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NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April 2024

Good afternoon,

The [Second International Symposium on Research and Impact in Education](#), held in Puerto Rico last month, brought together researchers, implementing partners, and community members to share the evidence being generated on innovative education programs in the territory. The event highlighted the [Puerto Rico Department of Education \(PRDE\)](#)'s ongoing partnership with J-PAL North America to build and use evidence to inform education policy and help students learn.

We, Damarys Varela Vélez and Jeannine Ortiz Morales, along with our team, implement the innovative programs in Puerto Rico that are being studied by researchers in the J-PAL network. The school system in our territory has [faced many challenges](#) that have affected student learning, and conducting these evaluations has come with its own set of challenges. In the face of these challenges, strong research partnerships to evaluate new programs such as [ATEMA](#)—an evaluation on the impact of computer-assisted learning—and [ACEmoción](#)—a program that provides social emotional training for teachers—have provided important insights into our educational programs at this critical time.

This research partnership has succeeded due to constant communication and effective collaboration between the J-PAL team, the implementation team, the researchers, and the embedded research managers at PRDE who directly support these projects and relationships. Working with Spanish-speaking staff at J-PAL North America and researchers who hold a deep understanding of the Puerto Rican context have benefitted these evaluations tremendously. Gustavo Bobonis is Puerto Rican, which provides him with a strong understanding of the culture and social behavior of the government and people of Puerto Rico. Philip Oreopoulos is interested in working to improve the education sector in Puerto Rico and recognizes the unique, unitary system of our schools and the many people committed to excellence at PRDE.

As a former teacher, I (Damarys) am deeply familiar with the educator experience and bring this perspective to my work supporting evaluations to inform student learning. And I (Jeannine) also have a unique perspective as a former program participant of [EDUGESPRO](#)—a project evaluated by J-PAL researchers that supported the professional development of school principals—before joining PRDE's Institute for Professional Development. The professional learning experience provided a safe place that developed professional learning communities where participants exchanged insights, experiences, and challenges.

EDUGESPRO is one of the many innovative programs being evaluated in Puerto Rico that proposes new and creative strategies to improve educational outcomes.

We have a deep appreciation for the relationship that the PRDE has fostered with J-PAL North America over the many years of our partnership. We would also like to recognize the resilience of all teachers, school directors, and staff to support the 240,000 students in our education system. Through this strong partnership, we are generating rigorous evidence and are looking forward to continuing to build a culture of evidence-based policies to improve student outcomes.

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Generating evidence for educational outcomes in Puerto Rico through collaborative partnerships

In March, J-PAL North America participated in the Second International Symposium on Research and Impact in Education, hosted by the [Forward Society Lab](#) and the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE). The event brought together researchers, implementing partners, research centers, and community members to reflect on research partnerships and share results from the innovative educational programs being evaluated in Puerto

Rico. Read more about the event and PRDE's work to build and use evidence to inform education policy >>



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New results: The impact of medical debt on financial & health outcomes

A new [working paper](#) from researchers in the J-PAL network, Raymond Kluender (Harvard) and Neale Mahoney (Stanford), and their co-authors, Francis Wong and Wesley Yin, reports the findings of a randomized evaluation relieving medical debt. The researchers found that debt relief had no impact on the health or financial outcomes measured, including health care utilization, self-reported mental health, and spending. [Read more about the results and the broader policy context in the New York Times >>](#)



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Featured event on May 23: "Nurturing the Null"

On May 23 at 3:00 pm ET, the Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) will be hosting the next webinar in their "Evidence Matters" series titled Nurturing the Null: Learning from Unexpected Results to Improve Community Outcomes. The session will be co-hosted by J-PAL North America Co-Executive Director [Vincent Quan](#) and J-PAL North America's 2023 Evidence Champion Carrie Cihak of King County, Washington. [Register today >>](#)

FEATURED POLICY INSIGHT



Preventing crime and violence with behavior change techniques

A new [Policy Insight](#) summarizes evidence from eight experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of behavior change interventions designed to reduce criminalized and violent behaviors. It finds that

programs that address cognitive biases in decision-making have been effective in reducing criminalized acts and violence. These interventions may offer a high-potential, cost-effective alternative to more traditional security sector interventions.

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



Photo credit: J-PAL North America

Assessing viability and building relationships

Whether you work in government, program implementation, or research, building strong partnerships is key to conducting successful evaluations. Early discussions with partners interested in randomized evaluations serve to: (1) gather enough information to assess the practical and statistical feasibility of a randomized evaluation, and (2) establish strong working relationships with key stakeholders. [This resource](#) provides guidelines for researchers leading these early discussions with program implementers who have expressed interest in a randomized evaluation and with whom a partnership seems potentially viable.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[Paying Off People's Medical Debt Has Little Impact on Their Lives, Study Finds](#)
The New York Times

[What Researchers Discovered When They Sent 80,000 Fake Résumés to U.S. Jobs](#)
The New York Times

[How Do You Help Patients Who Show Up in the ER 100 Times a Year?](#)
Tradeoffs

[Improving vaccine messaging: Sarah Eichmeyer discusses ways to increase vaccine take-up rates](#)
American Economic Association Research Highlights Podcast

We're paying off medical debt wrong

The Hill

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