

Can Outsourcing Improve Liberia's schools? Preliminary RCT results

By Mauricio Romero, Justin Sandefur and Wayne Aaron Sandholtz

Last summer, the Liberian government delegated management of 93 public elementary schools to eight different private contractors. Given the intense controversy around the program, the government—with some encouragement from our colleagues at Ark Education Partnership Group, who helped manage the program—agreed to randomize the allocation of schools during the pilot, and the three of us partnered with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) to evaluate its impacts. One year later, we have the first preliminary results from the randomized control trial, which we presented to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her cabinet last week.

To save you a click, here's the lede from the joint IPA and Center for Global Development [policy brief](#):

After one year, public schools managed by private operators raised student learning by 60 percent compared to standard public schools. But costs were high, performance varied across operators, and contracts authorized the largest operator to push excess pupils and under-performing teachers into other government schools.

Here's the full [working paper](#).

We look forward to feedback on the paper, and please stay tuned for a more academic write-up of these results in the coming months—covering what we think they mean for the broader debate on aid in fragile states, school management, and charter schools.

In the meantime, Liberia is holding presidential elections next month. President Sirleaf and Education Minister George K. Werner championed both this project and the idea of a rigorous, independent evaluation. But it will fall in part to a new government to weigh the pros and cons highlighted in the evaluation their predecessors started. If the program continues, we hope to follow these schools and students through the full three years of the pilot, ending in the summer of 2019.

September 07, 2017