Assessing the Role of Safe-Zone Policies in Promoting Academic Achievement: Evidence from California

Growing concerns about the educational outcomes of underrepresented students have led schools across the United States to adopt policies aimed at boosting their achievement. Of interest to us are safe-zone policies, which aim to provide all students with a safe environment that promotes their academic progression while offering migrant students specific assistance. Using representative data on almost six million students in California’s K-12 public education system, we evaluate the effectiveness of school districts’ safe-zone policies in supporting the academic progression of racially/ethnically diverse students (especially migrants and students with migrant families). The analysis focuses on graduation rates and standardized scores in English language skills (ELA) and mathematics as measures of academic achievement. In addition, we examine the role of various policy components, as well as student and teacher perceptions, in shaping academic outcomes to understand underlying mechanisms. Our findings point to the promising role of safe-zone policies in boosting student achievement in the state.

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