

Summer 2019

LEO QUARTERLY REPORT



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NEW MEASUREMENT PILOT WITH STAND TOGETHER

LEO has partnered with Stand Together, a foundation driven to end the cycle of poverty, to aid non-profit organizations in designing research evaluations to generate evidence-based solutions to poverty. The first cohort of six non-profits includes providers focused on housing, homelessness, youth employment and training, supports for single mothers, job training for veterans, and entrepreneurship training for underserved communities.

NEW STAFF JOINING LEO

Joining the LEO team are Leigh Lynes as our External Relations Specialist, Kelli Reagan as our Executive Coordinator, and Brendan Perry as our Design Manager. We are grateful for these talented people joining our already talented team and look forward to working with them to reduce poverty and improve lives!

ROB COLLINSON JOINS LEO

Also joining LEO this summer is Rob Collinson as an Assistant Professor of Economics at Notre Dame. Dr. Collinson is an applied micro-economist focusing his research on housing policy, urban policy and the design of anti-poverty programs. Rob recently



LEO co-founder Jim Sullivan talking among the Future of Work Conference panel.



LEO and Stand Together work together to create impact at a meeting in Chicago.

completed his PhD in Economics at New York University. We are thrilled to welcome Rob to our team!

SULLIVAN AND TURNER AT IRP SUMMER WORKSHOP

LEO co-founder Jim Sullivan and research faculty Patrick Turner presented at the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) Summer Workshop. Dr. Sullivan presented early results from LEO's evaluation of the Padua Program, a wrap-around case management program for low-income individuals and families. Dr. Turner presented results from the evaluation of the ReHire Colorado program, a job training and placement program for welfare recipients.

SULLIVAN PRESENTS AT FUTURE OF WORK CONFERENCE

LEO co-founder Jim Sullivan took part in a panel on Skilling Up at the Future of Work Conference hosted by Notre Dame's Institute for Global Development, Citigroup Foundation and the City of South Bend. Dr. Sullivan talked about how technology disproportionately hurts people in lower paid, lower wage jobs and how that relates to the work LEO does to find programs that help low-income people gain self-sufficiency.

FACULTY AFFILIATE UPDATES

LEO's research network is comprised of faculty affiliates from universities around the country with experience evaluating anti-poverty programs. LEO identifies innovative projects and matches them to academic researchers with appropriate expertise.

MATT FREEDMAN

Professor Freedman was promoted to Full Professor at the University of California, Irvine. He was also awarded a grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation for a project with Benjamin Hyman (Federal Reserve Bank of New York) and David Neumark (UC Irvine) to study the effectiveness of a large state business tax credit program.

CRAIG GUNDERSEN

Professor Gundersen attended a conference at the Vatican titled "Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation Convention 2019 The Catholic Social Teaching from inception to the digital age: How to live the Laudato Si." As part of this, Professor Gundersen contributed, based on his work on food insecurity and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to a report titled "Reduce Hunger: Pope Francis' Call for New Approaches."

CHLOE GIBBS

Professor Gibbs gave a keynote address at the 2019 National Head Start Conference in San Antonio, Texas in May. Her talk, "A Head Start in Life: Measuring the Program's Long-term and Intergenerational Impact," focused on what we have learned from rigorous studies of Head Start's effectiveness and what we can learn from research going forward.

RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

Partner Agency:
Practice Makes
Perfect

Policy Focus Area:
Education

Investigators:
Sarah Kroeger
James Sullivan
Chloe Gibbs
Sean Corcoran

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Practice Makes Perfect (PMP) operates a five-week long summer learning program entailing 200 hours of mentoring and scholarship education to students from low-income communities in the New York City public school system. It offers an innovative alternative to traditional summer school that aims to reduce summer learning loss by incorporating both academic guidance and peer mentorship into the summer curriculum. Schools pay a per-student program fee of \$1,250 for the five-week session.

SIGNIFICANCE

Disadvantaged elementary and middle school students can lose up to the equivalent of one to two months' worth of learning during the summer months. Interestingly, summer learning loss—or “summer slide”—is not consistently predicted by race, IQ, or gender. It is, however, concentrated among low-income students, and therefore perpetuates the academic achievement gap based on family socio-economic status. Over time, these losses accumulate—the total slide over the period from third through eighth grade can be as large as the reading gains from an entire year of school and math gains for more than a year of school. This slide creates a significant achievement gap that can severely impede the chances of academic success and reduce the likelihood that low-performing students go on to complete high school and attend college.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The evaluation will explore the impact of PMP on academic outcomes for participants. Specifically, LEO seeks to answer the following question: What is the impact of PMP on reading and math scores, grade promotion, and

grades? LEO is also interested in understanding whether PMP affects students' engagement in the classroom. This will be tested, in part, by looking at students' attendance records.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

In the summer of 2018, PMP collaborated with LEO to launch a randomized control trial (RCT) pilot study to generate preliminary evidence of the program's impact on academic outcomes. To enroll these students PMP first requested lists of the eligible students from the eight classes across the five participating schools. Eligibility was determined at the discretion of each school's principal. From this study sample, the LEO research team randomly selected students to be offered a spot in a PMP classroom. Selected students were invited sequentially to enroll in the program by PMP staff, who conducted multiple rounds of invitation telephone calls. These students comprise the treatment group. The remaining students, those not invited to enroll in PMP, comprise the control group.

PROJECT STATUS

The preliminary analysis of the effects of PMP will utilize data on academic outcomes from the New York City Department of Education. The primary outcomes of interest are subsequent school attendance and standardized test scores. The first round of these data for the 2018–19 school year will be available for analysis in fall 2019.



Karim is the CEO of Practice Makes Perfect, a Benefit Corporation that partners with K-12 schools to deliver high quality academic programs. He founded Practice Makes Perfect at 18. He writes for Entrepreneur, Forbes, and LinkedIn. Karim is a TED Fellow and Echoing Green Fellow. At 23, he was named to Forbes' 30 under 30 list in Education, and at 24 was named to Magic Johnson's 32 under 32 list. In 2016, he was ranked in the top three most powerful young entrepreneurs under 25 in the world by Richtopia. He graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor's in Hotel Administration and is currently pursuing a Master's in Education Policy at Columbia University.

KARIM ABOUELNAGA

How did you become interested in helping students living in low-income communities reduce summer learning loss?

I grew up in a low-income community and was fortunate enough to have a series of non-profits and mentors who helped me escape a dead end life. It was the generosity of their time and love that allowed me to be successful. That ultimately inspired my desire to give back and pay it forward. When I learned about the need for support over the summer and the inequality that resulted from it, I decided to focus my efforts on leveling the playing field over the summer.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

I genuinely believe that our society has the intellect and ability to solve any problem. The challenge we often have is in defining the problem or addressing the right one. Research is all about data collection and interpreting data to make sense of problems and some formidable solutions. Poverty is a global problem that needs to be broken down more narrowly into separate problem parts so we can tackle them one at a time. That's where research is really important.

How do you anticipate Practice Makes Perfect will be improved as a result of LEO's research study?

Research provides us with insights into what we're doing. The information will ultimately help us make evidence-based tweaks to improve the efficacy of the work we are doing.

What have you gained from working on a LEO research project?

Thus far, I've seen the complexity in executing what may be the simplest thing to do, such as collecting data from eight schools. It requires constant communication, troubleshooting, having a plan B and C sometimes, and patience. The outcomes we want to measure sometimes aren't readily available.

Why do you think Practice Makes Perfect is important?

Practice Makes Perfect provides students with opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have. We've managed to be a conduit for social change across some of NYC's most deserving communities that are often also the most underresourced.



Sarah Kroeger, Ph.D., is a Research Assistant Professor at the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) within the Department of Economics at the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests lie in inequality, intergenerational mobility, and economics of the family. Her recent research examines such topics as women's education, career choice, and gender differences in college completion, and has been published in top field journals. Prior to coming to Notre Dame, Sarah worked as an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for four years. Sarah earned her MA and PhD in economics from Boston University, and an undergraduate degree in economics and international relations from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA.

SARAH KROEGER

What is your role at LEO?

I am a research faculty member at LEO, and my focus is on education and health. I work as an investigator on projects related to topics like college completion, early childhood learning, maternal education, and homeless patient health. I work to design research projects, oversee the data analysis process, and write papers for publication as well as reports for our non-academic partners.

Why did you join LEO?

My family spent some of my childhood years living among a very impoverished rural community in Malaysia, and I saw first-hand how poverty, low education, and poor healthcare can turn into a vicious cycle. As a researcher, I want to learn more about the intergenerational persistence of poverty, and what we can do to disrupt this cycle. I was very excited to join LEO because of the opportunity to research these questions by working directly with agencies and policy makers who actively combat poverty. I wanted to do work that mattered for real programs and real people. I was also drawn to work with the talented and thoughtful people who make up the LEO team.

How are you involved in the Practice Makes Perfect evaluation?

I'm a co-principal investigator on this project. This is a project close to my heart because PMP's goal is to help disadvantaged children keep pace with more affluent children during the summer months, a period where low-income students typically fall behind their peers. Since this evaluation is a randomized control trial, we randomized lists of students and PMP offered out the classroom spots in sequence to students in the treatment group. We had multiple conversations with PMP about the obstacles to summer school that disadvantaged families might face, and addressing these obstacles is a critical step for PMP and LEO moving forward. For example, many of the families are not able to sign up for programs outside their neighborhood because they do not have reliable transportation. Being involved with this project has taught me a lot about the urban summer school environment for low-income children.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

The individuals and organizations that work on the frontline to combat poverty are focused on the day to day needs of their clients, and they aren't able to step back and make objective assessments about what works and what doesn't work. It's also easy to become emotionally attached to a program or service, and that makes it very difficult to make any changes. Evaluating these projects with rigorous research can illuminate problems in the delivery or model of a service, and identify which services should be expanded and which services should be modified.

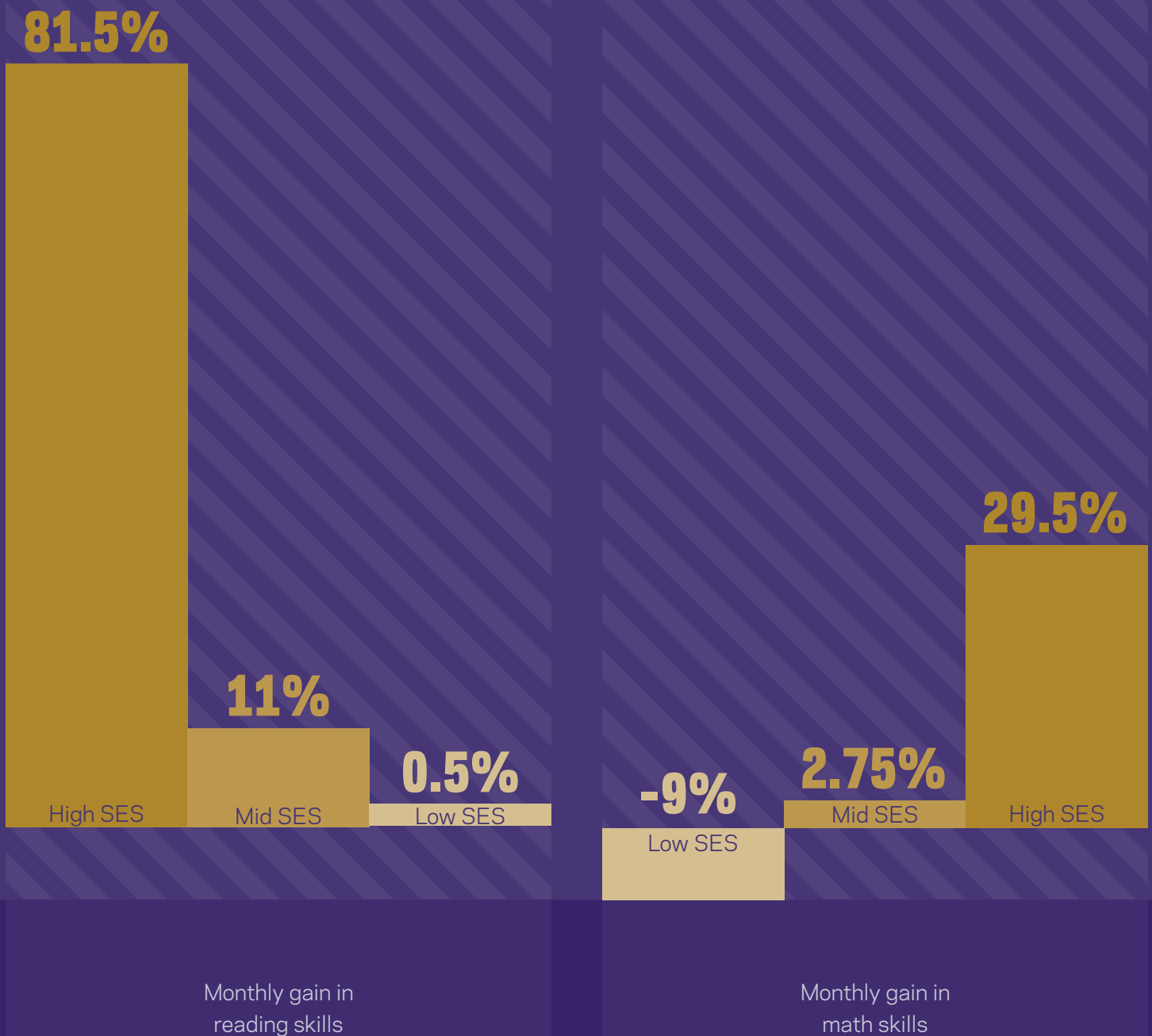
What makes LEO's approach to research unique?

LEO brings the academic training of researchers together with the institutional knowledge of service providers. When we have personal, repeated conversations with non-profit organizations or local governments, we learn things about poverty that we could never understand from reading academic journal articles. This is crucial for finding the right research design and implementing it optimally. There are several other labs around the country conducting poverty research, but I think the very close partnership we have with providers combined with a commitment to high quality, rigorous evaluation makes LEO unique.

How does LEO's work improve the ability of agency partners to serve those living in poverty?

I think this happens in two ways. First, we can inform our partners directly about what they are doing in peoples lives: what works, what doesn't, and who is helped the most. It's very rewarding and humbling to know that the research product could actually change outcomes or services for real people, and that makes it so important to conduct high-quality, well-designed evaluations. Second, being able to demonstrate efficacy is a huge asset to service providers in sustaining and growing their programs. Most of our partners depend heavily on fundraising and grants to support their operations. Increasingly, donors and grant-making organizations are asking for evidence that programs work before they are willing to give significant financial support.

BY THE NUMBERS: SUMMER LEARNING LOSS BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)



Source: Data is from Alexander, Entwisle, Olson (2001), over a five-year period.