

PEER launches seven rapid response studies with Metro Nashville Public Schools

The Nashville Partnership for Educational Equity Research (PEER) is excited to announce the launch of new rapid response projects this spring. These innovative projects aim to address pressing educational policy and practice questions within Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) through a swift and collaborative research approach.

What Are Rapid Response Studies?

PEER conducts both long-term and short turnaround collaborative research studies with teams comprised of leaders from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College and Metro Nashville Public Schools. Rapid Response studies support MNPS by providing evidence to help address pressing questions of policy and practice within six months or less. They include both quick turnaround studies designed to accelerate long-term learning of PEER's working groups as well as stand-alone studies.

This approach bridges the gap between the immediate demands of decision-making and the time-intensive nature of conventional research, offering MNPS a dynamic tool for addressing critical challenges. The studies culminate in actionable presentations to MNPS leadership, helping to foster impactful policy and practice changes within the district for the next school year.



New Rapid Response Studies

This cycle, PEER launched seven projects seeking to understand a range of diverse topics and questions within MNPS:

University MNPS Scholarship Utilization Patterns, Student Perceptions, and Organizational Supports

(PI: Claire Smreker)

This project explores the underutilization of University MNPS scholarships, which provide critical financial support to help low-income students attend college. The research will analyze student awareness, perceptions of the scholarship's benefits, and the role of school-level organizational supports in shaping student participation (and non-participation) in this scholarship program. By comparing high schools with high, average, and low participation rates, the study will identify effective strategies for boosting application numbers. Insights gained will guide efforts to create a stronger culture of post-secondary awareness and preparation within MNPS and help more students overcome financial barriers to higher education, ensuring the scholarship program fulfills its potential to expand college access.

Examining the Root Causes of Educational Inequities for MNPS Students

(PIs: Maury Nation & Sarah Suiter)

This comprehensive study addresses racial, economic, and structural inequities within MNPS, focusing on how fragmented systems of services and support impact student success—particularly for Black students, who experience the largest disparities in educational outcomes. The research includes focus groups with students, families, educators, and community members to explore the interplay of school and neighborhood systems. Additionally, systems dynamics modeling will visualize inequities within elementary, middle, and high school structures. Collaborating with MNPS leaders, the research team will analyze these findings to develop targeted interventions and solutions that address root causes of inequity. This project seeks to create actionable strategies to reduce educational gaps and improve outcomes across the district.

Identification of Economically Disadvantaged Students

(PI: Christopher A. Candelaria)

This project examines the significant decline in the identification of economically disadvantaged (ED) students in MNPS following Tennessee's shift from Free and Reduced-Price Lunch applications to direct certification in 2015. By analyzing student-level administrative data, the research will uncover how changes in identification criteria affect the distribution of resources to support ED students. As an extension to this project, the research team will simulate funding models to evaluate the potential financial impact of different ED definitions on the district's budget. The findings will provide MNPS with actionable recommendations to more accurately identify and support ED students, ensuring funding is allocated effectively to address poverty-related challenges and improve student outcomes.

Investigating the Effectiveness of MNPS Teacher Retention Bonuses

(PIs: Nicole Mader & Laura Booker)

This project investigates the effectiveness of teacher retention bonuses in stabilizing the workforce within MNPS, particularly in hard-to-staff schools and positions. The study will analyze detailed data on teacher characteristics, performance, and retention trends, comparing teachers at bonus-eligible schools with those at similar non-eligible schools. The research aims to determine whether these bonuses incentivize high-performing teachers to remain in their roles and whether they attract stronger candidates to challenging positions. By assessing the impact of these financial incentives, the project will provide MNPS with critical insights into the design and implementation of strategies to address staffing challenges and improve educational quality in underserved areas.

Optimizing Walkthrough Micro-Routines to Support Instructional Improvement

(PIs: Jennifer Russell & Jessica Slayton)

This co-designed study will iteratively refine ways to optimize micro-routines that make up the Support Hub-led instructional walkthroughs. Through this study, we hope to refine the walkthrough routine as a core instructional leadership practice and establish an evidence base to support particular actions and micro-routines that facilitate more productive walkthroughs.

Articulating the District's Strategy for Fostering Positive School Climate through Development of Positive Student Skills

(PI: Marisa Cannata)

This study will seek to understand the district's stated and enacted theory of action for supporting student social-emotional learning. By articulating both the stated strategy and how it is understood by key stakeholders, we can begin to design research activities to support and improve the strategy. The PEER Social-Emotional Skills Working Group members will serve as research collaborators, giving ongoing input on proposed research activities during working group meetings. This research will serve as the launching point for the working group's research agenda.

Understanding How MNPS's Tiered Intervention Platforms Are Working: An Implementation Study

(PIs: Marcia Barnes, Changhee Lee, Krista Davis, Katie Pattullo, & Melissa Brock)

MNPS has invested significantly in tiered interventions (materials, PD, teacher time, student time) to accelerate growth in students' learning and improve access to Tier 1 high-quality instruction. Ongoing PEER rapid response studies beginning in 2023 have focused on measuring and maximizing the effects of these interventions. Initial rapid response studies show that while students are benefiting from intervention programs, especially in the early grades, these benefits are mixed which is likely due to variability in implementation. The purpose of this proposal is to investigate how interventions are implemented in schools where students are demonstrating the highest growth in FastBridge scores to inform district decision-making around resource allocation and supports for effective implementation.