



Research Week 2020

Exploring Oregon Kindergarten Assessment Scores: Can we identify and learn from schools beating the odds?

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Abstract

School Readiness (SR) is an important predictor of child health and academic success; however, low-income children enter kindergarten with lower SR than their more affluent peers. In 2018, over half of all Oregon kindergartners were living in poverty and performed below the state average on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (OKA).

Positive deviance (PD) is an approach that highlights uncommon practices that reduce risk in low-resource communities. We used a PD approach to analyze data from the 2018-2019 OKA to identify positive deviants, defined as schools serving a large percentage of low-income children who are excelling on the OKA.

Publicly-available 2018-2019 OKA data was used to identify "high-poverty" schools, defined as schools serving greater than 75% economically disadvantaged students (n=212 schools). High-poverty schools were ranked by average Approach to Learning (AL) score. The AL segment of the OKA is an observational assessment, referring to tasks such as following directions. Positive deviants were defined as high-poverty schools with AL scores in the top centile (n=21 schools).

In the 2018-2019 school year, 41,005 children entered kindergarten in Oregon and 704 schools reported AL scores. The weighted mean AL score among all schools was 3.6 (1.8-4.6, SD=0.3). Schools serving less than 25% economically disadvantaged (ED) children (n=88) had a weighted mean score of 3.7 (3.0-4.4, SD=0.3); schools serving greater than 75% ED children (n=212) had a weighted mean score of 3.5 (2.2-4.5, SD=0.3); PD schools (n=21) had a weighted mean score of 4.1 (4.0-4.5, SD=0.1).

Previous analyses have already shown gaps in SR between higher and lower income communities. Utilizing a PD approach, we identified 21 high-poverty schools that are beating the odds on the OKA. Ongoing research includes school locality, school type (public vs charter), and school size, as well as community descriptors and resource accessibility such as libraries or HeadStart programs.

