

MPES Colloquium Series

Differentiated Accountability and Education Production: Evidence from NCLB Waivers

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2:00-3:00 PM

Annenberg 317 *space is limited so please arrive early

In 2011, amidst entrenched Congressional inaction, the U.S. Department of Education granted states the opportunity to apply for waivers from the core requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In exchange, states implemented systems of differentiated accountability in which they identified and intervened in their lowest-performing schools (“Priority” schools) and schools with the largest achievement gaps between subgroups of students (“Focus” schools). We use administrative data from Michigan to implement a regression-discontinuity design to study the effects of these reforms on schools and students. We find that the Priority designation affected potential mediators such as student mobility and engagement, and the share of teachers new to a school. Yet, we detect no effects of Priority reforms on short-run math or reading performance for schools or students. Similarly, we fail to detect conclusive evidence of any achievement effects of Focus interventions, but find a collection of marginally significant impacts on measures of the spread of within-school achievement that, taken together, are suggestive of short-run improvements in gaps in math and reading performance. Complementary evidence from qualitative interviews in Priority and Focus schools suggests that implementation of these waiver-based, schoolwide reforms was hampered by formidable barriers that ranged from community violence to insufficient resources for an array of student services.

Brian A. Jacob is the Walter H. Annenberg Professor of Education Policy and Professor of Economics in the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. His primary fields of interest are labor economics, program evaluation, and the economics of education. Jacob’s research on education covers a wide variety of topics from school choice to teacher labor markets to standards and accountability. His work has appeared in top economics journals including the American Economic Review, the Quarterly Journal of Economics, and the Review of Economics and Statistics. Earlier in his career, he served as a policy analyst in the NYC Mayor’s Office and taught middle school in East Harlem. He is also a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and a member of the editorial boards of the American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, Education Finance and Policy and the Review of Economics and Statistics. Jacob received his BA from Harvard College and his PhD from the University of Chicago. In 2008 he was awarded APPAM’s David N. Kershaw Prize for Distinguished Contributions to Public Policy by Age 40.