

Insights in Education, Training, and Learning

Education plays a crucial role in our personal and national well-being. It provides children with the tools they need to become successful adults, college students, and graduate students with opportunities to build careers and to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. Education also provides workers with new skills to adapt to a changing economy. Since its early years, NORC has been exploring the entire learning life cycle. NORC research has provided vital information on the needs and experiences of learners of all ages, the nature and quality of the training and education resources available to them, and the impact education has made on other parts of their lives.

Access to Education

An individual's access to education can vary by family income level, physical condition, geographic location, and gender, among other factors. Our researchers seek to identify disparities in access and understand how access to education impacts personal, professional, and socioeconomic outcomes. NORC has substantial experience in helping governments, school systems, and individual institutions develop and evaluate programs designed to impact educational access across the education life cycle. Our researchers have also applied that expertise overseas and with special populations, assessing and enhancing programs designed to improve access to education for students in war zones and describing the needs of students with disabilities, autism, and other challenges.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is of great interest to educators and policymakers who seek to understand the factors that affect a child's early education and how that education might impact later academic and professional achievement. NORC is a leader in harvesting reliable, actionable data on early childhood education. In addition to the HighScope Perry Preschool study, which has surveyed the participants in the Perry School's intervention curriculum from the age of 3 to the age of 50, NORC has helped develop and evaluate assessments to support pre-K math and language instruction, measured the effectiveness of a reading intervention program pioneered by AmeriCorps, and completed the National Survey of Early Care and Education, the largest national study of its kind to assess the accessibility and quality of early care and education in the United States.

Start a conversation.
Contact us.

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.



Education Workforce

Educational success depends on providing students with capable, committed teachers and mentors from pre-K through postgraduate study. NORC researchers specializing in the field of education workforce development have helped school systems, colleges, and universities measure the effectiveness of their efforts to recruit, train, and retain effective teaching professionals. NORC studies in this area include Teaching Artists and the Future of Education, which explored the role of “teaching artists” in arts education, and A Study of the Working Environments of the Natural Science Departments in the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, which measured faculty members’ perceptions of their working climates and the potential influence of gender, race, and ethnicity on their professional experiences.

Educational Attainment and Outcomes

Illuminating the connection between the amount, kind, and quality of education people receive and the personal, professional, and health outcomes they experience later in life is of great importance for education and economic policymakers and other stakeholders. NORC’s examination of that connection includes the High School and Beyond study, which has tracked the outcomes of students who were in high school in 1980. The 2014 follow up resurveyed the 1980 high school sophomore class cohort, and the 2015 follow up resurveys the 1980 high school senior class cohort. Our researchers are also using data from the landmark National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which began in the mid-1960s, to examine how schooling and specifically individuals’ experiences in postsecondary education influence health trajectories, early adult labor force participation, and family formation.

Elementary and Secondary Education

From exploring the connection between high school performance and later life outcomes to evaluating the United States Agency for International Development’s School Health and Reading Program in Uganda, the experience of NORC researchers in issues related to elementary and secondary education is wide and varied. Many of NORC’s projects deal directly or indirectly with the ongoing implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), including NORC’s evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education’s Growth Model Pilot Program, an effort to improve how student achievement data were analyzed and used to assess the effectiveness of schools and school systems under the accountability provisions of NCLB. NORC is also conducting a study for the National Assessment Governing Board analyzing the degree of content alignment between the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading and Mathematics assessments for grade eight and the ACT Explore assessments in reading and mathematics. This research will provide a greater understanding of the connection between students’ scores on these assessments and their preparedness for freshman college course work.

Postsecondary Education

Through a number of studies, conducted both in the United States and abroad, NORC provides essential information about how many people undertake postsecondary education, in what fields they specialize, their levels of attainment and attrition, and the relationship between those factors and their professional and socioeconomic outcomes. This ongoing research is providing higher education administrators and policymakers with the data they need to make sound decisions. NORC’s Education and Transition to Adulthood project is using transcript data from participants in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to improve our understanding of the complex interplay of family, education, work, and health across the life course.

Professional Development, Job Training, and Adult Education

As technology and globalization make the economy and the job market increasingly unstable, educators, education policymakers, and industry have directed increasing attention to vocational training, professional development, and the kinds of adult education that help people build and change careers across the full arc of their working lives. Many of their initiatives rely on NORC’s data and analysis. NORC is conducting a national evaluation of the United States Department of Labor’s Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program, which provides funds to community colleges and other educational and career training institutions. NORC researchers have also collected rich data on the impact of continuing education in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

School Improvement and Accountability

The ongoing debate over school reform—what should be taught, how students’ progress should be measured, how teachers should be trained and evaluated, how and whether national standards should be set—has occupied the policy landscape in a significant way. The policymakers, school administrators, and other stakeholders participating in that debate consistently turn to NORC for reliable, independent data on which curricula, teaching techniques, and evaluation protocols for both teachers and students produce the greatest achievement for the greatest number of students. In the process, NORC has developed special expertise in both educational assessment and the security and management of the data that assessments generate, making it easier for clients to analyze and to share data with other researchers while protecting student confidentiality. NORC conducted an evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education’s Growth Model Pilot Program, which allowed a pilot set of states to incorporate measures of student growth in reading and mathematics for measurement of school progress under No Child Left Behind. All states are now able to use measures of student achievement growth for accountability purposes.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

Business and government leaders have long recognized that for the United States to remain competitive in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and in the innovative industries those disciplines support, more students—particularly women and minorities—must enter the STEM fields. NORC has been a pioneer in tracking STEM students, the educational choices they make, their career outcomes, and the economic and educational policy decisions that influence their success. NORC conducts the biannual Survey of Doctorate Recipients, the nation’s only source of data on the career outcomes of the U.S.-trained science, engineering, and health doctorate holders, and the annual Survey of Earned Doctorates, which tracks new recipients of research doctorates in the United States. NORC and the University of Chicago host the National Science Foundation’s Center for Advancing Research and Communication in STEM, which supports education research focused on core scientific questions about learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Student Performance

Finding ever more effective ways to measure and motivate student performance is one of the primary goals of educators, administrators, and education policymakers. NORC researchers have been among their primary partners in pursuing that goal. NORC partnered with the U.S. Department of Education to develop three high-profile panel surveys: High School and Beyond, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. These seminal studies lay the foundation for longitudinal education research carried out today. The data they provide continue to inform innovation in the assessment and motivation of student performance.

Engage our experts. NORC is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research institution with 75 years of experience helping clients identify and exceed their research goals. Our experts in education, training, and learning hail from a variety of disciplines, including elementary through postsecondary education, and state education data systems. They draw on institutional strengths in economics, health, and other disciplines.

