

Impacts of the Aim High Summer Learning Program on Student Engagement & Achievement

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THE PROMISE OF SUMMER LEARNING

Summer learning programs aim to redress the documented slump or stagnation in student learning during summer break. While many programs focus on academics, out-of-school time in summer months offers not only more hours for learning but more hours for enrichment activities that engender emotional connections to learning.

For socioeconomically disadvantaged students, participation in high-quality summer learning programs can offer resources and opportunities otherwise difficult to access, laying the foundation for success during later school years.

Nearly all studies of summer learning programs focus on whether programs help students academically. This focus makes sense if the goal of a summer learning program is remediation in fundamental skills like mathematics and reading. However, the potential benefits of summer learning go beyond improvements in academic skills. Programs may also increase engagement in school—a foundational part of academic success and attainment, as well as general student well-being.

THE PROGRAM

Aim High is a summer enrichment program free for low-income middle school students. The five-week program offered at sites across Northern California emphasizes team-teaching, the recruitment of diverse educators, and a multi-year program design aimed at building community and long-term success.

Students engage in project-based learning in humanities, mathematics, and science—alongside courses on social-emotional development and college/career readiness.

Based on the most recent year of aggregate descriptive data, ninth graders who participated in Aim High during middle school have higher rates of attendance, lower rates of disciplinary involvement, and higher fall semester GPAs compared to the average ninth grade student in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Aim High participants graduate high school at higher rates and with higher GPAs than the average SFUSD student.

The positive observed outcomes for Aim High students in SFUSD motivated us to apply sophisticated statistical approaches to the available data to test for a causal link between program participation and student engagement and achievement.

THE STUDY

We conducted a study of the impact of Aim High participation on students in the San Francisco Unified School District. We ask:

Does participation in Aim High impact student engagement and academic achievement?

We employ a quasi-experimental method known as a “difference-in-differences” design to answer this question. Using administrative data from SFUSD that is linked to participation data from Aim High, we effectively compare patterns of Aim High participants’ engagement and achievement outcomes before and after participation to the outcomes of non-participants across the same period.

Specifically, we report on whether program participation influences chronic absenteeism (i.e., missing 10% or more of enrolled school days), suspension from school, state test scores, and more. The details of our data, analytic strategies, and results are available in a corresponding technical report (<http://cepa.stanford.edu/wp20-10>).

The Promise of the Aim High Approach

Our results suggest that Aim High participation ...



reduces the chronic absenteeism rate by 22% among participants

reduces the suspension rate by 37% among participants

improves the average participants' English language arts scores by six scale score points

If all socioeconomically disadvantaged middle school students in SFUSD and across California had access to Aim High, our estimates suggest that would amount to ...

	Chronic Absenteeism	School Suspensions	ELA Scores
San Francisco Unified School District  7.2K socio-economically disadvantaged 6th, 7th, & 8th graders	 100 fewer students chronically absent per year	 79 fewer students suspended per year	 89 more 6th & 7th grade students meeting benchmarks per year
Statewide  886K socio-economically disadvantaged 6th, 7th, & 8th graders	 12,403 fewer students chronically absent per year	 9,745 fewer students suspended per year	 13,184 more 6th & 7th grade students meeting benchmarks per year

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