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Should local authorities target policies and programs to attract highly educated people? If so, what works?

Educated families are drawn to places that offer distinctive educational opportunities for their children. For example, research that my team and I have undertaken on dual-language immersion education programs in Portland, Oregon, suggests that access to these programs may causally boost student achievement in reading at low cost. Recent research in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, has shown positive dual-language immersion effects on math achievement also. Not surprisingly, it appears that dual-language programs are a draw for families. In Utah, for example, where the state incentivized a rapid scale-up of dual-language education, our team observed that the number of zip codes schools served increased with the launch of dual-language programs. Granted, the popularity of dual-language programs among educated families can be a double-edged sword if families with greater resources can better navigate access to these programs, and if the presence of such programs leads to higher property values, pricing out of lower-income families and families of color.

Are highly educated cities better able to withstand economic shocks?

Economically resilient cities are those with diverse economies that serve many socioeconomic strata. When cities become unaffordable to the blue-collar and white-collar workers who service them, the situation is unsustainable. Economic heterogeneity within a region seems to facilitate resilience by fostering interdependence of community members and by broadly distributing risk across multiple sectors and firms.

In your opinion, what is the most important step we can take as a country to develop a more educated and skilled workforce?

To develop a more educated and skilled workforce, one promising economic investment is early childhood education, because we know that this pays off in the long run. On the other end of the P-16 education spectrum, we need to increase access to postsecondary education by increasing the size and availability of federal Pell grants. The dollar value of the Pell grant, which provides tuition assistance for low-income students, has not kept pace with the massive inflation we have seen in postsecondary education costs. Moreover, Pell grants are rarely available to older, non-traditional students who are not economically dependent on their parents and want to upgrade their skills. These students can easily find themselves maxing out federal student loan limits at public four-year universities without even completing a bachelor's degree, and their independent and part-time status makes them largely ineligible for need-

based grants. That needs to change if we want to capitalize on the creativity and ingenuity of our entire workforce.

What will be the short- and longer-term impact of school closures during the pandemic?

From preliminary assessments, we already know that the school closures of the past year-and-a-half have increased heterogeneity in student achievement. Students' access to academic instruction and support--including reliable technology and workspaces--has varied enormously both between and within school districts, in ways that have likely exacerbated existing inequality. In the near term, schools will have to address this variation by allowing teachers more flexibility to reteach content from prior grade levels. Teachers will also need guidance in strategies, like the use of small groups, that let them differentiate instruction for students with different levels of content mastery. The upside is that the pandemic may have jump-started schools' flexibility in many ways. Teachers in the U.S. and around the world have had to quickly acclimate to new technologies and address profound variations in student needs. Many will incorporate those skills into their work moving forward.

In the longer term, there is even more reason for optimism. Though it is tempting to extrapolate long-term consequences from such a long disruption of schooling, we know from decades of education research that effects of sharp disruptions, be they positive interventions or negative shocks, tend to fade over time. We can expect the pandemic

effects on learning to fade because school curricula already loop through content, covering core ideas and skills repeatedly in each grade, with increasing levels of sophistication. Moreover, we know that societies have flourished in the wake of greater disruptions. The challenge is to ensure that schools adopt the lessons in flexibility that they have learned during school closures, and that they attend not just to children's academic needs in the wake of the pandemic, but to their needs for socio-emotional recovery as well.

How can the US reform its immigration policy to attract and retain highly educated workers from abroad?

The U.S. has long benefitted economically by attracting people from around the world who seek a more open, opportunity-rich society. The spirit that moves people to relocate for opportunity is the same spirit that drives them to persevere and innovate in their new context. This is true for highly educated workers and those without the benefits of advanced education in their home countries. Openness yields innovation and innovation is what we need to confront the many scientific and social challenges of the 21st century.

End Notes

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