



Beyond Short-Term Learning Gains

The Impact of Outsourcing Schools in Liberia after Three Years¹



After three years, outsourcing management of public schools to private providers raised test scores by 0.21 standard deviations in math and 0.16 standard deviations in English (equivalent to 4 words per minute additional reading fluency for the cohort that started in first grade). Looking beyond learning gains, the program reduced corporal punishment (by 4.6 percentage points from a base of 51%), but increased dropout (by 3.3 percentage points from a base of 15%) and failed to reduce sexual abuse. Results vary by provider: some produced uniformly positive results, while others present stark trade-offs between learning gains and other outcomes.

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Country: Liberia

Sample: 3,624 students in 185 schools

Timeline: 2016-2019

The [Liberian Education Advancement Partnership \(LEAP\)](#), originally known as Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), began in 2016 with 93 public schools, and has since expanded to an additional 101 schools. The model is similar to charter schools in the United States or academies in the United Kingdom. LEAP schools remain public schools, charge no fees, and are staffed by public school teachers, but each school is managed by one of eight private contractors, including three for-profit companies and five charities which have taken responsibility for everything from teacher in-service training to fixing leaks in the roof.

While originally motivated by the government's desire to improve test scores, the initiative has been dogged by the [expulsion of students by private operators](#), an [alleged coverup of sexual abuse of minors](#), and [cost overruns](#).

This brief summarizes the results of a three-year randomized control trial, comparing outcomes for children in LEAP schools to those in regular government schools through March-May 2019.² We highlight impacts in four dimensions: access, learning, sustainability, and child safety. Results vary enormously across operators, and the overall picture for some operators looks much better (or worse) than the average.

¹ Click here for the latest draft of the full report, on which this summary is based.

² The randomized trial sampled students already enrolled before their schools were assigned to either become part of LEAP or remain as control schools and track these same students whenever they went through 2019 — so results are not driven by private operators advertising or expelling pupils selectively.

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Read the full paper [here](#).

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