

# Organizing Schools to Improve Student Achievement

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- Education reform debates often focus on issues that are controversial and/or political
  - Vouchers, charter schools, merit pay, etc.
- Yet there are many less “glamorous” reforms with high benefit-cost ratios
  - Start times, middle school conversations, teacher assignments
- Our message: Untapped potential for improvement by changing organization and/or management practices in schools

# Start Times

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- Adolescents/teenagers *biologically* need later sleep/wake times than young kids and adults
  - “7am for adolescents is like 4am for adults”
  - Yet most adolescents start school by 8:00am
- Several high-quality studies show large impacts of start times on student learning
  - Moving start times one hour later → +0.175 s.d.
- What is the cost of starting school later?
  - Financial vs. non-financial costs

# Grade Configurations

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- Middle/junior high schools are popular in U.S.
  - Three-quarters of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders nationwide
  - Force students to adapt to new teachers/peers in a much larger, less personalized setting, at a particularly difficult period in their lives
- Mounting evidence of lower student growth in these schools relative to the K-8 structure
  - Concern with middle school is not new
  - Recent research shows large negative effects,  $\sim -0.1$  s.d.

# Teacher Assignments

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- Teachers are key “input” in educational process
  - Large variation in effectiveness among teachers
  - Debates focus on certification, evaluation, pay
- Evidence that teacher assignments have important influence on effectiveness
  - Practice makes perfect (e.g., ELL students)
  - Large returns to grade and subject experience
    - Every year, 20-40% of teachers switch grade levels
- We believe assignments could be managed in a way that improves student achievement

# In Conclusion

- Organization and managerial practice is an important area for cost-effective reform

TABLE 1

## Estimated Cost-Benefit Ratios for Organizational Reforms

Organizational Reform	Lifetime Earnings Gains Per Student	Cost per student	Benefit/Cost Ratio
Convert K-5/6-8 to K-8	\$10,000	\$50 to \$250	40:1 to 200:1
Middle/Upper Grades Start 1 Hour Later	\$17,500	\$0 to \$1,950	9:1 or more
Managing Teacher Assignments	\$2000	\$0 financial, but other costs hard to measure	