

Grants for Randomized Controlled Trials Administered
by the LJAF Evidence-Based Policy Team



SEPTEMBER 2018

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- **Randomized controlled trial of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) for high utilizers of hospitals and jails in Dallas County**

Grant Recipient: Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Term: February 2017 – April 2022

Principal Investigators: John Petrila, LL.M., Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
Jennifer Skeem, Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley

Funding: \$1,024,737

Summary: This grant will fund a randomized controlled trial (RCTs) of evidence-based programs – ACT and FACT – for justice-involved individuals with serious mental illness who are high utilizers of hospitals and/or jails in Dallas County.

ACT is an evidence-based program for people with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders who are high utilizers of hospitals. ACT is delivered by a transdisciplinary team of 10 to 12 practitioners who provide services to about 100 people, and work to engage clients in treatment and directly provide 24/7 services and support in the community. Although prior studies suggest ACT reduces hospitalization and improves other clinical outcomes, it does not necessarily reduce police contacts and arrests. For this reason, offenders with moderate to high risk of recidivism will be assigned to FACT teams, which add a probation officer to ACT's standard multidisciplinary clinical team.

Dallas County will be delivering ACT and FACT as part of a larger Smart Justice initiative, whose implementation is being funded by a \$7 million grant from the W.W. Caruth Jr. Foundation as well as state and local funding. The ACT/FACT model has been previously evaluated in small RCTs and matched quasi-experiments, which have found promising reductions in hospitalizations and/or criminal arrests for high utilizers.

The RCT will evaluate ACT and FACT in a sample of approximately 1,000 justice-involved high healthcare utilizers. Sample members will be randomly assigned to receive either Smart Justice (where those who are determined to be at low risk of recidivism will receive ACT, and those determined to be at high risk of recidivism will receive FACT) or services as usual. The study will measure service utilization and cost – i.e., hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and arrests – over a two-year period as the primary outcomes.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A large randomized controlled trial of Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring program for youth at risk of criminal involvement**

Grant recipient: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

Principal Investigators: David DuBois, Ph. D., University of Illinois at Chicago
Carla Herrera, Ph. D., independent research consultant

Term: August 2016 - October 2023

Funding: \$1,760,785

Summary: Over the course of seven years, the grantee will conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America's (BBBSA) community-based mentoring program for disadvantaged youth. BBBSA is the largest mentoring organization in the United States, with over 300 affiliates serving nearly 160,000 youth annually. Many of the participating youth are at risk of criminal involvement (prior longitudinal evidence suggests approximately 40% of the program's targeted population will be arrested at least once in adulthood). A sizable RCT of the program in the 1990s found promising effects on both youth violent behavior and substance use, but was limited by only short-term follow-up and exclusive reliance on youth self-reports to measure outcomes.

This RCT will be conducted in 20 BBBSA agencies nationwide, with a sample of approximately 2,500 youth. Crime and delinquency outcomes will be measured with official data over a follow-up period of 4 to 5.5 years (depending on the time of youth enrollment into the study). Crime/delinquency and other outcomes (e.g., school suspensions, truancy, substance use) will also be measured with parent and youth surveys over an 18-month follow-up period.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of *Interventions* – a cognitive behavioral treatment program for offenders with mental illness**

Grant recipient: Regents of the University of California

Principal Investigators: Jennifer Skeem, Ph. D., School of Social Welfare & Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley
Susan Turner, Ph. D., School of Social Ecology, University of California Irvine

Term: August 2016 – November 2021

Funding: \$1,637,106

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of *Interventions*, a non-proprietary manualized cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) program for justice-involved individuals with mental illness. With U.S. Department of Justice funding, *Interventions* was recently implemented and refined in four sites (located in California, Ohio, and Texas). In this RCT, researchers will partner with two community-based sites (both in California) to test the impact of the program on recidivism. Prior evidence supporting a CBT approach includes a Campbell Collaboration meta-analytic review of high-quality studies, which found that CBT programs for general offenders (not necessarily offenders with mental illness) reduce recidivism by 25% on average.

In this study, a total of 720 individuals at two sites – a mental health court and an adult probation program – will be randomly assigned to either *Interventions* or to treatment as usual, which typically includes psychiatric treatment. The primary outcome in this RCT is recidivism, as measured with arrest records over a minimum period of 1 year. The study will also assess whether *Interventions* works by reducing criminal thinking and other general risk factors for recidivism.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Evaluation of Critical Time Intervention for Recently-Released Jail Detainees in Chicago**

Grant Recipient: University of Chicago Urban Labs

Principal Investigators: David Meltzer, Ph.D., University of Chicago
Harold Pollack, Ph.D., University of Chicago

Term: April 2018 – July 2023

Funding: \$858,963

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of an adapted version of the Critical Time Intervention (CTI), a case management program designed to connect mentally-ill clients with community services and insure they have an appropriate support system. CTI is typically provided to adults with severe mental illness leaving shelters, hospitals, or other institutions, with the goal of preventing homelessness. In the proposed adaptation, CTI will be offered to ex-detainees who (i) are being discharged from Cook County Jail in Chicago, IL; (ii) have a history of substance abuse, mental illness, and/or chronic health conditions; (iii) and are identified as being at high risk of homelessness. The program's delivery is being supported by Cook County and philanthropic funders.

CTI is [backed](#) by strong, replicated RCT evidence of reductions in homelessness when delivered to the original target population: adults with severe mental illness, based on findings of reductions of more than 60% in the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

The study will randomly assign approximately 657 ex-detainees over the course of 20 months to receive the intervention described above, or to receive usual services, and will measure re-incarceration rates for a new offense, as well as homelessness, over a three-year follow-up period.

- **A randomized controlled trial of Motivational Interviewing plus Critical Time Intervention for hospitalized gunshot wound victims, to prevent future risky behavior.**

Grant Recipient: University of Washington

Term: February 2017 – April 2019

Principal Investigator: Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, Ph. D., University of Washington

Funding: \$590,676

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of an intervention that combines (i) in-hospital Motivational Interviewing designed to prevent hospitalized gunshot wound victims from engaging in risky behaviors upon their release (e.g., crime, retaliation), and (ii) Critical Time Intervention, a case management program provided for several months after hospital discharge that is designed to connect gunshot wound victims with necessary community services, insure they have an appropriate support system, and help them develop a plan for achieving long-term goals (e.g., employment, education). Both components of the intervention are backed by promising evidence of effectiveness from RCTs in other policy contexts.

This study will randomly assign 145 calendar weeks over approximately a three-year period (2016-2018) to treatment versus control conditions. Gunshot wound victims admitted to Seattle's Harborview Medical Center during "treatment" weeks will be eligible to receive the intervention, and those admitted during "control" weeks will receive usual services. The researchers anticipate enrolling at least 300 gunshot wound victims in the study, with the primary outcome measure being arrest rates.

Funding beyond 2018 for longer-term follow-up will be considered if promising impacts emerge by late 2018.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **RCT of Fostering Healthy Futures for Teens** – an intensive mentoring program for maltreated youth

Grant Recipient: Colorado Seminary, which owns and operates the University of Denver

Principal Investigators: Heather Taussig, Ph.D., University of Denver
Kimberly Bender, Ph.D., University of Denver

Term: May 2017- May 2021

Funding: \$548,455

Summary: This project is an RCT of Fostering Healthy Futures for Teens (FHF-T), a nine-month intensive mentoring program for 8th and 9th graders with open child welfare cases and histories of maltreatment. FHF-T is an adaptation of Fostering Healthy Futures, a program for preadolescent (ages 9-11) maltreated children in foster care that has been found in a small but well-conducted RCT to produce sizable effects on key child outcomes. These effects included, for example, a statistically-significant reduction from 24% (control group) to 8% (treatment group) in the percent of children placed in a secure residential treatment center – an adverse outcome that typically occurs when children’s behavioral, substance use, or psychiatric problems become too severe for them to be in foster care or other non-secure placements.

The new RCT will evaluate FHF-T in a sample of 234 maltreated 8th and 9th grade youth in the Denver metro area with open child welfare cases. Since this target population is at elevated risk of delinquency, the main outcome of interest will be the rate of youth delinquent behavior measured over a 15-month follow-up period. A pilot RCT of FHF-T with 28 8th and 9th graders found that the program was successfully implemented in its target population and achieved preliminary impacts on the targeted short term / process outcomes (e.g., level of caregiver support and connections to school). The Kempe Foundation, Kempe Center, and the University of Denver will ensure that the program’s delivery costs are covered through grants and donations as part of this RCT.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trial of Therapeutic Communities and Interactive Journaling in Florida State Prisons**

Grant Recipient: Florida State University Research Foundation

Principal Investigators: Stephen Tripodi, Ph.D., Florida State University
Carrie Pettus-Davis, Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis

Term: April 2018 – July 2026

Funding: \$480,254

Summary: This is a three-arm randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluating the effectiveness of two different interventions for men and women soon to be released from prison with substance use disorders: Therapeutic Communities and Interactive Journaling. The study will compare both of these programs to a treatment-as-usual control group, which will receive counseling sessions over a 4-month period.

The first program, Therapeutic Communities, consists of specialized units within a prison to house inmates with substance use disorder. Therapeutic Communities encourage substance-free living through a system of established routines, hierarchies of earned privileges, and strict rules and associated sanctions and incentives for behavior. Prisoners are provided with services that include but are not limited to individual and group counseling, and training in pro-social behaviors. Prior RCTs and quasi-experimental studies of TCs have produced positive impacts on incarceration rates, re-arrest, criminal activity, and illegal drug use.

The second program, Interactive Journaling, is a 24-week directed journaling curriculum – comprised of weekly group sessions, regular journal assignments, and drug treatment resources – which aims to reduce substance use and related behavioral problems. An RCT testing Interactive Journaling with a sample from a county jail found that it produced reductions in the likelihood of being re-booked for a new criminal offense during the year after receiving services.

The new study will randomly assign approximately 2,490 prisoners with substance abuse disorders who are within 15-48 months of their scheduled release in three Florida prisons to receive (i) Therapeutic Communities, (ii) Interactive Journaling, or (iii) treatment as usual services. This study will measure the interventions' respective impacts on 3-year recidivism rates – specifically, the likelihood of a new conviction or technical violation that results in incarceration to a state prison or county jail – using administrative data from the Florida Department of Corrections.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

- **A randomized controlled trial of Durham Connects** – a postnatal nurse home visiting program in Durham County, North Carolina

Grant recipient: Duke University

Principal Investigator: W. Benjamin Goodman, Ph. D., Duke Center for Child and Family Policy
Kenneth Dodge, Ph. D., Duke Center for Child and Family Policy

Term: July 2014 – September 2016

Funding: \$95,809 from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (\$87,000 from other funding sources)

Summary: This project was a large RCT of Durham Connects, a postnatal nurse home visiting program designed to improve child and mother health and well-being. This study, which is now [completed](#), sought to replicate the positive findings from a prior RCT of Durham Connects. The study used hospital administrative records to measure program impacts on families' emergency department use and related healthcare costs through child age 24-months, for a sample of 937 families in Durham County, North Carolina.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Extending the analysis of the Nurse Family Partnership’s impacts on maternal and child mortality: long-term follow-up of three randomized controlled trials**

Grant recipient: The Regents of the University of Colorado

Principal Investigator: David Olds, University of Colorado-Denver

Term: March 2016 – June 2017

Funding: \$76,238

Summary: This 12-month project is a study of the long-term impacts of the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) on mortality among the mothers and children served by the program. As background, NFP is an evidence-based nurse home visitation program for first-time (mostly low-income and unmarried) mothers, which has been evaluated in three well-conducted RCTs in the U.S. (in Elmira NY, Memphis TN, and Denver CO). These studies have found a pattern of sizable, sustained effects on important child and maternal outcomes including reductions in child abuse and neglect and mothers’ number of subsequent births in their late teens and early twenties. This new project will expand on Dr. Olds and colleagues’ analysis of NFP’s impacts on mortality for mothers and children in the Memphis sample 21 years after random assignment. That analysis found promising, though not yet statistically significant, reductions in all-cause mortality for mothers (2.2% of NFP group mothers had died vs. 3.7% of control group mothers) and their children (0.9% of NFP group children had died vs. 2.7% of control group children).

Dr. Olds will use National Death Index data (i) to extend the follow-up period of the Memphis mortality impact analysis by an additional four years (i.e., to 25 years post-random assignment), and (ii) to conduct similar mortality impact analyses for the Elmira sample (37 years after random assignment) and the Denver sample (21 years after random assignment).

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

- **RCT of a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum for disadvantaged youth participating in the federal Job Corps program**

Grant Recipient: President and Fellows of Harvard College

Principal Investigators: Sara Heller, Ph.D., University of Michigan
David Deming, Ph.D., Harvard University
Will Dobbie, Ph.D., Princeton University

Term: May 2017 – September 2022

Funding: up to \$582,956.00

Summary: Under this project, the study team will build on its partnership with the National Job Corps Association (NJCA) to implement and rigorously evaluate a low-cost, replicable cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) curriculum for youth participating in Job Corps. As background, Job Corps is the nation’s largest “second chance” program for disadvantaged youth who are neither employed nor in school. Program appropriations in 2016 were approximately \$1.7 billion for operations at 126 sites, with capacity to serve 60,000 youth annually. Participating youth usually reside full-time in Job Corps centers, where they receive comprehensive services beyond just academic and career instruction, including counseling, health services, and leadership training.

In prior RCTs with youth who, like Job Corps enrollees, are at risk for poor workforce outcomes and criminal justice involvement, CBT-based interventions have been found very promising. For example, a large, well-conducted RCT of Becoming a Man – a cognitive behavioral curriculum for at-risk male high school students in Chicago – found that the program reduced youth arrests by 22% and arrests for violent crimes by 35%, versus the control group, more than a year after random assignment. Other RCTs of CBT-based interventions for unemployed adults have found promising effects on employment outcomes, although these studies are generally small and of short duration.

In the pilot phase of this project, the study team will select 4-6 Job Corps centers for the full RCT, adapt and refine established CBT curricula for use in Job Corps, pilot the random assignment and training of Job Corps staff to deliver the curriculum at 1-2 centers, and obtain access to administrative data needed to measure outcomes in the RCT. In the second phase of the project, to go forward conditioned on success in the first phase (e.g., successful site recruitment, program implementation, and data access), the study team will carry out an RCT of the curriculum at 4-6 Job Corps centers with a sample of approximately 5,100 youth. The study will measure employment, earnings, and crime outcomes over a follow-up period of three to five years, using administrative data.

- **RCT of English for Advancement, a workforce advancement intervention for adult English language learners**

Grant Recipient: Economic Mobility Corporation

Term: June 2017 – November 2022

Principal Investigators: Anne Roder, Ph.D., Economic Mobility Corporation
Mark Elliott, Economic Mobility Corporation

Funding: \$150,000

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of English for Advancement (EfA), an employment-focused program for adult English language learners that includes language instruction, career coaching, and job training and placement services. The program is delivered by Jewish Vocational Service (JVS-Boston), an established adult-education and workforce development nonprofit service provider. The training and placement services are provided through a network of partner organizations located throughout the Greater Boston area.

There have not been any prior rigorous studies of workforce interventions serving this population. However, a prior pre-post pilot study of the EfA program found unusually large effects on employment and earnings. These gains weren't measured with respect to a control or comparison group, and so could at least partly reflect improvements that participants would have experienced in the natural course of events (i.e., without receiving program services). Nonetheless, the magnitude of the pre-post gains is sizable for a workforce development program, suggesting that the intervention may indeed be producing true impacts.

This study is part of a Pay For Success initiative, with Social Finance, Inc., serving as the intermediary. The study will randomly assign approximately 2,200 participants to EfA or usual community services, and will measure impacts on employment and earnings two years after random assignment for all study participants using state-level administrative data. Longer-term follow-up is not possible because participant consent was only obtained for a two-year period, so this RCT's primary contribution will be to determine whether there are sizable two-year impacts that warrant further study in a replication trial with longer-term follow-up.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trial of Nevada’s Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) Program**

Grant Recipient: IMPAQ International

Principal Investigators: Marios Michaelides, Ph. D., IMPAQ
Peter Mueser, Ph. D., IMPAQ

Term: April 2018 – May 2021

Funding: \$226,792

Summary: This is a replication randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Nevada’s Reemployment Eligibility Assistance (REA) program, which is a mandatory program for new Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants that provides them with an in-person review of their UI eligibility, and personalized reemployment services (e.g., job search assistance). REA was launched by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2005 and has since expanded to 33 states, with the Trump administration proposing to expand it nationwide. Nevada’s program is uniquely streamlined, in that participants who pass the eligibility review are then offered job-counseling services during the same meeting. This contrasts with the usual practice in other state REA programs of referring claimants to reemployment services at a separate office or organization. Nevada REA is an inexpensive program, costing approximately \$230 per participant in 2018 dollars.

The program is backed by highly-promising prior evidence of effects on workforce outcomes. A [high-quality RCT](#) of Nevada’s REA program with a sample of 32,751 new UI claimants who filed a UI claim in late 2009 found that the program produced a \$2,789 (18%) increase in earnings per claimant, a four percentage point increase in their employment rate, and net savings to the UI system of \$715 per claimant, 18-26 months after random assignment.

This new study’s sample will comprise approximately 45,000 new UI recipients who filed a claim in 2015 and 2016. As was the case with the original RCT, the new study will capitalize on the fact that REA-eligible UI claimants were randomly assigned to either a group that received the intervention or a control group that did not. This study will measure the program’s impacts on participants’ earnings, benefits received, and employment rates using administrative UI data from the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation. The researchers will report on outcomes in early 2018, early 2019, and early 2020. The final data collection will cover a follow-up period of approximately 3-5 years after random assignment (depending on when individual claimants were randomly assigned).

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Randomized Controlled Trial of Providing Pell Grant Eligibility to Prison Inmates**

Grant Recipient: Drexel University

Principal Investigator: Jordan Hyatt, Ph.D., Drexel University
Sarah Tahamont, M.P.P., Ph.D., University of Maryland

Term: June 2018 – August 2023

Funding: \$927,774

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the impact of offering federal “Pell” grants to incarcerated adults to pursue postsecondary education. The U.S. Department of Education’s Second Chance Pell Pilot Program is approximately a \$30 million per year program that provides grant funds to colleges and universities, which the institutions use to cover the cost of delivering college courses to eligible inmates.

This program has not yet been rigorously evaluated but is widely implemented with significant taxpayer investment, underscoring the need for this RCT. The program is backed by evidence that it may reduce recidivism, based on a 2013 RAND Corporation [meta-analysis](#) of studies of correctional education for incarcerated adults.

This study will recruit inmates who are interested in pursuing postsecondary education from all 26 state correctional institutions (SCIs) in Pennsylvania, and collect documentation from these inmates and the SCIs to determine the inmates’ program eligibility. The study will randomly assign approximately 350 eligible inmates to receive the offer of a Pell grant and transfer to an SCI that provides access to qualifying educational programming, or to a usual-services control group. Randomization will be conducted on a rolling basis as eligible inmates are identified and other requirements for program participation are fulfilled (e.g., inmates’ completion of the federal FAFSA form for financial aid). The primary outcomes will be recidivism and employment as measured with official arrest and employment records two to six years after random assignment.

- **A randomized controlled trial of Transforming Impossible into Possible** – a program designed to address cognitive and social barriers to employment for disadvantaged, unemployed adults

Grant recipient: University of Chicago

Principal Investigator: Marianne Bertrand, Ph. D., University of Chicago

Term: September 2016 – November 2023

Funding: \$155,071

Summary: The project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Transforming Impossible into Possible (TIP), a job-readiness training program designed to address psycho-emotional and social barriers to employment for low-income, persistently unemployed adults. The 3-week, 15-session TIP program is delivered by job-readiness trained staff in a group setting at local employment agencies through a manualized curriculum designed to empower job-seekers and participants with psychological capital for labor market success, while also providing traditional services such as job-search and resume assistance. Prior evidence for this intervention consists of positive findings from similar interventions tested in other settings. For example, a small but well-conducted RCT of a similar intervention in the UK, found substantially higher rates of full-time employment over a 4-month follow-up period.

The study will take place in three employment agencies in Chicago, each serving economically disadvantaged adults who have been persistently unemployed. The study will randomly assign 930 adults to either receive TIP services, or to a control group that receives usual services (i.e., job-readiness training and job search assistance). The study will use data from the Illinois Department of Economic Security and the Illinois Department of Human Services to measure earnings and employment over a three-year period.

K-12 EDUCATION

- **A randomized controlled trial of Annual Summer Book Fairs for high-poverty elementary schools**

Grant recipient: The University of Tennessee

Principal Investigator: Anne McGill-Franzen, Ph. D., the Reading Center, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Term: March 2016 – December 2019

Funding: \$150,000 from LJAF (the Annie E. Casey Foundation is providing \$100,000 in co-funding)

Summary: As background, schools with a high proportion of students from poor families struggle to turn around low academic performance, as evidenced by the mixed success of reform efforts, summer school, and parent programs. The gap is already large upon entry into kindergarten, exacerbated over time by the few resources for academic learning available to poor families over the summer, and ultimately reflected in a much lower high school graduation rate.

This project develops policy relevant evidence for mitigating the achievement gap by expanding Annual Summer Book Fairs, a well-researched and low-cost summer reading intervention to mitigate summer reading loss that has met the “near top tier” evidence standard according to the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy. A previously conducted randomized controlled trial (Allington, et al., 2010) established that providing 10-12 free, self-selected books to first and second grade cohorts (N=1,713) from 17 high-poverty urban, primarily African-American, elementary schools over three summers not only mitigated summer reading loss but increased students’ annual reading achievement on the Florida statewide test at the 3rd and 4th grade level by 0.14 standard deviations overall and close to 0.21 standard deviations for the poorest students. Annual Book Fairs is an inexpensive intervention – the cost per child over three years is only \$225.

This replication study will expand the intervention to a different high-poverty student population in rural East Tennessee. Approximately 1,640 first graders who are eligible for free/reduced lunch will be randomly assigned to either the treatment (summer books) or the control (no books) conditions. The study will access the state reading assessment data (TNReady) and, if available, partner districts’ local assessments to measure student outcomes over a three-year period.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of a program, implemented city-wide in Baltimore, that provides eyeglasses to disadvantaged students to improve learning outcomes**

Grant recipient: Johns Hopkins University

Principal Investigators: Robert E. Slavin, Ph. D., School of Education, Johns Hopkins University
Megan Collins, MD, Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Term: July 2016 - September 2019

Funding: \$449,889

Summary: Over the course of three years, the project will evaluate a system-wide approach to ensuring that all disadvantaged children enrolled in Baltimore City Public Schools in grades 3 to 8 are screened for vision problems, and given free eyeglasses if needed. It will provide principals and teachers with professional development and eyeglass management methods to increase the chances that students will use and protect their glasses and that glasses will be replaced if lost or broken. The Baltimore City Health Department will do initial screening, and a Los Angeles-based non-profit called Vision to Learn, which has mobile eye clinics outfitted to provide on-site services, will do full vision assessments and provide free eyeglasses. Staff from the Johns Hopkins School of Education and the Wilmer Eye Institute will work with the schools to train school staff and to maximize use of the glasses.

The initial vision assessments and free eyeglasses will be funded by Vision to Learn, which will ultimately seek reimbursement from the state of Maryland. Professional development for school staff will be provided by Johns Hopkins University and Medical School staff, paid for by a grant through the President of Johns Hopkins University and another from Baltimore's Abell Foundation.

A total of 127 elementary and middle schools have been randomly assigned to receive the vision screening, evaluation, and intervention in 2016-2017, 2017-2018, or 2018-2019. The primary outcomes will be English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics test scores of students in grades 3-8 identified through screening as having refractive error requiring corrective lenses (approximately 6,500 students). The outcomes will be measured over both a one and two-year follow-up period, using mandated state achievement tests in Maryland. Prior RCT evidence suggests the intervention could produce meaningful effects on student achievement.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of Bernie’s Book Bank, a free book-distribution intervention for high-poverty students, to be conducted in a large sample of Chicago-area elementary schools**

Grant Recipient: Measured Decisions, Inc.

Term: June 2017 – February 2021

Principal Investigator: Geoffrey Borman, Ph.D., Measured Decisions, Inc.

Funding: \$235,513

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Bernie’s Book Bank, which provides free high-quality books to low-income children on a large scale and at low cost throughout the Chicago area (serving approximately 250,000 students annually at approximately 50 cents per book). Its elementary school intervention distributes 12 free books annually to all students in high-poverty schools; students are encouraged to trade books with their classmates to ensure that everyone brings home books they will enjoy.

Prior evidence suggests this intervention could produce sizable impacts on academic achievement. It shares some key features with Annual Summer Book Fairs, an intervention found in a large, well-conducted RCT in Florida to increase elementary school students’ reading achievement on the state test by about 35-40% of a grade level, three years after random assignment.

This RCT will randomly assign approximately 60 elementary schools to treatment or control groups, and track outcomes for approximately 4,700 1st-5th grade students over a period of three years. The study will assess effects on academic achievement as measured by state tests, as well as effects on related outcomes, such as literacy behaviors, to determine whether and how students and their families use the books.

- **A randomized controlled trial of career and technical education programs in New York City high schools**

Grant Recipient: New York University

Term: July 2017 – September 2019

Principal Investigator: James Kemple, Ed.D., Research Alliance for New York City Schools

Funding: \$299,973

Summary: This project is a low-cost randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in New York City high schools. After considerable growth in its CTE offerings over the past decade, New York City’s Department of Education now oversees the largest and most diverse system of urban CTE programs in the country, with 145 schools offering CTE, 47 of which are dedicated exclusively to CTE. Nationally, CTE programs are widely implemented, serving more than 7.5 million students in the 2013-2014 school year.

This RCT will capitalize on school lotteries that took place between 2008 and 2014, randomly allocating limited 9th grade spots at 70 oversubscribed New York City CTE programs. The study will measure the programs’ impacts on rates of high school graduation as well as postsecondary enrollment and persistence. The total randomized sample includes approximately 52,000 students, whose outcomes will be measured 4 to 10 years after random assignment, depending on what year they participated in a CTE lottery. Outcomes will be measured using administrative data from the New York City Department of Education, the City University of New York, and the National Student Clearinghouse.

This study will provide policy-relevant information regarding the educational impacts of the city’s CTE programs. If feasible, the study will also measure (through an augmentation of the current design) CTE programs’ long-term effects on workforce outcomes such as earnings and employment. This is a particularly important outcome since a prior RCT of career academies (a type of CTE program) found no effects on educational attainment but large, long-term impacts on earnings.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Expansion of well-implemented Career Academies in California public high Schools**

Grant Recipients: Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation & the University of California, Berkeley

Term: January 2017 – November 2020

Funding: \$1,500,000 (including \$1,165,000 to the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation and \$335,000 to the College & Career Academy Support Network at the University of California, Berkeley)

Summary: As background, Career Academies are small learning communities in low-income high schools, combining academic and technical/ career curricula, and offering workplace opportunities through partnership with local employers. When evaluated by MDRC in a large, multi-site randomized controlled trial (RCT) over 1993-2008, Career Academies were found to produce a \$2,500 increase in annual earnings sustained over the eight years after high school graduation – making Career Academies the only educational program for disadvantaged youth that has been rigorously shown to produce sizable gains in long-term economic outcomes.

Under this grant, the California Department of Education (CDE), in collaboration with U.C. Berkeley's College and Career Academy Support Network (CCASN), will significantly enhance the quality of implementation of Career Academies in California by ensuring adherence to the key features of the model that MDRC and others have found effective in improving student outcomes. 406 "California Partnership Academies" (CPAs) are currently in operation in California, but full adherence to the model is uncommon as CDE data show that 80% fail to implement one or more of the model's core elements.

Grant funds will be used to (i) bring all California Partnership Academies (serving 80,000 students at any given time) into full adherence to the model, through such activities as summer training institutes for Career Academy educators and administrators, and ongoing technical assistance in the form of conference calls, virtual meetings, webinars, and site visits; and (ii) implement a fidelity rating system for the Academies based on objective measures of model adherence that will be used to generate periodic implementation fidelity reports for LJAF and others.

Under a separate grant, LJAF is funding an RCT of the California Partnership Academies participating in this project, to determine whether the sizable effects on workforce earnings found in the earlier RCT can be successfully reproduced.

- **A randomized replication trial of Career Academies in California**

Grant Recipient: MDRC

Principal Investigators: Susan Sepanik, MDRC
Rachel Rosen, Ph. D., MDRC

Term: March 2017 – October 2030

Funding: \$2,943,916

Summary: This project is a large, multi-site randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Career Academies in California that are receiving technical assistance under a separate grant from our foundation to ensure faithful implementation of the Career Academy model. In winter 2018, MDRC will randomly assign approximately 1,500 ninth graders within 25 high schools across the state, to either a treatment group that is offered a position in the school's Career Academy, or to a control group that receives the school's usual services. The study will measure high school graduation rates, college persistence and completion, and employment and earnings outcomes over a 12-year follow-up period, using California state data and the National Student Clearinghouse. The study team will also measure service contrast (i.e., the difference in services received by the treatment and control students) through a survey of sample members at the end of high school.

The ultimate purpose of this RCT is to determine whether the large, sustained impacts on participants' economic well-being found in the prior RCT of Career Academies can be successfully reproduced in a new sample of schools and time period (i.e., 20 years later). If so, the strength and robustness of the findings will provide policy officials with a potent tool for improving life outcomes of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **Randomized controlled trial of a vision care intervention in disadvantaged Chicago elementary schools, designed to improve eyeglass usage and learning outcomes**

Grant Recipient: Johns Hopkins University

Term: July 2017 – March 2020

Principal Investigators: Robert Slavin, Ph. D., Johns Hopkins University
Megan Collins, M.D., Johns Hopkins University

Funding: \$397,721.43

Summary: This project will rigorously evaluate a schoolwide vision care intervention designed to increase eyeglass receipt, retention, and use among children in grades K-5 in disadvantaged Chicago Public Schools, with the goal of improving their vision and (as a result) their school achievement. Chicago Public Schools has an established system of school-based vision screenings, comprehensive eye assessments, and eyeglass provision to students who need them. However, the school system currently obtains consent from only 17% of parents for the comprehensive eye assessments, which means that many children in need of glasses do not obtain them.

The vision care intervention will provide schools with supports and incentives to ensure that parental consent is obtained and that all children who need glasses receive them, wear them, care for them, and replace them if they are lost or broken. The intervention was designed by researchers at the Johns Hopkins School of Education and the Wilmer Eye Institute, based on their experience in the ongoing LJAF-funded RCT of eyeglass provision to disadvantaged students in Baltimore. Based on this experience, the researchers expect the intervention to increase parental consent from 17% in Chicago to at least 70%, and ensure that about 80% of students who are prescribed eyeglasses actually wear them in class.

The intervention will be funded through a \$1.2 million grant from the Robert M. and Diane V.S. Levy Family Foundation. The costs of comprehensive eye assessments and glasses will be covered through Medicaid. LJAF will fund the RCT, in which 80 elementary schools will be randomly assigned to a treatment group that receives the intervention in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, or to a control group that receives services-as-usual (without the intervention). The primary outcomes will be math and reading test scores of students in grades K-5 identified through screening as at risk for refractive error (approximately 10,000 students). The outcomes will be measured over both a one and two-year follow-up period, using mandated state achievement tests in Illinois.

Prior RCT and quasi-experimental evidence suggests the intervention could produce meaningful effects on student achievement. This Chicago project is a variation on the intervention being tested in Baltimore, and will provide an important second test, in another major urban public school setting, of whether vision correction can lead to improved educational outcomes.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **RCT of Core Knowledge Charter Schools – long-term follow-up**

Grant Recipient: The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia

Term: May 2017 – August 2020

Principal Investigator: David Grissmer, Ph. D., University of Virginia

Funding: \$510,256

Summary: This project is an extension of an existing RCT evaluation of CORE Knowledge Charter Schools in Denver, Colorado. Core Knowledge schools use an integrated curriculum for K-8 students that sets out, in a clear grade-by-grade sequence, the specific knowledge that students should gain in each grade, rather than simply providing teachers with broad goals and objectives about what topics to cover. The Core Knowledge curriculum is implemented in over 1500 schools across 41 states and the District of Columbia.

The existing RCT, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, capitalized on kindergarten lotteries, which randomly allocated limited offers for admission in 14 lotteries over two years at nine oversubscribed CORE Knowledge schools. The total randomized sample was 1,796 students. At 3rd grade (i.e., four years after the lottery), lottery winners scored roughly 25-30% of a grade level higher in reading than lottery losers, and also scored higher in English. These effects remained substantial and statistically significant even after the researchers made conservative assumptions to adjust for potential bias due to sample attrition.

This grant will extend the evaluation by assessing effects on achievement in English, reading, writing, and math through 4th, 5th and 6th grade, and on achievement in the social sciences and science in 4th and 5th grade, using Colorado state test scores.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Randomized Controlled Trial of the Educational Liaison (EL) Program for High School Students in Foster Care**

Grant Recipient: The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University

Principal Investigators: John Hitchcock, Ph.D., Indiana University Bloomington
Jeffrey Anderson, Ph.D., Indiana University Bloomington
Patricia Muller, Ph.D., Indiana University Bloomington

Term: May 2018 – March 2024

Funding: \$498,908

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the Child Advocates of Indianapolis' Educational Liaison (EL) intervention model, a dropout prevention program for middle and secondary school students in the foster care system. The EL intervention incorporates key elements from the Check & Connect model, which has credible evidence of effectiveness (two prior, well-conducted RCTs), and additionally provides wraparound services, consulting on Individualized Education Programs, graduation and post-secondary planning, and other services. Approximately 400 eligible students will be enrolled in the study over two years and randomly assigned to either receive EL services in addition to standard Best Interest Advocate (BIA) services (treatment group) or to receive only the standard BIA services (control group). The primary outcome of interest will be students' need to participate in an alternate graduation path (AGP) over the four-year follow-up period. AGP serves as a proxy for school dropout rates. The AGP classification is determined by a formula identifying students for whom it will be almost impossible to graduate on time and with a standard diploma based on a student's credit hours earned relative to other students in their cohort. Secondary outcomes will include credit hours earned, attendance, academic achievement based on state test scores, disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Evaluation of Fostering Opportunities Program**

Grant Recipient: Colorado Seminary, which owns and operates the University of Denver

Principal Investigators: Elysia Clemens, Ph.D., University of Denver
Kristin Klopfenstein, Ph.D., University of Denver

Term: June 2018 – December 2022

Funding: \$266,033

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Fostering Opportunities, a program that provides 7th-10th grade youth in foster care with an advocate who coordinates between teachers, families, social workers and other systems involved in foster youths' lives to help the youths succeed in school. A major focus of the advocate is to prevent these youth from having to frequently change schools, based on research indicating that such school changes are a potentially important contributor to foster care youths' very low on-time high school graduation rates (in Colorado, where this study will take place, only 23% of foster care youth graduated on-time in 2017, compared to the statewide on-time graduation rate of 79%).

The program is similar to the Check and Connect model, which has been shown in two well-conducted RCTs to produce sizable increases in school attendance and graduation rates for samples of high school students with learning, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. The Fostering Opportunities program has been piloted on a small scale in the school district where this study will take place, and has been implemented effectively.

This study will randomly assign approximately 280 students over the course of two school years to either a group that is offered the program or a control group that is not. The study will measure impacts on attendance and course completion over a two year follow-up period using administrative data from Jefferson County Public Schools and Denver Public Schools. The study team has previously carried out a well-implemented RCT.

This project came about as a result of a Pay for Success initiative launched by the Colorado Governor's office to fund programs backed by promising prior evidence of effectiveness in serving youth involved in the state's foster care and/or juvenile justice systems.

- **Randomized Controlled Trial of the web-based Healthy Minds intervention to prevent youth depression**

Grant Recipient: North Carolina State University

Principal Investigators: Jeni Burnette, Ph.D., North Carolina State University
Laura Widman, Ph.D., North Carolina State University
Mitch Prinstein, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Term: July 2018 – March 2022

Funding: \$499,314

Summary: This study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Healthy Minds – a growth mindset intervention for high school students designed to reduce rates of clinical depression. Healthy Minds is delivered via a web-based platform making it cost-effective and scalable. The intervention consists of a brief, online, self-administered reading and writing activity that stresses the changeable nature of personality and teaches about the research related to growth mindsets and mental health. Prior evidence suggests this intervention could meaningfully reduce rates of clinical depression in youth. Specifically, Healthy Minds is an enhanced version of a growth mindset intervention which decreased rates of clinical depression in ninth grade students by about 30-40% at 9-month follow-up in a well-conducted RCT. The current work seeks to recruit all ninth grade students from four high schools in a predominately low-income, rural school district in North Carolina and randomly assign those who agree to participate in the study (approximately 650 students) to either a treatment group that will receive Healthy Minds or an attention-matched control group that mimics the time and attention received by the Healthy Minds group but is *not* aimed at improving mental health. The primary outcome of interest will be rates of clinical depression at 18-month follow-up for students in the intervention, compared to the attention-matched control group.

- **Continuation of a promising LJAF-funded RCT of high-dosage literacy tutoring for disadvantaged 1st graders in Chicago Public Schools**

Grant Recipients: SAGA Innovations, Inc. and the University of Chicago

Term: May 2017 – April 2020

Principal Investigator: Jonathan Guryan, Ph. D., Northwestern University and University of Chicago Urban Labs;

Director of SAGA Innovations: Alan Safran, J.D., The George Washington University

Funding: \$225,000 (\$175,000 to SAGA Innovations, Inc. and \$50,000 to University of Chicago Urban Labs)

Summary: This project will extend an LJAF-funded pilot RCT of a high-dosage literacy tutoring program for 1st graders delivered by SAGA Innovations in low-income Chicago schools. As brief background, tutoring programs for at-risk students in early elementary school have been found effective in a number of prior RCTs, with high-dosage tutoring often generating the largest effects. The goal of this ongoing LJAF-funded RCT is to measure the impact on first- and second-grade reading outcomes of a high-dosage tutoring program that is delivered at modest cost by full-time in-school-day tutors who are well-educated community members willing to work for ten school months for a modest stipend as a public service. The program's cost is approximately \$3000 per pupil, but may vary depending on school size and other factors.

Under a prior LJAF grant, SAGA Innovations successfully developed and is now implementing this program within two charter schools in low-income neighborhoods in Chicago. The new grant provides additional funds to continue the pilot RCT for a second year; this funding will double the study's sample size to over 300 students and thus increase the study's power to detect meaningful impacts (e.g., 0.20 standard deviations). The funding also will enable the study to measure impacts at the end of two school years for the two cohorts of students. Should the program be found effective in this study, its expansion in Chicago and elsewhere could largely be funded by federal Title 1 funds.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of the Minnesota Math Corps, a widely implemented one-on-two tutoring program for 4th-8th grade students in Minnesota**

Grant Recipient: ServeMinnesota

Term: June 2017 – October 2018

Principal Investigator: David Parker, Ph.D., ServeMinnesota

Funding: \$191,051

Summary: This project is a low-cost randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Minnesota Math Corps, a one-on-two tutoring program for 4th-8th graders struggling with math. Minnesota Math Corps was recently evaluated in a short-term RCT, which found it produced a sizable impact on math achievement on a standardized assessment over the course of one semester. More generally, findings from RCTs of a different one-on-one tutoring program for slightly older students struggling with math, suggest that such tutoring can produce meaningful improvements in students' math achievement (e.g., as much as an extra 2/3 of a grade level of learning over the course of one school year). Minnesota Math Corps already operates on a sizable scale in 150 Minnesota schools and is in the process of expanding to additional states. The program could potentially be implemented on a substantially larger scale given its modest cost – about \$800 per student per year – which is made possible by the program's use of AmeriCorps volunteers as tutors.

This RCT will evaluate Minnesota Math Corps in a sample of approximately 720 4th-8th graders across 15 elementary schools. The primary outcome measure will be math scores at the end of one school year on Minnesota's state test, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment. This study will have a substantially larger sample than the previous RCT of the program and will provide longer-term follow-up than the earlier study, which only lasted one semester.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports** - a school-wide reform initiative designed to increase K-12 academic achievement and reduce behavioral problems

Grant recipient: Wake County Public School System

Principal Investigators: Dina Bulgakov-Cooke, Ph. D., Wake County Public School System
Matthew Lenard, Wake County Public School System

Term: October 2015 – November 2018

Funding: \$81,512

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a school-wide reform initiative, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), designed to increase academic achievement and reduce behavioral problems at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. MTSS is being scaled-up district-wide in Wake County, North Carolina, through a phased-in approach that will embed an RCT. Forty-four schools (the treatment group) began implementing MTSS in the 2015-2016 school year, and 44 schools (the control group) will implement it two years later. The study will measure math and English test scores, behavioral suspensions, and other outcomes over the two-year period using district administrative data.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of a comprehensive music education program for disadvantaged youth, measuring the impact on academic achievement**

Grant Recipient: Bard College

Term: June 2017 – December 2024

Principal Investigator: Steven Holochwost, Ph.D., WolfBrown
Dennie Wolf, Ph.D., WolfBrown
Judith Hill Bose, Ph.D., Longy School of Music of Bard College

Funding: \$224,720

Summary: This project is a replication randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a promising music education intervention for economically disadvantaged elementary school students, inspired by the “El Sistema” program in Venezuela. The intervention, which is funded through a combination of public and philanthropic funding sources, is delivered in an after-school setting and provides students with comprehensive music education and orchestral experience.

A prior well-conducted RCT of this intervention – carried out by the current project’s study team – found meaningful impacts on academic achievement: students offered participation in the intervention experienced a sizable, statistically-significant improvement in academic achievement (0.24 effect size) over a 1-3 year period, as measured by standardized academic exams. The theorized mechanisms for this improvement include increased school engagement, academic persistence and motivation, and social-emotional learning (all of which will be measured in this new study).

The study will seek to replicate these impacts in a larger, multi-site RCT in Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, New York, and Pennsylvania. The study will randomly assign approximately 570 students in grades K-2 to the intervention or to a wait-list control group that would have an opportunity to participate in the intervention after a two-year waiting period. The study will measure impacts on academic achievement over the two-year follow-up using administrative data (i.e., district-level standardized test scores).

- **A randomized controlled trial of the Literacy First Tutoring Program for struggling readers in early elementary school**

Grant Recipient: American Institutes for Research

Term: March 2017 – December 2020

Principal Investigators: Sarah Caverly, Ph. D., American Institutes for Research
Ginger Stoker, Ph. D., American Institutes for Research

Funding: \$319,476

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Literacy First (formerly ACE Tutoring), an intensive one-on-one tutoring program for struggling readers in early elementary school. Literacy First has been evaluated in several quasi-experimental studies over the past three years and been found to produce sizable impacts on reading ability. More generally, findings from multiple RCTs have shown one-on-one tutoring to be a particularly promising approach to addressing early reading failure. However, the most intensive tutoring programs, which tend to produce the largest positive effects, are often expensive, costing as much as \$6,000 per student. By contrast, Literacy First offers a potentially more scalable intensive tutoring approach – providing 30 minutes of daily individualized tutoring at a cost of just \$600 per student – by making use of Americorps volunteers as tutors, rather than more expensive options employed by other tutoring programs (e.g., certified teachers).

This RCT will evaluate Literacy First in a sample of 624 2nd graders across 26 elementary schools. The primary outcome measures will be reading scores on the well-validated SAT-10 standardized test at the end of 2nd grade and the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) at the end of 3rd grade. The study's measurement of outcomes over a two-year follow-up period will help address an important gap in the literature regarding the longer-term impact of one-on-one tutoring programs, since most studies of such programs have only followed students for one school year or less.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trial of Read for Success**

Grant Recipient: Measured Decisions, Inc.

Principal Investigator: Geoffrey Borman, Ph.D., Measured Decisions, Inc.

Term: April 2018 – February 2022

Funding: \$287,550

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Read for Success, a nationally-disseminated program designed to engage elementary school students in both summer and school-year reading. Read for Success will provide books and materials for second and third grade classrooms, students, and their families. Across a two-year period, the program will offer an annual distribution of 35 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) books and related instructional materials for use during the school year, and for the summer, 8 books per student to take home along with family materials to encourage summer reading. The goal is to improve students' access to quality literacy materials, increase engagement and enjoyment of reading, and ultimately to boost reading achievement.

Prior evidence suggests this intervention could produce sizable impacts on academic achievement. It shares some key features with Annual Summer Book Fairs, an intervention that provides summer reading materials to students in high-poverty schools over three consecutive summers. Annual Summer Books Fairs was [found](#) in a large, well-conducted RCT in Florida to increase elementary school students' reading achievement on the state test by about 35-40% of a grade level, three years after random assignment.

The RCT of Read for Success will randomly assign 60 elementary schools in Dallas, Texas, to a treatment or control group, and track outcomes for approximately 4,800 students over a period of three years after random assignment (i.e., through 4th and 5th grade) The study will assess effects on reading achievement as measured by state tests, as well as effects on related outcomes, such as literacy behaviors, to determine whether and how students and their families use the books.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of a Social Belonging mindset intervention for students entering middle school**

Grant recipient: Measured Decisions, Inc.

Principal Investigator: Geoffrey D. Borman, Ph. D., Measured Decisions, Inc.

Term: September 2016 – February 2020

Funding: \$216,950

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a “social belonging intervention” consisting of two 15-minute in-class writing exercises provided to students entering middle school – i.e., fall of 7th grade – a time of transition to a larger, less personal school environment that many perceive as intimidating. The exercises ask the students to consider a specific school experience in which they might feel social or academic uncertainty (e.g., related to test taking or fitting in with peers), prompts them with stories from other beginning middle-school students about how they struggled initially but eventually got through it, and asks the participating students to write about how they can manage their own difficulties and ultimately overcome them.

A prior well-conducted RCT in Madison, Wisconsin with a sample of 1,500 students found statistically-significant impacts on GPA, failing grades, disciplinary referrals, and absences (effect sizes were modest, between 0.09 to 0.14 standard deviations). This new study is a replication trial, which will be conducted in seven middle schools in Paradise Valley School District in Arizona, with a sample of approximately 2,000 7th grade students. It will measure GPA, behavioral referrals, attendance, and other outcomes using school records. If positive impacts are found after one school year, the study will measure these outcomes over two additional years to determine whether the effects endure.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Randomized Controlled Trial of Youth Guidance’s Working on Womanhood Program**

Grant Recipient: University of Chicago

Principal Investigator: Harold Pollack, Ph.D., Harvard University

Term: April 2018 – December 2021

Funding: \$1,108,149

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Working on Womanhood (WOW), a cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) program for disadvantaged female high school students at high risk of mental illness.

The prior evidence for CBT-based programs serving youth at risk of mental illness – including a Cochrane Collaboration review – suggests that WOW has the potential to meaningfully reduce rates of clinical PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Similar programs (e.g., school-based CBT for adolescents in Los Angeles who had been exposed to violence) have been previously shown to produce such improvements in mental health status (though these studies generally had only short-term follow-up).

The City of Chicago has expanded access to WOW as part of its \$36 million mentoring initiative. The RCT includes a sample 1,500 youth who have been randomly assigned to receive WOW or usual services, and will measure WOW’s impact on mental health status, academic achievement, and criminal activity.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Evaluation of Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) at the City University of New York John Jay College of Criminal Justice**

Grant Recipient: Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY)

Principal Investigators: Jing Zhu, Ph.D., Metis Associates
Diana Strumbos, City University of New York (CUNY)

Term: March 2018 – July 2024

Funding: \$265,152

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of an adapted version of the City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). [ASAP](#) is a comprehensive community college program that provides academic, personal, and financial supports to predominantly low-income students, and requires their full-time enrollment. This new study will evaluate the same basic model, renamed [Accelerate, Complete, and Engage \(ACE\)](#), adapted to a four-year college setting – John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The program is backed by highly-promising prior [evidence](#) of effects on college attainment. A [high-quality RCT](#) of CUNY ASAP with a sample of 896 students found that the program produced an 18 percentage point increase in degree completion three years after random assignment, and a smaller but still impressive 10 percentage-point increase in degree completion six years after random assignment (i.e., three years after program services ended). At that point, 51% of the treatment group had completed a degree versus 41% of the control group (statistically significant $p < 0.01$). The CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, which created and implemented ASAP, developed the ACE program and piloted it at John Jay College in the fall of 2015. A quasi-experimental study with incoming 2015 students at John Jay College found that at the beginning of their third academic year, ACE participants were nearly twice as likely to be on-track to graduate in four years, compared to the matched comparison group (65% of the ACE group was on-track to graduate versus 37% of the comparison group).

This study will randomly assign 570 students in the fall of 2018 to either a group that is offered the program or a control group that is not. The study will measure impacts on college persistence and degree completion over a 5-year follow-up period using administrative data from the CUNY system and the National Student Clearinghouse.

The study's pre-analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Skyline College implementation of the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)**

Grant Recipient: San Mateo County Community College District

Term: February 2017 – April 2019

Funding: \$836,607

Summary: Skyline College in San Bruno, California is implementing the Accelerated Study in Associates Programs (ASAP) model for all full-time incoming students, using dedicated local (non-LJAF) funding. ASAP is a comprehensive community college program that provides students with academic, personal, and financial supports. An earlier randomized controlled trial (RCT) of ASAP at CUNY found that the program nearly doubled three-year graduation rates in a population of primarily low-income students with modest basic skills deficits (22 percent of the control group graduated versus 40 percent of the treatment group). These effects on college completion are far larger than identified in any previous well-conducted RCT in postsecondary education.

Skyline anticipates enrolling 500 students per year in ASAP, but the number could rise as the benefits of ASAP incentivize more students to attend full time. The ASAP program at Skyline will become part of a larger Skyline College Promise initiative aimed at increasing overall student success and college completion by removing financial barriers, restructuring the curriculum, and providing intensive academic and personal support services to students.

LJAF's grant is funding a Skyline-CUNY partnership under which CUNY is providing Skyline College with technical assistance to ensure implementation of ASAP with high fidelity to the program model.

- **Longer-term follow-up of an ongoing RCT of the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at three Ohio community colleges**

Grant Recipient: MDRC

Principal Investigators: Colleen Sommo, MDRC
Michael Weiss, Ph. D., MDRC

Term: January 2017 – March 2020

Funding: \$275,000

Summary: This project will support the continuation of an RCT at three Ohio community colleges that are implementing programs based on the ASAP model. ASAP is a comprehensive community college program that provides academic, personal, and financial supports to low-income students. An earlier RCT of ASAP at the City University of New York (CUNY) found that the program nearly doubled three-year graduation rates in a population of primarily low-income students with modest basic skills deficits (22 percent of the control group graduated versus 40 percent of the treatment group). These effects on college completion are far larger than identified in any previous well-conducted RCT in postsecondary education.

The Ohio ASAP evaluation will provide a second proof point for the ASAP model. The Ohio research sample of 1,505 eligible students was randomly assigned in three cohorts: the spring and fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016. Early findings, which MDRC recently published, show that the short-term estimated impacts for the first two cohorts of the Ohio programs are generally consistent with those found in MDRC's evaluation of CUNY ASAP.

This LJAF grant will support continued data collection, analysis, and reporting on the impacts and cost-effectiveness of the Ohio programs. Data collection will include detailed school records and program participation data from the participating colleges, enrollment and degree data from the National Student Clearinghouse, and cost data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the colleges. A brief deliverable in summer 2018 will update the early Ohio impact findings. The final report in fall 2019 will include impact and cost-effectiveness findings on the Ohio programs, with follow-up of three years for all sample members. The ultimate purpose of this RCT is to determine whether the large impacts on college completion found in the prior RCT can be successfully reproduced in the Ohio programs.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of Creating Birds of a Feather – an intervention aimed at increasing achievement and persistence of low-income college students**

Grant recipient: University of California, Santa Barbara

Principal Investigators: Hunter Gehlbach, Ph. D., University of California, Santa Barbara
Michael Gottfried, Ph. D., University of California, Santa Barbara

Term: September 2016 – April 2019

Funding: \$209,242

Summary: This study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a brief, low-cost intervention designed to improve relationships between college instructors and their students by identifying and highlighting interests and values that they share, with the goal of improving students' academic achievement. A previous RCT of this intervention, conducted with a sample of 25 high school teachers and 315 of their students, found significant improvements in students' grades over one school year, with particularly large effects for Black and Latino students.

The current study seeks to replicate these previous findings in a college setting, with a much larger sample and a longer-term follow-up. The target sample in the current study is 150 teachers and 2,500 students. The study will use school record data from the college to measure (i) student achievement using objective end-of-course exams, (ii) future course enrollments, and (iii) college persistence over two years.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of Bottom Line** – an intervention that provides one-on-one guidance to help low-income students get into and graduate from college

Grant recipient: Bottom Line, Inc.

Principal Investigator: Ben Castleman, Ph. D., University of Virginia

Term: June 2015 – September 2021

Funding: \$100,000 from LJAF (\$59,000 from another philanthropic funder)

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Bottom Line – a program that provides one-on-one guidance to help low-income, first-generation students get into and graduate from college. This study is measuring college enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes for a sample of about 2,400 students over a seven-year period, using administrative data from the National Student Clearinghouse. Early impact findings are shown [here](#).

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of College Forward** – a program that provides individualized coaching to help low-income students get into and graduate from college

Grant recipient: College Forward

Principal Investigator: Ben Castleman, Ph. D., University of Virginia

Term: October 2015 – October 2024

Funding: \$98,377 from LJAF (the Greater Texas Foundation is providing \$24,000 in co-funding)

Summary: This study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of College Forward —a program that provides individualized coaching from trained AmeriCorps volunteers to help low-income students get into and graduate from college. The program is backed by promising evidence from a prior quasi-experimental study, which found positive impacts on college enrollment and persistence. This RCT will be a large, multi-site study measuring college enrollment, persistence, and completion with a sample of approximately 2,000 high school students from Houston and Austin, Texas. The students will be tracked over an eight-year period using administrative data from the National Student Clearinghouse to measure key college-related outcomes.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of the evidence-based use of multiple measures to determine the college readiness of incoming community college students**

Grant recipient: Educational Results Partnership

Principal Investigator: John Hetts, Ph.D., Senior Director of Data Science, Educational Results Partnership

Term: August 2016 – September 2020

Funding: \$147,009

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial of an algorithm-based method for determining incoming community college students' level of preparation for college-level coursework in English and mathematics, and whether they need to take developmental/remedial courses. The method, which uses high school achievement (especially GPA) as a key predictor, is an alternative to the more widely-used practice of administering single-instance, single-method placement tests to incoming students to determine their placement in college-level versus developmental/remedial courses. Prior studies indicate that such tests typically place two-thirds of community college students into one or more developmental/remedial courses, potentially unnecessarily, as much of the same research suggests that up to a third of these students would succeed in college without such courses. Correlational evidence suggests that students placed into college-level coursework using the algorithm-based method perform as well as other students; save, on average, 1-2 semesters of unnecessary remedial education per student; and are more likely to remain on track for college completion. The project will randomly assign approximately 15,000 entering students in at least six community colleges in California, Texas, and Washington to have their placement in remedial courses determined by the algorithm-based method (treatment group) or the existing placement test system currently in use at the college (control group). The primary outcomes will be degree completion and/or successful transfer to a four-year college, measured over a four-year follow-up period.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Randomized controlled trials investigating the near and medium-term impacts of behavioral nudge interventions to improve college entry and persistence among low-income students**

Grant recipient: The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia

Principal Investigator: Ben Castleman, Ph. D., University of Virginia

Term: January 2016 - October 2017

Funding: \$110,620

Summary: This grant will fund two projects.

In the first project, the study team, in collaboration with [The Common Application](#), will conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the impact of various text-messaging strategies to encourage student completion of college financial aid application forms, with a national sample of 350,000 economically-disadvantaged high school seniors. The Dell Foundation is the primary funder of the study. The total cost of the project is \$695,000 (LJAF's contribution is \$60,000).

In the second project, the study team will measure the longer-term outcomes of three RCTs that evaluated various interventions to encourage economically-disadvantaged high school seniors to complete financial aid forms and other items needed for college matriculation. The RCTs are high-quality studies that found promising effects on short-term outcomes (e.g., college matriculation). Longer-term follow-up will be valuable to determine whether these effects are sustained over time and lead to more policy-important outcomes (e.g., college persistence and completion).

The pre-specified analysis plans for the two projects are linked [here](#) and [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of One Million Degrees** – a program providing financial, academic, professional, and personal supports for low-income community college students

Grant recipient: University of Chicago

Principal Investigators: Marianne Bertrand, Ph. D., University of Chicago
Kelly Hallberg, Ph. D., University of Chicago

Term: September 2016 – January 2025

Funding: \$146,842

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of One Million Degrees (OMD), a program that provides wrap-around financial, academic, professional, and personal supports for low-income community college students in Chicago. Prior evidence suggests this intervention could provide sizable impacts – it shares some key features with the City University of New York’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which has been found in a large, well-conducted RCT to nearly double the graduation rate (from 22% for control group students to 40% for ASAP students, over a 3-year period).

OMD’s ongoing expansion in Chicago provides an opportunity to embed a randomized evaluation. The study sample will consist of approximately 1,071 students from all seven Chicago City Colleges and a nearby suburban community college (Harper College), and will use administrative data sources to measure college enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment, as well as workforce outcomes, over an 8-year period.

This study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of up-front performance incentives for instructors and students in community colleges**

Grant recipient: Regents of the University of California

Principal Investigators: Sally Sadoff, Ph. D., University of California San Diego
Andy Brownback, Ph. D., University of Arkansas

Term: August 2016 – December 2022

Funding: \$312,147

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of performance incentives for community college instructors and their students. The instructors' incentive consists of an upfront bonus worth up to 50% of their per course salary. If their students exceed pre-established performance targets, instructors earn additional payments, while failure to meet the targets results in the instructors repaying a portion of their upfront bonus. Students receive incentives as well in the form of vouchers for a free summer course if they successfully complete a selected course during the spring semester. As with the teacher incentive, the voucher is provided upfront at the start of spring semester, but students can lose the voucher if they fail to successfully complete the targeted course. The design of the intervention is informed by prior RCTs in Louisiana, Arizona, California, Florida, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Illinois and Mexico, which have found that 1) incentives for teachers and/or students can improve achievement at least in the short term and 2) upfront incentives are particularly powerful.

The study sample will consist of approximately 140 instructors and 6,000 students at Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana, and will use administrative data sources to measure student performance on an objective final exam, credit accumulation, degree completion, and employment over six years.

This study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Long-term follow-up of the Randomized Trial of Project QUEST**

Grant Recipient: Economic Mobility Corporation

Principal Investigators: Anne Roder, Ph.D., Economic Mobility Corporation
Mark Elliott, Economic Mobility Corporation

Term: December 2017 – March 2020

Funding: \$261,848

Summary: This is a long-term follow-up of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Project QUEST – a workforce development program for low-income individuals – which found large impacts on participant earnings and employment. QUEST supports low-income students’ completion of college credentials in occupational areas that pay good wages and are in high demand in San Antonio, Texas. Major components of the program are: required full-time enrollment in an occupational program that QUEST supports, required weekly group or individual counseling sessions, financial assistance for tuition and other school-related expenses, and a remedial education course for those requiring it. The program costs approximately \$10,500 per participant.

Between 2006 and 2008, the RCT randomly assigned 410 individuals who were interested in nursing, medical records coding, or another health-related program that QUEST supports, but who were not currently attending college, to QUEST or to a control group. The study was very well conducted and, in 2017, the Economic Mobility Corporation published six-year follow-up findings based on a survey with high completion rates. The impact in the sixth year after random assignment was \$5,080 in annual earnings per person, among the largest ever observed in a workforce-focused RCT.

Under this project, the researchers will partner with the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas to extend follow-up to nine years using Texas unemployment insurance earnings data. The researchers will also use other administrative data to estimate long-term effects on educational attainment and public assistance receipt. Finally, they will conduct a simple and straightforward cost-benefit analysis.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Replication randomized controlled trial of Stay the Course, an intervention designed to increase college persistence and completion by low-income community college students**

Grant Recipient: University of Notre Dame

Term: June 2017 – July 2019

Principal Investigators: Melissa S. Kearney, Ph.D., University of Maryland
James X. Sullivan, Ph.D., University of Notre Dame
William Evans, Ph.D., University of Notre Dame

Funding: \$129,529

Summary: This grant will support the continuation of an ongoing randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Stay the Course, an intervention designed to improve postsecondary persistence and graduation outcomes for low-income community college students through case management and access to emergency cash assistance. Stay the Course shares some similarities with the evidence-based City University of New York Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in that it seeks to reduce financial, academic, and other barriers to community college students remaining in school. While Stay the Course’s services are less comprehensive than ASAP’s, it is also less costly to implement – about \$5,600 per student total for three years of enrollment for Stay the Course versus about \$14,000 per student for ASAP.

Stay the Course was previously evaluated in a well-conducted pilot RCT at one campus of Tarrant County College, a large community college system in Fort Worth, Texas. That study found that the program produced a promising increase in the likelihood that students remained enrolled in postsecondary education six semesters after random assignment (50% of the Stay the Course group was still enrolled vs. 44% of the control group, an impact that was close to statistical significance). A possible reason the program did not produce impacts that were large enough to reach full statistical significance (at the 0.05 level) is that only 22% of students in the Stay the Course group ever participated in the program.

The LJAF grant will support longer-term follow-up of a replication RCT of the program that is currently underway with a sample of 261 students at a different Tarrant County College campus. Compared to the pilot study, this study has achieved a much higher program participation rate among treatment group members (87%), and so is better powered to detect program impacts. After one year of follow-up, the new study’s initial findings on postsecondary enrollment are consistent with the promising findings from the pilot trial.

This grant will support continued data collection, analysis, and reporting on the impacts of Stay the Course for two additional years, providing outcome data three years after random assignment. Data collection will include school records and program participation data from Tarrant County College, as well as enrollment and degree data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

This study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **Evaluation of Tacoma Housing Authority’s College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP)**

Grant Recipient: Temple University

Principal Investigator: Sara Goldrick-Rab, Ph.D., Temple University

Term: March 2018 – November 2023

Funding: Up to \$331,050

Summary: This project is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the Tacoma Housing Authority’s College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP). CHAP is financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Moving to Work program and provides rental assistance vouchers to currently enrolled Tacoma Community College students who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness (“near-homeless”).

The prior evidence on CHAP, while not yet demonstrated in an RCT, suggests it has potential to improve academic completion outcomes among a targeted population of homeless and near-homeless students. Substantiating this evidence with a well-conducted and relatively low-cost RCT will be of value given the existence of a dedicated funding stream for the program and the expressed interest of other housing authorities to implement similar programs, thus demonstrating a viable path to scale up if proven effective.

Under this project, the study will randomly assign approximately 300 near-homeless students via lottery to receive an offer of a CHAP voucher or to a control group not offered a voucher. The researchers will collect and analyze administrative data to ascertain CHAP’s effects on academic completion, homelessness, healthcare utilization, and, if initial effects on these outcomes are sufficiently promising, on employment and earnings under an optional extension.

The study’s pre-analysis plan is linked [here](#).

REGULATORY POLICY (HEALTH, SAFETY, ENVIRONMENTAL)

- **Evaluation of Automated Enforcement of Outdoor Water Restrictions in Fresno, California**

Grant Recipient: University of Chicago

Principal Investigator: Michael Greenstone, Ph.D., Energy and Environment Lab, University of Chicago

Term: April 2018 – June 2020

Funding: \$233,162

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) designed to help the City of Fresno, California identify the most effective outdoor water restriction enforcement strategy to maximize water conservation while minimizing public complaints. Like many water-scarce areas in the United States, Fresno seeks to conserve water by limiting when households can water their lawns, particularly during the hot and dry summer months when drought risk is highest. However, 2016 water meter data indicates that, in a given summer month, over half of Fresno single-family households likely violate these restrictions based on their level of water use.

Historically, Fresno has used a costly system to enforce outdoor water restrictions, under which city employees (“water cops”) visited individual households with recent high water use to visually inspect their lawns for evidence of watering during restricted times, and issued a fine if they found such evidence. However, the city plans to move to a more efficient, automated system to identify and fine violators of water restrictions using data from recently installed smart water meters, which provide near real-time, hourly household water usage data. Because this is a new system, it is unknown what combination of fine threshold (i.e., the amount of water use that would trigger a fine) and fine amount will result in the most water conservation while not being so stringent as to provoke widespread citizen complaints.

This study will randomly assign approximately 100,000 Fresno single-family households with hourly water meters to one of 12 different strategies for promoting water conservation, comprised of various combinations of fine thresholds and fine amounts, or to the existing strategy (i.e., water cops and the existing fine amount).

The study will measure average daily household water use in each of the randomly-assigned groups using data collected by the smart meters during the summers of 2018 and 2019. The City’s Department of Public Utilities will use the study’s findings regarding the optimal fine threshold-level combination to shape its water conservation policies.

The study’s pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) workplace inspections**

Grant recipient: David Levine

Principal Investigator: David Levine, Ph. D., University of California Berkeley

Term: July 2014 - November 2015

Funding: \$96,000 from LJAF (\$57,000 from other philanthropic sources)

Summary: This project was a large, multi-site RCT of workplace health and safety inspections conducted by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). For a sample of about 13,000 business establishments eligible for a randomized inspection, the study tested whether being randomly chosen for inspection affects establishments' subsequent injury rates and business outcomes (*e.g.*, sales, business closures) over a three-to-four year period – all measured through administrative data from OSHA and other sources. The study is now [completed](#).

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

- **Evaluation of Peer Navigators for Emergency Department Patients Presenting with an Opioid Overdose**

Grant Recipient: Rhode Island Hospital

Principal Investigators: Francesca Beaudoin, M.D., Ph.D., Rhode Island Hospital
Brandon Marshall, Ph.D., Brown University

Term: July 2018 – December 2022

Funding: \$801,819

Summary: This is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a peer navigator program for emergency department (ED) patients presenting with an opioid overdose in Rhode Island, which has had one of the highest rates of overdose mortality in the nation. Peer navigators are individuals in long-term recovery for opioid addiction who have undergone extensive training to provide ED patients with recovery support and referrals to treatment, and remain engaged with patients for at least 90 days after their discharge from the ED. The peer navigator program was launched in 2014 at Rhode Island Hospital, which treats the majority of the state's overdose patients.

The state currently plans to increase the number of certified peer navigators in Rhode Island in 2018 and would likely further expand the program should it be shown in this RCT to be more effective than standard care. Additionally, jurisdictions in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New Jersey have, or are in the process of, creating programs based on the Rhode Island peer navigator model, with several other states expressing an interest in doing so.

Besides being a rapidly expanding approach to addressing the opioid crisis, the peer navigator model shares many similarities with the Recovery Coach model, which has been [found](#) in a large, well-conducted RCT to produce promising effects on substance use (e.g., a 29% reduction in the likelihood of mothers delivering a substance-exposed infant).

This study will randomly assign approximately 650 ED patients admitted for an opioid overdose to either a group that will receive peer navigator services or a control group that will receive usual care (i.e., a brief, one-time session with a social worker in the ED). Random assignment will take place on a rolling basis as patients present in the ED during the two-year study enrollment period.

The study's primary outcomes will be (i) engagement in formal addiction treatment from a licensed substance abuse treatment provider within 30 days following patients' original ED visit, and (ii) repeat ED visits for an opioid overdose within 18 months of the original ED visit. These outcomes will be measured using administrative data collected through Rhode Island's overdose surveillance platform.

- **Replication randomized controlled trial of PROSPER** - a community-wide system for delivering evidence-based substance misuse prevention programs for youth

Grant Recipient: Iowa State University of Science and Technology

Term: March 2017 – July 2022

Principal Investigator: Richard Spoth, Ph. D., Iowa State University

Funding: \$1,500,000

Summary: This project is a replication and extension trial of PROmoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER), a program-delivery system through which land grant universities partner with community teams to implement evidence-based programs for preventing youth substance misuse and other problem behaviors. A prior well-conducted randomized controlled trial (RCT) with a sample of 28 school districts in Pennsylvania and Iowa found sizable, sustained effects on important substance use outcomes, including (at a 6.5 year follow-up) school-wide reductions of 10-35% in illicit drug use initiation by youth who were non-users in 6th grade (prior to program delivery); and reductions in substance use for the full sample – non-users and users (e.g., 14% lower likelihood of past-month cigarette use).

This RCT will evaluate PROSPER combined with Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). SBIRT applies a brief, web-based screening tool to identify youth who are at greatest risk of developing serious behavioral problems including substance misuse, so that these youth and their families can receive in-depth support. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation will fund most of the program delivery expenses, along with a process evaluation.

The study sample will include 28 school districts in Iowa with over 2,500 participating 6th graders (none of the districts will have participated in the prior RCT). The districts will be randomly assigned to PROSPER + SBIRT versus a delayed intervention control group. The primary outcome measures will be non-medical prescription opioid use, marijuana use, and other illicit drug use, measured over a 3.5 year follow-up period (end of 9th grade). If sizable impacts are found, the study team will seek a follow-up grant from LJAF and/or other funders for longer-term follow-up (end of 12th grade), to determine whether the effects endure.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).

- **A randomized controlled trial of PROSPER – a community-wide substance abuse prevention program for youth**

Grant recipient: The Pennsylvania State University

Principal Investigator: Max Crowley, Ph. D., The Pennsylvania State University

Term: July 2016 – September 2018

Funding: \$150,000

Summary: The project is a study to determine whether the positive, long-term impacts on youth substance use found in a prior well-conducted randomized controlled trial (RCT) translate into reductions in youth Medicaid utilization and costs. Specifically, this study will build on an RCT of Promoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER), a program-delivery system in which universities partner with community teams to implement evidence-based programs for preventing youth substance abuse and other problem behaviors. The original RCT of PROSPER had a sample of 28 rural towns and small cities in Iowa and Pennsylvania. At a 6.5-year (end of 12th grade) follow-up, PROSPER was found to produce (i) community-wide reductions of 10-35% in illicit drug use initiation by youth who were non-users in 6th grade (prior to program delivery), and (ii) moderate reductions in substance use for the full sample – non-users and users (e.g., 14% lower likelihood of past-month cigarette use).

For the new analysis, the study's sample will consist of 33,000 youth in the communities randomly assigned in the PROSPER RCT described above. The study will use administrative Medicaid data to measure sample members' health care utilization and Medicaid costs between the ages of 12 and 18.

The study's pre-specified analysis plan is linked [here](#).