

Policing as Education Policy

A briefing on the initial impact of the Impact Schools program

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Introduction

This briefing summarizes key findings of a longer research paper analyzing the relationships among school attendance and other student behaviors, variable factors in school environments, and the initial implementation of the New York City Department of Education's (DOE's) Impact Schools program (Balmer, 2006).¹ The paper builds on other work done over the past two years by the Drum Major Institute and the Prison Moratorium Project with Capstone graduate students at the New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service (Angelova, 2006, June 5; Drum Major Institute, 2005).

Consistent with those initial critiques, we found significant environmental and demographic differences between schools that City Hall had designated as Impact Schools and those that were not involved in the project. Building on that work, our analysis documented that the decline in attendance from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 at the Impact Schools was significantly greater than the decline in attendance at a group of similar schools that had not been subjected to the Impact Schools intervention. This is an important finding in light of City Hall's justifying an arguably draconian policy by predicting that it would turn troubled schools into "safe environments for learning" (Office of the Mayor, 2004) where students are engaged and academically successful.

City Hall Creates Impact Schools

At a January 2004 press conference fronted by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, Mayor Bloomberg designated a dozen large schools as Impact Schools.² The Impact Schools program targeted New York City public

¹ *When the schoolhouse feels like a jailhouse: Relationships between attendance, school environment, and violence in New York City public schools.* Available at www.ncscatfordham.org.

² Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Canarsie High School, Christopher Columbus High School, Evander Childs High School, Far Rockaway High School, Franklin K. Lane High School, Jordan L. Mott Junior High School, Mario

schools with higher than average rates of reported police incidents, student suspensions, and safety-related transfers, and below average rates of attendance, when compared to citywide averages (Office of the Mayor, 2004; Drum Major Institute, 2005).³ In an Impact School, the number of police officers permanently assigned to the campus doubled. Any student caught carrying a weapon or causing serious bodily injury to another was immediately removed to an alternative school. A student with two suspensions on his record who then received an additional suspension was also removed to an alternative school (Office of the Mayor, 2004; Drum Major Institute, 2005). Though this policy purports to address the problem of crime in city schools, it broadly targets students who have been suspended, even though many behaviors that can lead to suspension under the DOE discipline policy are not inherently criminal or violent.

The Impact Schools, compared to citywide averages, had significantly:

- higher enrollments
- higher percentages of African-American students
- lower percentages of students performing at grade level in math
- lower average spending per student⁴

We found that the Impact Schools, compared to citywide averages, after just a semester in the program, had significantly:

- higher rates of suspensions
- higher rates of reported police incidents
- lower rates of attendance

Salvadori Middle School, Sheepshead Bay High School, South Shore High School, Thomas Jefferson High School, and Washington Irving High School. This analysis focuses on high schools.

³ However, rates of suspensions and police incidents can be misleading because they are the result of highly subjective administrative decisions made within the school. The DOE discipline policy generally allows a range of sanctions for any given offence. Therefore, a behavior that in one school may result in a suspension may carry a much lighter, or heavier, penalty in another.

⁴ *Equity or Exclusion*, an extended analysis by the National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC) released just prior to the imposition of the Impact School policy, also confirmed the relationship between various measures of student and adult behavior and the distribution of resources in the City's schools (Eskenazi, Eddins, and Beam, 2003).

Methodology

The National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC) used data from the DOE-issued 2003-2004 annual school reports for each high school.⁵ We examined environmental differences between the Impact Schools⁶ and most other New York City public high schools.⁷ Average enrollment and ethnic composition differed significantly between Impact Schools and most non-Impact schools and were strongly correlated with attendance rates.⁸

We then compared changes in school attendance rates between the 2002-2003 and the 2003-2004 school years at Impact Schools to changes over this period at ten similar schools that were not in the program.⁹ We matched each Impact School with a similar non-Impact school that otherwise resembled that Impact School in terms of total enrollment and racial composition, the two most salient characteristics identified in the broad comparison. This stage of our analysis also identified differences between the two categories of schools that were statistically significant (i.e., not random).

⁵ DOE released these reports in March 2005; they are available at the DOE website (<http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/SchoolReports/>). DOE bases the reports on data provided to the DOE by school principals and from the DOE central database. These data were provided to NCSC in spreadsheet form by Deinya Phenix.

⁶ For this study, we examined only high schools identified by DOE as Impact Schools in January 2004 and subjected to the Impact Schools program during the spring of 2004.

⁷ We excluded from our analysis schools having elementary (K-5) or middle (6-8) school grades combined with traditional high school grades (9-12); non-school educational programs, such as a GED or YABC program; alternative drop-out prevention schools; and specialized high schools requiring a competitive entrance exam. In fact, none of the Impact Schools met any of these criteria.

⁸ Throughout this report, *average* refers to the mean. *Significantly* refers to findings that were statistically significant at the .05 level, i.e., the finding has at least a 95 percent chance of being non-random.

⁹ The 2003-2004 annual school reports included data on the 2002-2003 attendance rates.

Findings

In addition to having significantly higher rates of suspension and police incidents and significantly lower attendance rates than most non-Impact schools, Impact Schools were significantly different from other city high schools in a number of ways.

Compared with most non-Impact high schools, the Impact schools had:

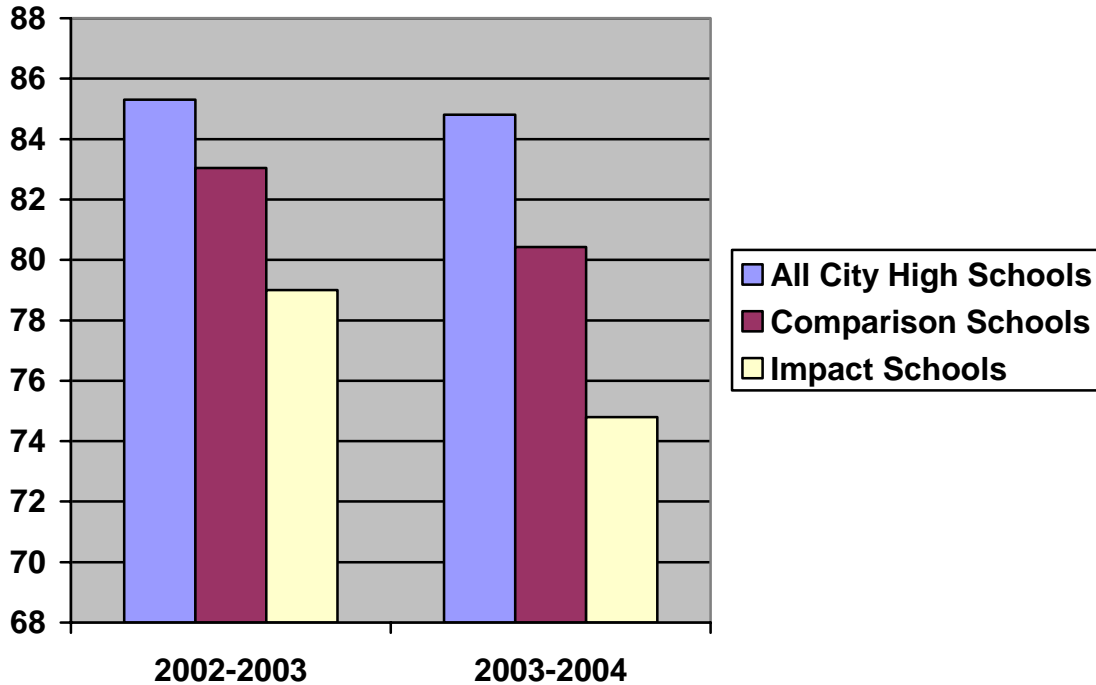
- total enrollments that were almost double
- higher percentages of African-American students
- lower percentages of white and Asian students
- lower per student spending,
- lower percentages of students who were performing on grade level in math

The Impact Schools program did not address the disparity between the schools regarding high student enrollment, shortage of resources, or concentration of high needs students, which research has correlated with increased rates of suspension and police incidents as well as with decreased attendance rates in New York City high schools (Eskenazi, Eddins, & Beam, 2003). Note also that, though the city received \$6.25 million from the United States Department of Justice to increase the number of police officers at the Impact Schools, Mayor Bloomberg stated that the remaining expenses of the intervention were funded by *shifting* resources. He did not comment, however, on whether this shifting occurred within the individual budgets of these already resource-poor schools or across the system at large (Office of the Mayor, 2004).

A NCSC study of Philadelphia public schools showed that when resources are unequally distributed, schools that received a smaller percentage of the various available resources have lower attendance rates than schools that received a higher percentage of the various available resources (Beam & Eddins, 2001). This study also found that attendance correlates statistically with students' performance on standardized testing.

Our examination of the DOE's data found that the Impact School program did not improve attendance rates, though the program's stated goal was to provide a better environment for learning. In fact, when we controlled for 2002-2003 attendance, average attendance at the Impact Schools for 2003-2004 – the year City Hall introduced the Impact School program – was still significantly lower than average 2003-2004 attendance at the comparison group of non-Impact schools. The Impact Schools attendance rate decreased 4.2 percent, from 79.0 to 74.8, while attendance at the non-Impact school comparison group decreased only 2.6 percent, from 83.04 to 80.43 (see Figure 1). This translates into students at Impact Schools attending school an average of 10.1 fewer days than students attending the comparison group of non-Impact schools.

Figure 1. Comparing decrease in attendance rates from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 at Impact Schools and non-Impact comparison schools.



The operating assumption of school/police partnerships such as the Impact Schools program is that disruptive behavior results from individual problem students rather than from a social environment that fosters maladaptive behavior (see for example: Noguera, 1995; Hyman and Perone, 1998; Casella, 2002). Punitive measures meant to discourage certain student behavior may not be the most effective method for improving student outcomes (Noguera, 1995; Hyman and Perone, 1998; Mayer and Leone, 1999; Casella, 2002) and may actually increase resistance and acting out by transforming the school into an unwelcoming place for students that heightens stress and chips away at students' dignity and self-esteem. Looking more specifically at the Impact Schools, the Capstone study suggested that the Impact School program might actually increase tension at the schools and that students might receive criminal records for

incidents that would have not been treated as criminal offenses at other schools (cited in Angelova, 2006, June 5).

Discussion

The DOE has reported that the rates of student suspensions and police incidents in the Impact Schools decreased since the Impact Schools intervention. Although the DOE reports declines as large as 59 percent for major crime incidents and 33 percent for all crime at the Impact Schools, the numbers on which these percentages are based are so low that even very small numerical decreases create large percentage changes (Office of the Mayor, 2006). For example, at Christopher Columbus High School behavior officially classed as violent crime decreased from 17 incidents during the 2004-2005 school year to 10 during the 2005-2006 school year, which represented a 41 percent decline on paper, but only a small decrease in actual incidents. Moreover, according to a paper educational analyst Deinya Phenix is preparing for presentation at the next national conference of the American Educational Research Association, the decline in crime figures at Impact Schools was not statistically significant compared to similar declines in other high schools (Phenix, 2006). According to Phenix, crime in schools has been declining since well before the Impact Schools program, and “every regression model indicates the most important factor in the decrease in school crime is the passage of time.”

We found that, during the initial implementation of the Impact Schools program covered by our analysis, the already low attendance of these Impact Schools significantly declined even more than in non-Impact comparison schools. Furthermore, Impact Schools continued to receive fewer resources compared both to citywide averages and to the non-Impact comparison group. Are students at the Impact Schools singled out for push-out to schools that amount to dead-end, last-chance holding facilities? Despite evidence that good school attendance is a strong correlate

of academic success, are Impact Schools students less likely to attend school now that there is an increased police presence on campus? Researchers would need (and welcome) access to up-to-date data as well as to affected students to explore these questions.

A recent public debate around expanding the use of some Impact Schools tactics to other schools, however, suggests the possibility of strong negative reaction from at least some of the public schools' constituency. A NCSC on-line straw poll of students, parents, and teachers from a variety of schools during the height of the recent controversy over cell phones confirmed that metal detectors and searches leave many young people and their parents with the impression that the City regards them as criminals instead of students. From a policy perspective, the numbers suggest that the public and policy makers alike should look more closely at the Impact Schools if the so-called success of the Impact Schools is based on keeping students away from school. Given the fact that the Impact Schools enroll significantly higher percentages of African American students than other New York City high schools, the Impact Schools program is sending a dangerous message about who the City is or is not willing to educate.

Additional tables and a reference list follow.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation for attendance, suspension, police incidents, and school environment measures for non-Impact high schools.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
School Environment Variables			
% attended the school for entire year	214	94.2	4.4
% Hispanic	215	42.2	23.3
% African American	215	39.7	25.0
% White and Asian	215	18.1	22.8
% male	215	48.3	11.6
% English Language Learners	213	13.5	17.3
% Special Education	180	11.8	7.3
% eligible for free lunch	213	64.4	21.9
% overage for grade	211	30.9	15.5
Total enrollment	215	1,229.6	1,248.8
Average spending per student	185	\$10,110	\$2,140
% of school capacity utilized	213	102.1	52.5
% reading at grade level	211	25.8	19.3
% on grade level for math	211	28.5	19.6
% taking SAT	154	35.5	12.1
% of teachers at school 2+ years	214	46.1	27.7
% of teachers 5+ yrs exp.	214	47.7	18.1
% of teachers with masters	214	74.4	11.8
Student/teacher ratio	213	18.1	3.2
Attendance, Suspension, and Crime Variables			
2003 attendance rate	187	85.3	5.8
2004 attendance rate	215	84.8	6.9
# suspensions per 1,000 students	194	73.9	77.8
# other crimes per 1,000 students	197	15.3	12.9
# non-criminal per 1,000 students	197	47.42	56.62
# property crimes per 1,000 students	197	1.80	1.72
# violent crimes per 1,000 students	197	3.32	3.66

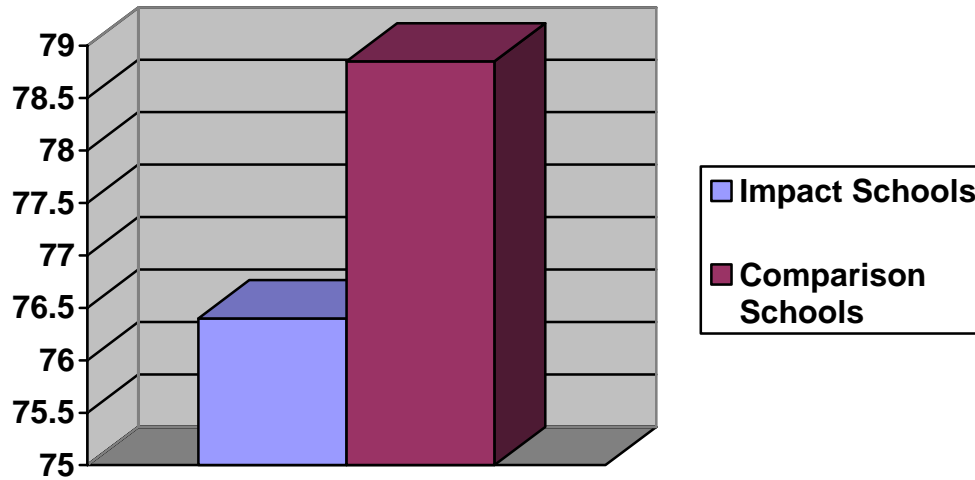
Table 2. Comparison of school environment measures and rates of attendance, suspension, and police incidents for Impact and non-Impact schools.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTIC	Impact Schools			Non-Impact Schools		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
% attended the school for entire year	10	92.2	2.7	204	94.3	4.4
% Hispanic	10	34.5	21.3	205	42.6	23.3
% African American*	10	56.7	23.2	205	38.8	24.8
% White and Asian*	10	8.8	7.7	205	18.6	23.2
% male	10	51.9	3.8	205	48.2	11.8
% English Language Learners	10	12.0	5.3	203	13.6	17.7
% Special Education	10	13.1	2.8	170	11.7	7.4
% eligible for free lunch	10	58.7	21.6	203	64.7	21.0
% overage for grade	10	38.8	6.5	201	30.5	15.7
Total enrollment**	10	2,864.0	789.1	205	1,149.8	1,212.9
Average spending*	10	\$8,886	\$962	175	\$10,180	\$2,169
% of capacity utilized	10	117.1	32.4	203	101.3	53.3
% reading at grade level	10	17.6	8.9	201	26.2	19.6
% on grade level for math**	10	16.8	7.7	201	29.1	19.8
% taking SAT	10	28.7	8.0	144	36.0	12.2
% of teachers at school 2+ yrs	10	54.7	19.1	204	45.7	28.0

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTIC	Impact Schools			Non-Impact Schools		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
% of teachers with 5+ yrs exp.*	10	54.6	7.3	204	47.4	18.4
% of teachers with masters	10	75.7	6.7	204	74.3	12.0
Student/teacher ratio	10	19.9	2.2	203	18.0	3.2
# suspension per 1,000 students	10	100.0	50.8	184	72.5	78.9
# other crimes per 1,000 students**	10	35.7	12.5	187	14.2	12.1
# non-criminal per 1,000 students**	10	165.0	38.4	187	41.1	50.2
# property crimes per 1,000 students	10	2.5	1.5	187	1.8	1.7
# violent crimes per 1,000 students**	10	10.9	4.4	187	2.9	3.2
2002-03 Pre-Impact attendance rate**	10	79.0	4.3	177	85.7	5.7
2003-04 Post-Impact attendance rate**	10	74.8	3.6	205	85.2	6.7

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 3. Mean 2003-2004 Attendance Rates Controlling for 2002-2003 Attendance at Impact and Non-Impact Comparison Schools.



$p < .05$, SE = .71

Resources

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