

SAM STEMPER

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Undergraduate Studies:

B.A., Economics, Brandeis University

Summa Cum Laude, 2013

Graduate Studies:

Harvard University, 2017 to present

Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy (Economics Track)

Thesis Title: Essays on the Economics of Education

Expected Completion Date: June 2023

References:

Professor Christopher Avery

Harvard University

(617) 496-4063

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Associate Professor Joshua Goodman

Boston University

(781) 736-2283

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Professor Lawrence Katz

Harvard University

(617) 495-5148

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Teaching and Research Fields:

Primary fields: Labor Economics, Economics of Education, and Public Economics

Teaching Experience:

Spring 2022 Economics of Education (Brandeis University)
Instructor and Adjunct Professor

Fall 2021, Economics Senior Thesis Research Seminar in Education, Data Science, Public
Spring 2022 Economics, and Applied Microeconomics (Harvard University, Undergraduate)
Instructor

Spring 2020, Economic Analysis of Public Policy (Harvard Kennedy School, MPP)
Spring 2021 Teaching Fellow for Professor Mark Shepard

Fall 2019 Quantitative Analysis and Empirical Methods (Harvard Kennedy School, MPP)
Teaching Fellow for Jonathan Borck, Dan Levy, and Theodore Svoronos

Spring 2013	Economics of Innovation (Brandeis University) Teaching Assistant for Professor Gary Jefferson
Spring 2012	Introduction to Economics (Brandeis University) Teaching Assistant for Scott Redenius

Research Experience and Other Employment:

2019-2021	Harvard Evidence for Policy Design Research Assistant for Profs. Ina Ganguli, Jamal Haidar, Asim Khwaja, and Basit Zafar
Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Spring 2021	Harvard Department of Economics Undergraduate Programming Tutor
Fall 2020- Spring 2021	Harvard Kennedy School Quantitative Course Assistant (MPP)
2013–2017	Cornerstone Research Research Associate
Summer 2011 Summer 2012	Goldman Sachs Summer Analyst

Professional Activities:

Presentations	American Economic Association: ASSA 2023 Annual Meeting (2023) Syracuse University: Conference in Honor of John Yinger (2022) AEFP 2022: 47th Annual Conference (2022) 6th IZA Workshop: The Economics of Education (2021)
Referee	Journal of Policy Analysis and Management Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Organizer	Harvard Kennedy School Applied Microeconomics Workshop (2019-2020)
Member	American Economic Association Association for Education Finance and Policy

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:

Fall 2021	Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching
Spring 2020	Harvard Kennedy School Dean's Award for Excellence in Student Teaching
Spring 2020	Harvard Kennedy School Distinction in Student Teaching Award
2009–2013	Lerman-Neubauer Fellowship Program, Brandeis University
2013	Phi Beta Kappa, Brandeis University

Research Awards:

2022–2023	Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Harvard University
2022	Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Science Jeanne Humphrey Block Dissertation Award \$2,000
2020	J-PAL's Post-Primary Education Initiative: \$50,842

Research Papers:

“Doing More with Less: School Superintendents and Education Production” (Job Market Paper)

Abstract: The school superintendent is the highest-ranking executive in U.S. school districts, responsible for managing personnel decisions and overseeing regular school operations. To estimate the causal effect of superintendents on district performance, I collect data on the tenures of over 18,000 school superintendents covering over half of American public school children using a model of test score value-added that allows a superintendent's effect to emerge over the course of their tenure within a district. Superintendent transitions between districts are leveraged to validate these estimates and to identify common practices of effective superintendents. I show that superintendents have large effects on school district performance, accounting for one-fourth of the observed differences in learning rates across districts. Top management matters most in districts where managerial flexibility is ex-ante largest: smaller districts and districts with weaker teachers unions. Effective superintendents do not change levels of district spending or staffing but instead make changes in school operations, increasing teacher turnover and reducing teacher absences. Finally, I find evidence that the link between value-added and salary for superintendents is strongest in districts with higher levels of local interdistrict competition.

“School Segregation, Student Achievement, and Parental Preferences.

Abstract: For most American K-12 students, where you live determines where you go to school. At the local level, school assignment is dictated by school attendance zones: boundaries that assign households to schools. I use geospatial data on the boundaries used to assign over 10 million public school students across 1,401 districts to identify changes in school assignment and estimate how these changes affect school segregation, student achievement, and neighborhood house prices. Comparing districts that impose integrative versus segregationary rezoning schemes shows that rezoning decisions can change segregation substantially, and that reductions in segregation narrow test score gaps between White and Black students. I find evidence that house prices fall in neighborhoods that are newly-assigned to schools with higher shares of Black and Hispanic students.

“Budget Hawks on the Board: School Boards, Education Finance, and Student Achievement”

Abstract: Funding for education in America is spread across multiple levels of government, but financial decision-making is handled by locally elected school boards. During elections, many candidates for board seats run on promises of reforming district finances. I identify such "budget hawks" using natural language processing methods and campaign statements from school board candidates in California. I use a regression discontinuity design to test how district outcomes evolve in the years following the narrow victory of a hawk over a non-hawk. The election of a budget hawk leads to large and prolonged cuts in district spending. Using test score data, I find suggestive evidence that students in these districts exhibit lower rates of test-based proficiency in subsequent years. Heterogeneity analyses show evidence that districts that exhibit higher reductions in spending experience larger test score declines.

“Economic Shocks and Skill Acquisition: Evidence from a National Online Learning Platform at the Onset of COVID-19” (with Ina Ganguli, Jamal I. Haidar, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Basit Zafar)

Abstract: Funding for education in America is spread across multiple levels of government, but financial decision-making is handled by locally elected school boards. During elections, many candidates for board seats run on promises of reforming district finances. I identify such "budget hawks" using natural language processing methods and campaign statements from school board candidates in California. I use a regression discontinuity design to test how district outcomes evolve in the years following the narrow victory of a hawk over a non-hawk. The election of a budget hawk leads to large and prolonged cuts in district spending. Using test score data, I find suggestive evidence that students in these districts exhibit lower rates of test-based proficiency in subsequent years. Heterogeneity analyses show evidence that districts that exhibit higher reductions in spending experience larger test score declines.