

The Role of Self-Discipline, Perseverance and Motivation in Reducing School Dropouts in France

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Location: France

Sample: 97 Middle Schools

Timeline:

2014 to 2019

Partners:

Énergie Jeunes

Non-cognitive skills, such as motivation, perseverance and self-discipline are increasingly considered to be at least as important as cognitive skills for educational attainment and labor market outcomes. Researchers are evaluating the impact of a series of class discussions in middle school that emphasize the importance of these skills, on student behavior, test scores, and dropout rates.

Policy Issue: Non-cognitive skills, such as motivation, perseverance and self-discipline are increasingly considered to be at least as important as cognitive skills for educational attainment and labor market outcomes. However, a child's early cognitive and non-cognitive development can be affected by family background and socioeconomic status. Children growing-up in low-income families, with less educated parents, often receive poor stimulation at home. They are more likely to fall behind in school and to drop out compared to their better-off peers. Investing in the development of non-cognitive skills at school could help close the attainment gap. Yet little evidence exists about the impact of policies that target students' non-cognitive skills on educational achievement.

Context of the Evaluation: Since 1981 the French government has been providing additional resources to schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods, known as Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire, to reduce class size and provide extra hours of teaching. However, a recent survey revealed that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with less educated parents or from immigrant descent, still tend to have lower academic performance.¹ To close this gap, the French government has encouraged non-profits such as Énergie Jeunes, the partner in this evaluation, to implement a range of programs in schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Details of the Intervention: Researchers partnered with Énergie Jeunes to measure the impact of the program *Exploiter tout son potentiel* ("Reaching your full potential") on student behavior, test-scores, and dropout rates. The program consists of three one-hour sessions per year over a period of four years. Workshops are facilitated by volunteer professionals and take place in the classroom during school hours.

Facilitators encourage students to adopt good study habits,

to work hard, and to find positive role models. During the first workshop the facilitators ask students to write down their goals in terms of adopting new study habits. Six weeks later, during the second workshop, they verify whether students have worked to accomplish their objectives.

From a sample of 97 volunteer middle-schools, researchers randomly assigned schools to one of two groups:

- In the first group of schools, the program was offered to all sixth grade classes in 2014, and will be offered to the same group of students for the following three years of middle school, until they complete ninth grade. The students entering sixth grade the following year will not receive the program throughout middle school.
- In the second group of schools, students entering sixth grade in 2014 will not receive the program during the four years of middle school, and constitute the comparison group for students who began receiving the program in 2014. In these schools, the program was provided to sixth grade students a year later, and will be offered to the same group of students for the following three years, until the end of middle school. These students will be compared with the corresponding cohort in the first group of schools.

Researchers will collect administrative and survey data on student study habits, behavior in class, grades, grade repetition, quality of life, academic self-esteem, schooling decisions at the end of middle school, and drop-out rates.

Results and Policy Lessons: Results forthcoming.

¹ OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing.

Related Papers Citations: *Algan, Yann, Adrien Bouguen, Axelle Charpentier, Coralie Chevallier, and Élise Huillery. "The Impact of a Large Scale Mindset Intervention on School Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from France." Working paper, April 2018.*

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