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**Looking Beyond the Classroom:**

**Understanding Broader Efforts to Promote Children’s Education and Development**

Although education policy often centers on classroom activities, out-of-school experiences and non-academic strategies within schools may also affect academic achievement. This dissertation includes three papers that evaluate the impact of summer employment, after-school programming, and school food policy on educational outcomes for low-income students in New York City.

The first paper examines a large-scale summer youth employment program that uses a random lottery to determine participation, allowing for causal estimates of program impacts. Findings indicate that winning the lottery increases students’ school attendance in the following year. Effects are largest for students at greater risk of disengaging; those with prior low attendance rates and older students, for whom the program also increases the probability of attempting and passing optional statewide exams.

The second paper examines the relationship between after-school program quality, program attendance, and academic outcomes. Analyses use unique panel data and regression models with site fixed effects. Measured program quality appears to influence program attendance and test scores for participants. Specifically, greater opportunities for purposeful engagement are negatively associated with test scores for both elementary and middle school participants, and with attendance for middle school participants. In contrast, supportive environment and structured interactions are positively related to reading performance for middle school participants.

The third paper (with co-authors Schwartz, Weinstein, and Corcoran) examines the impact of a universal free school breakfast policy on breakfast participation, attendance, and academic achievement, using a difference-in-difference estimation strategy that exploits within and between group variation in school meal pricing before and after the policy change. Estimates suggest that the policy increased breakfast participation for students from all meal eligibility groups including those already eligible for free meals, highlighting the potential merits of universal provision over targeted services. Some students experienced small increases in school attendance, although academic performance was not affected.

These findings indicate that policy interventions operating outside the classroom can influence academic engagement and success for low-income urban students, and imply that evaluation research should consider a broad range of outcomes to more fully understand the influence of policies for children and youth on their education, development, and well-being .