

Current Research:

My current research focuses on topics in labor and education economics, with a particular interest in employee evaluation and compensation. I summarize my current research projects below. I also describe a few preliminary projects that provide a framework for the type of research I plan to pursue in the future. My work is multi-dimensional, making me well-suited to collaborate on work with a focus in business, education, and public policy as well.

Job Market Paper

My job market paper investigates the determinants and use of subjective evaluations in an education context, where supervisor ratings assignment determines portions of both employee and supervisor pay. This paper adds to a growing body of work in economics that focuses on the efficacy of subjective evaluation systems and the types of biases that appear to be characteristic of these types of systems—namely that evaluations are too high and compressed given the underlying distribution of employee productivity. Prior work has primarily focused on these questions using a narrowly defined measure of employee productivity in low-skilled or occupations with singular tasks. Instead, I explore this topic in an education setting that provides me with the opportunity to construct well-identified measures of employee productivity in a high-skilled, multi-task environment.

First, I document that subjective evaluations of teachers consistently increased throughout my sample period, with mixed evidence on the relationship of this increase to teacher productivity. I then turn to investigating the mechanisms by which ratings assignment could be influenced by the incentives principals and teachers face in this system. I document no evidence that supervisors alter their rating behavior in response to the penalty, using an event study approach to determine that teachers who were and were not included in the penalty calculation received no different ratings after the introduction of the penalty. I also find that teachers who are marginally close to a salary increase and thus face a strong financial incentive for higher ratings are assigned higher ratings that do not correspond to productivity improvements. Ratings also exhibit some evidence that principals take into account interpersonal effects when assigning ratings, issuing higher ratings for teachers that they have rated in prior instances, even after accounting for factors that may influence changes in productivity.

Working papers:

The first working paper, coauthored with Minh Nguyen, Eric Hanushek, Ben Ost, and Steve Rivkin, focuses on a policy in the Dallas public schools that substantially increased the salary of teachers serving in a targeted a group of chronically underperforming schools. Teacher effectiveness in these schools rose substantially after the introduction of the program. Employing difference in differences and synthetic control strategies, we find strong effects on concurrent student achievement for elementary schools, with less evidence for the effects on student in middle schools compared to a similar set of non-treated schools in the district. Longer term student outcomes are more mixed, with small and largely insignificant effects on student achievement and non-cognitive outcomes.

In the second working paper, coauthored with Eric Hanushek, Steve Rivkin, Jeffrey Schiman, and Lauren Sartain, we identify principal contributions in the Chicago and Texas public school systems to concurrent and longer-term student outcomes, including high school test scores, grades, absences, discipline, labor force participation, college attendance and persistence as well as criminal activity in adulthood. We utilize long panel datasets in Chicago and Texas, tracking individuals from early elementary school into adulthood to construct well-identified estimates of principal effectiveness on concurrent and longer-term outcomes, accounting for school, year and high school effects. We find that there exists a substantial variation in principal effectiveness, and there exists strong correlations between principal effects on cognitive and non-cognitive and behavioral outcomes.

Work in Progress:

In more preliminary work, coauthored with Eric Hanushek, Jin Luo, Minh Nguyen, Ben Ost, and Steve Rivkin, we identify the effects on student achievement of a broad-based education reform in the Dallas public school system. Using a synthetic control approach to identify comparable districts in the state of Texas, we find that student achievement significantly increased after the policy change, particularly for math scores. Preliminary results suggest these effects are primarily coming from elementary school grades, with less evidence of increased achievement for middle schools.

In other work, I investigate the stability of value-added estimates before and after the introduction of performance pay system that is partly based on value-added. While this work is still in progress, preliminary results suggest that value-added may be substantially affected by its use in a high-stakes system.