

The New Heights Evaluation: The Impact of New Heights on Closing the Achievement Gap

With a 2010 Pregnancy Assistance Fund grant from the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), DC Public Schools (DCPS) refined and expanded New Heights, a program for expectant and parenting students that previously existed in just two high schools. Beginning with the 2011–2012 school year, DCPS expanded New Heights to make it available in all of the district’s large comprehensive high schools. OAH conducted an evaluation of New Heights, seeking to better understand program goals and structure, the ways in which New Heights supports expectant and parenting students, and its effectiveness in improving academic outcomes.

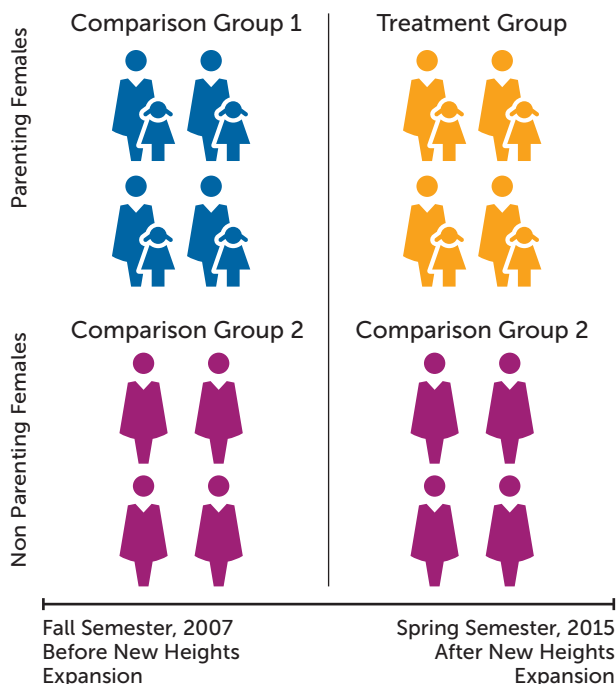
New Heights is a voluntary, school-based program of supports designed to help expectant and parenting DCPS high school students navigate the challenges of pregnancy, parenthood, and completing high school. New Heights aims to increase school engagement, credit accumulation, and progress toward graduation while building teen parents’ self-sufficiency and resilience. A program coordinator, placed in each high school, integrates the four main components of New Heights into the regular school day: (1) advocacy, (2) targeted school-based case management, (3) weekly educational workshops, and (4) incentives.

The New Heights evaluation

The New Heights evaluation has two components: (1) documenting the implementation of the program and (2) assessing its impact on academic outcomes. This *brief*, a *brief* on program implementation, and the accompanying full report, *Raising the Bar: Impacts and Implementation of the New Heights Program for Expectant and Parenting Teens in Washington, DC*, are part of a series of products from the evaluation.

A Natural Experiment

New Heights Expansion Fall Semester, 2011



The expansion of New Heights to 11 additional DCPS high schools in the 2011–2012 school year constitutes a natural experiment in which all parenting females in these expansion schools create a treatment group that had the opportunity to participate in New Heights, whereas parenting female students attending the same schools before the expansion create a comparison group that did not have the opportunity to participate in New Heights. This natural experiment is similar to a randomized control trial because students could not choose whether they were in the treatment or comparison group. To help account for any other school- or district-wide changes that may have influenced students’ outcomes over this period, the evaluation also includes a second comparison group consisting of nonparenting females in the same schools. To identify parenting teens in D.C. Public Schools who participated in New Heights, the study team acquired and matched birth records, school records, and New Heights participation records from 2007–2015. The study team estimated the difference in outcomes for all parenting females after the expansion of New Heights compared with before, and compared this with the difference in outcomes before and after New Heights for nonparenting females. The difference in the change in outcomes over time for parenting and nonparenting females provides an estimate of the impact of the program.

The Impact of New Heights

New Heights had positive impacts on parenting females for all three outcome domains we examined: school engagement, credit accumulation, and graduation. These impacts narrowed the pre-New Heights outcome gap between parenting and nonparenting females in the same schools.

Before New Heights, parenting females lagged their nonparenting classmates in attendance by 15.7 days per semester, in credits by 1.42 credits per year, and in graduation rate by 8 percentage points. The impact of New Heights narrowed these gaps by 28, 99, and 50 percent, respectively. Specifically, New Heights increased attendance by 4.4 days, increased credits earned by 1.4 credits, and increased the graduation rate by 4 percentage points.

In addition, New Heights reduced unexcused absences by 5.8 absences while increasing excused absences by 1.7 absences. These impacts are consistent with New Heights' effort to convert unexcused absences into excused absences. When students accumulate too many unexcused absences, they can be subject to administrative penalties, such as disenrollment from school. New Heights coordinators helped parenting students understand how to submit the paperwork necessary to have a pregnancy or child care-related absence excused, leading to an increase in excused absences of 1.7 absences.

Looking Ahead

Using the most rigorous design feasible, the New Heights evaluation found that the program is effective at improving academic outcomes for parenting females. These results stayed the same across several alternative methodological approaches to calculating impacts, as shown in the full report. The findings suggest that the New Heights approach is filling a pressing need in Washington, DC, in helping parenting females remain in school and make progress toward completion, which in turn can lead to improved long-term outcomes for both mother and child.

The Positive Adolescent Futures Study

The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) is funding the Positive Adolescent Futures study, which includes three evaluations of programs that serve expectant and parenting teens. This study, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research under contract number HHSP233201450026A, is part of OAH's overall strategy to identify effective programs that offer a seamless network of support for teen mothers, fathers, and their children. The programs evaluated offer a range of programmatic approaches that are prevalent nationwide, particularly among OAH Pregnancy Assistance Fund grantees, including case management and referrals, home visiting, and school-based workshops. The programs take place in California, Washington, DC, and Houston, Texas. All evaluations measure impacts on outcomes that align closely with the program model and examine program implementation. Learn more about the evaluation [here](#) and more about the Pregnancy Assistance Fund grant program [here](#).

New Heights narrows the gap between parenting females and nonparenting females



*** significantly different from 0 at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

** significantly different from 0 at the .05 level, two-tailed test.

* significantly different from 0 at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Suggested citation: Zief, Susan, Julie Worthington, and John Deke. *The New Heights Evaluation: The Impact of New Heights on Closing the Achievement Gap*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health, June 2017.

To learn more about the Office of Adolescent Health and its grant and evaluation efforts, please visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>



Office of Adolescent Health | Website: <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>
 Email: oah.gov@hhs.gov
 Phone: (240) 453-2846

