

What Works Clearinghouse



September 2010

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Toward Reduced Poverty Across Generations: Early Findings From New York City’s Conditional Cash Transfer Program”¹

What is this study about?

This study examined whether offering low-income families cash rewards for engaging in activities related to children’s education, family preventive health care, and parental employment improves family and child outcomes. This quick review focuses specifically on the effects of the Opportunity NYC-Family Rewards program on children’s core educational outcomes.²

The study covered the first two years of this ongoing project and followed more than 9,000 K–12th-graders. It reported a range of education outcomes, including student attendance, academic performance (as measured by New York State test scores), credits earned, test-taking and passing rates, and graduation rates.

The study measured the effect of the Family Rewards program by comparing educational outcomes of students whose families were randomly assigned to participate in the program with students whose families were not given the opportunity to participate.

Features of the Opportunity NYC-Family Rewards Program

The Opportunity NYC-Family Rewards program provides cash rewards to low-income families who live in high-poverty communities.

Families are eligible for financial incentives ranging from \$20 to \$600 for participating in 22 pre-specified activities related to children’s education, family preventive health care, and parental employment.

Education incentives are given for student behaviors, such as meeting student attendance targets and achieving proficiency on standardized tests, and for parental involvement, such as attending parent-teacher conferences.

The intervention is an “incentives only” program and thus does not provide social services, case management, or direct services, such as tutoring or test preparation.

(continued)

¹ Riccio, J., Dechausay, N., Greenberg, D., Miller, C., Rucks, Z., & Verma, N. (2010). *Toward reduced poverty across generations: Early findings from New York City’s conditional cash transfer program*. New York, NY: MDRC.

² The study also examined effects on family poverty and hardship, banking and savings, use of health services, parental employment, and children’s activities. These are outside the scope of the quick review protocol, and program effectiveness on these outcomes is not assessed in this review.

What did the study find?

Of the more than 50 attendance and test-score outcomes examined for elementary and middle school students, the only statistically significant finding was a 2.9 percentage-point difference favoring the Family Rewards group in the percentage of K–5 students who were proficient on the state math test in Year 2 of the study.

Of the more than 20 attendance and credit-accumulation outcomes examined for high school students, the study reported statistically significant positive effects of the program on outcomes in two categories: having an attendance rate of 95% or higher and attempting 11 or more credits. However, there were no program effects on the overall attendance rate or total number of credits earned.

Of the more than 50 Regents exam outcomes examined, only six were statistically significant and suggest an increase in the number of students attempting and passing Regents exams.

There were no significant effects on the four graduation outcomes examined.

However, an analysis of 9th grade students who had scored proficient or higher on their 8th grade math tests revealed statistically significant impacts on enrollment, attendance, credit accumulation, and passing Regents exams.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report meets WWC evidence standards³

Strengths: This was a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Cautions: The authors examined a large number of outcomes for a number of age groups and different points in time. Estimating such a large number of effects increases the possibility that some may be found to be statistically significant by chance. The authors did not adjust for this possibility when reporting the statistical significance of individual effects.

³ Although the version of the report reviewed by the WWC did not contain baseline sample sizes, the study authors subsequently provided these to the review team.