

Southwest Counseling Solutions: English Language Learners Program

What is the community challenge?

Poverty and literacy, two barriers to well-being, are handed down generation to generation. Recent economic trends raised concern for the future of young Detroit children who are raised in families for whom English is a second language, or not spoken at all. The challenge is to reduce the achievement gap by investing in the future success of Hispanic families in Detroit for whom English is a second language spoken by students and their families.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund
Intervention: English Language Learners Program (ELLP)
Subgrantee: Southwest Counseling Solutions
Intermediary: United Way of Southeastern Michigan
Focus Area: Youth Development
Focus Population: Youth grades K-3
Community Served: Detroit, Michigan

What is the promising solution?

The purpose of the English Language Learners Program (ELLP) is to provide a school-centered educational program designed to end the cycle of poverty and low education by strengthening literacy traits in Hispanic families living in southwest Detroit. The strategy is to simultaneously promote school engagement, family literacy, and English language proficiency in Hispanic parents/caregivers and their young elementary school-age children.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Southwest Counseling Solutions' ELLP began in 2012 and finished reporting in 2017. The analysis was grounded by the impact question, "To what extent does the ELLP increase education-related parent behaviors, improve student school actions (attendance and academic growth mindset/behaviors), and increase student reading achievement?" The question was explored through a quasi-experimental design with a matched comparison group as well as a single group design among participating parents. Three hundred and thirteen parents signed up for ELLP over the course of five years. The study compared 270 comparison students and 271 Focus students (171 students whose parents fully participated in the program [150+ hrs.] and 100 students whose parents partially participated in the program [\leq 150 hrs.]).

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Southwest Counseling Solutions engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate ELLP. The pilot year of the evaluation 2012-2013 was an implementation study, which found a moderate level of fidelity. Findings from the impact evaluation indicated that there was at least one statistically significant effect of parent's level of participation on student attendance, academic mindset, or reading level. A subsequent ANOVA and post-hoc tests indicated that these results were only significant for the student attendance outcome and that differences were only present for students whose parents fully participated in the program (150+ hrs.). No statistically significant differences were observed between the children of partial program participants (\leq 150 hrs.) and comparison parents, or on the academic mindset or academic achievement outcomes.

Notes on the evaluation

Although positive impacts on student attendance were observed for the children of parents who fully participated in the program, these results should be interpreted with caution given that matching was not conducted based on dosage groups and positive impacts were not observed for the academic mindset or reading achievement outcomes. Additionally, matching did not account for parent or household-level characteristics such as income, parent education level, or number of parents in the household and this may have led to self-selection bias—particularly among full participants who may have had access to additional resources or supports that made them more likely to fully participate in the program.

How is Southwest Solutions] using the evaluation findings to improve?

The report suggests that the findings from the evaluation of ELLP will strengthen programs and policies in the following ways:

1. Findings will build awareness for educators and policy makers regarding the role English language learner parents play in children’s educational outcomes.
2. Results will inform school administrators and staff of ways to support and cultivate culturally responsive environments that are welcoming to parents.
3. Implications will support school leaders as they work to build relationships that increase the capacity of parents to support their children’s educational needs.
4. Implications will inform adult educators about the knowledge, skills, and abilities parents need to support children’s learning.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Designs: Quasi-experimental between-groups design formed by matching and quasi-experimental single group design.

Study Population: Hispanic students in four schools in Detroit, grades K-3

Independent Evaluator: Center of Effort LLC: Jeri A. Levesque, Ed.D. and Margaret Scordias, Ed.D.

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*: Moderate (for the attendance outcome and full participants only)

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.