

Triangle Economics of Education Workshop – Paper Abstracts

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Center for Child and Family Policy

Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

STATE FUNDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND MINORITY STUDENT REPRESENTATION (Dora Gicheva)

This paper examines how changes in state funding for higher education impact the share of minority students at public postsecondary institutions in the U.S. To isolate a causal relationship between state funding and minority student representation, I use a shift-share instrumental variable approach that combines variations in state-level funding with each institution's baseline level of reliance on state appropriations. The results suggest that state appropriation cuts decrease the diversity of incoming students; Hispanic student enrollment is particularly sensitive to funding levels. This trend is most pronounced at less selective four-year institutions. One potential mechanism driving this relationship is an increase in students' cost of attendance: I show that posted tuition and fees are higher, the share of students receiving state grant aid is lower, and more students borrow when states cut funding for higher education.

RETURNS TO FEDERALLY FUNDED JOB TRAINING (Julian Hayes and Arkādijs Zvaigzne)

Government interventions in the labor market are used to address a broad range of societal problems and challenges such as income inequality, skill obsolescence, and economic downturns. Active labor market policies aim to bolster local labor markets by offering subsidies to unemployed workers in the form of unemployment insurance, job search assistance, and worker training. In this paper, we examine how federal jobs training affects workers' earnings in the United States. We use individual-level data from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the most important workforce development legislation in the country. We find that job training boosts earnings on average, increasing earnings by 0.511 log dollars, or 66% increase in earnings the year after training. Displaced workers benefit less than others, seeing increases of only 13%, while workers who train for their future jobs benefit more, seeing an additional 25% increase. We also find that women and Black workers gain more, while Asian workers gain less. Our paper sheds light on how jobs training can improve or worsen labor market outcomes for different groups of workers.

PUTTING THE “APPLIED” INTO APPLIED ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION: THE POTENTIAL OF GOVERNMENT-RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS (Kaitlin Anderson and Jenni Owen)

Research-practice and research-policy gaps are a persistent concern for educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, and partnerships are an important way to bridge these gaps. This session brings together representatives from the North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) and state agencies for a conversation about Government-Research Partnerships related to education – defined broadly – in North Carolina.

THE ROLE OF TEACHER-STUDENT ETHNORACIAL MATCHING IN STUDENT IDENTIFICATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES (Anna Egalite, Michael A. Gottfried, Christy Batts, and Leanna C. Martin)

The importance of teacher-student ethnoracial matching has been established as critical to students' outcomes including achievement, attendance, graduation, and college enrollment. Yet, little attention has been paid to the role of ethnoracial matching for students with disabilities and special education. It is highly likely that race and ethnicity play a role in special education placement, and thus, we ask if teacher-student ethnoracial matching is associated with students' special education classification. To address this, we rely on student-level longitudinal data for all Massachusetts public school students in kindergarten through Grade 12 between 2011 and 2018. Using a quasi-experimental research design that features multiple level fixed effects, we find a reduction in the likelihood of student evaluation for special education services when teachers and students are ethnoracially matched, particularly for male and lower elementary students. The results are particularly salient for Black and Hispanic elementary school students. We discuss implications as they pertain to the special education context.

THE ATTRACTION OF MAGNET SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM EMBEDDED LOTTERIES IN SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT (Melinda Morrill, Umut Dur, Robert Hammond, Matthew Lenard, Thayer Morrill, Colleen Paepflow)

Magnet schools provide innovative curricula designed to attract students from other schools within a school district, typically with the joint goals of diversifying enrollment and boosting achievement. Measuring the impact of attending a magnet school is challenging because students choose to apply and schools have priorities over types of students. Moreover, magnet schools may influence non-cognitive skill formation that is not well-reflected in test scores. This study estimates the causal impact of attending a magnet school on student outcomes by leveraging exogenous variation arising from tie breakers embedded in a centralized school assignment mechanism. Using a rich set of administrative data from a large school district, we find suggestive evidence that attending a magnet school led to higher performance in mathematics and non-language immersion magnet schools also increased students' reading scores. Student engagement was significantly higher, as measured through absenteeism and on-time progress rates. Further, students were significantly less likely to change schools when attending a magnet. These results provide robust evidence that magnet schools—a typically understudied school choice option—can benefit student learning and increase student engagement while enabling the system to achieve its goals of promoting racial and socioeconomic balance through school choice.