

Exploring the Impact of Student Teaching Apprenticeships on Student Achievement and Mentor Teachers

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Every year there are more than 125,000 student teachers who complete apprenticeships in K-12 public schools. These apprenticeships occur in the classrooms of inservice teachers, known as mentor or cooperating teachers. Does hosting teacher candidates affect student test performance, either during the apprenticeship or in the classrooms of mentor teachers after they host a student teacher? There is a good deal of speculation about this, but no published quantitative exploration of the impacts on students in the classrooms where student teaching has taken place.

The lack of information about how student teaching impacts K-12 students is problematic. States and localities make decisions about key aspects of student teaching that may influence whether there are positive or negative effects on students and the quality of the apprenticeship. While specific state-level requirements for mentor teachers are relatively rare, state laws occasionally mandate aspects of the field placements in which student teaching occurs, such as the diversity of the school in which student teaching occurs or the effectiveness or qualifications of the mentor teachers. Nevertheless, teacher education programs often have trouble finding student teacher placements for their candidates because of the perception that student teaching may be disruptive in ways that negatively impact students.

We explore the effects of hosting student teachers in grade 4-8 math and ELA classrooms on the achievement of students in the host classroom and for future students of the mentor teacher. In particular, we utilize a unique, longitudinal database of student teachers from 15 education programs that place student teachers in Washington State public schools to address three inter-related

questions: 1) Does hosting a student teacher have an impact on student achievement in the classrooms in which student teaching occurs?; 2) Does hosting a student teacher have an impact on student achievement in the classrooms of mentor teachers in years after student teaching occurs?; and 3) Do these effects vary according to the prior effectiveness of mentor teachers?

To answer these questions, we observe student performance of teachers before hosting a student teacher, while hosting a student teacher, and after hosting a student teacher. We find little evidence that hosting a student teacher helps or hurts student achievement during the year of student teaching, at least in grades 4-8 in math and reading. However, in subsequent years we find modest positive impacts on student math and reading achievement of having supervised a student teacher. We speculate that hosting a student teacher may help a mentor teacher refine their teaching through reflection and the process of helping a novice learn their craft. Regardless of the mechanism, the fact that future students benefit from the fact that their teacher had hosted a student teacher should encourage schools and districts to host more student teachers.

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