Welcome to Strategy Session #8:
The Third-Grade Graduation Strategy

Moderator:  Reba Dominski, Target Foundation
Dr. Donald Hernandez, Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York
Dr. Jay Greene, Department Head and 21st Century Chair in Education Reform, University of Arkansas
Clark Jolley, Oklahoma Senate
Tony Bennett, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction

Today’s presentations available for download at www.ExcelinEd.org/agenda
DOUBLE JEOPARDY: HOW THIRD GRADE READING SKILLS & POVERTY INFLUENCE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

by

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Third-Grade Graduation Strategy
National Summit on Education Reform 2011: Education Everywhere
San Francisco, October 13, 2011

Acknowledgements:
Annie E. Casey Foundation, Foundation for Child Development,
Center for Social and Demographic Analysis of the University at Albany, SUNY,
and staff of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
Slide 2. Thanks for Support and Assistance

Thanks for support from...
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Foundation for Child Development
  and assistance from...
- Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY
- Staff of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

Slide 3. Overview of New Study

- Why study third-grade reading?
- Key features of the study
- New findings
- Policies and programs
Slide 4.
Why Focus on Third-Grade Reading Skills?

No Child Left Behind Act

...asserted “President Bush’s unequivocal commitment to ensuring that every child can read by the end of third grade”

...requires states to annually test and report third-grade reading skill by poverty status and race-ethnicity

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Slide 5.
Why Focus on Third-Grade Reading Skills?

President Obama’s blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act calls for...

“Putting Reading First” by significantly increasing Federal investment in scientifically-based early-reading instruction
Slide 6. New Results in This Study

First-ever study to calculate high school graduation rates for children with different...

reading skill levels and poverty experiences

Slide 7. Fourth-Grade Reading Skills of America’s Children, Based on NAEP, “The Nation’s Report Card”

Among All children...
- 33% ... proficient readers *(at or above grade level)*
- 67% ... not-proficient readers *(below grade level)*

Among Not Proficient Readers...
- 33% ... basic level readers
- 34% ... below-basic level readers
Slide 8. Key Features of the New Study

- 1/3 of children classified as high, medium, or low skill readers
- National Longitudinal Study of Youth
- 3,975 children born 1979-1989
- PIAT reading test
- Children classified as (1) never poor, or (2) poor at least 1 of 5 interview years
- High school graduation on time, that is, by age 19

Slide 9. Percent of Students Not Graduating by 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency

- Total: 12%
- Proficient: 4%
- Not Proficient, Total: 16%
Slide 10. Percent of Students Not Graduating, among Not-Proficient Readers

- Not Proficient, Total: 16%
- Not Proficient, Basic: 9%
- Not Proficient, Below Basic: 23%

Slide 11. 3rd Grade Reading Test Scores for All Students and Non-Graduates

- Reading Scores for All Students:
  - 33.3%: Low, Not Proficient Below Basic
  - 33.3%: High, Proficient
  - 33.3%: Medium, Not Proficient Below Basic

- Reading Scores for Non-Graduates:
  - 63%: Low, Not Proficient Below Basic
  - 25%: Medium, Not Proficient Basic
  - 12%: High, Proficient
Slide 12. Percent of Students Not Graduating by Reading Proficiency & Poverty Experience

- Children without Poverty Experience
- Children With Poverty Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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Slide 13. Poverty Experience for All Students and Non-Graduates

- Poverty Experience for All Students:
  - Yes: 38%
  - No: 62%

- Poverty Experience for Non-Graduates:
  - Yes: 30%
  - No: 70%
Align high quality early education with curriculum/standards thru 3rd grade

Attend to health and developmental needs of children

Work training and other programs to help lift families out of poverty

Two-generation programs

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The Medium Run Effects of Florida’s Test-Based Promotion Policy

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Policies Intending to End Social Promotion

- In the past, public schools have tended to promote students to next grade level even if they have very low academic proficiency
  - The idea is that holding them back would be harmful to their self esteem, and thus counterproductive
  - This is the idea of “social promotion”

- But in recent years more and more people have argued that it might be better to ensure that students have the skills necessary to succeed at the next grade level

Previous Research

- There is a wide body of research going back several decades that finds student proficiency is harmed by retention

- But past research has been severely limited by its inability to account for unobserved differences between retained and promoted students
  - Past research has not been able to make apples-to-apples comparisons
Test-Based Promotion

- Florida is one of several school systems that have recently adopted test-based promotion policies intended to end social promotion
  - Texas, Chicago, New York City and others

- Students must meet a minimum threshold on a reading test in order to be default promoted to the next grade

- These policies provide us with the opportunity to better measure whether or not retention is related to later academic achievement

Florida’s Policy

- Policy first enacted statewide in 2002

- Third grade students required to meet the Level 2 benchmark on the state’s reading exam in order to be default promoted to the fourth grade
  - Second lowest of five levels

- Could receive one of a variety of exemptions and be promoted even if scored below threshold
  - About 60 percent of students in the first class subjected to the policy with scores below the benchmark were retained
Interventions Other than Retention

- Retained students were required to attend summer school
- Were required to be placed in the classroom of a “high-performing teacher”
  - Determined by student performance data and above-satisfactory performance reviews
- Schools were required to develop academic improvement plans for each of the retained students
- Retained students were required to receive an additional 90 minutes of daily reading instruction during the school year

Our Research Approach

- We use a research strategy known as “regression discontinuity”
- Essentially, the procedure compares the later academic outcomes of students who barely pass the exam to those who barely failed it
  - The difference of one or a few questions right on the exam
    - Largely explained by randomness
- Compare students when in same grade level
- Look at the medium-run effects of the policy on student achievement
  - Can follow students through the seventh or eighth grade
- Here we will focus on the second class subjected to the policy
  - Measuring the effect on the first class is tricky
Fourth Grade Reading

Fifth Grade Reading

kernel = epanechnikov, bandwidth = 37.0907

kernel = epanechnikov, bandwidth = 38.6434
Summary of Findings

- Retention had a large short-run effect that declines over time, but is still distinguishable and meaningful in size as late as 7th grade
- Reading Cohort 2 – by 7th grade 0.183 standard deviations
- Math Cohort 2 – 0.174 standard deviations
- Also see similar positive effect on 5th grade science test
- Results similar on low-stakes standardized test

What We Still Need To Know About Florida’s Experience

- We now want to know whether that positive effect leads to higher rates of high school graduation
- What effect does this have on students in their initial third grade year?
- Also, we want to know whether the program is cost effective in the long term
  - Holding students back a year is an expensive reform
  - The benefits might very well outweigh the costs if the program dramatically increases student achievement and graduation, but the costs are there
Tonight...

4:30 -- 5:00 pm  Book Signing  Regency Foyer
6:00 -- 7:00 pm  Reception  Gold Ballroom
7:00 -- 9:00 pm  Dinner Keynote: Melinda Gates, Co-Chair,  
                  Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation  Grand Ballroom