The Oklahoma Center for Educational Policy

The Community School Effect

Evidence from an Evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THE CENTER

The Oklahoma Center for Education Policy (OCEP) was established as a resource for the State of Oklahoma and its education policy makers at the State, district, community and school levels. OU scholars from both the Norman and Tulsa campuses and from various disciplines are tapped as needed to address research needs as they are identified. Some projects are identified by the core scholars of OCEP and result in policy white papers, evaluation reports, or scholarly publications. Other research projects are contracted with civil and governmental agencies.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study used data collected from 18 community schools associated with the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) and 18 comparable non community schools to test the achievement effect attributed to the community school model. The primary research questions were: Is there an achievement difference between students in TACSI schools and students in comparable non TACSI schools? Does diffusion of the community school model make a difference in student achievement? If an achievement effect exists, what social conditions contribute to differences in student achievement?

Is there an achievement difference between students in TACSI schools and students in comparable non TACSI schools?

Significant math and reading achievement differences were not found when comparing students in TACSI schools and comparable non TACSI schools. Graph one shows that the average TACSI student performed slightly below the average non TACSI student in math. These differences were eliminated when individual poverty was entered in the model, suggesting that differences between the two groups were largely a function of differences in individual student poverty rather than systematic differences between schools.

Mean Math Achievement

![Graph showing mean math achievement with TACSI and non-TACSI students.](image)

Mean Math Achievement

![Graph showing mean math achievement for TACSI and non-TACSI students with F/R LUNCH categories.](image)
Does diffusion of the community school model in TACSI schools make a difference in student achievement?

Significant achievement differences were found when accounting for the development of the community school model. The evidence suggests that bringing the community school model to scale in TACSI schools has the potential to enhance student achievement and to narrow the achievement gap attributed to poverty. Controlling for level of diffusion provided a different achievement picture than a simple comparison between TACSI and non TACSI schools. Students in TACSI schools that had reached the mentoring and sustaining levels of diffusion significantly outperformed other students in the original sample. Nearly all of the mentoring and sustaining students were high poverty students. When isolating the poverty effect, results indicate that students in mentoring and sustaining schools significantly outperformed comparable students in other schools. In short, the efficacy of the community school model as operationalized in TACSI is greatest when core components have been fully diffused to the school level.
Two additional samples were drawn in order to test the durability of the achievement effect when comparing student performance in schools with a more affluent student composition. Comparison schools in the first sample had an average school poverty rate of 48 percent whereas the average poverty rate for the second sample was 20 percent. Results from the first post hoc showed there were no significant differences in the math achievement between groups of students. There was, however, a significant difference in the poverty gap, with students in mentoring and sustaining schools significantly outperforming poverty students from schools with a more affluent composition. A similar relationship was found with the second sample. Students in mentoring and sustaining TACSI schools significantly outperformed free/reduced lunch students in the comparison schools where the average poverty rate was 20 percent.
If an achievement effect exists, what social conditions contribute to differences in student achievement?

Reforms, much like policies or planned change, do not directly influence achievement. The effect is more indirect, operating through social conditions in schools to shape student and school performance. Conditions for learning targeted by TACSI are the mechanisms to promote effective teaching and to satisfy the learning needs of students. Two school level conditions in particular were found to significantly predict student achievement: student trust in teachers and faculty trust in students and parents. Student performance is likely to improve when collective trust defines the behaviors and social interactions of teachers, parents, and students. In short, collective trust mediated the relationship between student poverty and achievement.