



IESP POLICY BRIEF

More than a Paycheck? The Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Students' Educational Engagement and Success

Jacob Leos-Urbel, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, Beth C. Weitzman

Introduction

This policy brief presents initial findings of the impact of New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) on academic outcomes for public school students.¹ Despite the broad appeal of providing summer jobs for urban youth, there is little research documenting the relationship between summer employment and educational outcomes for high school students. Because SYEP participation is determined through a random lottery system, our research provides a causal estimate of the impact of summer work. This brief examines SYEP's impact on school attendance, test taking, and performance in the following school year.

What is SYEP?

SYEP is administered by NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and all NYC youth ages 14-24 are eligible.² Youth apply through community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout the city which serve as intake sites and supervise job placements. Participants work in entry-level jobs in the non-profit, private, and public sectors. Placements with summer camps and day care centers are most common. Participants work up to 25 hours per week for 7 weeks and earn the New York State minimum wage. Ten percent of these hours are devoted to education and training. We match SYEP data for the summer 2007 program year to NYC Department of Education files. Our sample includes 36,630 SYEP applicants who were NYC public school students in grades 8-11 during the

Key Findings

- SYEP increases school attendance in the following school year.
- Increases in attendance are larger for students who are at the greatest educational risk; those with less than 95 percent attendance before SYEP, and students ages 16 and older who have more autonomy in school attendance decisions.
- SYEP increases the probability of attempting and passing math and English Regents exams for students ages 16 and over, with low prior school attendance.

¹ Because this analysis focuses on educational outcomes, it considers only SYEP applicants who were students in NYC public schools, although this is not a requirement for participation in SYEP itself.

² However, SYEP participants must be eligible to work in the United States.

2006-07 academic year. Approximately 90 percent of the sample was eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and about 85 percent were black or Hispanic.

Methodology

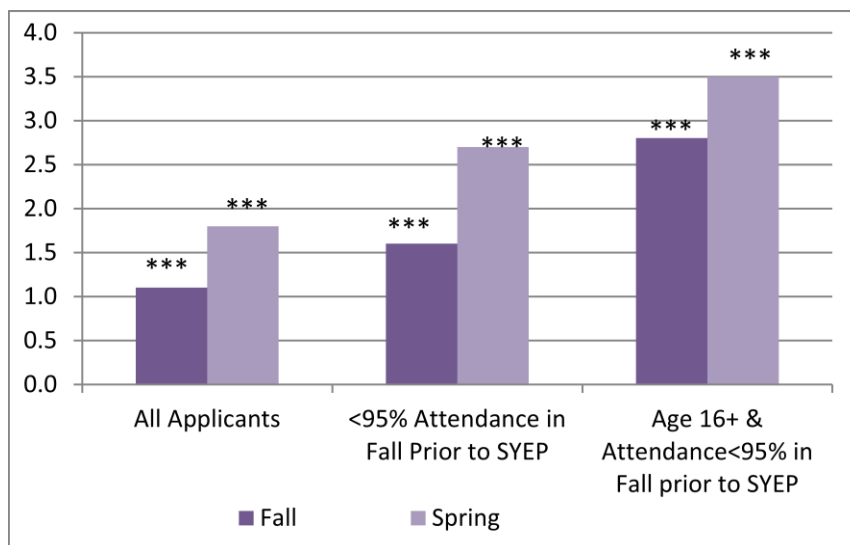
Demand for SYEP greatly exceeds the number of slots available, and participation is determined through a lottery system.³ The lottery represents the “gold standard” for program evaluation, as it randomly assigns youth to SYEP. This random assignment allows us to derive causal estimates of the impact of SYEP on educational outcomes, including school attendance, and attempting and passing English and math Regents exams.⁴ Finally, we note that while the majority of students selected by the lottery do participate in SYEP, our “intent-to-treat” estimates likely underestimate the impact of participating in SYEP as not all applicants offered SYEP enroll in the program.⁵

Results

We find that SYEP increases school attendance in the following year by 1.1 percent in the fall semester and 1.8 percent in the spring (Figure 1). This amounts to about 2 additional days of school in the following year. Students at greater educational risk demonstrate larger gains. For those who were in attendance less than 95 percent in the prior fall, the effect of SYEP is a 1.6 percent increase in attendance in the fall and 2.7 in the spring. For students ages 16 and older with less than 95 percent attendance before SYEP the increase is 2.8 percent in the fall and 3.5 percent in the spring.⁶ This amounts to approximately 4 additional days of school per year.

SYEP also increases the probability of attempting and passing English and math Regents exams for students ages 16 and older, with low prior school attendance. For these students, SYEP increases the probability of attempting the English Regents by 2.9 percent and of passing by 1.7 percent. For math Regents, the increase is 1.2 percent for attempting and 1.3 percent for passing.⁷ This amounts to about 100 additional students passing each exam.⁸

Figure 1. Impact of SYEP on School Attendance Rate (%) in the Following Year (Fall and Spring Terms)



***Results are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

³ Lotteries are conducted among all applicants to each CBO.

⁴ Our analyses verify the random nature of the SYEP lottery. There is no statistically significant relationship between SYEP applicant characteristics and selection by the SYEP lottery.

⁵ Approximately 73 percent of those offered SYEP participated, and those who did participate worked on average 150 out of a possible 175 hours.

⁶ Models estimate the log school attendance rate and include lottery and school fixed effects and demographic controls (free lunch eligibility, race/ethnicity, gender, limited English proficiency, special education, and grade).

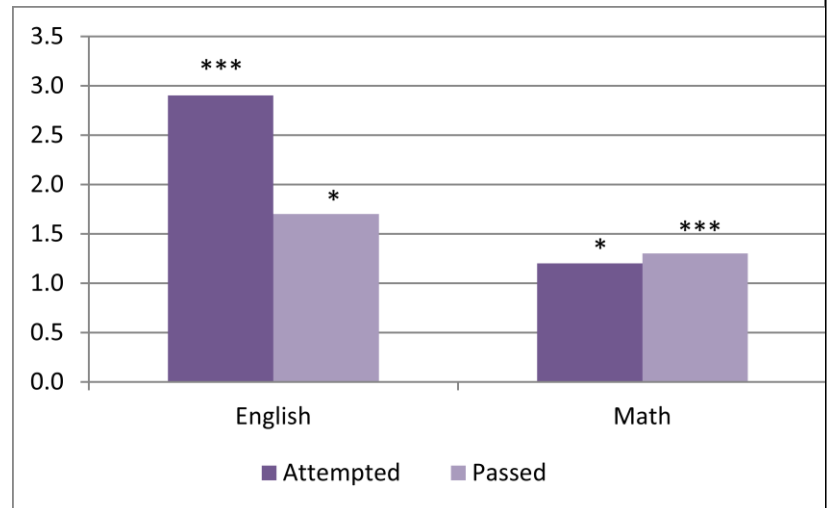
⁷ Note: Results are for the Math A Regents exam.

⁸ Note: The increased probability of passing appears to be due to the increased probability of attempting the exams rather than improved test performance.

Summary

Although intended primarily to provide work experience and income for low-income youth, SYEP also improves school outcomes, increasing school attendance in the following year. Impacts are larger for students who had room for improvement, those attending less than 95 percent in the fall before SYEP, and students ages 16 and older who have greater autonomy in school attendance decisions. Further, for students ages 16 and older with low prior attendance, SYEP significantly increases the probability of attempting and passing optional Regents exams in English and math. Finally, future research will examine the impacts of SYEP in 2008-2010 and explore the program's effect on other outcomes such as high school graduation and college enrollment.

Figure 2. Impact of SYEP on Attempting and Passing English and Math Regents Exams in the Following Year



*** Results significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. * Results significant at the $p < 0.1$ level.

Note: Sample limited to students ages 16 and over, with less than 95% school attendance in the fall prior to SYEP.

For more information contact:

The Institute for Education and Social Policy

Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development | New York University
665 Broadway, Suite 805 | New York, NY 10012

Phone: 212.998.5880 | **Fax:** 212.995.4564 | **Email:** iesp@nyu.edu | **Website:** steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp

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