



Lessons from New York City's Small Schools of Choice about High-School Features that Promote Graduation for Disadvantaged Students

Background

- U.S. graduation rates remain low when compared to those of other countries, especially for disadvantaged students.
- Existing causal research provides limited guidance for improving this situation, in part because few interventions are implemented in a manner that is amenable to rigorous evaluation, and in part because ambitious, transformative interventions are hard to implement at scale.
- New York City implemented a district-wide high school choice process between 2002-10. Ninth grade students gain access to schools they choose through lotteries.

Study Overview

- The present paper uses a rich dataset based on naturally-occurring lotteries for 68 new small non-selective high schools in New York City, (i.e., mall schools of choice (SSCs)), to address two questions:
- (1) What high school features are promising levers for increasing graduation rates for disadvantaged students?
- (2) What high school features helped to produce SSCs' positive impacts on graduation rates?

Learn More

- Bloom, H.S., Unterman, R., Zhu, P. and Reardon, S.F. (2020), Lessons from New York City's Small Schools of Choice about High School Features that Promote Graduation for Disadvantaged Students. *J. Pol. Anal. Manage.* doi:10.1002/pam.22192
- <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22192>

Key Takeaways

- There is suggestive evidence that school inputs including school leadership quality, teacher empowerment, teacher mutual support, teacher evaluation and feedback, teacher professional development, data-driven instruction, teacher/parent communication, academic rigor, personalized learning, and teacher/student respect are promising levers for increasing graduation rates for disadvantaged students.
- Many of the school features explain part of the total average SSC effect on graduation rates, although most of this average effect remains unexplained.
- SSCs are clearly distinguishable from their counterfactual counterparts in terms of school features that were emphasized by SSC funders.