

Using Promotion Power to Identify the Effectiveness of Public High Schools in the District of Columbia

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) in the District of Columbia (DC) sought high school accountability measures that fairly assess each school’s contribution to student outcomes. Currently, OSSE’s high school accountability system, like others across the country, uses measures such as proficiency rate and graduation rate to assess outcomes. Yet these status measures could penalize schools that serve students who are less prepared when they enter high school.

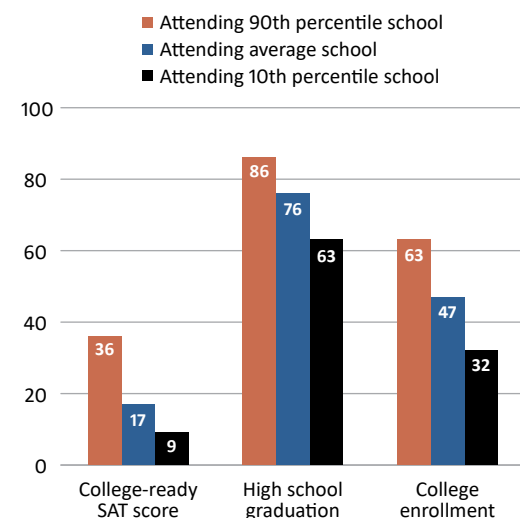
This study explored promotion power, a measure of a school’s effectiveness that separates a school’s contributions to student outcomes from the contributions of the background characteristics of the students it serves. Focusing on schools’ power to promote college- and career-ready SAT scores, high school graduation, and college enrollment, the study team constructed promotion power scores for 36 traditional public and charter high schools in DC. Promotion power accounted for test scores and other student characteristics as of grade 8.

Key findings

- **Public high schools in the District of Columbia varied in their power to promote student outcomes.** For example, the model predicts that students who attend a high promotion power school (90th percentile) are 10 percentage points more likely to graduate than similar students who attend an average school (86 percent compared with 76 percent; see figure). Promotion power shows promise for distinguishing differences in high school effectiveness.
- **Schools with high promotion power for high school graduation were also more likely to have high promotion power for college enrollment.** Even so, some schools appear better at promoting one outcome over others. For this reason school accountability systems that use promotion power should include multiple outcomes to identify several important dimensions of a school’s effectiveness.
- **Student background characteristics were less strongly related to promotion power scores than to status measures such as high school graduation rate and college enrollment rate.** The relationship between students’ grade 8 achievement and schools’ promotion power is weaker than the relationship between students’ grade 8 achievement and schools’ status measures. As a result, promotion power scores are less likely than status measures to penalize schools that serve students who are less prepared or otherwise disadvantaged.

Students attending high schools with high promotion power are expected to have better outcomes than similar students attending schools with average or low promotion power

Probability that an average District of Columbia student will achieve the outcome (percent)



Note: Each set of bars represents different schools. It is unlikely that the same schools would be at the average, 90th, or 10th percentile for all promotion power outcomes.

Source: Authors’ analysis of data from the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education.