

AN EVALUATION OF MISSOURI'S A⁺ SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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Abstract

The A⁺ Schools Program was initiated to offer financial incentives to students to attend Missouri's public 2-year post-secondary schools. Under the program, the state government provides eligible students with college expenses, but only students in specially designated schools are eligible. It also promotes high school institutional change through the provision of grants to high schools. The program was initiated in 1997 and continues to be phased in gradually.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effects of the A⁺ Program on Missouri high schools and post-secondary institutions. The use of administrative data provided by the Missouri state government assures greater reliability of the measures of program participation and post-secondary school attendance than obtained in studies using survey data. Program impacts are based on difference-in-differences estimators using the high school as the unit of analysis. Outcome measures include high school dropout rates, college enrollment rates, average test performance, and grades of high school seniors.

The results suggest that high schools that initially have greater enrollments in 2-year colleges are more likely to participate in the program. Schools participating in the A⁺ program experience declines in dropout rates and A⁺ designation also increases the number of graduates who enroll in Missouri 2-year public colleges. This increase in enrollment in 2-year public colleges is the result of behavioral changes in two types of students: those who would not have gone to college at all and those who would have gone to other types of post-secondary institutions. Enrollment in 4-year public post-secondary institutions has decreased as a result of the program.