

# Programs for Disadvantaged Youth: What We've Learned from Rigorous Evaluations

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# Key Contextual Factors

- Growing earnings gap between college-educated and non-college educated workers.
- Seepage at each stage in educational pipeline:
  - Controversy about HS dropout rates, but rates appear to exceed 50% in big cities (though 2/3 of dropouts eventually earn GED or diploma).
  - Large proportion of HS graduates not college ready (though college attendance among recent HS graduates has risen over time).
  - Low completion rates in community colleges.
- Plus...
  - High rates of involvement with juvenile, criminal justice system among dropouts (not necessarily “disconnected”).
  - Collapse of youth labor

# What is a “rigorous” evaluation?

- Presentation focuses on evaluations using random assignment (RA) designs.
- RA is not always appropriate, but it is the best way to isolate what difference a program makes.
- There have been many RA evaluations of programs for disadvantaged youth, but some programs with strong outcomes (e.g., Youthbuild, Gateway to College) have not been evaluated with RA.
- Other kinds of evaluations provide valuable data about implementation, outcomes, and costs.

# Terminology: Models and Systems

- Model: A distinctive set of activities, services, curriculum, staffing, etc. designed to achieve a certain outcome for youth.
- Local system: The collection of programs, agencies, policies, and funding arrangements that shape youth services in a jurisdiction.
- Both are important, but rigorous evaluations tend to focus on models, not

# Models for disadvantaged youth that have been rigorously evaluated: Targeting

- Models for at-risk youth still in school
- “Second chance” models for out-of-school youth
- Models for both in-school and out-of-school youth:
  - Target youth based on factors other than school status (e.g., welfare receipt, disability, neighborhood, justice involvement)

# Models for disadvantaged youth that have been rigorously evaluated: Settings

- Models for at-risk youth still in school:
  - School-based reforms (e.g., Career Academies)
  - After-school/community-based programs (e.g., QOP, STEP, CAS-Carrera, Career Beginnings)
- “Second chance” models for out-of-school youth:
  - Non-residential programs (e.g., JOBSTART, JTPA, New Chance, CET, Conservation and Youth Service Corps, Supported Work)
  - Residential programs (e.g., Job Corps, National Guard ChalleNGe)
- Models for both in-school and out-of-school youth

# Models for disadvantaged youth that have been rigorously evaluated:

## Strategies

- Models for at-risk youth still in school:
  - College prep (e.g., Career Beginnings, Upward Bound)
  - Curricular changes, connections to work (e.g., Career Academies)
  - Out-of-school supports (e.g., QOP, STEP)
- “Second chance” models for out-of-school youth:
  - Work-focused (e.g. Conservation Corps, Supported Work)
  - Education/training focused (e.g., JOBSTART, CET, JTPA)
- Models for both in-school and out-of-school youth:
  - Financial incentives (e.g., Ohio LEAP, Opportunity NYC)
  - Guaranteed jobs (e.g., Youth Entitlement)

# Results: In-School Youth

- Mixed, with some positive results:
  - Career Academies: Large, long-term increases in earnings, particularly for males.
  - Career Beginnings: Modest increases in college enrollment.
  - CAS-Carrera: Reduction in teen pregnancy.
  - STEP: Short-term increases in academic outcomes.

# Results: Out-of-School Youth

- Overall story is discouraging; few long-term impacts on any key outcomes.
- Some hints of success:
  - JOBSTART, New Chance: Increases in GED receipt.
  - Job Corps: Short-term increases in earnings.
  - Service and Conservation Corps: Increases in earnings, particularly for AA males.
  - National Guard Youth Challenge: Very early results are positive.

# Results: Other Programs

- Mixed, with some positive results:
  - Youth Entitlement erased the gap between black and white youth unemployment rates; no impact on academic outcomes.
  - Evidence of positive results from mentoring (Big Brothers/Big Sisters).
  - Ohio LEAP (mandatory) generated some increases in school enrollment, GED completion, earnings.

# Why not more positive results?

- Possible explanations:
  - Inconsistent participation in programs?
  - Inappropriate targeting?
  - Difficulty of replication?
  - JTPA/WIA constraints?
  - Weakness of GED in the labor market?
  - Low quality academic instruction?
  - Insufficient attention to post-program transitions, post-secondary education?
  - Limitations of research designs?

# Research-Based Hypotheses

- Would large-scale use of financial incentives and/or paid work succeed in engaging more disconnected youth in education, training, and work?
- Would the GED have a greater payoff if tied more directly to post-secondary education?
- Would linkages between CBOs and community colleges help more out-of-school youth obtain post-secondary education?