



SUMMARY NOTE

Research Partnerships

Evaluating the Impact of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships on Student Achievement

This research examined the impact of the Smarter Schools National Partnership on literacy and numeracy achievement in primary and secondary school students.

Key Findings and Conclusions

- Overall, the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNP) program was found to have caused a greater improvement in student achievement in secondary schools, while at primary school level, students improved to a lesser degree. The program appears to have been successful in raising student achievement beyond typical growth between year levels in NAPLAN tests.
- Compared to their peers in non-SSNP schools, secondary school students gained an additional 12 points in reading and 34 points in numeracy NAPLAN scores.
- Further analyses of varying groups of students (i.e. from different SES backgrounds) in SSNP schools, found large improvements in secondary school students compared to primary school students. In secondary schools, growth in low-SES students' numeracy score was 13 points higher than that of students in the highest SES quartile. A similar differential of 14 points was found in reading.
- The paper suggests that the additional SSNP funding may have addressed resource issues for disadvantaged students; particularly those that do not have access to resources or support at home (i.e. homework support).
- The results also indicate a significant causal impact of the SSNP program on teaching and learning. Students reported improved experiences of the quality of their learning environment and substantially higher levels of teacher effectiveness. Teachers reported higher opinions of their teaching practice as well as higher support from school leaders.

- The paper concludes that these results are largely due to schools spending a majority of their SSNP funds on coaches for teachers and principals to enhance the quality of their practice and leadership.

Project Background

- This research examined the impact of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNP) on student achievement between 2009 and 2011. Using data from the SSNP program in Victorian government schools along with NAPLAN results, it analysed the effect of the program on numeracy and literacy scores in primary and secondary school students.
- Using quasi-experimental¹ economic and statistical techniques, this research contributes to the current literature by presenting evidence on the impact of school resourcing and management on student outcomes.
- A partnership between state/territory and Commonwealth governments, the SSNP provided \$2.5 billion in funding to schools. Broadly, three major initiatives were developed under the SSNP which aimed to improve students' literacy and numeracy outcomes; strengthen the capacity of disadvantaged schools; and drive continuous improvement in teaching.
- These initiatives were labelled: 'Literacy and Numeracy'; 'Low Socio-economic Status School Communities'; and 'Improving Teacher Quality'. The paper only evaluated the first two due to the limited data and low school take-up on the 'Improving Teacher Quality' initiative.

Project Methodology

- The paper argues that other analyses of the SSNP have not found sufficient evidence of its effectiveness due to their failure to recognise existing differences between students that participated in the SSNP program and the rest of the student body.
- In contrast, this research examined changes in student achievement, as measured by NAPLAN, between two points in time (in 2009, prior to the SSNP, and 2011, following a complete year of full implementation of SSNP) for students who only differ by their participation in the SSNP program.
- In Victoria, selection of schools into the SSNP program was based on the schools' Student Family Occupation (SFO) index. As a result, a cut-off score was used to allocate schools into the SSNP program. In total, 334 schools with over 137,000 students received SSNP funding. From this, two samples were constructed:
 - Primary school sample – students who moved from Year 3 in 2009 to Year 5 in 2011; and
 - Secondary school sample – students who moved from Year 7 in 2009 to Year 9 in 2011.
- The research evaluated the differences between students at schools who were just above the SFO index cut-off score and were allocated into the SSNP program and those who were just below the cut-off score and were not allocated into the SSNP program. The assumption is made that these students only differ by whether or not their school was allocated into the SSNP program.

¹ Quasi-experimental research examines the causal impact of an intervention on its target population. Although similar to traditional research designs it specifically lacks the element of random assignment to treatment or control group. This is an appropriate technique for this research as selection into the SSNP program was not random.

Acknowledgments

This summary note is based on the 2013 research report, *School Resources, Autonomy and student Achievement: Evidence from Regression Discontinuity Design*, by Mike Helal. The research report can be accessed at: <http://www.sole-jole.org/13470.pdf> or <https://www.melbourneinstitute.com/miaesr/publications/working-paper-series/wps2014.html>

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