



SAMPLE MATERIAL: Overview of MSAP Rigorous Evaluation

Purpose:

You can use this PowerPoint® presentation to provide basic Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) rigorous evaluation information to stakeholders and staff. Doing so can elicit and address concerns and misconceptions about rigorous evaluation.

Note: This presentation was tailored for an audience of district administrators interested in accepting the invitational priority to conduct rigorous evaluation as part of the federal MSAP grant.

Source:

Excerpted from a PowerPoint® presentation by The Education Alliance at Brown University, during the Magnet Schools of America Conference, Washington, DC, February 2007.

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Rigorous Evaluation of MSAP Programs

Susan Saxon, A.M.
Deborah Collins, Ph.D.



THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

What is Rigorous Evaluation?



THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Rigorous Evaluation is **NOT**

- Scary
- Hard work for districts



THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Rigorous Evaluation **IS**

- A way to demonstrate how magnet schools contribute to overall district and educational health.
- Use of statistical methodology to isolate effects providing in-depth understanding of program impact
- A method in which *evaluators* work hard to understand unique district context and to analyze data

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

What Rigorous Evaluation can do

- Answer a large array of questions about program impact
- Provide information about students, student subpopulations, schools, school choice, comparison schools
- Help build capacity of district staff to ask more targeted questions, design more informative evaluations, and use findings to make program and policy changes

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

How Rigorous Evaluation Is Implemented

- In the MSAP rigorous evaluations, most evaluators use *existing* data (e.g., achievement data, demographic information, data collected as part of the “regular” evaluation).
- Evaluators work with district data managers to obtain “clean” data in a timely fashion and in a useable format.
- Evaluators work with district personnel to understand the unique district context (e.g., magnet program implementation, comparison schools, choice policies).

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Research Questions for Two Education Alliance Rigorous Evaluations

- Do students attending magnet schools make greater achievement gains than similar students attending conventional schools?
- What is the magnitude of any difference in achievement gains between magnet and non-magnet students?
- Do magnet schools produce greater achievement benefits for certain subpopulations of students?
- What is the relative impact of magnet school attendance when compared to other relevant factors influencing achievement?

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University


KEY: Up-front preparation by evaluators & good communication with districts' magnet teams

- Evaluators reviewed documents and visited districts to ensure that the evaluation team understood each district, its policies, and how student data were organized.
- It was critical for evaluators to understand districts' policies related to school choice and student assignment, how these policies played out at the school level, and implications for the research and sampling design.

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

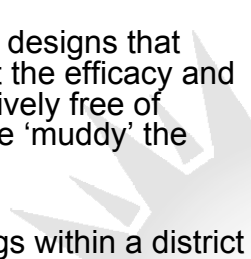
Research Design

A quasi-experimental longitudinal research design using propensity scoring to comprise student-level treatment and control groups.



THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Propensity Scores

- A statistical methodology that provides a way to match rigorously across groups based on a set of predetermined variables (e.g., ethnicity, gender, free/reduced lunch, special education, ELL, and prior state test score).
 - Controls for heterogeneity, resulting in designs that provide districts with information about the efficacy and impact of MSAP programs that is relatively free of extraneous factors that could otherwise 'muddy' the data.
 - Increases the generalizability of findings within a district
- 

Understanding Choice and Lottery Policies

- Schools from which to select comparison students were identified if:
 - They were not current magnet schools
 - They were not former magnets
 - They did not possess structural similarities to MSAP schools, such as choice or other themed programs that could in any way be construed as “magnet-like.”
- In 6 rigorous evaluations, lotteries were not appropriate to approximate random assignment because, for example, of the priority given to attendance zones or siblings.

Sampling

- A larger sample size means more reliable findings.
- In District 1, comparison students were identified from a pool of students drawn from 58 schools across the district.
- In District 2, comparison students were drawn from a pool of students drawn from 40 schools across the district.

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Findings

- When complete, these 3-year longitudinal rigorous evaluations will provide districts and the magnet community with information that may be used for data-driven decision-making and grant applications.
- These rigorous findings will provide new insights and contribute to the pioneering research now being conducted on magnet programs across the country.

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE at Brown University

Contact Info

The Education Alliance at Brown University
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 401-274-9548, 532

Fax: 401-421-7650

Web: www.alliance.brown.edu