Measuring the Impact of Funding on Educational Outcomes

W205 Project Proposal

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With ESSA replacing No Child Left Behind during the Obama Administration the role of evaluating schools and determining how to fix them fell largely on each state. Pros and cons existed for each bill, but the question still remained, “How should we measure academic success or educational outcomes within the US?”. With the Trump administration now overturning many of the educational bills passed during the Obama administration and the Bush administration federal, state and local funding of public schools is in flux. Changes made thus far include less strict review of teacher preparation programs and funding being cut to help states identify failing schools and development of  plans to improve schools success rates. With less funding being aloted to reviewing different measures contributing to educational outcomes our team requests that we be given backing to create an educational database focused on collecting factors that contribute to educational outcomes and develop measures to determine the success students, and thus schools. For the purpose of this project we will focus first on gathering funding and financial data along with any available educational factors related to public schools K-12. How much of an impact funding has on children’s success is debatable, but through this project we hope to give better insight on how public school funding is linked to a school’s ability to output successful students.

Our stakeholders are students, parents, schools, districts, states and the government.

Answers to questions about educational funding are important to policymakers who determine where our tax money is spent, as well as to parents of school age children and their teachers. It is also an important question for the future of our country, as a well educated and informed society is better equipped to take a leadership role on the world stage.

Our approach to answering this question involves an analysis of school expenditure and enrollment data from 1995 - 2016 covering a range of topics from student enrollment and performance, teacher numbers and salaries, graduation and college enrollment, education expenditures and international comparisons. Our research examines various performance metrics from this data and compares with school expenditure to look for trends.

Other approaches used to investigate these questions in the past include investigative journalists conducting surveys of schools and students to uncover factors influencing their ability to teach and learn. A recent NPR series (http://www.npr.org/series/473636949/schoolmoney) used this approach. We will compare the findings of our data analysis with the journalistic approach to see whether our results are comparable.

Our research question is the following:

What impact does public school funding have on the success of education?

Success of education will be measured in terms of graduation rates, college enrollments and National Assessment of Educational Progress student performance values. Funding is measured in terms of school expenditures, teacher salaries and student teacher ratios.

Our primary source of data is the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Additional demographic data may be obtained from the Center for Economic Studies census bureau or the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey to provide additional context to the educational outcomes.

The NCES publishes data annually. The project will be designed to incorporate new data seamlessly and update its findings accordingly.

We recognise that our definition of educational success is limited to factors measurable in a statistical survey. Outcomes such as teamwork, social leadership skills and a love of learning are difficult to quantify although they are undoubtedly valuable outcomes of a good education. We are also relying on educational assessment standards to measure success which do not necessarily provide a complete picture of academic achievement. Despite these limitations we expect to be able to provide good insight into the relationship between educational success and funding.

The results of our research will provide valuable insight into the extent to which additional funding helps improve educational outcomes.