

Summer job makes a difference in classroom learning, scholar says

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The researchers found that participation in a summer jobs program had a positive effect on a test used to measure academic progress in high school.

A summer job can help boost academic performance in the classroom, a Stanford researcher says.

Moreover, working jobs over the course of multiple summers helps [high school](#) and college students even more, according to the new study by Stanford's Jacob Leos-Urbel, associate director of Stanford's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities.

As Leos-Urbel wrote, holding a summer job is a rite of passage in American teenhood, often viewed as a big step toward adult independence and maturity. But it is not always easy to find such work – unemployment rates for youth jumped to historical highs after the recession of 2008 and have only recently begun to recover, he noted.

"Summer youth employment has the potential to benefit [high school students' educational outcomes](#) and employment trajectories, especially for low-income youth," he wrote with co-authors Amy Ellen Schwartz, a New York University professor, and Matthew Wiswall, an associate professor of economics at Arizona State University.

Dividends beyond the paycheck

For their study, the researchers examined data from nearly 200,000 applicants to New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides jobs to youth ages 14 to 24. They matched this data with educational records from New York City's education department. Due to a high demand for [summer jobs](#), positions were given out through a random lottery system.

Leos-Urbel and his colleagues found that participation in the summer jobs program had a "positive, albeit small, effect" on taking and passing the standardized tests administered by New York state to measure academic progress in high school. Specifically, a greater number of students working summer jobs attempted to take those exams – and when they did, they performed a bit better than those who did not work summer jobs.

"Our research showed that a summer youth employment program has positive and significant effects on academic outcomes, as well. Because participation is determined by a random lottery, we can conclude that the program in fact caused these improvements," Leos-Urbel said.

Also, the academic improvements were considerably larger for students who took part in the jobs program over the course of multiple summers, he said.

Jobs encourage better thinking

In an interview, Leos-Urbel said that prior research shows that adolescent employment can foster noncognitive skills like time management, perseverance and self-confidence.

He said his most recent findings suggest that summer youth employment programs may be a bargain in terms of value or money spent. Many cities across the country offer publicly funded summer youth employment programs.

"These programs are relatively inexpensive, with the primary cost being wages paid to youth, who are predominantly low-income," he said.

The benefits of these [jobs](#) extend well beyond the summer, and influence educational outcomes over the long run, Leos-Urbel added.

"Policymakers may want to ensure that youth have employment opportunities for multiple summers, as this is where we see the greatest educational benefits," he said.

More information: "Making Summer Matter: The Impact of Youth Employment on Academic Performance." NBER Working Paper No. 21470. [DOI: 10.3386/w21470](https://doi.org/10.3386/w21470)

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