

What Works Clearinghouse



March 2009

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Rewarding Persistence: Effects of a Performance-Based Scholarship Program for Low-Income Parents”[†]

What is this study about?

This study examined whether community college students are more likely to persist in school if they are offered financial incentives tied to school performance.

The study included 1,019 low-income parents enrolled at two Louisiana community colleges.

Eligible students who had not previously taken college-level courses at the community college and volunteered to participate were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that received the performance-based scholarship or a control group that did not.

The study authors analyzed school transcript data to assess effects on college enrollment and credits earned.

Features of the Opening Doors Performance-Based Scholarship

Financial incentives for low-income parents to attend community college

Up to \$2,000 over the course of two semesters

Provides \$250 if students enrolled at least half time, \$250 if they were still enrolled at least half time with at least a C average after midterms, and \$500 if they completed their courses with at least a C average

Counselors advise students, monitor progress, and disburse incentive checks

Funded through Louisiana’s Temporary Aid for Needy Families program

WWC Rating

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

Strengths: The study is a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Cautions: Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast shortly after study students completed the program. The storm interrupted the study’s follow-up period and affected its ability to examine longer-term impacts.

What did the study authors report?

The financial incentive program increased the percentage of community college students who were enrolled the second semester after random assignment (65%, compared with 50% for the control group). It also increased the average number of credits they earned during the first two semesters after random assignment (3.9 credits, compared with 2.8 for the control group).

Among students whose follow-up period was not interrupted by Hurricane Katrina, the intervention group was significantly more likely than the control group to be enrolled in school four semesters after random assignment (30% versus 23%) and had earned significantly more credits over that period (12.6 versus 9.2 credits).

[†]Richburg-Hayes, L., Brock, T., LeBlanc, A., Paxson, C., Rouse, C. E., & Barrow, L. (2009). *Rewarding persistence: Effects of a performance-based scholarship program for low-income parents*. New York, NY: MDRC.