



Research Brief

THE NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

The Long-Term Effects and Cost-Effectiveness of Success For All: A Summary

By Bruce Latta

Guiding Questions:

- *What are the sustained effects of Success For All on student achievement, retentions in grade, and special education placements, through 8th grade?*
- *How do the educational costs associated with Success For All students through 8th grade compare to the costs associated with control students through 8th grade?*
- *How do the cost-effectiveness estimates for Success For All compare to the cost-effectiveness estimates obtained from studies of three other widely acclaimed early interventions: Perry Preschool, the Abecedarian Project and the Tennessee class-size reduction program?*

Introduction

In today's economic and policy climate three questions are often asked about education reform efforts: Do they work? What are the costs? And, can they be replicated? To Dr. Geoffrey Borman of the University of Wisconsin - Madison, these questions represent practical concerns educators must consider when selecting a reform program. Moreover, the answers to these questions hold the promise of addressing an important policy quandary – which reform programs fundamentally improve students' academic trajectories (and later adult outcomes) at a reasonable cost and can be scaled up to serve significant numbers of children.

Unfortunately, according to Borman, either due to poor research or the lack of high-intensity research, few interventions for improving educational equality and productivity have convincing evidence of long-lasting benefits to students and society. Further, even when the benefits of a particular program are known, the costs of a program both in fiscal and human terms are often unexplored. Thus, many comprehensive school reform (CSR) models lack research bases that include findings about both the effects of the model on long-term student outcomes and the cost-effectiveness and/or replicability of the intervention.

Understanding One Model's Effectiveness

To add to the CSR research base on effects and cost-effectiveness of models, Dr. Borman and Dr. Gina Hewes of Johns Hopkins University investigated a popular CSR model, Success For All (SFA), which is implemented in approximately 2,000 schools serving 1 million children throughout the country. The SFA approach to school improvement emphasizes prevention and early, intensive intervention designed to detect and resolve reading problems as early as possible. Although there is strong evidence of the short-term benefits of SFA in many schools, there is less proof of the long-term effects and cost-effectiveness of SFA, which is considered to be one of the more expensive models when compared to other CSR designs. Thus, the questions for schools that are considering the Success For All model, and for Borman and Hewes as well, are

1. What are the sustained effects of Success For All on student achievement, retentions in grade, and special education placements, through 8th grade?
2. How do the educational costs associated with Success For All students through 8th grade compare to the costs associated with control students through 8th grade?
3. How do the cost-effectiveness estimates for Success For All compare to the cost-effective-

ness estimates obtained from studies of three other widely acclaimed early interventions: Perry Preschool, the Abecedarian Project and the Tennessee class-size reduction program?

Methodology

In Borman and Hewes' study, the student and school samples include five SFA schools and five matched control schools. Using a quasi-experimental design, the final analytical sample sizes were 581 SFA students and 729 control students. The demographics of the sample populations were 99% African American and 90% free or reduced lunch eligible.

To reduce winnowing in the sample due to student mobility (which may create sample bias) the study utilizes an Intent-to-Treat (ITT) approach, grouping students as they were originally assigned in the schools. Data sources on students and their achievement include complete Pupil Information Files in the Baltimore City Public School System (1986-87 through 1998-99) and district-administered test results.

A per-pupil expenditure estimate of the costs of SFA was constructed using the ingredients method, which includes measures of personnel costs (including salaries and benefits), training, materials and professional development costs, and retention versus promotion costs gathered from both the U.S. Census Data and the Success For All program staff.

Findings

Relative to controls, Success For All students completed eighth grade at a younger age, with better achievement outcomes, fewer special education placements, fewer retentions, and at the same educational expense. Further, Borman and Hewes' research found that Success For All students show a six month advantage in reading ($p < .001$) and a three month advantage in mathematics ($p < .05$) as compared to the control group students.

The research shows that the costs for the schooling of SFA students were statistically equivalent to the costs of schooling for the control students. When the effects and costs of SFA were compared to the effects and costs of the other interventions, SFA effects were lower than the others, but so were the marginal costs. When Borman and Hewes considered the ratios of effects to cost per \$1,000, SFA had the highest "bang for the buck" in reading.

Conclusion

Ultimately, should we focus our money on programs like SFA, preschool, or smaller classes? Borman and Hewes concluded that the answer to this "either/or" question is "all of the above." None of the programs studied was the silver bullet solution educators have been seeking, but many of the interventions were shown to improve student outcomes. Schools in need of improvement, therefore, would be wise to

continue to seek strategies that have evidence of success in environments similar to their own. Those strategies, when implemented well, will likely offer the greatest return on investment.

This Research Brief is based on a presentation made by Dr. Geoffrey Borman at the June 9, 2003, Network of Researchers meeting in Washington, DC.



Source

A full paper on this topic is available at Borman, G., & Hewes, G. (2002). *The long-term effects and cost-effectiveness of Success For All. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(4), 243-266. [Online]. Retrieved September 21, 2003, from <http://www.successforall.net/resource/PDFs/LTEffectsandCostEffofSFA-2003.pdf>

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