
[HOME](#) // [ALL PROJECTS](#) /

Analyzing the Impact of Student Incentives

**Chicago,
Dallas, TX,
New York City,
Washington DC**

2007 - 2010

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can providing financial incentives increase student motivation? Can financial incentives clarify the relationship between schooling and economic stability and provide students with a different perspective on the relationship of education to their future potential?

ACTION

From 2007-2010, EdLabs conducted school-based field experiments in over 200 urban schools across four cities (Dallas, Chicago, Washington DC, and New York City). These experiments encompassed a variety of incentive models and engaged distinct grade-level participants in an effort to obtain a well-developed understanding of how financial incentives influence student behavior and achievement:

- In New York City, fourth- and seventh-grade students were paid for performance on interim assessments.
- In Washington DC, middle-school students were paid for meeting homework, **attendance, and classroom behavior expectations.**
- In Chicago, high school students were paid for classroom grades.
- In Dallas, second-grade students were paid to read books.

OUTCOMES

Based on the results from all cities, we found that incentives for specific inputs, such as doing homework or reading books, produced modest gains in student achievement and might have positive returns on investment, **thus providing the best direction for future student incentive programs.** We found that incentives tied to outputs, such as interim assessment results or classroom grades, did not produce statistically significant gains in student achievement as measured by standardized tests. EdLabs partnered with the Hamilton Project to produce a policy paper that draws on all of our incentives research to offer a set of guidelines for schools.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

EdLabs' field experiments generated a rich set of new facts. After evaluating whether student incentives increase achievement by motivating students and

**Read the full academic paper,
published in the Quarterly Journal of**

changing behaviors, we sought to determine whether **involving parents and teachers in a similar incentive program could yield more significant achievement gains.** **Economics.**

See also: [Chicago, IL](#), [Dallas, TX](#), [New York City](#), [Washington, D.C.](#), [Incentives](#)

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