (Doan et al., 2022)	Year 3 Report (this report)	Best Practice Guide (Lawrence et al., 2023)
What does research say are the most effective investments for SEPs and MLs?	X			
How much have LEAs spent of their total Opportunity Funding and SSBG allocations?	X	X	X	
What investments did LEAs and schools make with their Opportunity Funding and SSBG?	X	X	X	
What barriers to implementation did LEAs encounter?	X	X	X	
What best practices did LEAs identify for SEPs and MLs?	X	X		X
How have LEAs adapted their use of Opportunity Funding and SSBG to COVID-19?	X	X		
Which aspects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG do LEAs wish could change?	X	X	X	
What did implementation look like in practice?		X	X	X
Is the expenditure of Opportunity Funding and SSBG correlated with improved performance among SEPs and MLs?			X	
What are recommended ways that LEAs should use Opportunity Funding?				X

NOTE: The year 1 report (Doan et al., 2021) examined 2019–2020. The year 2 report (Doan et al., 2022) examined 2020–2021. This year 3 report examines data from the 2019–2020 to 2021–2022 school years.

et al., 2022). Data from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which provides a common assessment across states, suggest that COVID-19–induced decreases in academic achievement may have been more prominent in Delaware than in other states. For example, in 2019, 39 percent of Delaware fourth graders scored proficient or above on the NAEP math assessment, 1 percentage point behind the national average of 40 percent. In 2022, only 26 percent of Delaware fourth graders scored proficient on the NAEP math assessment, a rate that was now 9 percentage points behind the national average (35 percent).

These major changes in instructional methods from in-person to remote and hybrid learning led to significant changes in participation rates throughout SBAC. Participation rates for English language arts (ELA) testing within SBAC states fell an average of 6.4 percent from 2019 to 2021, with participation for math assessments falling even further, with an 11.1 percent average decrease (McRae, 2022). Along with setbacks in classroom instruction and testing for higher-poverty schools and districts, some states also identified achievement gaps between MLs and non-MLs, given that MLs were not able to develop their language development through conversational interactions with instructors and peers while in remote or hybrid learning models (Lazarin, 2022).

Second, federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds in response to COVID-19 infused massive amounts of funding for public schools nationally throughout the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. The co-occurrence of both the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs and federal ESSER funds—in addition to the fact that federal stimulus funds accounted for roughly five times the amount of spending that the Opportunity and SSBG funds did in FY 2022 (Figure 3)—makes it hard for us to disentangle the specific effects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG over and above the federal stimulus funds.

In light of the challenges posed by COVID-19, we adopted multiple approaches to assessing the impacts of Opportunity Funding and SSBG on student achievement. Specifically, we conducted two separate comparisons of student achievement: (1) We compared aggregated achievement data across

states (Delaware, Connecticut, and Washington), student groups (SEPs, MLs, and students not identified as SEPs nor MLs), and time (2018–2019 versus 2021–2022), and (2) we compared schools that did and did not expend Opportunity and SSBG funds during 2021–2022. We discuss the strengths and drawbacks of each approach in subsequent sections of this report. We encourage readers to look for patterns across the two analyses rather than place undue weight on any one analysis, given how the COVID-19 pandemic clouds the picture.

LEAs' Use of Opportunity Funding and SSBG

In this section, we describe how Delaware LEAs spent funds from three funding streams during FY 2022: (1) flexible Opportunity Funding, (2) mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and (3) SSBG funds for reading interventionists.

How Were Opportunity and SSBG Funds Allocated, and What Proportion of Available Funds Did LEAs Spend?

In FY 2022, the state of Delaware allocated a total of \$30 million to flexible Opportunity Funding, \$8 million to mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and \$3.6 million to SSBG funds for reading interventionists. Both Opportunity Funding allocations represent sizable increases from FY 2021: a \$10 million increase in the flexible fund allocation and a \$3 million increase for the mental health and reading interventionist allocation. The increased allocation for flexible Opportunity Funding meant greater per-pupil allocations for SEPs and MLs, and the increased allocation for the mental health and reading interventionist funding stream corresponds to expanded eligibility criteria for these funds. In FY 2022, the DDOE lowered the eligibility threshold for this fund from 60 percent SEPs down to 30 percent and from 20 percent MLs down to 10 percent. This expanded eligibility criteria meant that a total of 87 grade K–4 serving schools were eligible in FY 2022 to receive Opportunity Funding for mental health and reading interventionists, which is double the 43

schools that qualified during FY 2021. Meanwhile, the eligibility criteria for SSBG did not change. Accordingly, a total of 44 schools were eligible to receive SSBG reading interventionist funding in FY 2022, which was nearly identical to the number of schools (43) eligible for these funds in FY 2021. The State of Delaware allocated a total of \$41 million across all three funding components in FY 2022.

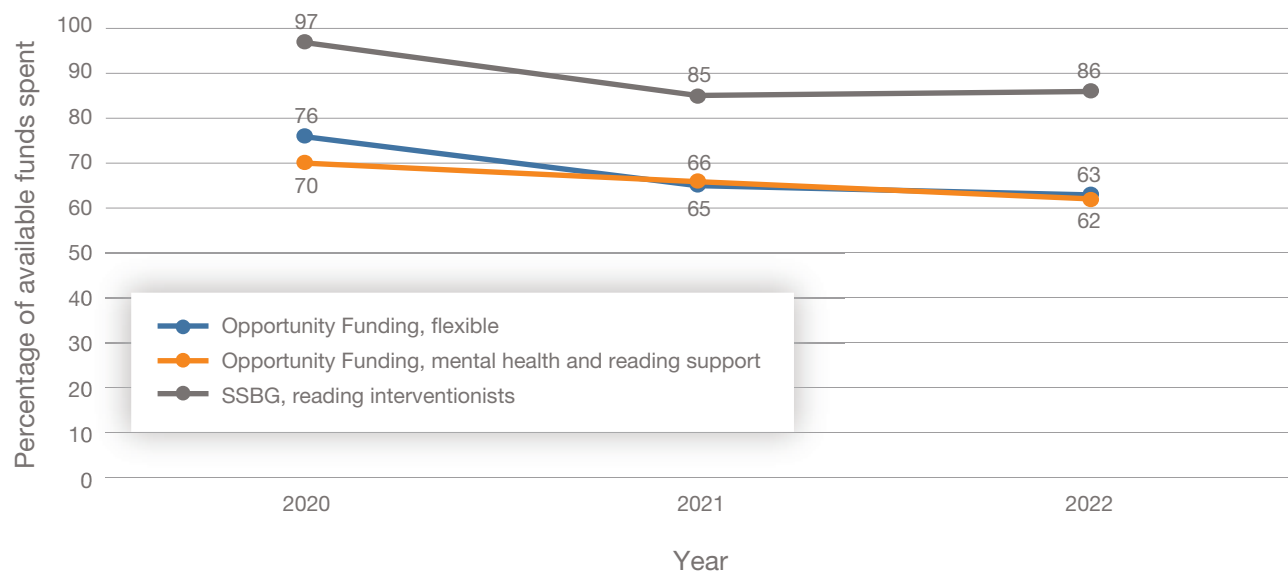
With substantial increases in allocations, expenditures across both Opportunity Funding programs were accordingly higher: LEAs spent a total of \$24 million in Opportunity Funding in FY 2022, compared with the approximately \$15 million spent in prior FYs. Likewise, expenditures of mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding totaled \$5.9 million, an increase from \$3.9 million and \$3.5 million in FY 2021 and FY 2020, respectively.

As shown in Figure 4, the proportion of available funds that LEAs spent—which includes both allocations from FY 2022 plus unspent rollover funds from prior years—remained steady in FY 2022 across all three funding programs despite sizable increases in the total amount of expended funds. Including

unspent rollover funds from prior years, Delaware LEAs had roughly \$51 million in available funds to spend across these funding streams during FY 2022. Of these available funds, Delaware LEAs spent approximately \$33 million, or 65 percent of total available funds. LEAs spent slightly over 60 percent of the funds available to them through the flexible Opportunity Funding program (63 percent of available funds spent) and the mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding program (62 percent). LEAs spent 86 percent of their available SSBG reading interventionist funds, comparable to percentages spent in prior years (85 percent in FY 2021, 97 percent in FY 2020).

There are several reasons why Delaware LEAs do not spend all of their allocated funds, including lack of staff capacity to procure new services and secure new personnel, uncertainty about funding, delays in procurement and approvals, and the added layer of COVID-19–related staffing shortages and changes in school schedules and services. Some LEAs have indicated that carrying funds over for contractual salary payments past the June 30 funding cycle can be dif-

FIGURE 4
The Percentage of Opportunity Funding and SSBG Funds That LEAs Spent



NOTE: This figure shows the percentage of available funds expended by Delaware LEAs in FY 2020, 2021, and 2022 of flexible Opportunity Funding; mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding; and SSBG funds for reading interventionists. In FY 2021 and FY 2020, “available funds” included both allocations in that FY and rollover funds unspent from prior FYs. Specific allocation and expenditure amounts are reported in Table A.1.

difficult given uncertainty about the specific amount of funding to be allocated in the following academic year. Finally, LEAs received an unprecedented amount of stimulus funds, which are time limited and require significant capacity to draw down.

What Types of Schools Were Most Likely to Expend Flexible Opportunity Funding?

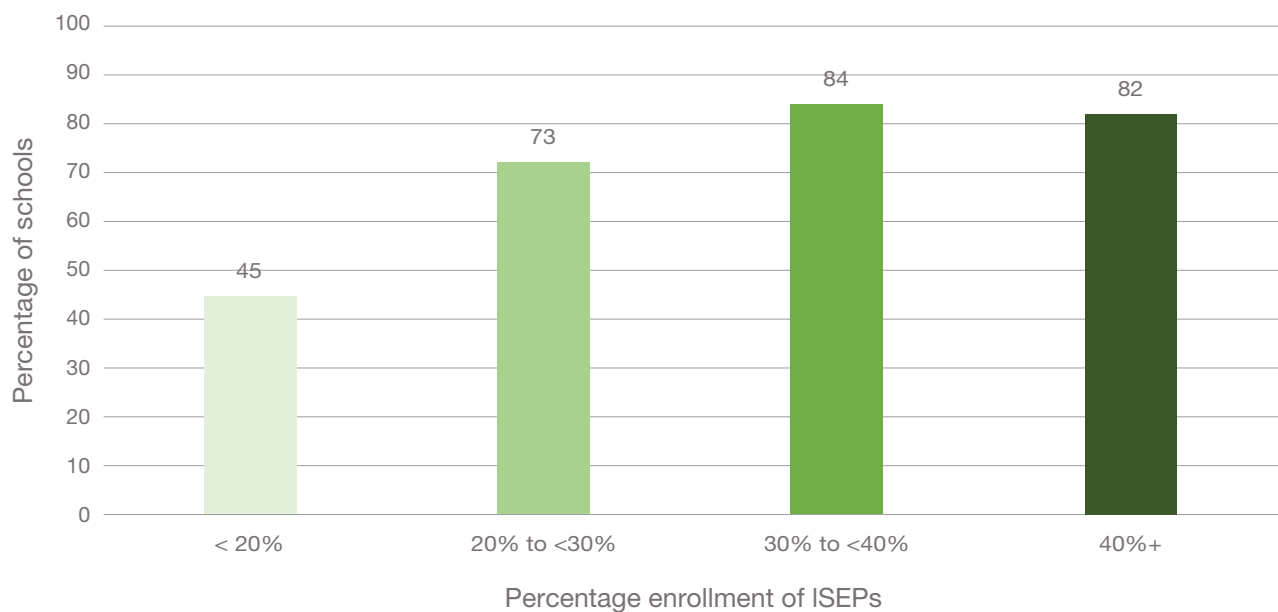
Although the DDOE allocates flexible Opportunity Funding dollars to LEAs based on their number of SEPs and MLs, LEAs then have some discretion in how to allocate those funds to their schools. (LEAs need to specify in a written plan, that the DDOE must approve, how the LEA will use the flexible monies.) We used school-level expenditure data from the 2021–2022 school year to examine what types of schools were most likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding to gauge whether flexible funds are, in fact, flowing to schools with higher enrollments of SEPs and MLs. Figure 5 shows that, as intended, schools with higher percentages of SEPs were, in fact,

more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2022. Over 80 percent of schools serving 30 percent or more SEPs expended flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2022, compared with only 45 percent of schools in which fewer than 20 percent of students were identified as MLs. We found similar patterns when examining patterns of flexible Opportunity Funding expenditure by schools’ percentage of ML enrollment. That is, schools serving higher proportions of students targeted by the flexible Opportunity Funding program (SEPs and MLs) were more likely to have expended these funds during FY 2022.

What Investments Did LEAs Make with Opportunity Funding?

Subject to approval from the DDOE, Delaware LEAs were able to use flexible Opportunity Funding to support a wide range of investments, ranging from staff members to instructional materials. We reviewed LEAs’ approved spending plans for 2021–2022 flexible Opportunity Funding and midyear conference forms from 42 Delaware LEAs. From these two data sources, we identified a total of 223 listed investments

FIGURE 5
Percentage of Schools Expending Flexible Opportunity Funding, by Enrollment of SEPs



NOTE: This figure shows the percentage of Delaware schools that expended flexible Opportunity Funding during FY 2022. We created categories of schools by enrollment of SEPs so that approximately one-quarter of Delaware public schools are in each of the four categories shown.

Staff were the most popular type of investment in FY 2022 (67 percent of all total investments), followed by such programming types as professional development (12 percent) and curriculum, assessments, and intervention materials (11 percent).

with the FY 2022 flexible Opportunity Funding. On average, LEAs listed 5.3 investments in their flexible Opportunity Funding plans, with one LEA requesting 23 investments.

Using definitions outlined in Appendix B, we categorized each of the 223 investments into categories to identify patterns. Our categorization of the 223 investments is shown in Table A.3. LEAs noted that two-thirds of flexible Opportunity Funding investments in FY 2022 were continuations of investments initiated in prior years. Accordingly, patterns of investment in FY 2022 were very similar to prior years, with staff continuing to be the most popular type of investment (67 percent of all total investments), followed by such programming types as professional development (12 percent) and curriculum, assessments, and intervention materials (11 percent).

We then further classified the types of staff that LEAs employed, which is shown in Table A.4. Among the 150 flexible Opportunity Funding investments to fund staff hires, the most common type of staff hire in FY 2022 was for staff specifically to support MLs (40 percent of all staff investments), followed by social, behavioral, or mental health hires (23 percent). Staff to provide other forms of academic support not specific to MLs were 21 percent of the staff hires, and 16 percent were general, cross-purpose hires.

What Barriers to Implementation Did LEAs Encounter?

The midyear conference form that LEA leaders filled out in spring 2022 provided LEA leaders with a list

of 11 potential barriers to implementation of Opportunity Funding investments. LEA leaders indicated whether they had experienced any of these barriers, with the option to write in a 12th barrier that they could specify.⁵

As of the midyear review, about 63 percent of the 35 reporting LEAs selected one or more barriers to the implementation of flexible Opportunity Funding, a higher share compared with the responses to the same question one year earlier.

- The most prevalent barrier, selected by ten LEAs, was that the amount of funding available was insufficient to “cover the full cost of the resource.” This was the dominant response in the prior year’s survey as well.
- Two other barriers were each mentioned by eight LEAs: COVID-19 changes made the investment “moot or else difficult to implement,” and there were too few applicants to fill the targeted roles.
- Seven LEAs reported that the long hiring process left positions unfilled for at least part of the year, a barrier that was also more prevalent in the prior-year survey.
- No LEAs selected barriers related to delays in receiving funds, having the needed training to implement the intervention, or lacking staff buy-in.

We asked about a similar set of barriers in the context of mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding. These interventions applied to 19 of the responding LEAs, and, again, 63 percent reported

at least one barrier, with the most common issue being insufficient funds to cover the full cost (six of 19 LEAs). The next most common barriers were the changing circumstances because of COVID-19 (five LEAs) and having too few applicants (four LEAs). At most, one or two and often no LEAs reported being affected by the remaining barriers. In a more open-ended question about barriers to using SSBG funding, few LEAs reported any barriers, and most responses had to do with finding qualified candidates for the reading interventionists or knowing whether the funding was stable.

What Changes to Opportunity Funding or SSBG Do LEAs Desire?

At the conclusion of the survey, the midyear conference form asked LEA leaders whether there were aspects of the three funding streams that they would change. Eleven LEAs of the 32 with completed surveys provided responses, which fell into one of three themes. First, one set of suggestions concerned the stability of the funding stream overall, but also the fact that LEAs can fall in and out of eligibility for the mental health and SSBG funds based on small changes in their student populations. Thus, there is a preference for more stability in the funding streams. Second, a related suggestion was for the DDOE to provide information about expected funding to LEAs earlier to allow LEAs more time for planning. Third, some LEA leaders expressed a desire for increased flexibility in the use of funds, such as the option for LEAs to determine how the mental health component is allocated and to lessen the job responsibilities for

reading interventionists to address issues of retention in the position.

Are Opportunity Funding and SSBG Related to Improved Student Learning?

In this section, we examine the relationships between schools' access to and expenditure of Opportunity Funding and SSBG and student achievement on the spring 2022 SBAC assessments in ELA and math. We faced a substantial challenge when estimating these effects because of the co-occurrence of the expansions of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs with both the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant amounts of federal stimulus funds that followed. To increase our confidence in the results, we performed two different analyses—each with their own advantages and drawbacks—that compared student achievement across relevant subgroups:

Comparison 1: We compared changes in proficiency for SEPs and MLs in Delaware with both non-target Delaware students and target and nontarget students in comparable schools in two other states that did not change their funding formulas immediately before or after 2019–2020, the first year of the expanded Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs.

Comparison 2: We compared proficiency in Delaware schools that did and did not expend Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds during 2021–2022.

What LEA Leaders See as Best Practice Investments

In a companion report for the DDOE titled *Flexible Opportunity Funding Investments in Delaware: Lessons from District Leaders* (Lawrence et al., 2023), we describe which flexible Opportunity Funding investments LEA leaders felt were best practices for MLs and SEPs. Investments in staff were most frequently mentioned by LEA leaders. And, among the staff they hired, most provided individualized academic instruction to MLs and/or SEPs. Second most common were staff to provide mental health, social and emotional learning, and behavioral supports. We provided detailed descriptions of three representative flexible Opportunity Funding investments in three LEAs—Laurel School District, Colonial School District, and Academia Antonia Alonso School—to show how some of these investments have worked in practice. We conclude with recommendations for the DDOE about the future administration of the flexible Opportunity Funding program.

Preview of the Patterns of Findings Across the Two Comparisons

1. Comparison 1 showed that, after accounting for state-specific forces that affected all students in each state and group-specific forces that affected SEPs, MLs, and nontarget students in all states, there was some evidence that the funding change increased proficiency for SEPs but reduced proficiency for MLs.
2. Comparison 2 showed that schools expending more Opportunity Funding or SSBG funding in 2021–2022 did not see higher proficiency rates among all students or specifically among SEPs or MLs.

Below, we share key findings for each of these two comparisons. Readers can find technical details for each comparison in Appendix B.

Comparison 1: How Did SEPs and MLs Perform Academically in Delaware Compared with SEPs and MLs in Similar Schools in Other States?

In Comparison 1, we estimated the effect of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding programs (in combination) on the academic achievement of SEPs and MLs (“target students”) in Delaware by comparing proficiency rates among target students in Delaware with those among target students in demographically comparable schools in two comparison states, Washington and Connecticut, while using nontarget students in all three states to account for state-specific forces. Ultimately, Comparison 1 used information about how student achievement differed over time (i.e., 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 versus 2021–2022), across states (i.e., Delaware versus Connecticut versus Washington) and across student groups (students in target groups versus students not in target groups).

These comparison states were selected because (1) they both administer the same standardized assessment, SBAC, as Delaware, (2) they had publicly available SBAC data for 2021–2022 at the time of the writing of this report, and (3) neither state administered a similar change to its school funding policy at

the same time as the expansion of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding programs (2019–2020).

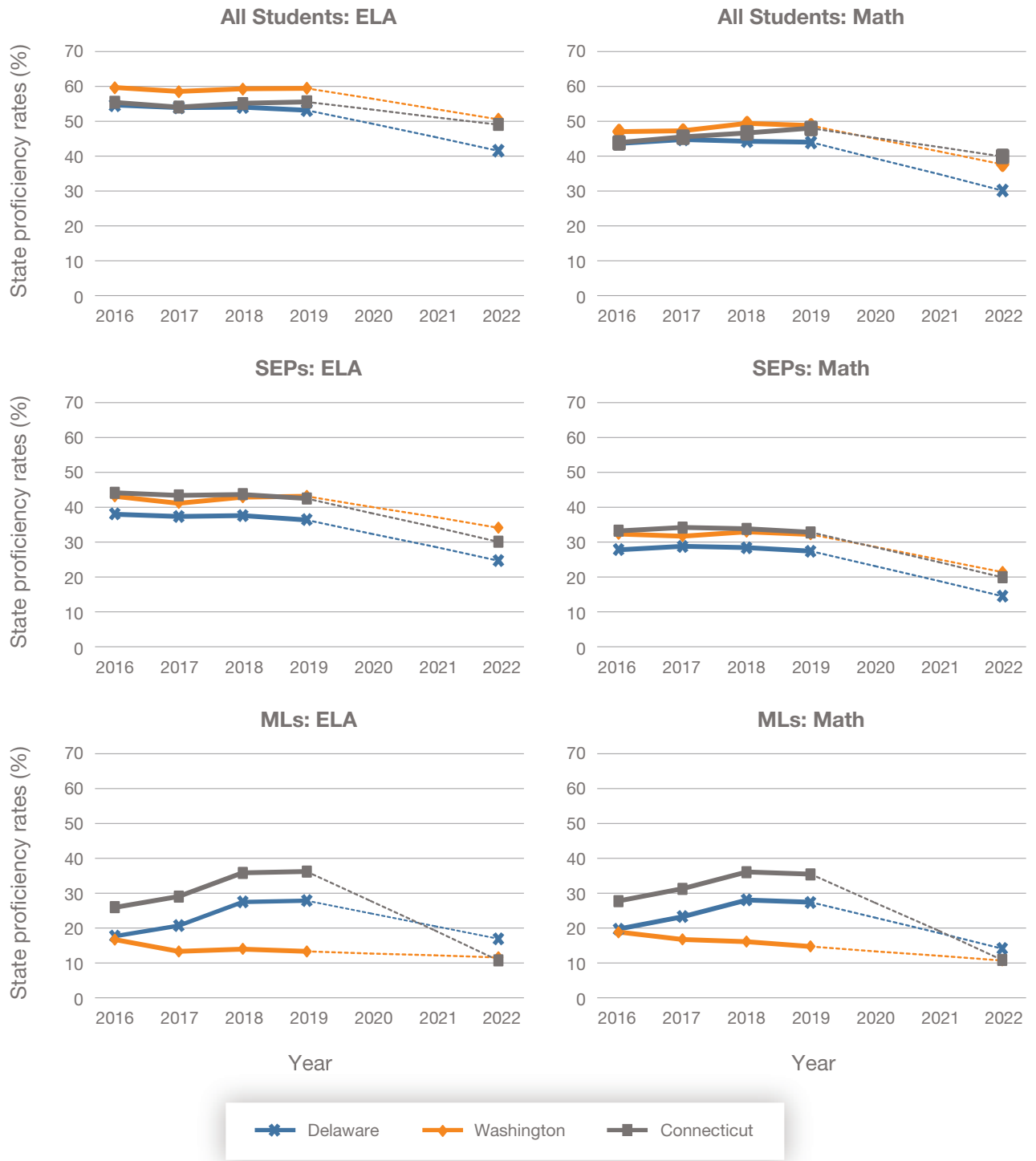
Connecticut and Washington data are a valuable comparison because they provide a sense of how student performance was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in locales that did not have access to Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds. However, the strength of this comparison relies on the assumptions that COVID-19 affected both students in Delaware and the comparison states similarly. Additionally, while our review of school funding policy in both states did not reveal that Connecticut and Washington unveiled any changes specifically to funding policy that started during the 2019–2020 school year, both states instituted changes in targeted funding beginning in 2017–2018. Therefore, all three states had constant funding policy for 2017–2018 and 2018–2019, followed by a change in Delaware’s policy effective in 2019–2020.

In Figure 6, we show the percentage of students who scored proficient or above on the math and ELA SBAC for the four school years leading up to the expansion of Opportunity Funding in Delaware (which was in 2019–2020) and for the 2021–2022 school year, which is the only year following the funding change for which we have comprehensive testing in these states. At the time of the writing of this report, 2021–2022 test data were not available from any other SBAC state.

Aligning with national trends in student achievement since the onset of COVID-19 (Goldhaber et al., 2022), all six panels in Figure 6 show declines in academic proficiency rates between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022. Declines in ELA and math were observed for both SEPs and MLs, as well as the full student population, across all three states.

Looking specifically at student achievement in Delaware, we found differences in proficiency rates between SEPs and students who were not experiencing poverty between the 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 school years. For example, during the 2018–2019 school year, math proficiency rates among students who were not experiencing poverty were 25 percentage points higher than among SEPs (54 percent versus 29 percent). In 2021–2022, this gap narrowed to 19 percentage points (37 percent versus 18 percent). Similarly, the size of the proficiency rate difference

FIGURE 6
 SBAC Proficiency Rates over Time in Three States, by Student Group



NOTE: These figures show proficiency rates for SEPs and MLs in the three SBAC states that have posted 2022 data on their public websites.

in ELA between SEPs and students who were not experiencing poverty narrowed from 27 percent (2018–2019) to 23 percent (2021–2022). Differences in proficiency rates between MLs and students who are not MLs also shrank between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022, though the sizes of these reductions (less than 1 percentage point in both math and ELA) were much smaller. In Appendix B, we describe results of an auxiliary analysis that examined how differences in academic achievement between SEPs, MLs, and their peers not identified as SEPs nor MLs varied across various points of the test score distribution.

Figure 6 also shows that some of the pre-COVID-19 trends in Delaware for achievement among SEPs, MLs, and all students differed considerably from comparable groups in Connecticut and Washington. Therefore, rather than naively comparing Delaware’s changes with those in Connecticut and Washington, we used statistical methods to create a comparison group of only those schools from Connecticut and Washington that had similar percentages of SEPs and MLs as the Delaware schools. We also restricted our statistical analysis to 2017–2018 and later, a time period in which there were no targeted funding formula changes in Connecticut and Washington. Appendix B describes our method in more detail.

We present our estimates of the impact of Delaware’s change in targeted funding policy on ELA and math proficiency rates separately for SEPs (Table 2) and MLs (Table 3) using the methods we describe above. We present two sets of estimates—one using Connecticut as a comparison state and one using Washington as a comparison state—to check the robustness of the evidence against the choice of comparisons.

When we used Washington as the comparison state, we found evidence that the Delaware funding change increased the proficiency of SEPs relative to what it would have been in the absence of the funding change. Math proficiency rates were approximately 1 percentage point higher than they would have been, and ELA proficiency rates were almost three-quarters of a percentage point higher. Both of these estimates are significant at a 0.01 level. When we used Connecticut as a comparison state, the estimates were smaller and not statistically significant.

On the other hand, our estimates show that the funding change decreased MLs’ proficiency rates by

TABLE 2
Impact of Targeted Funding Changes for SEPs

	Comparison State	
	Connecticut	Washington
Panel A. ELA results		
Impact	0.003	0.726**
Standard error	(0.304)	(0.266)
Panel B. Math results		
Impact	0.462	1.098**
Standard error	0.293	0.264

NOTE: Table 2 presents the estimated impact of Delaware’s targeted funding change on SEPs in 2022. It uses the triple difference-in-difference model described in Appendix B.

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

TABLE 3
Impact of Targeted Funding Changes for MLs

	Comparison State	
	Connecticut	Washington
Panel A. ELA results		
Impact	-1.436*	-2.755**
Standard error	(0.649)	(0.534)
Panel B. Math results		
Impact	-2.261**	-2.408**
Standard error	0.614	(0.537)

NOTE: Table 3 presents the estimated impact of Delaware’s targeted funding change on MLs in 2022. It uses the triple difference-in-difference model described in Appendix B. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

about 2 percentage points in both ELA and math, using either Connecticut or Washington as the comparison. These estimates are all significant at the 0.05 level.

Comparison 2: How Did the Academic Performance at Schools That Expended Opportunity Funding and SSBG Compare with the Academic Performance at Schools That Did Not?

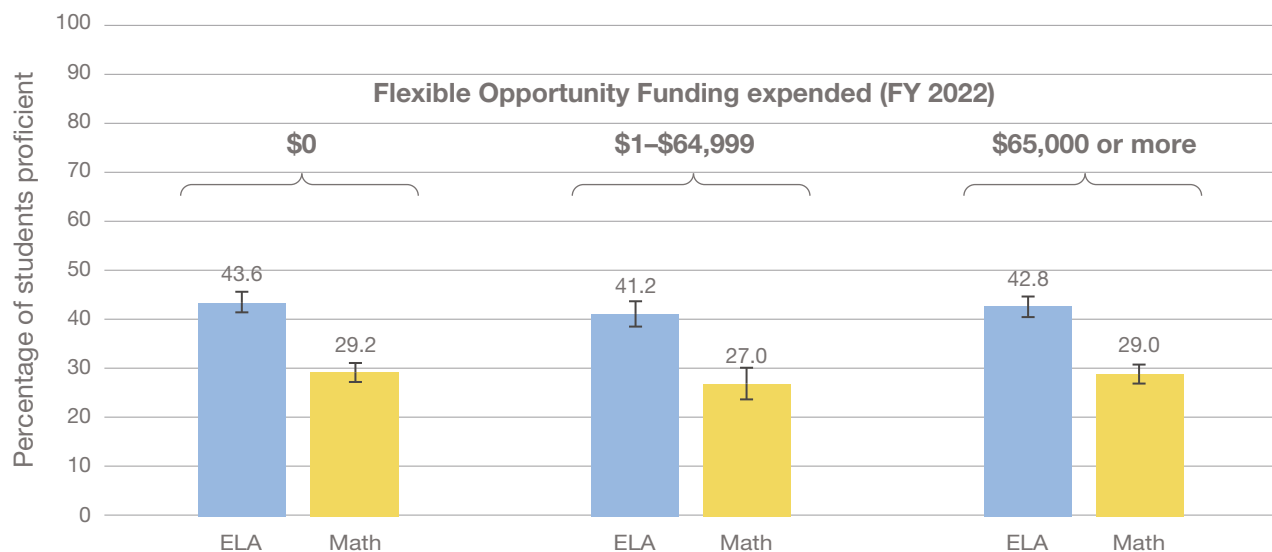
Lastly, we compared how student proficiency rates on the spring 2022 state ELA and math assessments

differed between schools that did and did not expend flexible Opportunity Funding, mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and SSBG funds for reading interventionists. One advantage of this approach, relative to Comparison 1, is that we were able to examine student performance specifically within schools that did expend these funds, allowing for a level of detail not afforded in the prior comparisons. One weakness of this approach is that schools expending these funds may be very different from those that do not in ways that may confound our analysis. One way that schools that do and do not expend funds differ is in the types of students they serve. By the design of their eligibility criteria, schools that are eligible for mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds for reading interventionists serve greater proportions of SEPs and MLs than schools that were not eligible. Although allocations of flexible Opportunity Funding are based on LEA enrollment of SEPs and MLs,

rather than school-level enrollment of these populations, our analysis shown in Figure 5 found that the schools most likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding were more likely to enroll higher percentages of SEPs and MLs. Beyond observable characteristics, such as the percentage of schools' enrollments who are SEPs and MLs, schools that do and do not expend these funds differ in other ways, such as school leader quality. Because the distribution of flexible Opportunity Funding to individual schools is at LEA discretion, there is a possibility that LEA leaders may opt to direct these funds to the schools that are predisposed to optimally using them.

Figure 7 shows regression-adjusted average grade 4–8 state test score proficiency rates in ELA (blue) and math (orange) for all students in Delaware, separated by whether they attended a school that spent \$0, \$1–\$64,999, or \$65,000 or more dollars in flexible Opportunity Funding during the 2021–2022 school year; we selected \$65,000 as a threshold because

FIGURE 7
Regression-Adjusted ELA and Math Proficiency Rates, by Delaware Schools' Flexible Opportunity Funding Spending Levels



NOTE: This figure shows regression-adjusted Grade 4–8 proficiency rates in ELA and math from the 2021–2022 school year, separated by school expenditure of flexible Opportunity Funding: \$0, \$1–\$64,999, and \$65,000 or more. Error bars indicate 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates were produced using subject-specific student-level linear probability models that regressed an indicator set equal to 1 if a student was proficient in ELA/math on a categorical variable indicating the amount of flexible Opportunity Funding expended at their school during FY 2022; student race/ethnicity; student-level indicators for whether a student was identified as an SEP, an ML, homeless, or a migrant; prior-year academic achievement in that same subject; per-pupil expenditures (omitting flexible Opportunity Funding); and dummy indicators for grade level. The values plotted are predicted margins from this regression model, holding all covariate at their means.

* indicates that proficiency rates for a given level of spending are significantly different from proficiency rates among students in schools spending no flexible Opportunity Funding in 2021–2022 at the $p < 0.05$ level. Standard errors are clustered at the district level. The sample is composed of 34,504 Grade 4–8 students.

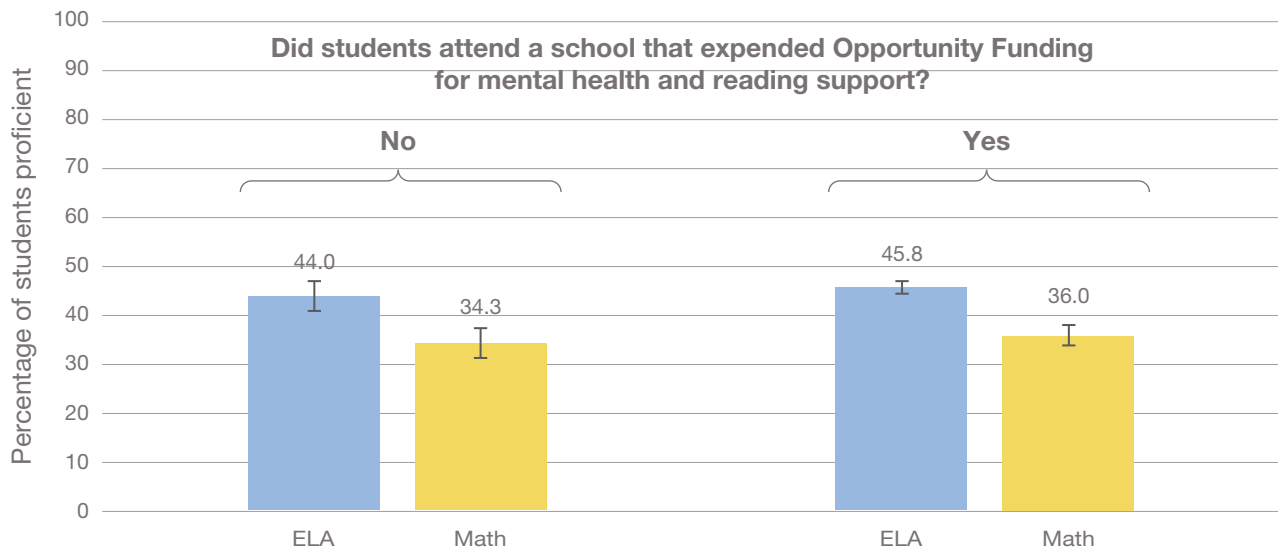
reporting by Schultz, 2020, indicated that \$65,000 was the average K–12 teacher salary in Delaware. The presented proficiency rates are statistically adjusted to account for differences in student demographics, per-pupil expenditures, and prior achievement between schools in each spending category.

On average, we found no statistically significant differences in ELA or math state test proficiency rates according to the level of flexible Opportunity Funding expenditures at a school. We found similar levels of proficiency on the 2022 ELA assessment between students in schools spending \$0 (43.4 percent proficient), \$1–\$64,999 (41.2 percent proficient), and \$65,000 or more (42.8 percent proficient) in flexible Opportunity Funding during the 2021–2022 school year. Regression-adjusted math proficiency rates were also comparable across the levels of flexible Opportunity Funding spending, with no statistically significant differences across the three levels pre-

sented above (\$0: 29.2 percent proficient, \$1–\$64,999: 27.0 percent proficient, \$65,000: 29.0 percent proficient). Furthermore, we did not find any evidence of statistically significant differences in ELA or math proficiency rates when we specifically examined academic performance only among SEPs and MLs.

We found similar results when comparing state proficiency rates between elementary students at schools that spent funds from the other two funding streams under study—mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG reading interventionist funds—after adjusting for student demographics and prior achievement (Figures 8 and 9).⁶ Both ELA and math proficiency rates were slightly higher among schools expending mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding (Figure 8), but these differences (ELA: 44.0 percent proficiency versus 45.8 percent proficiency; math:

FIGURE 8
Regression-Adjusted Average ELA and Math Proficiency Rates Among Elementary Students, by Mental Health and Reading Support Opportunity Funding Spending

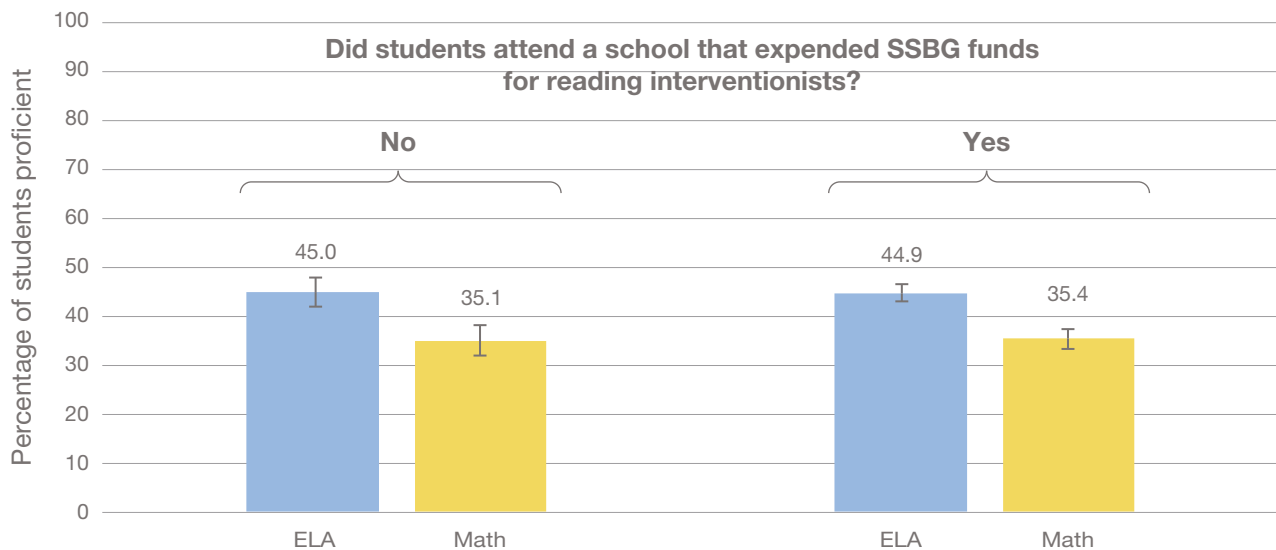


NOTE: This figure shows regression-adjusted Grade 4–5 proficiency rates in ELA and math from the 2021–2022 school year, separated by whether students attended a school that expended mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding. Error bars indicate 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates were produced using subject-specific student-level linear probability models that regressed an indicator set equal to 1 if a student was proficient in ELA/math on a binary variable indicating whether a student’s school had expended funds from mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding; student race/ethnicity; student-level indicators for whether a student was identified as an SEP, an ML, homeless, or a migrant; prior-year academic achievement in that same subject; school-level per-pupil expenditures (omitting mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding); and dummy indicators for grade level.

* indicates statistically significant differences between spending categories at the $p < 0.05$ level. The values plotted are predicted margins from this regression model, holding all covariate at their means. Standard errors are clustered at the district level. The sample represented is composed of 12,741 Grade 4 and 5 students.

FIGURE 9

Regression-Adjusted Average ELA and Math Proficiency Rates Among Elementary Students, by SSBG Spending



NOTE: This figure shows regression-adjusted Grade 4–5 proficiency rates in ELA and math from the 2021–2022 school year, separated by whether students attended a school that expended SSBG funds for reading interventionists. Error bars indicate 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates were produced using subject-specific student-level linear probability models that regressed an indicator set equal to 1 if a student was proficient in ELA/math on a binary variable indicating whether a student’s school had expended funds from the SSBG reading interventionist program in FY 2022; student race/ethnicity; student-level indicators for whether a student was identified as an SEP, an ML, homeless, or a migrant; prior-year academic achievement in that same subject; school-level per-pupil expenditures (omitting SSBG reading interventionist spending); and dummy indicators for grade level.

* indicates statistically significant differences between spending categories at the $p < 0.05$ level. The values plotted are predicted margins from this regression model, holding all covariate at their means. Standard errors are clustered at the district level. The sample represented is composed of 12,741 Grade 4 and 5 students.

36.0 percent proficiency versus 34.3 percent proficiency) were not statistically significant.

Likewise, we found that ELA and math proficiency rates differed by fewer than 0.3 percentage points between students at schools that did and did not expend SSBG reading interventionist funds (Figure 9)—a margin that was not statistically significant.

Summary and Recommendations

Since the 2019–2020 school year, the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs have allocated nearly \$100 million to Delaware LEAs to support student learning and well-being, with particular emphasis on supporting SEPs and MLs in Delaware. Delaware LEAs have used these funds to make hundreds of investments, most of which are the employment of

staff dedicated to support reading instruction, MLs, and student mental health. Looking across the findings about Opportunity Funding and SSBG, we highlight a number of key findings:

- **LEA expenditures of Opportunity Funding have steadily increased since the 2019–2020 school year.** Since the program expanded statewide in 2019–2020, LEAs’ annual expenditures of Opportunity Funding have grown from \$14.9 million in 2019–2020 to \$24.0 million in 2021–2022. As a proportion of available funds, LEAs have spent between 63 and 76 percent of available Opportunity Funding in any given year.
- **Amid funding uncertainty, Delaware LEAs were able to use these funds to support strategic staff hires.** LEAs were initially concerned that Opportunity Funding would not be a stable source of funding through which

Schools serving the highest percentages of SEPs and MLs were more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding, suggesting that these funds are reaching their intended school recipients.

they could hire staff for the long term. However, the legal settlement in 2020 rendered the Opportunity Funding program permanent, and staff hires have been by far the most popular type of investment that Delaware school districts and charter schools have made with their funding.

- **As intended, schools with the highest proportions of SEPs and MLs have been the most likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding.** Mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds for reading interventionists are distributed on the basis of school-level enrollments, guaranteeing that funds are directed to specific schools. But that is not necessarily the case for flexible Opportunity Funding, where LEAs have more discretion about how to distribute their flexible dollars to their schools. After looking at actual expenditures, rather than just initial allocations, we did, in fact, find that schools serving the highest percentages of SEPs and MLs were more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding, suggesting that these funds are reaching their intended school recipients.
- **Achievement gaps have narrowed since the inception of Opportunity Funding and SSBG, with more pronounced changes for SEPs.** Compared with the test scores from the 2018–2019 school year, proficiency rate gaps between SEPs and students who are not experiencing poverty have narrowed by roughly 5 percentage points. Proficiency rate gaps between MLs and students who are not MLs

have only narrowed by less than 1 percentage point.

- **However, we found mixed evidence about the effects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG on student achievement levels when comparing Delaware with other states.** In comparison with academic performance among similar students in two comparison states, proficiency rates among SEPs in Delaware were comparable to those in Connecticut and slightly higher than those in Washington. However, academic proficiency among MLs declined more between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 in Delaware than in both comparison states.
- **Delaware schools that did and did not expend Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding in 2021–2022 had similar levels of academic achievement.** We did not find a relationship between school expenditures of Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding and academic proficiency in 2021–2022. This lack of a statistically significant relationship was true in both subjects and when looking specifically at the achievement of SEPs and MLs.
- **Neither comparison method is ideal.** The between-state comparisons may not accurately estimate the effects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding if COVID-19 and subsequent policies addressing the pandemic differentially affected student performance among SEPs and MLs. Likewise, although comparing schools that did and did not expend Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds allows us look specifically at schools where investments were targeted, these schools may also differ in

both observable ways (as shown in Figure 5) and unobservable ways, making comparisons between them potentially problematic.

- **Taken together, both comparison methods suggest that access to Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding since 2019–2020 has had limited effect on academic proficiency in Delaware.** Program effects were most promising for SEPs, where we observed both a narrowing of achievement gaps within the state of Delaware and improved academic performance relative to one comparison state. Our analyses suggest null or negative effects of both programs for MLs on academic achievement.
- **Test scores represent only one of many student outcomes of interest.** Other research on the effects of school funding changes have examined how these changes have affected dropout and graduation rates and rates of postsecondary enrollment (Kreisman and Steinberg, 2019; Johnson and Tanner, 2018). Future research on Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding effects on these outcomes will

further inform understanding of program effects.

- **Readers should not interpret our results to mean that extra funding does not matter for SEPs and MLs.** Rather, readers should consider the amount of funding relative to the size of achievement gaps. A prior body of research on the effects of school funding changes, summarized in our year 1 report (Doan et al., 2021), found beneficial effects of sustained funding increase on multiple student outcomes, with greater benefits among SEPs (Lafortune, 2022; Lafortune, Rothstein, and Schazenback, 2018; Kreisman and Steinberg, 2019; Gigliotti and Sorensen, 2018). The investments made through Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding represent only a portion of the state’s growing commitment to funding supports for SEPs and MLs. The prior research suggests that the continuation and growth of these investments will be necessary to see the long-term impacts on educational outcomes that Delaware seeks to achieve.

APPENDIX A

Supplemental Data Tables

Tables A.1–A.4 provide supplemental data referenced in the body of the report.

TABLE A.1

State Appropriations for Opportunity Funding and SSBG from Inception to 2025

FY	Program	Unit	Number of Units That Received Funds	Grades	Criteria	Total State Appropriation
2018	Opportunity Grants	School	9	K–12	Application	\$1,000,000
2019	Opportunity Grants	School	46	K–12	Threshold	\$6,000,000
2019	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	28	K–3	Per pupil	\$2,855,200
2019	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	45	K–4	Threshold	\$3,571,400
2020	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	40	K–12	Per pupil	\$20,000,000
2020	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	44	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2020	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	27	K–3	Per pupil	\$4,489,700
2020	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	45	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2021	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	39	K–12	Per pupil	\$20,000,000
2021	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	43	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2021	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	29	K–3	Per pupil	\$4,489,700
2021	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	43	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2022	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	42	K–12	Per pupil	\$30,000,000
2022	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	87	K–5	Threshold	\$8,000,000
2022	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	44	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2023	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$30,000,000
2023	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2024	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$45,000,000
2024	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2025	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$55,000,000
2025	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000

SOURCES: Delaware operating budgets for FYs 2019–2021 (Delaware General Assembly, 2018; Delaware General Assembly, 2019; and Delaware General Assembly, 2020). 2022–2025 budgets are from *Fiscal Year 2022 House Bill 250 Operating Budget*, p. 224 (Delaware General Assembly, 2021).

NOTE: FY corresponds with the spring of each school year. For example, FY 2022 corresponds with the 2021–2022 school year. – = Not applicable because it was a future date when this report was written.

TABLE A.2

Opportunity Funding and SSBG Appropriations, Rollovers, and Expenditures in FY 2020–2022

Program	2022				2021				2020	
	Total State Appropriation	Total Funds Available ^a	Total Expenditures by LEAs ^a	Percentage of Available Funds Spent	Total State Appropriation	Total Funds Available ^a	Total Expenditures by LEAs ^a	Percentage of Available Funds Spent	Total Expenditures by LEAs	Percentage of Available Funds Spent
Opportunity Funding, flexible	\$30,000,000	\$38,082,313	\$23,997,637	63%	\$20,000,000	\$23,536,620	\$15,299,493	65%	\$14,953,803	76%
Opportunity Funding, mental health and reading support	\$8,000,000	\$9,717,518	\$5,994,943	62%	\$5,000,000	\$5,821,984	\$3,862,058	66%	\$3,476,626	70%
SSBG K–3 special education	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$4,489,700	\$6,106,934	\$4,314,294	71%	\$3,364,190	75%
SSBG reading interventionists	\$3,631,628	\$4,058,201	\$3,489,401	86%	\$3,504,072	\$4,086,087	\$3,454,514	85%	\$3,860,601	97%
Total	\$41,631,628	\$51,858,032	\$33,481,981	65%	\$32,993,772	\$39,551,625	\$26,930,359	68%	\$25,655,220	77%

SOURCE: Features information from DDOE validity reports provided to the authors.

^a Includes rollover of unspent funds from the prior year.

TABLE A.3

Categories of Approved Opportunity Funding Investments in FY 2022,
FY 2021, and FY 2020

Category	FY 2022		FY 2021		FY 2020	
	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N
Staff	67	150	62	111	54	100
Professional development	4	10	8	15	15	27
Curriculum	11	25	12	22	11	20
Programming	12	27	10	18	10	19
Supplies	5	11	6	10	7	13
Other	0	0	2	3	3	6

SOURCES: Features information from LEA FY 2020, 2021, and 2022 flexible Opportunity Funding applications provided to the authors.

TABLE A.4

Staff Type as a Percentage of All Staffing Investments Using Flexible
Opportunity Funding

Staff Type	FY 2022 (n = 150)	FY 2021 (n = 111)	FY 2020 (n = 100)
ML staff	40	32	28
ML-certified classroom teachers	13	14	9
ML other academic support (e.g., ML coaches)	10	9	5
ML paraprofessionals	7	5	3
ML translator	1	2	3
ML social, behavioral, and mental support	6	2	2
ML general or other	3	1	6
Social, behavioral, and mental support (total)	23	31	29
Social worker, counselor, psychologist	15	13	19
General or other	5	9	4
Family and community engagement	3	8	6
Academic support (total)	21	21	23
Reading (e.g., specialist, interventionist, coach)	8	9	9
General or other	9	8	11
Math (e.g., specialist, interventionist, coach)	3	4	3
General/cross-purpose (total)	16	16	20
General/unspecified	11	14	11
Paraprofessionals	5	2	9

SOURCES: Features information from LEA FY 2022, FY 2021, and FY 2020 flexible Opportunity Funding applications provided to the authors.

NOTE: The employment of staff, either new hires or continued employment, constituted 150 of 223, 111 of 179, and 100 of 185 total proposed flexible Opportunity Funding investments in FY 2022, FY 2021, and FY 2020, respectively. Yellow represents lower percentages, and greener cells represent higher percentages.

APPENDIX B

Data and Methods

In this appendix, we describe the data sources used throughout this report and the statistical methods used in the “Are Opportunity Funding and SSBG Related to Improved Student Learning?” section.

Data Sources

School Year 2021–2022 Opportunity Funding Applications

Similar to prior years, we drew upon LEAs’ submitted applications for flexible Opportunity Funding in the 2021–2022 school year to identify the specific investments that they proposed to use these funds toward. These applications were submitted and approved by the DDOE during summer 2021.

We coded LEAs’ flexible fund investments using six categories: (1) hiring of additional **staff**, (2) purchasing **professional development** or training for existing staff, (3) purchasing **curricula** or other types of instructional materials, (4) offering out-of-school (e.g., afterschool, summer school) **programming** for students and their families, (5) providing classroom **supplies**, and (6) **other** miscellaneous investments. These categories are consistent with those used in prior years of our evaluation.

Because the majority of investments propose the hiring of new staff, we also created subcategories of staff investments that identify the specific role or purpose of each new staff member. These staff subcategories include (1) staff for supporting **MLs**, including ML-certified teachers, translators, and biliteracy coaches; (2) staff for supporting **students’ socioemotional and behavioral skills**, such as social workers, school counselors, and student-family liaisons; (3) staff for providing **academic support**, such as interventionists, reading and math interventionists, and instructional coaches; (4) **paraprofessionals**; and (5) **general** unspecified staff and **other** miscellaneous staff. To create mutually exclusive categories, we coded any staff investment as *ML support staff* if it was designated to specifically serve MLs even if the investment could be potentially coded into other categories (e.g., ML paraprofessional, ML social worker).

DDOE Midyear Conferences with LEAs

RAND researchers worked with staff at the DDOE to conduct conferences with each of the heads of the 42 LEAs that received funds from one or both streams of Opportunity Funding and SSBG. Prior to each conference, RAND staff generated short templates, unique to each LEA, that listed proposed investments for flexible Opportunity Funding and whether an LEA was eligible for mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding or SSBG reading interventionists. The template asked the LEA leaders to report on the implementation status of each of their proposed investments, self-reported best practices across investments, and summative questions about their overall opinions of Opportunity Funding and SSBG and what they would like to see changed about the programs.

Staff from the DDOE arranged meetings with leaders from each of the 42 LEAs during spring 2022 to discuss the content of each template and helped them to complete each form. DDOE staff then sent completed forms back to RAND. We possess completed midyear conference forms for 38 out of 42 LEAs.

Educational Expenditure and Allocation Data

We used three expenditure and allocation data files from FY 2022 to examine LEA spending of Opportunity Funding and SSBG. First, we used a DDOE-provided program-level allocation file that summarizes LEA allocations for the flexible Opportunity Funding, mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and SSBG reading interventionist programs for FY 2022. This file summarizes allocations for each of the three programs under study and provides the specific unit counts of SEPs and MLs that determine allocations and eligibility for each program.

Next, we used a LEA-level validity report that contains all federal, state, and local expenditures and available funds by fund type and appropriation code for FY 2022. We used this file to confirm the allocations provided in the summary “program-level” file described above and calculate FY 2022 expenditures of funds made available through each of the funding programs. We used this validity report to determine

the specific source of funds expended by LEAs (e.g., “[LEA] spent \$10,000 that was allocated through flexible Opportunity Funding”), but we could not determine the specific use of expended funds (e.g., “[LEA] spent \$10,000 that was allocated through flexible Opportunity Funding for new instructional materials”).

Lastly, we used a school-level expenditure file that contains all federal, state, and local expenditures and available funds by fund type and appropriation code for FY 2022. This file allows for the same fund-specific tracking of expenditures provided by the LEA-level validity report but does not provide information on school-level allocations of funds.

School-Level Student Achievement Data from Comparison States

We used SBAC proficiency rates for each school in Delaware and each school in two states for which comparison data were available: Connecticut and Washington. We used data that were publicly available on the each of the states’ web sites for the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2022. These were the only three SBAC states that had publicly posted test scores from spring 2022 as of September 29, 2022, when we last retrieved the data for these analyses. Each state provided the percentage proficient not only for the school as a whole but also for SEPs and MLs within the school, providing that there were a sufficient number of them in the group so as not to risk compromising the confidentiality of the test results. From these statewide school-level reports, we not only obtained the percentage of SEPs and MLs in the school that met or exceeded standards on the SBAC ELA and math tests (for those schools with a sufficient number of SEPs and MLs), but we also obtained student counts by grade and by subgroup.

Student-Level Administrative Data

We used student-level administrative data from the 2015–2016 to 2021–2022 school years provided to us by the DDOE. These administrative data include information on student demographics (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, SEP status, special education status, ML status, migrant status, homelessness status), student school enrollment, and student achievement

(i.e., scale scores, proficiency classification) on the ELA and math SBAC assessments. The SBAC was not administered during the 2019–2020 school year and had low (60 percent) participation during the 2020–2021 school year. Thus, test score data from these years were not used as part of our analysis.

LEA-Level and School-Level Student Demographic Data

Lastly, we obtained student demographic information from the Delaware Open Data Portal from the 2015–2016 to 2021–2022 school years. These data describe the student populations (e.g., SEPs, MLs, students with disabilities, Black and Latino students) at each LEA. We used these data to report on patterns in statewide student demographics and to verify enrollment and demographic information in the analytic samples.

Methods

Comparison 1: Comparing Delaware SEPs and MLs with Nontarget Students and with Comparison States

For comparison 1, we used publicly reported annual school-level proficiency rates from Delaware, Connecticut, and Washington by subgroup to create a counterfactual for SEPs and MLs in Delaware in 2021–2022. Our analysis is based on the idea that proficiency rates for subgroups (SEPs, MLs, and nontarget students) change over time because of factors that similarly affect all students in each state and factors that affect all members of a given subgroup regardless of the state in which they reside. By modeling changes specific to a subgroup and changes specific to each state, we can predict what the proficiency rate would have been for target students in Delaware in 2021–2022 in the absence of a change in funding policy. The difference between the actual proficiency rate and the predicted proficiency rate for a subgroup is the estimate of the impact of the funding change. This method is referred to as a “triple difference” or “difference in difference in difference” analysis, because it uses differences over time, among states, and among subgroups to model the changes.

The triple difference model for the proficient percentage is a function of compositional variables, time dummies, school dummies, a target group dummy, and a state dummy. We estimated the model eight times, with each estimate using a unique combination of test subject (ELA or math), comparison state (Connecticut or Washington), and target group (ML or SEP).

Consider a specific run of the model, say, for the impact on ELA proficiency among MLs using Connecticut as the comparison state. The sample for this estimation contains ELA proficiency rates by school, separately for MLs and non-MLs, in school years 2017–2018, 2018–2019, and 2021–2022. Note that, in general, states report the school proficiency rate for identified subgroups (e.g., MLs) but not for their complement (non-MLs). Therefore, we calculated the proficiency rate for non-MLs using the reported proficiency rate for all students in the school, the total number of tested students, and the number of tested MLs. The states do not report sufficient information to calculate school-level proficiency rates for students who are both ML and SEP, ML but not SEP, and neither ML nor SEP, so we must compare MLs to non-MLs and use covariates to represent the percentage of tested students in the school who are SEPs.

The full model for this example is

$$\begin{aligned}
 P = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 ML + \beta_{2j} + \beta_3 Y \\
 & + \beta_4 ML \times DE + \beta_5 ML \times Y + \beta_6 DE \times Y \\
 & + \beta_7 Y \times DE \times ML \\
 & + \beta_8 Y \times POST + \beta_9 Y \times POST \times DE \\
 & + \beta_{10} Y \times POST \times ML \\
 & + \beta_{11} Y \times POST \times DE \times ML \\
 & + \varepsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

where P is the proficiency rate for a subgroup in a specific school in a specific year. The first row of the model includes a dummy for the target subgroup (ML, omitting non-ML), a separate intercept (i.e., fixed effects) for each school, and a linear term for time (Y). The second row includes two-way interactions of subgroup, state (Delaware, omitting Connecticut), and time. The third row includes a triple interaction of time, state, and subgroup. If we only ran the model with these three lines of covariates, we would be fitting separate time trends for each com-

bination of subgroup (ML, non-ML) and state (Delaware, Connecticut).

The next two lines of covariates allow for a “jump” off of the trend following the funding change (POST). The coefficient in the first term in line 4 (β_8) captures the jump for the omitted group (Connecticut non-MLs). This coefficient measures the impact of COVID-19 and ESSER funding on proficiency rates for this omitted group. The coefficient in the second term (β_9) captures any additional jump for non-MLs in Delaware, perhaps due to differences in COVID-19 policies or ESSER funding uses. The coefficient on the third term (β_{10}) captures the jump for MLs in Connecticut, perhaps due to ways in which COVID-19 uniquely affected MLs.

The coefficient on the triple interaction (β_{11}) is our estimate of the effect of Delaware’s funding change on proficiency rates of MLs. It captures any additional jump off of the trend, after accounting for the separate effects of being in Delaware and being ML, which are captured in the previous line of covariates. The estimates of this coefficient for the eight runs of the model are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

As recently pointed out by Olden and Moen, 2022, this estimate only has a causal interpretation if there is a stable relationship among the preintervention trends. In particular, trends can differ by state and by subgroup, but not by the interaction of state and subgroup. This restriction is equivalent to restricting β_7 to be equal to zero. Intuitively, this is because we do not want trend preintervention differences that are unique to the group of interest (MLs in Delaware). Therefore, we omitted the interaction of time, state, and subgroup from the model when estimating the impact of the funding change. We also tested this restriction and found that we could not reject it in any of the eight runs of the model (two states, two subjects, two target groups), with p-values ranging from 0.09 to 0.97.

Comparison 2: Comparing Academic Performance Between Schools That Did and Did Not Expend Opportunity Funding and SSBG Funding

In comparison 2, we estimated associations between (1) flexible Opportunity Funding, (2) mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, and (3) SSBG funding for reading interventionists by comparing SBAC proficiency rates from the 2021–2022 school year between schools that did and did not expend these funds in that same year. We fitted student-level linear probability model regressions separately for each subject s and fund (i.e., flexible Opportunity Funding, mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding, SSBG funding for reading interventionists) of the following form:

$$P_{isgj} = \delta Expend_j + X_{igj} \beta + \tau PPE_j + \lambda_g + \varepsilon_{igj}$$

where P_{isgj} is a dummy indicator set equal to 1 if student i in grade g and school j achieved proficiency on the 2021–2022 SBAC assessment in subject s . This outcome is regressed on $Expend_j$, an indicator of school spending for that particular fund. For models for mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding for reading interventionists, where eligibility is limited to specific schools and uses for these funds are highly prescribed by the DDOE, $Expend_j$ is simply a binary indicator that is set equal to 1 if school j expended any amount of money of a given fund in 2021–2022. When estimating the effects of flexible Opportunity Funding, because LEAs can use these funds to support investments of varying sizes, we operationalized $Expend_j$ as a three-level categorical variable to capture various intensities of spending: (1) expended \$0, (2) expended \$1–\$64,999, and (3) expended \$65,000 or more in flexible Opportunity Funding; we used \$65,000 because it is approximately the median salary of a Delaware classroom teacher (although our results were not sensitive to changes to this upper cut point). In addition to indicators for expenditure, this model also includes X_{igj} , a vector of student-level covariates including student race/ethnicity, student gender, student poverty status, student ML status, student disability status, student homelessness status, and

lagged SBAC test scores in subject s ; PPE_j , school-level per-pupil expenditures in 2021–2022, omitting expenditures from the fund represented by $Expend_j$; and λ_g , which is a vector of grade-level dummy indicators; ε_{igj} is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the level at which funds are allocated for each program—i.e., LEA-level clustering for flexible Opportunity Funding regressions and school-level clustering for mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding for reading interventionists regressions.

We estimated these regressions separately by subject (ELA, math) and for each of the three funding programs under study in this report; an alternative specification that jointly included indicators for expenditures of all three funding programs found substantively similar results. Models estimating the effects of mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding for reading interventionists were limited to students in grades 3–4 because both funds are eligible only to schools serving K–4 students.

δ is the focal coefficient in these models and represents the difference in the probability that student i is proficient in ELA or math between schools that did and did not expend funds in a particular program during the 2021–2022 school year, conditional on the covariates listed above. To facilitate readability, we present results from these regressions throughout the report as predictive margins of average proficiency rates across spending categories, adjusting for covariates included in the model.

Auxiliary Analysis: Comparing Differences in Proficiency Rates Between Students in Target Groups and Students Not in Target Groups Across the Test Score Distribution

We also examined whether the magnitude of achievement gaps between SEPs, MLs, and students who are not these groups were different across different points of the test score distribution. We used 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 student-level achievement and demographic data for the second comparison, in which we examined Delaware student performance

by subgroup over time. We obtained these data from the DDOE.

We first estimated Delaware SBAC test score distribution, using a quantile regression on all Delaware students who took the SBAC in 2019 and 2022. We did this at 5-percentage-point increments and included covariates for grade level, gender, student disability, and homelessness. Dummy variables that indicate whether a student is (a) an SEP only, (b) an ML only, or (c) both an SEP and an ML capture the difference between these groups and the Delaware nontarget students who are neither identified as an SEP nor an ML. A dummy indicator for the 2021–2022 school year captures the difference between nontarget students over time. The interaction terms between this dummy and the student subgroup dummies capture the differential changes for each group.

The achievement gaps and changes in the achievement gaps reported in Table B.1 are from these regressions. To interpret Table B.1, consider students who are identified as both an SEP and an ML, who are shown in the top pane. Table B.1 shows that the median student in this group in 2019 scored 65 scale score points lower on the ELA SBAC assessment than the median nontarget student. (For reference, the standard deviation of SBAC in a given grade is approximately 100 points.) Therefore, 65 scale score points is a large and statistically significant gap—about two-thirds of a standard deviation. Looking at the rightmost column, we found that the achievement gap shrunk by about 8 points, or more than 10 percent, by 2021–2022. This shows that the combination of Opportunity Funding and SSBG was associated with reduced test score gaps for the median ML and SEP.

The other rows in the top panel of Table B.1 show the achievement gap at our starting point in the

middle column (i.e., as of 2018–2019) and then the change in the gap by 2021–2022 for students at other points in the academic distribution—i.e., students at the lowest up to the highest levels of academic achievement on the SBAC.

Looking at the middle column of Table B.1, we see that the size of the achievement gap at our starting time point is similar for the lowest- up through highest-achieving students, ranging from a 56-point gap for students at the 10th percentile of SBAC to the mid-60s for students at higher levels of the academic distribution.

However, the decrease in the academic achievement gap is much larger and more precisely estimated for students at the lower end of the distribution, as shown in the rightmost column of Table B.1. For example, the achievement gap decreased by 15 points for students at the 10th percentile in ELA but did not decrease by a significant amount for those at the 90th percentile in the same subject. This suggests that the targeted funding helped close the achievement gap the most for the SEPs and MLs who were performing at the lowest levels.

The remaining portions of Table B.1 provide similar information for the SBAC math test and for students who are either SEPs or MLs but not both. The math achievement gap only closed significantly at the bottom of the academic distribution for students who are both SEPs and MLs. Similarly, the gap in both subjects only closed for students at the bottom of the distribution who are MLs but not SEPs. For students who are only SEPs but not MLs, the gap closed at the bottom of the academic distribution but widened at the top of the distribution.

TABLE B.1

Changes in the Achievement Gaps Between Delaware SEP, ML, and Nontarget Students

Students Who Are Identified as Both SEP and ML

Subject of SBAC Assessment	Achievement Level on the SBAC as of 2018–2019	Gap Between Nontarget Students and Students Who Are Identified as SEP and ML in 2018–2019 (scale score points)		Change in Gap by 2021–2022 (scale score points)	
ELA	10th percentile	-56	***	15	***
ELA	30th percentile	-63	***	11	***
ELA	median	-65	***	8	**
ELA	70th percentile	-67	***	6	*
ELA	90th percentile	-65	***	3	
Math	10th percentile	-53	***	8	*
Math	30th percentile	-56	***	5	
Math	median	-59	***	4	
Math	70th percentile	-61	***	-1	
Math	90th percentile	-64	***	-2	

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$. "Nontarget" refers to Delaware students who are both non-SEP and non-ML.

Students Who Are MLs

Subject of SBAC Assessment	Achievement Level on the SBAC as of 2018–2019	Gap Between Nontarget Students and Students Who Are MLs Only in 2018–2019 (scale score points)		Change in Gap by 2021–2022 (scale score points)	
ELA	10th percentile	-39	***	5	+
ELA	30th percentile	-38	***	1	
ELA	median	-34	***	-2	
ELA	70th percentile	-33	***	1	
ELA	90th percentile	-26	***	1	
Math	10th percentile	-42	***	9	**
Math	30th percentile	-35	***	2	
Math	median	-31	***	-1	
Math	70th percentile	-27	***	-1	
Math	90th percentile	-15	***	-5	+

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$. "Nontarget" refers to Delaware students who are both non-SEP and non-ML.

Table B.1—Continued

Students Who Are SEPs Only					
Subject of SBAC Assessment	Achievement Level on the SBAC as of 2018–2019	Gap Between Nontarget Students and Students Who Are SEPs Only in 2018–2019 (scale score points)		Change in Gap by 2021–2022 (scale score points)	
ELA	10th percentile	-49	***	8	***
ELA	30th percentile	-55	***	3	
ELA	median	-55	***	-2	
ELA	70th percentile	-54	***	-6	***
ELA	90th percentile	-52	***	-6	***
Math	10th percentile	-50	***	1	
Math	30th percentile	-55	***	0	
Math	median	-56	***	-2	
Math	70th percentile	-58	***	-5	**
Math	90th percentile	-57	***	-11	***

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$. “Nontarget” refers to Delaware students who are both non-SEP and non-ML.

Notes

¹ In the authorizing state legislation, SEPs are referred to as “low-income students” and MLs are referred to as “English learners.”

² Since the 2013–2014 school year, SEPs have been identified in Delaware as those who are eligible for either the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (DDOE, 2016). This pattern of declining shares of SEPs in Delaware mirrors broader national trends in declines in the child poverty rate preceding the COVID-19 pandemic but was further accelerated by several policies created in response to the pandemic, including federal stimulus payments and expansions to the child tax credit program (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022; Thomson et al., 2022).

³ Students who are defined as both an SEP and an ML are counted twice for the purposes of determining flexible Opportunity Funding allocations.

⁴ Previously, the SSBG program also provided per-pupil funding for basic special education in grades K–3. As of the 2021–2022 school year, that component of the SSBG program has since been incorporated into the state’s unit funding formula, and thus the SSBG program for basic special education has expired.

⁵ We created the list of potential barriers from a prior survey of Delaware LEAs participating in the Opportunity Grants program in 2018 (Klein, Mead, and Shapiro, 2019) and sought DDOE input to further adjust the list based on their awareness of barriers.

⁶ These models only include elementary students because both mental health and reading support Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds for reading interventionists were made eligible only to elementary schools.

References

DDOE—See Delaware Department of Education.

Delaware Department of Education, “Fall 2014—Low Income Measure,” webpage, December 5, 2016. As of October 10, 2022: <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/1890>

Delaware General Assembly, “Senate Bill 235,” webpage, 2018. As of January 26, 2023: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=26797>

Delaware General Assembly, “House Bill 225,” webpage, 2019. As of January 26, 2023: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=47647>

Delaware General Assembly, “Senate Bill 240,” webpage, 2020. As of January 26, 2023: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=48159>

Delaware General Assembly, “House Bill 250,” webpage, 2021. As of September 23, 2021: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/78941>

Delaware Open Data, “Student Enrollment,” data set, July 14, 2021. As of October 14, 2021: <https://data.delaware.gov/Education/Student-Enrollment/6i7v-xnmf>

Doan, Sy, Heather L. Schwartz, Daniella Henry, and Lynn A. Karoly, *Evaluation of Delaware’s Opportunity Funding and Student Success Block Grant Programs: Early Implementation*, RAND Corporation, RR-A230-1, 2021. As of October 14, 2021: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA230-1.html

Doan, Sy, Heather L. Schwartz, Rebecca Ann Lawrence, and Lynn A. Karoly, *Evaluation of Delaware’s Opportunity Funding and Student Success Block Grant Programs: Second Year*, RAND Corporation, RR-A230-2, 2022. As of October 14, 2022: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA230-2.html

Gigliotti, Philip, and Lucy C. Sorensen, “Educational Resources and Student Achievement: Evidence from the Save Harmless Provision in New York State,” *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 66, 2018, pp. 167–182.

Goldhaber, Dan, Thomas J. Pane, Andrew McEachin, Emily Morton, Tyler Patterson, and Douglas O. Staiger, *The Consequences of Remote and Hybrid Instruction During the Pandemic*, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022.

Johnson, Rucker, and Sean Tanner, “Money and Freedom: The Impact of California’s School Finance Reform,” Learning Policy Institute, 2018.

Klein, Jeff, Hilary Mead, and Alissa Shapiro, *2018/2019 School Year Opportunity Grant Analysis*, Center for Research in Education & Social Policy, University of Delaware, April 2019.

Kreisman, Daniel, and Matthew P. Steinberg, “The Effect of Increased Funding on Student Achievement: Evidence from Texas’s Small District Adjustment,” *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 176, 2019, pp. 118–141.

Lafortune, Julien, *Understanding the Effects of School Funding*, Public Policy Institute of California, September 27, 2022.

Lafortune, Julien, Jesse Rothstein, and Diane W. Schanzenbach, “School Finance Reform and the Distribution of Student Achievement,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2018, pp. 1–26.

Lawrence, Rebecca Ann, Elizabeth D. Steiner, Pierrce Holmes, Heather L. Schwartz, and Sy Doan, *Flexible Opportunity Funding Investments in Delaware: Lessons from District Leaders*, RAND Corporation, RR-A230-4, 2023. As of February 8, 2023: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA230-4.html

Lazarin, Melissa, *English Learner Testing During the Pandemic: An Early Readout and Look Ahead*, Migration Policy Institute, May 2022.

McRae, D. J., “Consortium 2021 State-by-State Comparisons: Smarter Balanced,” report provided directly to authors, February 15, 2022.

Schultz, Brooke, “Teacher Pay in Delaware: Good Enough to Recruit and Retain?” Delaware Public Media, February 28, 2020.

Thomson, Dana, Renee Ryberg, Kristen Harper, James Fuller, Katherine Paschall, Jody Franklin, and Lina Guzman, “Lessons from a Historic Decline in Child Poverty,” *Child Trends*, 2022.

U.S. Census Bureau, “Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2021,” press release, September 13, 2022.

About This Report

This report is the third of three annual reports evaluating the implementation and effects of two Delaware weighted funding programs designed to support local education agencies enrolling students experiencing poverty and multi-lingual learners during the 2019–2020 to 2021–2022 school years: Opportunity Funding and the Student Success Block Grant (SSBG) program.

The authors of this third report review patterns in expenditure and allocations in Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds, drawing comparisons to uses of funds from prior years. Additionally, the third-year report contains the results of quantitative analyses examining the relationship between access and expenditure of Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds and student academic achievement. The authors use and report results from multiple quantitative designs, including cross-state comparisons of academic achievement, comparisons of the size of academic achievement gaps before and after the availability of funds, and comparisons of academic achievement between schools that did and did not expend these funds.

This study was funded through a contract with the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to conduct an independent evaluation of these two funding mechanisms. The report will be of interest to Delaware state-level policymakers in the executive and legislative branches, including DDOE and legislative staff, as well as other stakeholders in the public and private sectors interested in the potential for strategic investments in the early elementary grades to improve student outcomes. The findings for Delaware should be of interest to policymakers in other parts of the United States considering or making similar investments.

RAND Education and Labor

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This study was sponsored by the DDOE.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to Sy Doan (qdoan@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the DDOE staff for the extremely helpful support for and participation in the study. We especially thank Mark Holodick, Delaware Secretary of Education; Susan Bunting, former Delaware Secretary of Education; and other DDOE staff, including Jennifer Carlson, Susan Haberstroh, Kathy Kelly, Kimberly Klein, Monica Gant, Maria Rodriguez, and Adrian Peoples. They responded promptly and fully to our requests for data and information and greatly aided the evaluation.

This report benefited substantively from quality assurance feedback from Katie Carman, a RAND Education and Labor quality assurance manager. We also thank our two reviewers, Christine Mulhern and Lucy Sorensen, who helped us improve the clarity and completeness of the report.



The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

Research Integrity

Our mission to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis is enabled through our core values of quality and objectivity and our unwavering commitment to the highest level of integrity and ethical behavior. To help ensure our research and analysis are rigorous, objective, and nonpartisan, we subject our research publications to a robust and exacting quality-assurance process; avoid both the appearance and reality of financial and other conflicts of interest through staff training, project screening, and a policy of mandatory disclosure; and pursue transparency in our research engagements through our commitment to the open publication of our research findings and recommendations, disclosure of the source of funding of published research, and policies to ensure intellectual independence. For more information, visit www.rand.org/about/research-integrity.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR-A230-3.

© 2023 Delaware Department of Education

www.rand.org