

Research statement

William Labadie

My research is primarily focused on the behaviors of public school teachers and administrators relative to policy. A robust understanding of these agents' incentives is crucial for well-informed education policy and reform. I use a combination of theory and econometric modeling in my research. My research frequently relies on administrative data, and requires exhaustive searches of unconventional sources and networking with school district, government, and academic sources in search of access to novel data.

In my job market paper, I analyze the effect that a common criteria in the systems by which states evaluate public schools, year-to-year individual student test score changes, has on student retention practices in public schools. I use a combination of statistical modeling and econometric analysis to investigate the question. I assembled a novel data set for this project, collecting retention data from 7 states' education agencies and manually coding the school ratings criteria in each state's accountability system through careful reading of state statutes. I find evidence that administrators respond to the incentives carried by the school rating system, and that they use student retention as a tool to maximize their schools' ratings.

I am currently developing a grant proposal for a project that builds on my job market paper. Given the potential developmental effects of retention, the finding that accountability ratings criteria affect administrators' retention practices is significant, but understanding which students are differentially promoted or retained due to the policy change is crucial for any insight into its welfare effects. Previous studies have found that accountability systems can cause administrators and teachers to increase the resources they devote to "high-leverage" students - students that are especially likely to affect their school's score. However, the model developed in my job market paper predicts that retention rates among students with test scores near the bottom of the distribution will increase in the presence of growth-based accountability. I intend to analyze restricted, student-level data from Texas to understand which types of students are more or less likely to be retained after a change in accountability systems. The data covers two accountability system changes in Texas, and as a result, I will be able to separately identify the effects of different accountability components on retention practices.

I plan to continue studying administrator and teacher responses to policy as my career in research progresses. Decision-makers in schools are not well-understood as economic agents; knowing more about their decision-making processes and the ways in which they respond to incentives is critical for well-informed development of education policy. However, I am generally interested in microeconomics, and public economics in particular, and my research has included analysis of the Affordable Care Act's dependent coverage mandate, the distribution of Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and the effects of universal primary education in Kenya. I am deeply interested in policy and its effects on decision-making, and my future research will certainly reflect that interest.