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EFP Takeaways

The Dynamic Effects of a Summer Learning Program on Behavioral Engagement in School

Background

Summer learning programs are designed to address slumps in student learning during summer break. Nearly all studies of summer learning programs focus on whether programs help students academically. However, out-of-school time in summer months offers not only more hours for learning but more hours for enrichment activities that engender emotional connections to learning essential for behavioral engagement in school. Jaymes Pyne, Erica Messner and Thomas S. Dee evaluate the behavioral effects of Aim High, a free summer enrichment program engaging low-income middle school students in project-based learning in humanities, mathematics, and science—alongside courses on social-emotional development and college/career readiness. Their work is published in vol. 18 issue 1 of *EFP*.

The Study

Aim High is a free five-week program offered at sites across Northern California. The program emphasizes team-teaching, the recruitment of diverse educators, and a multi-year program design aimed at building community and long-term success. The authors employ a difference-in-differences design, using school district administrative data linked to participation data from Aim High. This approach compares patterns of Aim High participants' engagement and achievement outcomes before and after participation to the outcomes of nonparticipants across the same period.

Findings

The authors find that Aim High participation reduces the chronic absenteeism rate by 22% and the suspension rate by 37% among participants, all while improving participants' English language arts scores by six scale score points. Effects appear to grow over time and with additional summers of participation, underscoring the extent to which voluntary summer learning programs offering engaging curriculum and social and emotional learning may provide long-lasting educational benefits.

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
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- Summary of:
Pyne, J., Messner, E., & Dee, T. (2023) The Dynamic Effects of a Summer Learning Program on Behavioral Engagement in School. *Education Finance and Policy*, 18 (1): 127-155.