

What Works Clearinghouse



July 2010

WWC Quick Review of the Report “When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools”¹

What is this study about?

This study examined the effect of closing public schools in Chicago on the academic achievement of students who had attended those schools.

The study analyzed data on nearly 3,800 students in 18 elementary schools that were closed between 2001 and 2006 and nearly 4,700 students from 18 comparison schools.

Academic achievement in reading and math was measured using the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

The study compared the achievement of students who attended closing schools with that of students attending similar comparison schools that were not closed. Comparison schools were selected on the basis of average student achievement and demographic characteristics.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards with reservations

Strengths: The study used a statistical procedure to match each closing school to a similar non-closing school based on average achievement and demographic characteristics.

Cautions: The precise mechanism by which schools were selected to be closed is unknown. Therefore, even schools that share similar observable characteristics could differ in ways not accounted for in the matching. In addition, the study matched schools and not individual students. There may have been differences between the types of students who attended the two types of schools that are unaccounted for, and these differences could have influenced achievement. Finally, the on-track graduation analyses were based on a subsample of students for which baseline equivalence is not established. Therefore, results of this analysis should be interpreted with caution and are not reported in this quick review.

Features of Chicago School Closings

The Board of Education closed selected schools, primarily for poor academic performance or low enrollment.

Schools were notified that they would be closing approximately six months before the end of the school year.

Students from closing schools were assigned to a designated receiving school but were also free to apply to a different school of their choice.

Fewer than half of the students from closing schools attended a designated receiving school.

What did the study authors report?

The study found that, approximately six months after the closings were announced, students in the closing schools were 1.5 months behind in reading and 0.6 months behind in math compared to students in the non-closing schools. In the school year following the closings, there were no statistically significant differences between the students whose schools had closed and those in the comparison schools.

The WWC has reservations about these results because the groups of students and schools compared in the analysis may have differed from each other in ways not controlled for in the analysis.

¹ De la Torre, M., & Gwynne, J. (October 2009). *When schools close: Effects on displaced students in Chicago public schools*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.