

Office of Evaluation
and Oversight

**Comments on Martinez and
Dinkelman “Investing in (secondary)
schooling in Chile”**

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Preliminaries

- **IEN and the Importance of Impact Evaluation in LAC**
- **IADB Office of Evaluation and Oversight Support**



Contributions of Martinez and Dinkelman

- **Novel work in a growing literature that identifies information and cognitive failures' role in shaping behavior. Literature particularly relevant for education policy.**
- **Paper provides evidence that information on the benefits of effort in school, delivered in the form of a motivational DVD to first year high school children, can alter perceptions regarding college attendance and how to finance it.**
- **Paper provides evidence that these changes in perceptions, in the short run (2-3 months), translate in changes in behavior by students, through increased effort in school, as measured by school attendance.**
- **Paper provides evidence that delivering this information through the classroom or through "take home" DVD has essentially the same effect.**
- **Paper provides a robust evaluation strategy, which is probably necessary in order to establish the credibility of the program.**

“Economic” importance of estimates

- Although the paper does not presume that a 15 minute DVD will actually impact longer-term behavior, it provides evidence of an impact on the order of 3-4 percentage point reduction in absenteeism.
- This is important given the difficulty of public policy in general to effect changes on student effort.
- For example, in a recent cross section estimate, a one year increase in mother’s education was associated with a 1.5 percentage point decrease in absenteeism. A one standard deviation increase in household income was associated with a 4 percentage point decrease in absenteeism. In this context, the estimated parameters of the program are quite significant.
- Also important given the ease of scaling-up program.

But what are we measuring

- **The intervention consists of both a motivational intervention and an informational intervention, and it does not separate the impact of each.**
- **Given the magnitude of existing motivational messages in public policy (e.g. importance of staying in school), one could argue that what is really important is the information, because this is the novel part of what the DVD contains.**

Sham-Controlled Randomized Trial?

- **Anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a treatment effect on attendance that is simply associated with having been selected to participate in the program (placebo); design cannot separate this from the informational/motivational impact.**
- **One possibility is to use a Sham-Controlled Randomized Trial, whereby a control group which is shown a pedagogical DVD which is does not contain a message on the importance of school effort or attendance is distributed to control children.**
- **Example of recent application in the evaluation of the impact of acupuncture on medical outcomes in patients with low back pain (Journal of Alternative Medicine, 2010).**

Some contradictory evidence on attendance

- **Another issue is the measurement of attendance. Paper presents three measures, and mentions a fourth. All provide different results:**
 - Self-reported children: 3-4 pp. reduction in absenteeism;
 - Self-reported parent: no effect;
 - Administrative records: higher effect;
 - Actual measurement by survey: no effect.
- **This does not provide conclusive evidence of an impact on attendance.**
- **Paper properly explains issues with parent's reporting, but the absence of an effect on actual measured enrollment is an issue. Authors say that students may have had some knowledge in advance that the follow-up survey was being administered, and therefore this could impact the measurement of attendance at the 3-month interview. However, presumably this would have been true of controls also; and if not, it would have biased the estimator upward.**

Conclusion

- **Important contribution to the literature on information and behavior in education;**
- **Robust evaluation design;**
- **Would benefit from a complete reporting on attendance;**
- **Might benefit from a Sham-controlled approach;**
- **Important for paper to recognize that it does not presume that a DVD would actually impact transitions from school to higher education. Rather, that it is testing the short-run cognitive-behavioral impact of the delivery of additional information in a motivational format.**