

What rigorous evidence has to say about summer youth employment programs

May 24 2022



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Ages 14 through 24 are marked by critical transitions as youth begin to make decisions about the future. Early employment is one type of formative experience that can have significant benefits for youths' trajectory into adulthood: In their first one or two jobs, youth can start to develop connections to employers, a work history, and soft skills that can be used in multiple areas of their lives. Unfortunately, [employment data](#)

have shown that the likelihood of youth and young-adult unemployment typically increases as household income decreases.

Over the past decade, federal and local policymakers have become increasingly focused on using summer [youth employment](#) programs (SYEPs) to help address high unemployment rates among youth, especially those from low-income backgrounds who face higher barriers to employment. SYEPs are municipal programs that provide qualifying youth, often from [low-income families](#), with a paid, part-time job during the [summer months](#). Participants may also receive mentorship, life skills training, or other supporting services. SYEPs have had particular appeal because of their perceived ability to meet multiple policy goals at the same time, including providing participants with a constructive way to spend free time while out of school that deters them from riskier behavior and supports healthy youth development. In fact, researchers have observed that some of the participant outcomes that SYEPs most consistently affect are related to criminal justice involvement.

Julia Breitman, assistant commissioner for youth workforce development at the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, shares about the importance of research in ensuring the city's SYEP best serves New York's young people: "Working closely with our research partners has allowed us to understand where the program is making the most impact, knowledge that is critical when public funds are limited. Long-term studies have shown us what industries lead to higher earning potential and educational gains, and what groups of young people benefit most from our programs. Research has helped us focus funds on at-risk populations, shape our programming, and finally make the case for necessary program expansion."

In a new publication, "The Promises of Summer Youth Employment Programs: Lessons from randomized evaluations," J-PAL North

America summarizes 13 [academic papers](#) covering randomized evaluations of summer youth employment programs in four major U.S. cities: Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Findings across these studies confirm that there are diverse benefits to summer youth employment:

- SYEPs provide employment to and boost earnings for youth who may otherwise have difficulty finding a summer job. SYEPs disproportionately serve youth from low-income households or who identify as Black or Hispanic, groups that typically face higher-than-average barriers to entering the labor market.
- SYEPs consistently reduce involvement in the criminal justice system for participating youth. Researchers have found reductions in rates of arrest, arraignment, conviction, and/or incarceration, with evidence pointing to effects that occurred both during the program and at least a year beyond. Youth at greater risk of experiencing socially costly outcomes such as involvement with the criminal justice system experienced the greatest effects.
- The evidence on SYEPs' role in improving educational outcomes is mixed. On average, in the studies that showed positive effects on academic outcomes, those who benefited were youth of legal dropout age and youth with a higher rate of school absences prior to program participation.
- There is promising evidence that SYEPs have positive effects on a range of youth development outcomes including social-emotional skills, academic and career aspirations, and work habits associated with job readiness.

This [evidence review](#) is meant to serve as a resource to policymakers seeking evidence-based ways to serve youth in their communities. It examines the effects of SYEPs on a wide range of outcomes and indicates where particular populations of participating youth may

experience the most benefits. In addition to summarizing policy implications from the existing evidence base, the review also outlines key open questions on different program model components, strategies to establish longer-term employment outcomes, and the impact of repeated participation in SYEPs for youth. Future research in these areas can help continue to inform policymakers about how to structure SYEPs most effectively.

More information: [The Promises of Summer Youth Employment Programs: Lessons from randomized evaluations](#)

This story is republished courtesy of MIT News (web.mit.edu/newsoffice/), a popular site that covers news about MIT research, innovation and teaching.

Provided by Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Citation: What rigorous evidence has to say about summer youth employment programs (2022, May 24) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-05-rigorous-evidence-summer-youth-employment.html>

| |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|