Initial elementary education findings from Promise Indiana’s Children’s savings account program

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ABSTRACT

The study conducts an initial examination of the associations between participation and saving in the Promise Indiana Children’s Savings Account (CSA) program and school administrative data on attendance and standardized math and reading scores. The primary research questions guiding this analysis are whether or not having a CSA is associated with lower absenteeism and/or higher reading and math scores and, for those who have a CSA, whether being a saver or the amount saved in the account is associated with better academic outcomes. Given the importance of family income to savings behaviors and academic achievement, analyses were conducted for the full sample as well as for the subsample of low-income students, defined by free/reduced lunch status. Among the low-income subsample, having a CSA is positively associated with both reading and math scores; this association is not found in the aggregate sample. The amount contributed to the CSA has a positive association with math and reading scores in the overall sample, but not with the scores of children receiving free/reduced lunch. Being a saver is associated with reading scores for both the overall and free/reduced lunch samples. Student attendance was not associated with any account variables. While more research is needed before policy conclusions can be drawn, these findings suggest that CSA programs may complement schools’ academic objectives. Further, this study adds to the literature on children’s assets by finding some differences in academic outcomes associated with different engagement with the CSA (e.g. account ownership and saving).

1. Introduction

Children’s Savings Accounts (CSA) are long-term, incentivized savings or investment accounts for postsecondary education (Elliott & Lewis, 2014). CSAs are typically established for children at birth or when they enter kindergarten and allowed to grow until children reach college age. Many CSA programs provide an initial seed deposit to catalyze asset accumulation and encourage family contributions. Family deposits are complemented by contributions from social networks and/or children themselves, as well as through features of the CSA program providing the account, including savings matches and incentives from public funds, community supporters, or philanthropic institutions. CSA programs represent long-range investments that do not come fully to fruition until a child reaches college age. In sharp contrast to the “just-in-time” approach of student loans and even most merit- and need-based grant aid, CSAs are designed not only to influence college access and affordability, but also to affect children’s outcomes throughout their lives, such that they are better-positioned for success in and following postsecondary education. In this study, we focus on CSAs’ potential to affect early education outcomes, specifically those in the primary elementary grades.

Given the long-term nature of CSA programs and the political and practical difficulties of waiting many years for educational investments to bear fruit, researchers and CSA champions alike have sought to identify early indicators that children’s assets are exerting effects on children’s progress toward postsecondary educational attainment. Elliott and Harrington [2016] made important contributions to the CSA literature base by connecting education research regarding predictors of postsecondary attainment to CSA research regarding assets’ effects on those predictors or their proxies. In this way, Elliott and Harrington [2016] attempt to identify interim measures for assessing CSA programs’ progress toward reaching the long-term goal of improved college attainment outcomes, before the point where those outcomes can be observed directly. Of course, other factors may intervene during the course of a child’s educational trajectory. Children’s achievement of any interim indicators of educational progress should not be taken as a guarantee of future attainment, nor should failure to meet these benchmarks be seen to preclude later achievement. As
Table 1  
Promise Indiana's CSA At-A-Glance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program elements</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Streamlined enrollment in CollegeChoice 529</td>
<td>● $25 initial seed deposit from Promise Indiana (mostly from philanthropic grants)</td>
<td>● Implemented in each community by a local team with support from Promise Indiana (including help with fundraising, materials, and strategy development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● College and career readiness activities, integrated into school day</td>
<td>● Up to $100 in additional match if children raise $25 from champions</td>
<td>Accounts held in CollegeChoice Direct 529, Indiana’s 529 plan (offered by Ascensus College Savings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Recruitment of community champions to support development of college-going culture</td>
<td>● Early scholarship disbursement into Promise Indiana accounts from the Wabash County Community Foundation, for students in that community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● $25 initial account seed</td>
<td>● Administrative support mostly in-kind from sponsoring organizations in each host community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Additional match, if children secure at least $25 in support from champions</td>
<td></td>
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Elliott and Harrington [2016] state, “Here, it is important to point out that interim metrics will not tell you whether a program is effective. Rather, they only convey whether the data is trending in a certain direction” (p. 5). Toward this aim, they identify, among other variables, math and reading achievement as potential interim measures for studying and evaluating CSA programs' effects on children's initial outcomes in K-12 education. As discussed below, there is evidence linking math and reading achievement to postsecondary educational attainment. Further, there is some existing evidence on the relationship between children's assets and math and reading achievement. However, until now, no data have been captured from actual CSA programs to test this relationship.

As context for this examination, in CSA programs such as Promise Indiana, in addition to owning a Child's Savings Account, children also partake in activities that may also have effects on educational expectations and achievement, such as college visits and college and career planning. This could create a problem for separating out the effects of having a CSA from participating in these other program components, which are not necessarily dependent on the provision of the Children's Savings Account. However, because Promise Indiana provides these other program components to all students regardless of whether they have an account or not, we are able to tease out the independent relationship that having a CSA has with children’s educational outcomes, distinct from participating in these other program components. In the following section we provide a description of the Promise Indiana CSA program intervention.

1.1. Promise Indiana CSA program overview

Promise Indiana is a community-driven Children’s Savings Account intervention designed to equip young children and their families with the financial resources, college-saver identities, community support, and savings behaviors associated with positive outcomes (see Table 1). Promise Indiana began in 2013 as the Wabash County Promise, the shared vision of the Wabash County YMCA and local school leaders in response to disparities in educational attainment, a perceived bias against higher education, and low participation in the state’s 529 college savings plan (CollegeChoice). The Promise Indiana model was informed by the YMCA’s experience helping individuals to change behaviors and conceived as part of its summer learning-loss prevention efforts, as a complement to other interventions in the educational progression of area children. Buoyed by strong interest from allies—local philanthropists, businesses, county and city leaders, educators—what is now Promise Indiana endeavored to activate not only families of young children but entire communities for the task of preparing children for college.

Today operating in 14 communities in both rural and urban Indiana counties, Promise Indiana’s goals include: (1) reinforcing parents' expectations for their children’s futures, (2) fostering a community-wide culture of saving, (3) incorporating college and career discovery into the school experience early, and (4) providing tangible resources to help families confront the challenge of financing higher education (see Elliott & Lewis, 2015). Promise Indiana's CSA includes a $25 seed deposit for all families in participating communities who open an Indiana CollegeChoice 529 account, as well as savings matches and additional ‘champion’ deposits that encourage family investment. As part of Promise Indiana, families receive assistance in opening CollegeChoice 529 accounts, including at kindergarten enrollment, with a simplified application, and, in some cases, acceptance of cash deposits onsite at children’s schools. In addition to the features associated with the accounts, all students in Promise Indiana, whether or not they have an account, participate in College Go Week activities in their classrooms, including curriculum for college and career discovery. The week culminates with the “Walk Into My Future” event, which is a dynamic experience on a nearby college campus, with age-appropriate hands-on activity stations led by students and faculty from a variety of departments designed to expose students to what one can study in college.

1.2. Why examine absences and math/reading scores?

Many CSA programs have the long-term goal of increasing college enrollment and college completion. However, they start as early as birth. Given this, there is need to identify interim metrics that can indicate whether these programs are on track or not Elliott and Harrington [2016] suggest that reading, math, and school absences may serve as potential interim metrics. However, to date, there is no direct evidence of whether or not CSA programs are correlated with school absences, reading, or math.

1.2.1. Absences

School absenteeism may be an important predictor of children's trajectory for academic success (Gottfried, 2010). There is evidence that excessive or chronic absences are associated with poorer school outcomes, findings consistent with the reasonable assumption that not attending in school to receive instruction will hinder children's ability to learn and progress academically. From kindergarten through high school, students who are frequently absent have lower achievement scores (Applied Survey Research, 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007), even controlling for factors that contribute to both absences and low achievement (Gottfried, 2011). These students have also been found to be overrepresented among those not graduating from high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Hickman, Bartholomew, & Mathwig, 2007), a crucial precursor to postsecondary attainment. Specifically, analysis has found gaps of 50 points on third-grade reading assessments and 76 points on third-grade math assessments between those with substantial absences in kindergarten/first
دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله
امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات