

## Citation

Hanser, L., & Stasz, C. (1999). The effects of enrollment in the Transportation Career Academy Program on student outcomes. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (Unpublished).

## Highlights

- The study's objective was to examine the effects of enrolling in a Transportation Career Academy Program (TCAP) on students' academic outcomes.
- The authors used school district administrative records of students in the six high schools included in the evaluation in school year 1996–1997.
- TCAP students achieved higher grade point averages, earned more credits, and had higher attendance rates than students in general academic programs. Outcomes for TCAP students were not statistically significantly different, however, from those for magnet school students.
- The quality of causal evidence in this study is low because the authors did not adequately control for the academic achievement of students before they enrolled in TCAP. This means we are not confident that the results estimated in the study are attributable to TCAP; other factors are likely responsible.

## Features of the Transportation Career Academy Program (TCAP)

In the mid-1990s, the Los Angeles County Unified School District collaborated with the Los Angeles Community College District and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority to implement TCAP, a Career Academy that would introduce students to careers in the Los Angeles transportation industry. To implement TCAP, the district assigned a core team of teachers, administrators, and support staff to form learning communities in three high schools. Students in 9th and 10th grades identified as at risk of dropping out were invited to enroll. The curriculum included a survey course that served as an introduction to the transportation industry, industry-related electives, summer internships, industry mentors, and field trips. Each of the three TCAP programs was well established by the time of the evaluation.

## Features of the Study

The authors used administrative school district records to compare the outcomes of TCAP students in three high schools with two comparison groups drawn from the same three high schools and/or three similar schools in the same district: one comparison group included students enrolled in magnet programs in five of the six high schools, and the other comparison group was composed of general education track students in all six of the high schools. The authors controlled for race/ethnicity, gender, and pre-intervention test scores, which were available for about 40 percent of the sample. The outcomes of interest were attendance, grade point average, and credits attempted and earned.

## Findings

- TCAP students achieved higher grade point averages (2.1 versus 1.71), earned more credits (46.5 versus 38.0), had higher attendance rates (85.6 versus 79.9 percent), and were more likely to be on schedule toward graduation (85 versus 72 percent) than students in general academic programs.
- Outcomes for TCAP students were not statistically significantly different from those for magnet school students.
- The authors noted that pre-intervention baseline standardized achievement test scores were highest for the magnet school students, followed by the TCAP students, followed by the general education students.

## Considerations for Interpreting the Findings

The study authors attempted to control for students' pre-enrollment achievement, as measured by test scores, but these data were unavailable for more than half the study sample. For those for whom it was available, TCAP students had statistically significantly higher test scores than general education students. Therefore, it is likely that the estimates of TCAP's effects are attributable to the higher achievement of TCAP students, even before enrolling in TCAP.

## Causal Evidence Rating

The quality of causal evidence presented in this study is low because the authors did not adequately control for the academic achievement of students before they enrolled in TCAP. This means we are not confident that the results estimated in the study are attributable to TCAP; other factors are likely responsible.