EDUCATION FINANCE AND POLICY

EFP Takeaways

Can Technology Transform Communication Between Schools, Teachers, and Parents? Evidence from a Randomized Field Trial

Background

With the rapid growth in education technology, schools are increasingly adopting new mobile applications (apps) in an effort to increase and streamline communication with families. Matthew Kraft and Alexander Bolves evaluate the effects of supplementing access to a mobile communication application with intensive implementation supports. They ask whether these supports increase the amount of effort school staff invest in communicating via the app and assess the return on this effort. Their work is published in vol. 17 issue 3 of *EFP*.

The Study

The authors explore the implementation of a new mobile communication app, SchoolCNXT, in a sample of 132 New York Public Schools. In exchange for participating in the study, schools received free access to SchoolCNXT for the 2016-2017 academic school year. The authors conducted a randomized control trial with a matched pair design. Treatment schools received intensive supports involving monthly e-mails, in-person visits, incentives for schoolwide use, and a full-time coordinator, while control schools had only a general technical support line and product email.

For more details:

- View the full issue.
- See the full article in *Education Finance and Policy*.
- Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*.
- Summary of:
  Kraft, M. & Bolves, A. (2022) Can Technology Transform Communication Between Schools, Teachers, and Parents? Evidence from a Randomized Field Trial. *Education Finance and Policy, 17 (3): 479-501.*

Findings

The authors found that providing free access to SchoolCNXT with only basic supports for the control schools resulted in, on average, relatively low levels of adoption of the new technology.

Providing intensive user supports to treatment schools and teachers lead to moderate increases in app usage, primarily driven by increases on the intensive margin, more than doubling the baseline rate of overall use. However, these increases in adoption and use in treatment schools did not measurably improve overall perceptions about the quality of communication among administrators, teachers, or parents.

The authors also examined the broader effects of providing free access to the SchoolCXNT app on the perceptions of teachers and parents, and student outcomes. They find that access to the app caused significant improvements in teachers' overall perceptions about teacher-parent communication quality but no effects on parents' perceptions of communication quality. They found no impacts on student achievement and student absenteeism.

From a policy perspective, the authors suggest that the findings provide a cautionary tale for those hoping "EdTech" solutions will be a silver bullet for persistent challenges in the education sector. The findings highlight the obstacles to promoting successful adoption of new education technology even with intensive user supports.