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Impact Evaluation of the Lucy Calkins Units of Study Program

The Lucy Calkins Units of Study Program consists of materials and methods for teaching reading and writing in Grades K-8. We provide evidence on the impact of the Lucy Calkins Program on student achievement in a metro-Atlanta district. Achievement gains overall for students in Grades 4 and 5 are no higher when exposed to the Lucy Calkins Program rather than other reading and writing programs. Similarly, in Grades 1-3, we find no evidence of a positive effect on reading achievement gains.

What did we learn?

The estimated impacts of the Lucy Calkins Programs on annual student achievement gains in Grades 4 and 5 are positive but cannot be confidently distinguished from no effect. The impacts for students in Grades 1-3 are negative but not statistically significant.

The effects of the Reading Program in Grades 4 and 5 increase with the level of implementation, but we cannot say with confidence that the impacts differ significantly across implementation levels. There is no clear relationship with the level of implementation in Grades 1-3 or for the Writing Program.

Impacts of the Reading Program in Grades 4 and 5 appear to be greater for students experiencing poverty than for students from more affluent families. Impacts also appear to be larger for English learners than for students proficient in English.

What are the policy implications?

Because the Lucy Calkins Program does not appear to be more effective than alternative reading/writing curricula, other programs may be better for district budgets and student outcomes.

Our ability to measure program impacts in Grades 1-3 is limited by the relatively small number of students who took formative assessments. Using a consistent formative assessment for all students in Grades 1-3 could provide richer evidence about what works in the lower elementary grades.

Researchers

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What questions did we answer?

1. What is the average impact of utilizing the Lucy Calkins Program on student achievement (relative to other reading/writing programs)?
2. How does the impact of the Lucy Calkins Program on student achievement vary with the level of implementation?
3. To what extent does the impact of the Lucy Calkins Program vary by student characteristics, such as free or reduced-price meals eligibility and English learner status?

What data did we use?

We use administrative data for students in traditional public schools in a metro-Atlanta district. We use summative assessment data in Grades 3-5 from school year (SY) 2012-13 to SY 2018-19, and formative assessment results in Grades K-3 for SY 2017-18 and SY 2018-19. The formative assessment data yield approximately one sixth as many students-year observations as the summative assessment data, making estimates of program impact on test scores less precise.

Why is this issue important?

The Lucy Calkins Program is one of the most popular elementary-level reading/writing programs in the country, yet there is little direct evidence on its efficacy. Using individual-level data, this study provides new findings on the impact of the program's use on student achievement growth in Grades 1-5 and thus provides important information for districts choosing reading and writing instructional methods and materials.

Want to learn more?

A report is available at
gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications

The **Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education (MAPLE)** is a component of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

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