



NCLB and Student Achievement Comments for Discussion

Steven Glazerman
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The NCLB Impact Question



What impact did NCLB have on:

- *Average* achievement?
- The *distribution* of achievement?
- Teacher/school behavior?

Evidence Presented Today



	Neal and Schanzenbach	Reback, Rockoff, and Schwartz	Ballou and Springer
Data Source	CPS	ECLS-K	NWEA
Site(s)	Chicago	23 states	7 states
“Treatment”	NCLB (or CSR) in place	“NCLB pressure”	High stakes grade and “marginality”
Outcome Year(s)	1998, 2002	2004	2003-2006
Outcome Grade(s)	5	5	3-8
Identification Strategy	Pre-Post, 2 waves	Cross-state variation in NCLB rules	High- vs. low-stakes grades, years
Achievement Findings	Impacts at deciles 4-9 (reading) 3-10 (math)	No impact on test scores	Positive impact of NCLB, few perverse effects

What do we have to assume in order to believe these results?



Neal and Schanzenbach	Reback, Rockoff, and Schwartz	Ballou and Springer
No cohort differences in gains	“Similar” schools differ only in their accountability pressures	No spillover within school; Vertical scale is real

What insights do they bring?



Neal and Schanzenbach	Reback, Rockoff, and Schwartz	Ballou and Springer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational triage is measureable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulatory fine print matters;• Accountability regime affects non-test score outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Predicted perverse outcomes not inevitable

Is the current system perverse?



Theory says yes

- Shortchange non-tested subjects
- Shortchange non-tested grades
- Shortchange inframarginal students (e.g. based on the “marginality” of that subgroup)

Empirical evidence mixed

- How to reconcile findings?

How to Reconcile Findings?



- Test score based accountability will raise *someone's* test scores
- The distribution of achievement gains may be uncertain and context-dependent
- Differences in methods OR differences in underlying effects in each time/place studied?

Are we asking the right questions?



- How does research on (soon-to-be-obsolete?) NCLB inform new policy?
- How can we perfect value added models for school accountability?
- How should the penalty/reward itself be structured?

Let's Get Value Added Right!



- Problems to tackle:
 - Test scaling, floor/ceiling effects
 - Coverage by grade and subject
 - Student mobility
 - Sorting on unobservables
 - Imprecision