Teacher Unionization and Student Academic Performance: Will the Weakening of Teachers' Unions Harm the Middle Class and Intensify Inequality?

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Direct Effects of Organized Labor on Inequality and the Middle Class

• Levy and Temin 2007 – Declining unionism has contributed to reduced bargaining power and rising inequality.

• Farber et al 2018 – Unions reduce inequality by raising relative wages of the less skilled.

• Freeman et al 2015 – Children of union members experience more upward mobility than do children of non-union members.
“Indirect Effects” of Teachers’ Unions on Inequality and the Middle Class

• After the Supreme Court’s decision on Janus vs. AFSCME (2018) and as other limitations on teachers’ unions grow, what are the likely effects on educational outcomes of students?

• Might these effects vary by “class”?
How Do Teachers’ Unions Affect Student Outcomes?

• Positive Effects
  • Increasing resources, attracting and retaining good teachers through better pay and working conditions
  • Professional engagement and “voice” effects

• Negative Effects
  • Increasing costs, reducing flexibility
Identifying “Class”-Specific Effects of Teachers’ Unions on Student Outcomes

• Outcome Measure: District-level test score averages, grades 3-8, from Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), 2008-09 and 2012-13

• “Class” Measure: SES index from SEDA, based on district income, education, poverty, unemployment, female headship, and SNAP receipt indicators. Districts classed as high (top 25%), middle (middle 50%), and low (bottom 25%) SES
Identifying “Class”-Specific Effects of Teachers’ Unions on Student Outcomes (2)

• District-level measures of union presence from School and Staffing Survey (SASS). Three categories:
  • Collectively bargained contract in place (CB)
  • “Meet and Confer” agreement in place (MC)
  • Neither a CB nor a MC agreement in place (NA)
Math Scores by SES and Union Status

- **High SES**: CB = 268.4, MC = 266.8, NA = 259.7
- **Middle SES**: CB = 257.6, MC = 257.4, NA = 251.9
- **Low SES**: CB = 246.6, MC = 246.7, NA = 245.0
English Scores by SES and Union Status

High SES: CB 248.6, MC 240.9, NA 243.5
Middle SES: CB 237.2, MC 237.6, NA 233.6
Low SES: CB 225.9, MC 227.7, NA 225.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low SES</th>
<th>Mid SES</th>
<th>High SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% CB</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% MC</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% NA</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty Rate</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median HH Income</td>
<td>$38,594</td>
<td>$57,913</td>
<td>$92,757</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Headship</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>% College Grads</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences by Union Status Within Class

Within each SES class, CB and MC districts

- Serve more white/fewer African American students
- Have higher revenue per pupil
- Have fewer students on free/reduced price lunch programs than do NA districts.
After adjusting for school and community characteristics, we find

• CB status is associated with higher test scores for both Math and English in mid-SES districts, and MC status is associated with higher English scores in these districts.

• MC status may be associated with higher scores in low-SES districts (some 0 effects, some positive).

• CB and MC status are not associated with higher (or lower) scores in high-SES districts.
How might we interpret our “class” and MC results?

- The marginal benefit of union presence may be smaller in districts that are otherwise well resourced.
- Teacher “voice/engagement” effects may be most visible where resources are not abundant but also not too scarce.
Implications?

• For research on unions:
  ➢ Studies that don’t account for positive union effects even in the absence of a formal contract may understate union impacts.

• For inequality, mobility, and the middle class:
  ➢ Weakening teachers’ unions may widen school achievement differentials between high- and middle or low-SES districts.
  ➢ In the post-Janus era, it may be valuable to support institutional structures that provide teachers with voice and engagement even if formal union arrangements aren’t achieved.