

CONTACT:

Naush Boghossian (818) 209-2787 Larson Communications
Jonah E. Rockoff (212) 854-9799 Columbia University

EMBARGOED RELEASE

STUDY FINDS STUDENTS IN K-8 SCHOOLS DO BETTER THAN STUDENTS IN STAND-ALONE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Comprehensive analysis of 10 years of data from New York City shows middle-school students experience substantial achievement decline compared to K-8 peers

Cambridge, MA — A new study that analyzes New York City public schools' achievement data reveals that test scores of students who enter stand-alone middle schools experience significant drops in their math and English scores on standardized tests compared to their K-8 counterparts. The study, authored by Jonah Rockoff and Benjamin Lockwood, economists from Columbia University, is available today on www.EducationNext.org. The data also reveal that this achievement gap widens throughout the middle-school years.

The *Education Next* research article "*How and Why Middle Schools Harm Student Achievement*," featured in the Fall 2010 issue of *Education Next*, finds that the steep drop-off in middle-school students' academic achievement may be linked to the larger number of students in each grade level but cannot be explained by differences in per-pupil spending or class size, which were similar in middle and K-8 schools. They also found that student absence rates increased in stand-alone middle schools, which could also contribute to the achievement gap between these students and their K-8 peers.

"Our evidence shows clearly that middle schools are not the best way to educate students, at least in places like New York City," Rockoff said. "It raises the question—should we eliminate stand-alone middle schools altogether?"

The study looked at 10 years of data made available for New York City school children. The authors followed students who entered 3rd grade between the fall of 1998 and the fall of 2002 for six years, until most had completed the 8th grade.

"When students move to a middle school, their academic achievement falls substantially relative to that of their counterparts who continue to attend a K-8 school," observed Lockwood. "What's more, their achievement continues to decline throughout middle school, setting students up for unnecessary long-term disadvantages."

The analysis revealed that the decline in achievement is roughly 20 to 25 percent of the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students in New York City. Students continue to fall behind through the middle school years, and the outcome is even worse for those students who began middle school at the lower end of the performance spectrum.

Rockoff and Lockwood also examined survey data on New York City parents whose children attended both types of schools and found that parents whose children attend K-8 public schools rated their schools higher on education quality, academic rigor and school safety compared to parents whose children attend stand-alone middle schools.

About the Authors

Jonah E. Rockoff is associate professor of business at the Columbia Graduate School of Business. Benjamin B. Lockwood is research coordinator at the Paul Milstein Center for Real Estate at the Columbia Graduate School of Business.

About Education Next

Education Next is a scholarly journal published by the Hoover Institution, and online by Harvard University, that is committed to looking at hard facts about school reform. Other sponsoring institutions are the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. The journal's website is www.educationnext.org.

###