



Increasing On-Time High School Graduation Rates: What Works at What Cost?

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100% on-time high school graduation is a stated goal for the Los Angeles Unified School Districts, as it is for many districts around the state, but most fall short of the target. So what would it take to reach this goal? Professor Zimmerman presents simulations of 3 programs that aim to improve high-school graduation rates: after-school group mentoring, dual enrollment and school-based health centers. Using the Win-Win modeling tool, Professor Zimmerman shows how much it would cost to extend each of the programs to all students in L.A. County and the cost-savings for each program that would accrue over time. He also examines the quantified impact of each program on high-school graduation, health outcomes, and crime. These results will help us determine how – and by how much – these programs can get us closer to the County’s ambitious goal.

Disparities in high-school graduation between students of different backgrounds have been narrowing in LA County, yet they persist to a disheartening degree. There are many programs that are proven to improve graduation rates, but which are the most effective? Which achieve the greatest impact at least cost? How much would they cost if implemented at scale? These are the questions that are the most salient for school district officials, who must decide not only whether to adopt interventions, but which interventions best meet their goals.

Three programs are modeled to compare their impact on Los Angeles County high-school graduation rates and their return on investment (ROI) to Los Angeles City, County and California state governments. This included 1) School-Based Health Centers, which ensures student access to high-quality primary care in school, 2) Dual Enrollment, which enables high school students to earn college credit, and 3) After-School Group Mentoring programs for 6th – 12th grade students.

Key Findings

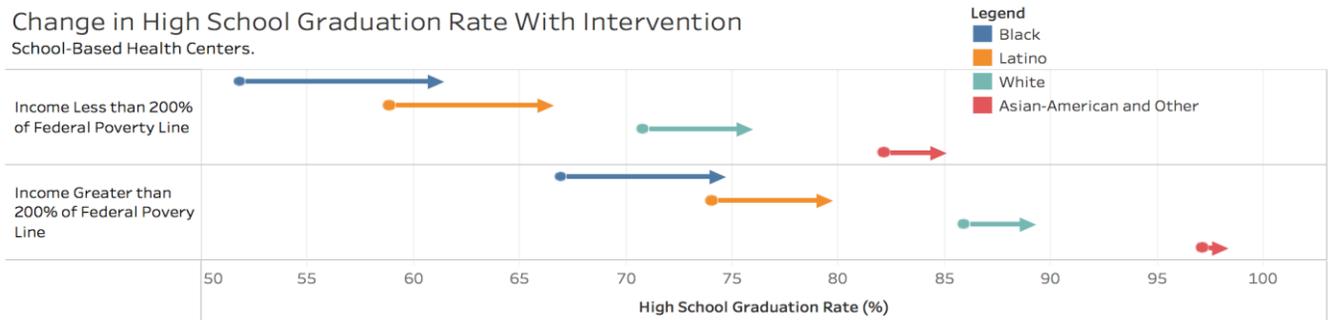
- School-Based Health Centers would create the largest increase in the high school graduation rates. Latinos and Blacks would benefit the most, and the graduation gap between the lowest and highest social groups would shrink by about 8 percentage points.
- Improvements in high-school graduation rates would reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases, particularly among Latinos, with a 3.1 percent reduction.
- All three programs would have a positive ROI, but Mentoring would have the highest ROI: about \$10 dollars per dollar invested by the state to fund the intervention.

Implications for Policy

The Win-Win Project makes it possible for policymakers to draw clear comparisons among different programs regarding their health and other benefits, cost, and return-on-investment. The geographically tailored results show clear ways to improve education disparities and the return on investment helps to make a business case for the intervention.

Change in High School Graduation Rate With Intervention

School-Based Health Centers.



Source: Author’s Calculations. Center for Health Advancement. Win-Win Project. School-Based Health Centers in LA County intervention model.

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