

**The Quantum Opportunity Program Demonstration:
Final Impacts**

Summary and Implications*

Background

From July 1995 through September 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor and the Ford Foundation operated a demonstration — the Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP) -- designed to help at-risk high-school-age youth obtain the education and training needed for success in the labor market. At the beginning of ninth grade, youth were teamed in small groups with an adult mentor charged with helping them stay in school and guiding them towards a career path after high school. The program included intensive case management that emphasized after-school supplemental academic education, personal developmental activities, and volunteer service to one's community. Services were provided throughout the high school years. The demonstration operated in affiliation with eleven high schools located in seven cities nationwide: Memphis, TN; Philadelphia, PA; Washington, DC; Cleveland, OH; Houston, TX; Ft. Worth, TX; and Yakima, WA.

The primary objectives of the demonstration were to increase the likelihood of high school completion and the likelihood of enrollment in postsecondary education or training. Its secondary objectives were to increase academic achievement while in high school and to reduce risky behaviors such as teen pregnancy and drug usage. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. conducted an implementation analysis of the demonstration and an evaluation of the demonstration's net impact with respect to these objectives. Previous reports assessed the implementation, short-term impacts, and early post-intervention impacts.

Previous Findings

1. QOP was not designed to influence the structure, policies, or operation of the respective high schools. This lack of influence might help explain the impacts on education-related outcomes (described below).
2. All sites underestimated the youths' need for supportive services such as child care, substance abuse treatment, and family counseling and only realized the wide range of needs well into operation of the program, after patterns of risky behavior were already established.
3. The evaluation found wide variation in implementation across sites; all experienced difficulty implementing the full model, including limited success in implementing the education component of the model.

Final Impact Report

This report presents estimates of the impacts of QOP based on data that were collected when most youth were 23 to 25 years old. The findings include:

1. QOP did not increase the likelihood of graduating from high school with a diploma.
2. QOP did not increase the likelihood of engaging in postsecondary education or training.
3. QOP did not improve high school grades and achievement test scores.
4. QOP did not reduce the incidence of risky behaviors.
5. In the employment arena, when entering their mid-twenties, the program had not increased the likelihood of youth being employed, the fraction of time employed, annual or hourly earnings, or the likelihood of having a job with benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, or pension and retirement benefits.
6. Despite the lack of overall impacts on education, the evaluation found promising results for those who were 14 or younger when they entered ninth grade. For these younger enrollees:
 - a. QOP increased rates of high school completion and engagement in postsecondary education or training.
 - b. QOP increased the likelihood of receiving a diploma or GED and the likelihood of completing at least two years of college or the military, completing vocational/technical school or an apprenticeship, or being honorably discharged from the military.
7. The evaluation also found beneficial impacts at certain sites. Specifically, the Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC sites had mostly beneficial impacts. Most noteworthy is the Cleveland site which found an increased likelihood of earning a diploma or GED and attending a two- or four-year college. The Cleveland site also showed beneficial impacts on some employment-related outcomes, smoking and binge drinking rates, and reduced dependence on welfare or food stamps.

Policy Implications

The results of the QOP demonstration indicate that QOP as a whole did not succeed for the broad range of youth targeted by the demonstration. While the demonstration cannot provide conclusive answers about how to modify the QOP model or how to create an entirely new program, some of the implementation and impact findings provide a basis for further research into programs designed to improve the educational and employment outcomes of at-risk youth.

1. An intensive case management and mentoring program such as QOP may be most beneficial for disadvantaged youth by starting early, before substantial barriers to academic success emerge.
2. Comprehensive services could be more specifically targeted with services individualized and limited to those deemed most critical for a particular youth's success.

* This Summary and Implications was prepared by the Employment and Training Administration and does not necessarily reflect the study author's opinions.