NCLB's Supplemental Educational Services: Is This What Our Students Need?

Ms. Ascher reviews several evaluations of supplemental educational services under NCLB. She concludes that we know little about what various programs offer students and still less about how programs affect student learning.

By Carol Ascher

SUPPLEMENTAL educational services, as legislated in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, must be made available to students in low-performing Title I schools. Although we have just completed the fourth year since implementation began, a handful of evaluations are beginning to present a few common themes.

The federal out-of-school tutoring program features free-market strategies promoted by the Bush Administration: parental choice, money following individual students, and the privatization of educational delivery. Created in response to low standardized-test scores, the requirement for supplemental educational services also reflects NCLB's lack of interest in the wider goals of public schools or students' school experiences. Just as NCLB has forced high-poverty schools to narrow their academic offerings to ensure that students make "adequate yearly progress" in English and math,[1] the two subjects currently tested, the supplemental services provision extends this narrowed educational agenda into students' out-of-school hours.

After-school programs had already begun a rapid expansion before NCLB, partly as a result of President Clinton's 21st Century Community Learning Centers and partly because of concerns about rising numbers of latchkey children and increasing crime rates in the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. There was also growing awareness that the poor were concentrated in inner cities and that regular classroom hours were too few to impart the academic, developmental, and social skills necessary to

CAROL ASCHER, one of the guest editors of this special section, is principal associate of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, New York City office.

help many low-income children move out of poverty. At the upper ends of the range of income and wealth, competition for college entrance was fueling a thriving tutoring industry on the lookout for new markets. With about $2.6 billion of the $13 billion in Title I funds potentially usable for supplemental services, the new federal program was a boon to the private tutoring industry and to nonprofits already providing tutoring.

As with vouchers, which were on the conservative agenda when supplemental services emerged as a compromise initiative, money for supplemental services follows the student. That is, a Title I school designated in need of improvement must inform its students of available tutoring and reimburse the supplemental services provider that each student chooses.[2] School spending for tutoring varies widely, depending on a school's Title I allotment, the number of students using supplemental services, and providers' hourly rates. However, costs for supplemental services have risen steadily over the past four years, reaching an average of more than $1,400 per student in 2004, which is two to three times the cost of Title I comprehensive schoolwide programs.[3] Given the current 20% cap on the use of Title I funds for supplemental services and choice-related transportation, districts estimate that they can serve about a fifth of all eligible children with available Title I funds, though urban districts estimate that they can pay for only 18%.[4] The percentage is still lower in large, high-poverty districts: Los Angeles, for instance, can serve 16% of those eligible with existing Title I funds.[5]

So far, however, enrollment in supplemental services nationwide remains low. According to the most recent estimate by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), only 233,000 or 11% of the two million eligible students are enrolled nationwide.[6] Moreover, a new report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) finds that 20% of districts required to offer supplemental services had no students enrolled. The majority of these were rural or had fewer than 2,500 students.[7] In the 299 districts surveyed by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) in 2005-06, 20% of eligible students took advantage of supplemental services. However, extremely low percentages of eligible students enrolling in supplemental services have been reported in Houston (3%) and Philadelphia (5%).[8] In Los Angeles, 32,500 or 11% of all eligible students are enrolled in supplemental services, but 318,000 students participate in various academic intervention programs before or after school or on Saturdays.[9]

If students and their families have been slow to seize the opportunity for out-of-school tutoring, districts and schools have not always fully promoted supplemental services, in part because NCLB allows schools to use unspent Title I funds in other ways. Not surprisingly, providers have accused districts and schools of a range of obstructionist tactics, including withholding information from parents, using obtuse bureaucratic language to tell parents about opportunities for supplemental services, creating obstacles to parents signing up, limiting the number of supplemental services slots before the 20% cap is reached, and making it difficult for providers to work in their schools. However, according to the GAO, about half of all districts do not notify parents in a timely manner, in part because they themselves experience delays in receiving school improvement results from their states.[10] Nor do all public school administrators resist supplemental services. In New York City, for example, some administrators were accused of giving out parents' phone numbers and other confidential information in return for favors from providers.[11] Glossing over the contradictory temptations built into supplemental services, an implementation guide from ED asks districts to "embrace the spirit" of supplemental services and to "set a positive tone."[12]

If students and their families have been slow to seize the opportunity for out-of-school tutoring, districts and schools have not always fully promoted supplemental services, in part because NCLB allows schools to use unspent Title I funds in other ways.

According to the CEP, which has conducted four annual reviews of supplemental services, 54% of all state-approved providers were profit-making companies in 2005-06, 21% were nonprofits not affiliated with a religious group, and 9% were districts, with the remainder divided among other public entities (7%), private or-

ganizations with religious affiliations (5%), and other types of organizations (3%).[13] ED, which has made special efforts to engage faith-based organizations in providing tutoring, reports that 9% of providers have religious affiliations.[14]

Clearly, urban districts with heterogeneous student populations, each of which must score at a proficient level on state tests, have the greatest difficulty making AYP. Not surprisingly, 40% of all urban districts are required to offer supplemental services. While providing their own tutoring services has been a way for districts to control costs, there has been a precipitous decline in the percentage of urban district providers — from 43% in 2002-03 to 13% in 2004-05 — largely because NCLB forbids districts that have not made AYP from acting as supplemental services providers.[15] Whatever sense it makes to punish urban districts by withholding the opportunity to manage the tutoring program, NCLB allows certified teachers working in the districts' schools — who have presumably taught many of the same students — to work for the nonprofits and companies that provide supplemental services. In fact, a number of large urban districts that did not make AYP — Anchorage, Boston, Chicago, Dayton, Los Angeles, Memphis, and New York, among others — have negotiated, or are currently negotiating, with ED to offer their own supplemental services programs.[16]

CHOOSING SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES

NCLB mandates that, within Title I schools, supplemental services be directed to students in academic trouble. But pressure to accelerate enrollment in supplemental services has led districts and schools to offer tutoring to all low-income students. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District has made clear that, until the district runs short of money, any interested student qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch can receive tutoring.[17] By contrast, in Chicago, where the district has engaged in a series of confrontations with private providers and the federal government, the Chicago Public Schools found that students receiving tutoring performed at a lower level than their Title I peers.[18]

And what choices in tutoring services do these students and their families have? Approximately 2,000 providers offer supplemental services nationwide, and the numbers have been growing exponentially each year. In 2004, parents were reportedly able to select on average nine providers per district; the number more than doubled to 20 choices per district in 2005.[19] But while some districts report a glut of providers, others have too few, or ones whose services don't match their students' needs. The CEP found that, in 42% of the districts it surveyed, none of the providers could serve students with disabilities, and in 51% of the districts, none could serve English-language learners.[20] There are also typically fewer providers for middle and high school students than for elementary school students.[21]

Regardless of the choices available, geography tends to limit the options from which parents are likely to choose. The two or three providers to which schools refer their students — including the district-run program, when available — most often operate in the school building or a nearby community center. Although some tutoring companies offer transportation, the wisdom of the industry is that few students are likely to travel beyond their neighborhood.[22]

NCLB's ideal of offering a range of tutoring choices is further compromised by the tendency of supplemental services providers to require a minimum number of students at each site — it simply makes better economic sense to offer tutoring to a large population in a single school than to a few students in each of several schools. This obviously coincides with the interests of a principal, for whom it is easier to host and monitor one or two providers than to manage multiple nonprofits and companies, each with its own schedule and rules for handling personnel and students.

The CEP reports that the percentage of providers used by families is actually going down; only 34% of providers listed by districts served students in 2004-05. Sometimes, no parent had selected the providers (parents without computers could not use an online tutoring service), and sometimes the providers backed out when too few students enrolled or the schools were too "remote."[23] Though discussions of supplemental services have emphasized the number of choices available to students, the more important issue is whether differences between tutoring programs are meaningful.

INSIDE THE SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES CLASSROOM

About half of all current private providers of supplemental services report having offered after-school programs before 2001,[24] yet we know little about their programs or how they have affected student learning. Do the companies whose television ads have become so familiar offer students eligible for supplemental serv-

ices the same computers and attentive female tutors pictured in the ads featuring children who suddenly love school? What do different supplemental services arrangements feel like to students who are adding another hour or two at the beginning or end of their school day? What is their attention like, their capacity for learning? What methods and activities work best in the late afternoon hours, which is when most tutoring occurs? Does the supplemental services curriculum dovetail with the instruction students are receiving in school, and should it? And does a student who has struggled to learn math in the classroom get to try a new instructional method that might better suit his or her strengths?

According to federal guidelines, states are to select only those providers whose instruction is "research-based" and focused on improving achievement, and they are to take any provider off the approved list that fails to improve student achievement for two years. However, ED reports that, as of early 2005, "15 states had not established any monitoring processes, 25 states had not yet established any standards for evaluating provider effectiveness, and none had finalized their evaluation standards."[25] In its fourth annual report on NCLB, the CEP noted for the first time that four states had removed providers for quality issues, but it added that most states remained unclear about their authority to do so. According to the GAO, though some states are in the process of evaluating the effect of supplemental services on student achievement, "none has provided a conclusive assessment of this effect."[26]

If diminishing NCLB funds and a federal policy climate that stresses deregulation have been obstacles to implementing clear systems of supplemental services oversight, states have also had to grapple with controversies surrounding "effective" reading and math programs. Moreover, the federal supplemental services program was inaugurated at a time when research was at best inconclusive about the impact of out-of-school instruction on student achievement. An evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers found no achievement effects.[27] In fact, some evidence suggests that effective after-school programs combine academic experiences with social and developmental activities and that, because what is most important for students is active participation, a structural alignment of in-school and after-school programs may actually limit student learning.[28]

In a study conducted for the Education Industry Association, supplemental services providers report that tutoring generally takes place in small groups of fewer than 10 students, and about a quarter of all providers offer one-on-one sessions.[29] But there are also online classes, some of which are directed from as far away as India. Although NCLB mandates "highly qualified" teachers for every classroom during the school day, the law is silent about qualifications for tutors. Most tutors are certified teachers, but some are college graduates without teaching experience, and 7% are high school students. Some, but not all, providers prepare their tutors to work with their instructional programs — preparation ranges from four to 20 hours. Some,

Because students simultaneously attend their public schools and after-school tutoring, the question of whether – and how much – supplemental services improve student achievement is not easy to untangle.

but not all, providers evaluate their tutors.[30]

We also know that some states ask providers to align their programs with state standards and that in some cities providers must give classroom teachers copies of student learning plans. But the GAO reports that, in 40% of districts, few or no providers contacted teachers in 2004-05.[31] Moreover, there are no mechanisms for teachers to let providers know the help their students need.[32]

Student attendance at tutoring sessions is irregular, with attendance averaging 50% — fairly typical for after-school programs.[33] Because districts generally pay providers on the basis of attendance, reported participation rates have been a source of controversy between districts and providers.[34] To increase student attendance, 60% of for-profits and 50% of nonprofits offer incentives, including computers, basketball tickets, and gift certificates, according to the Education Industry Association. However, providers report that incentives have little effect on attendance and recommend against the strategy.[35] Completion rates for semesterlong programs are also relatively low: in New York City, where data were analyzed for the 32 community school districts, completion rates ranged from a low of 6% to a high of 61%.[36]

Because students simultaneously attend their public schools and after-school tutoring, the question of whether — and how much — supplemental services improve student achievement is not easy to untangle. Public schools, with a potential for 30 instructional hours weekly, are at least as likely to contribute to the progress that providers measure through pre- and posttests as supplemental services providers, with at most two to six hours a week, are to contribute to the annual improvements in public school achievement measured by states and districts.

Any study of the effects of after-school programs must estimate what the outcomes would have been for the same students had they not attended. Yet, even with the best study design, it is extremely difficult to establish control groups that do not show selection bias, because choosing to attend an after-school program is itself an indication of student motivation and parents' educational and social-class background.

When the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) did not make AYP and so lost ED approval for offering tutoring, the district conducted an evaluation of supplemental services to make its case for being allowed to continue as a provider. Evaluators compared test-score gains of 60,000 students receiving tutoring in 2004-05 with those of low-income students who were eligible for supplemental services but did not enroll. We don't know how students were targeted for supplemental services, but tutored students began the year with lower scores in both English and math. Although attendance reporting was considered "at best problematic," eligible students who were assumed to have received at least 40 hours of tutoring (out of 80) had higher gains than those eligible students who had not been tutored. Students receiving at least 40 hours of tutoring had slightly higher reading-score gains for the year (1.11) than eligible untutored students (1.03) or the citywide average (1.06). In math, tutored students gained .97 over the course of the year, more than untutored eligible students (.92) but less than the citywide gain (1.01).

The CPS study also compared costs and gains across 17 providers, including the district. Students receiving tutoring from any of seven providers, including CPS, had higher reading-score gains than the district average; though costs were unrelated to test scores, they ranged from a low of $6 an hour (CPS) to more than $27. The researchers determined that CPS and two for-profit companies were the most cost-effective.

As much as we need similar quantitative studies from other districts, including those that follow students over more than one year, we also need program observations that allow us to understand what supplemental services classrooms look like over time and how children experience tutoring. As it stands, expectations for supplemental services appear low. State and district officials responding to CEP's fourth-year survey were generally "skeptical" about the effects of supplemental services, with only a "handful" (10% of all district respondents) believing that tutoring is important to improving achievement.

WHAT STUDENTS NEED

NCLB requires low-performing Title I schools to use existing federal funds to extend the school day for children who want extra instructional time. Though these schools lose control of how their Title I dollars are used, they remain responsible for getting their students to make AYP.

Despite four years of supplemental services and hundreds of millions of dollars spent on out-of-school tutoring, we still know little about the effects of tutoring on student achievement, the single purported goal of the federal program. We do know that competition for Title I funds has caused both private providers and public

school staff members to engage in illegal practices. We also know that states and districts have been slow to develop oversight and have asked the federal government for help. As is often the case in an unregulated climate, however, the burgeoning education industry has seen the advantage of regulating itself. In November 2005, the Education Industry Association published a code of ethics that, in an ironic turn, it now suggests states should adopt. If weeding out corruption from supplemental services is enough, then, thanks to business, we are on the right track.

Those responsible for administering supplemental services have promised to keep an eye on results, leaving schools — or, in this case, tutoring providers — to work out the process. But we already understand how high-stakes assessments in English and math have narrowed the in-school curriculum, particularly in high-poverty schools where student performance is likely to be low. Though our nation's most fragile children certainly deserve a better education than is generally available to them, it is hard to fathom that another few hours of disconnected English or math will meet that need.

---

1. *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy, March 2006).

2. NCLB requires Title I schools that have not made AYP for two or more years to offer their students the choice of a higher-performing school. After three or more years of not making AYP, low-performing schools must set aside up to 20% of their Title I, Part A, allocation for supplemental services and transportation related to offering their students choice. However, because only 1% of all eligible children choose to attend a higher-performing school, ED is seeking to reverse the order of choice transfers and supplemental services.

3. Policy Studies Associates, *Case Studies of Supplemental Services Under the No Child Left Behind Act: Findings from 2003-04* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, U.S. Department of Education, 2005); and Gail L. Sunderman and Jimmy Kim, "Does NCLB Provide Good Choices for Students in Low-Performing Schools?," Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2004.

4. *From the Capital to the Classroom*, p. 241.

5. Becki Robinson, program specialist, extended learning, Los Angeles Unified School District, telephone conversation, 28 June 2006.

6. *National Assessment of Title I: Interim Report: Executive Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, U.S. Department of Education, February 2006).

7. "No Child Left Behind: Education Actions Needed to Improve Local Implementation and State Evaluation of Supplemental Educational Services — A Report to Congressional Requesters," Government Accountability Office, Washington, D.C., August 2006.

8. Jennifer Radcliffe, "Few HISD Students Sign Up for Free Tutors," *Houston Chronicle*, 21 February 2006, p. B-1; and Clive R. Belfield and Chad d'Entremont, "Will Disadvantaged Students Benefit from a Free Market in Supplemental Educational Services?," *American School Board Journal*, May 2005, pp. 28-31.

9. Robinson, op. cit.

10. "No Child Left Behind: Education Actions."

11. Catherine Gewertz, "Tutoring Firms, N.Y.C. School Employees Faulted in Probe," *Education Week*, 15 March 2006, available at www.edweek.org.

12. *Creating Strong Supplemental Educational Services Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 2004), available at www.ed.gov/nclb/choice.

13. *From the Capital to the Classroom*.

14. *National Assessment of Title I*.

15. *From the Capital to the Classroom*.

16. Council of the Great City Schools, "Urban Districts Gain Flexibility in No Child Left Behind Law," *Urban Educator,* October 2005, p. 5.

17. Linda Jacobson, "Leveling the Playing Field: In Los Angeles, the Free Tutoring Required Under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act Is Opening Doors for Students — And Making Demands on the School District," *Education Week*, 2 November 2005, available at www.edweek.org.

18. *SES Tutoring Programs: An Evaluation of the Second Year — Part One of a Two-Part Report* (Chicago: Chicago Public Schools, August 2005).

19. Linda M. Anderson and Katrina G. Laguarda, *Case Studies of Supplemental Services Under the No Child Left Behind Act: Findings from 2003-2004 — Report to the USDOE* (Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, 2005), available at www.ed.gov; and *From the Capital to the Classroom*.

20. *From the Capital to the Classroom*, p. 141.

21. *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy, March 2005).

22. Jennifer Harmon and Kerstin Le Floch, *The Promise & Challenge of SES: The Providers' Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research and Education Industry Association, November 2005), available at www.educationindustry.org; click on "Publications."

23. *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4*, p. 137.

24. Harmon and Le Floch, op. cit.

25. *National Assessment of Title I*, p. 24.

26. "No Child Left Behind: Education Actions," p. 5.

27. Susanne James-Burdumy, Mark Dynarski, and John Deke, *When Schools Stay Open Late: Results from the National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program* (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, October 2005).

28. Chris Wimer, "Learning from Small-Scale Experimental Evaluations of After-School Programs," Harvard Family Research Project, May 2006, available at www.hfrp.org; and Meredith I. Honig and Morva A. McDonald, "From Promise to Participation: Using Socio-Cultural Learning Theory to Understand After-School Programs as Settings for Learning," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 2006.

29. Harmon and Le Floch, op. cit.

30. Ibid.

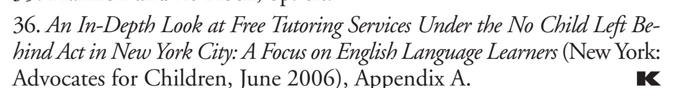
31. "No Child Left Behind: Education Actions," p. 4.

32. Sunderman and Kim, op. cit.

33. Harmon and Le Floch, op. cit.; and Sandra Simpkins Chaput, Priscilla M. D. Little, and Heather B. Weiss, *Understanding and Measuring Attendance in Out-of-School Programs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project, 2004).

34. Policy Studies Associates, op. cit.

35. Harmon and Le Floch, op. cit.



36. *An In-Depth Look at Free Tutoring Services Under the No Child Left Behind Act in New York City: A Focus on English Language Learners* (New York: Advocates for Children, June 2006), Appendix A.

File Name and Bibliographic Information

k0610asc.pdf

Carol Ascher, NCLB's Supplemental Educational Services: Is This What Our Students Need?, Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 88, No. 02, October 2006, pp. 136-144.

Copyright Notice
Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc., holds copyright to this article, which may be reproduced or otherwise used only in accordance with U.S. law governing fair use. MULTIPLE copies, in print and electronic formats, may not be made or distributed without express permission from Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc. All rights reserved.

Note that photographs, artwork, advertising, and other elements to which Phi Delta Kappa does not hold copyright may have been removed from these pages.

Please fax permission requests to the attention of KAPPAN Permissions Editor at 812/339-0018 or e-mail permission requests to kappan@pdkintl.org.

For further information, contact:

Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc.
408 N. Union St.
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, Indiana 47402-0789
812/339-1156 Phone
800/766-1156 Tollfree
812/339-0018 Fax

http://www.pdkintl.org