

HAITI: Can Non-Public Schools Fill the Gap for Poor Children?

Worldwide, some 57 million primary school age children don't have the chance to go to school. Many factors hold these children back: poverty, poor health and overcrowded or faraway facilities.

ous issues before implementing such approaches, from how to reach the target population to how to ensure schools maintain quality standards, among other things.



The problem is most acute in Sub-Saharan Africa, where some 30 million primary school age children aren't enrolled, but many countries in other regions are also still struggling to reach universal primary school

The World Bank has been working with countries to meet universal primary school enrollment, one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals that missed the 2015 target deadline. In Haiti, where the overwhelming majority of primary schools are non-public, fee-charging schools, the World Bank and other donors helped the government launch the Tuition Waiver Program to improve enrollment. This program gives schools a per student subsidy for new first grade students, requiring that the school not charge these students tuition. The subsidy continues through sixth grade. An impact evaluation found that the program is helping families educate their children for free, while the number of children who have to repeat grades has dropped. **As the Government of Haiti continues to develop its strategy to ensure all children get a primary school education, the impact evaluation results are helping development experts and policymakers understand the potentials and limits of such public-private partnerships.**

enrollment. In some places, education experts and policymakers are looking to low-cost private schools—whether run by private providers, faith-based groups or non-governmental organizations—to educate more children, especially where the public system is unable to do so. In order to make private schools accessible, governments usually set a per student subsidy that is supposed to cover tuition. In turn, schools agree not to charge fees to families. Development experts and policymakers have to consider numer-

EDUCATION

Context

Haiti's school system is dominated by the non-public (also called private) sector, whether for-profit, faith-based or run by another non-governmental group. In the school census just over a decade ago, more than 90 percent of all primary schools were non-public schools, enrolling more than 80 percent of all primary school children. The majority of these schools weren't free. The average cost, about \$80 a year before books, uniforms and transportation, put basic education out of reach for many children. A survey a few years later showed that around half of all Haitian children of primary school age weren't in primary school, while those in schools were much older than they should have been, due in part to families cycling their children in and out, depending on finances.

In 2006, the Government of Haiti and the World Bank developed a program to improve school enrollment by giving fee-charging schools subsidies to cover the costs for poor students. The decision to turn to these schools made sense: If Haiti was to reach universal education, it couldn't very well do so without the help of 90 percent of the schools. The private schools generally weren't as crowded as public schools, and had more flexibility to respond to an increase in demand. Under the program, tuition subsidies covered new students aged six to eight who entered first grade for the first time. The subsidies would continue through sixth grade and each subsequent group of first graders would qualify for the same subsidy.

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In order to target schools that served poor students, the subsidy was set at \$90 a year, slightly above the average tuition fee at the time. By setting the tuition at this level, schools charging higher fees and catering to wealthier students would

self-select out of the program. The program was launched in 2007 in two parts of the country and then further expanded in the 2008-2009 school year. Currently, the program covers over 200,000 students in more than 1,100 schools.

Evaluation

When the program was expanded to five additional “departments” for the 2008-2009 school year, financing was limited and not every school could be included. The Government and the World Bank agreed that the fairest way of selecting the 547 schools from the 1,034 eligible schools was through random selection. The sample was then further divided so that at least one school was picked in each commune (Haiti is divided into 10 administrative departments and each department is subdivided into communes.) This helped further target the program to rural areas.

Researchers used the 2011-2012 school census and the 2002-2003 school census to match the original applicant schools for the evaluation. They identified 64 percent of initial applicants in the 2011-2012 census and then 55 percent of those were identified in the first census. Because baseline data wasn’t collected when the program was rolled out, researchers used the 2002-2003 census as the proxy baseline. The schools were observationally equivalent at baseline, when considering things like infrastructure, teaching materials, staffing and number of students.

Results

Enrollment rose in schools that received the tuition subsidies...

The number of students in first through fourth grade increased, on average, by 88 students across the four grades, when compared with schools that weren’t in the program. This increase reflected students who started with the program in first grade and were now in fourth grade (and still receiving tuition waivers), and the newer students who had since started school under the same tuition waiver program. The figures were collected for the 2011–2012 period. However, the evaluation couldn’t measure what percentage of these additional students would have otherwise attended a public school or would have paid if necessary for private school.

When all six grades were looked at over time between the census of 2002–2003 and the census of 201–2012, there was a small dip in enrollment in the control schools—on aver-

age, these schools lost about 16 students, while schools that received the subsidy gained an average of 78 students. The figures indicate that some students may have switched to the subsidized schools because of the free tuition. The large increase in enrollment may show that the program is bringing in children who wouldn’t otherwise be in school, but the evaluation can’t pinpoint whether the increase is because of that or because students are switching from fee-paying schools.

...and there was a drop in the percentage of students who were older than they should have been for their grade.

The free tuition reduced the financial burden of schooling on families, which may have made it possible for them to keep children in school more consistently. In Haiti, families who have trouble paying school fees will often delay

sending kids to school, and then move kids in and out of school, depending on what they can afford at the time. This means that enrolled children are often older than they should be for the grade they're in, because when they return to school they will return to the grade they dropped out of or missed. Similarly, children are often made to repeat a grade, because of insufficient attendance during the year.

In schools that qualified for the tuition subsidies, the percentage of students who were two or more years older than the age for their grade dropped by 10 percentage points. Interestingly, this decline was seen even among fifth and sixth grade students, who didn't qualify for the subsidies because they were already in school when the program started. Researchers also suggested that schools in the program may have changed their policies to get more children into school at the right age.

Most of the schools that qualified for the tuition waiver program were open and educating students three year later.

Based on the later census, 76 percent of schools that had been picked to participate in the program three years earlier were still open. The schools that weren't eligible for tuition waivers were harder to track. Fifty percent were located through the census, while the others couldn't be found. They may have shut down, or they may have moved or changed names, as is common among fee-paying, non-religious schools in Haiti. In either case, it's possible that the ability to rely on regular tuition payments—the subsidies the government provided, starting with that year's first grade class—helped schools in the program plan for the future and maintain operations under the same name and in the same location.

Schools were also able to meet most of the program rules related to class size, permits and available textbooks.

The goal of the program was to get more students in primary school without ending up with overcrowded classes where children couldn't learn. In addition to keeping classes to a maximum of 45 students, schools had to give students at least three school textbooks, and they couldn't have more than two classes per grade that accepted subsidized students in order to keep program costs in control and spread access across schools.

Most schools were able to meet at least some of the requirements, but those that didn't weren't forced out of

the program, because the government didn't have the capacity to enforce the rules. Almost all of the participating schools don't charge parents any fees, keep class sizes under 45 students, and have a functioning school committee. However, some schools fail to meet at least one of the program's rules. For example, they provide fewer than the required three textbooks per student, they fail to make physical improvements in schools, or they don't maintain detailed accounting records.



One concern was that schools would overcrowd the classrooms to get more money but instead, schools responded to increased enrollment by hiring more teachers, so class size stayed about the same.

In participating schools, class sizes stayed about the same even though total enrollment increased, as schools responded by hiring on average one more teacher. In schools that didn't receive tuition subsidies, relatively small declines in enrollment caused class size to drop. So three years into the program participating schools had an average of eight more students per class than in control schools, but still below the maximum of 45 students per teacher set by the program.

The program likely has contributed to the increase in Haiti's national enrollment rate over the past decade or so.

Before the program started, national net primary school enrollment (which refers to the number of students who are enrolled and are at the right age for primary school) in Haiti was around 50 to 60 percent for children who were of primary school age. Five years into the program in 2012, the enrollment rose to 70 to 80 percent.

Conclusion

As we get closer to universal primary education, it becomes increasingly harder to reach those last kids still out of school. Creative approaches are going to be needed to succeed in bringing everyone in. Haiti's unusual educational landscape—where very few schools are state-run—required figuring out a way to work with the non-public sector. The decision to offer tuition subsidies allowed the government to build on an already existing network of schools, rather than building a parallel supply structure. This is something that may be applicable to countries where the state school system is very weak or schools have been decimated in conflicts and weather shocks. Funding non-state schools through targeted tuition subsidies can make education more accessible to the poor, and tying the money to standards can ensure that students have the opportunity to learn.

However, tuition waivers alone may not be enough to get all primary school aged children in class. For poor families, the additional costs associated with schooling, including uniforms and transport, as well as opportunity cost in the form of lost labor, may be sufficiently high to keep them

from sending their kids to school even when it is otherwise “free”. In addition, many communities, particularly in rural areas, may not have a school within a reasonable distance. A range of approaches may be needed to directly address these barriers, including building new schools or cash subsidies paid directly to families. At the same time, enforcement of school standards is necessary to ensure that going to school leads to learning. The program in Haiti is clearly helping families educate their younger children for free, which can reduce the financial burden and allow them to spend money to keep their older children in school too. More evaluations are needed to collect evidence on the impact of these programs on schools that don't receive subsidies and to understand how to fine-tune these programs to improve access and quality at the same time.

“Only when we have succeeded in seating all the children of this country on school benches will we be in a position to offer all Haitians . . . the same chance at building a future with respect and dignity.”
President Michel Martelly, August 2014 Haiti Libre newspaper

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1818 H STREET, NW WASHINGTON, DC 20433

Produced by the Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund
Series Editor and Writer: Aliza Marcus