

WORKING P A P E R

Evaluation of Two Out-of-School Programs in Pittsburgh Public Schools

No Child Left Behind's Supplemental Educational Services and State of Pennsylvania's Educational Assistance Program

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SUMMARY

Programs that provide services to children outside of school hours have grown tremendously in recent decades. Historically, non- and for-profit organizations provided many of these programs and often did not coordinate their efforts with the school district. However, out-of-school programs have been transformed through federal, state, and local programs—most notably through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Pennsylvania has also funded its own out-of-school programs, including one known as the Educational Assistance Program (EAP).

A key aim of the NCLB Act is to give parents of students in low-performing Title I schools new educational options, one of which is the opportunity to enroll a child in supplemental educational services (SES) such as tutoring outside the regular school day by state-approved providers. The federally-supported SES option is for low-income students attending schools that have failed to meet state goals for “adequate yearly progress” for three consecutive years. A variety of agencies may provide SES, including for-profit and non-profit entities, faith-based organizations, public or private schools, and school districts, but the state must approve them.

The Pennsylvania EAP provides extended learning opportunities for students by funding tutoring that can be provided before school, after school, during weekends, or in the summer. The EAP targets students who scored below proficient on the state accountability test or scored below a set score on a district-administered test. School districts are required by the state to provide a minimum of 45 hours of EAP instruction per subject area. Some districts have expanded the opportunity to other students. For example, Pittsburgh Public Schools opened the EAP program to all students.

Policymakers have a compelling interest in how well these programs are working. At the behest of the Pittsburgh Public School District, RAND examined the effectiveness of the SES and EAP programs in the district. The analysis not only examined the participation and the overall effectiveness of these programs, but also program factors that

were associated with higher student participation and gains in student achievement. To conduct the analysis, we used data from focus groups of parents, surveys of private organizations and schools providing SES and EAP services, and student test scores and demographic information from the district comprehensive data base. From these data sources, we were able to provide a comprehensive depiction of the programs.

Who participated in EAP/SES?

Overall, our analysis suggests that less than 25 percent of eligible students participated in SES and EAP programs, but participation varied by grade. Middle school students were less likely than elementary school students to participate in SES and high school students were less likely than all other students to enroll in EAP. Also, as intended, lower performing students took advantage of these programs. African-American students were no more or less likely to participate in the SES program than white students, but they were more likely to participate in the EAP program and attend more often.

What were some of the barriers to student participation in these programs?

Factors perceived by parents as inhibiting participation included unclear information about eligibility for and cost of the program, disciplinary issues, and provision of transportation. Parents also cited increased competition for students' time as they get older and take on a wider range of activities, e.g., sports and jobs, as a reason for not participating in the programs. Timely reminders by teachers of class sessions were regarded as having a positive effect on attendance.

What effects did EAP/SES activities have on student achievement?

The analysis provides strong evidence that the programs do have a positive effect on student achievement in math, with more limited evidence of an effect in reading. The largest effect occurred in math for students who participated in both programs, and that effect was substantial. The analysis also suggested that achievement gains experienced by African-American students participating in both programs

represented 40 percent of the existing district-wide achievement gap between them and white students in math.

What program factors were associated with higher participation and improved student achievement?

Using data from the surveys of private providers as well as schools, we examined what programmatic features were associated with higher participation rates and student achievement gains. The analysis suggested providing transportation might improve participation in the programs, but not necessarily attendance. In addition, having teachers remind students to attend their sessions was strongly associated with higher attendance. In terms of achievement, grouping students by skill level was associated with achievement gains for students receiving SES. Schools that designed their EAP program to target learning gaps for students (identified from prior school years data) experienced higher achievement gains.

What are our recommendations from our analysis?

The programs appear to have the potential to accomplish important educational goals and are making a difference in student achievement. The Pittsburgh School District, however, could do some things to improve the programs. Most notably, the district could improve the outreach to families by clarifying the information provided. Also, the district could expand access to transportation to these programs and have teachers remind students to attend their sessions. Finally, while there needs to be a greater understanding of how participation in both programs leads to large student achievement gains, there does seem to be evidence that the district should encourage students to participate in both programs.