



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

Education amendments improve student achievement and lead to policy changes

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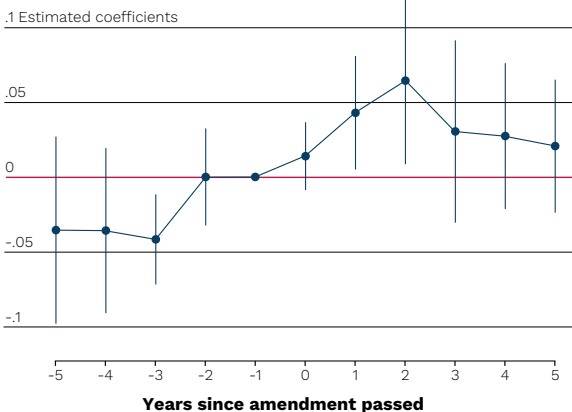
We examine the effect of changes in constitutional provisions on education policies and outcomes. Our **research** finds that student outcomes improve and inputs change following the passage of constitutional amendments that raise the minimum standards for education. In addition, analysis of 74 state constitutional amendments, more than 34,000 enacted bills, and about 13,050 state appellate court cases between 1990 and 2018 shows that passage of state amendments results in an increase in education-related bills enacted, without a corresponding increase in court cases.

Following the passage of strong education amendments in states:

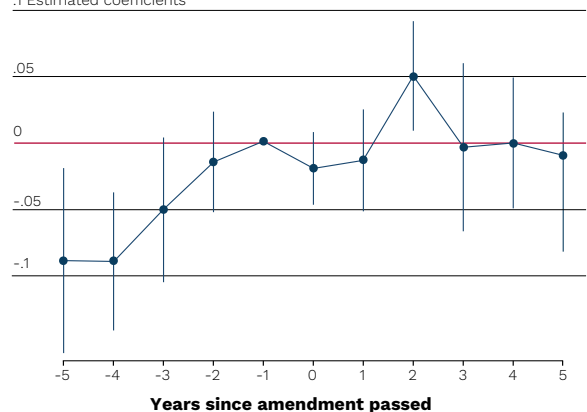
Student outcomes improve

Grade 5 reading scores increase significantly after an amendment is passed compared to states with no change in constitutional provisions. Grade 5 math scores also significantly increase but with a one-year lag compared to reading scores.

Grade 5 reading



Grade 5 math



Amendments drive meaningful policy change

The number of education-related bills enacted significantly increases one year after a state has passed a constitutional amendment compared to states with no change in education-related constitutional provisions. The increase is meaningful because it is evidence of productive legislative action and policy changes that have a long-lasting impact.

The enactment of bills into law is accompanied by changes in education inputs following passage of strong amendments. These vary state by state, depending on that state's local needs. Changes include equalizing or increasing per-pupil expenditures, teacher salaries, class-size reductions, or other types of targeted investments.

Amendments do not increase the number of court cases

There is no significant difference in the number of appellate court cases when an amendment passed compared to states with no change in constitutional provisions. Because legislatures respond by enacting policies and educational outcomes improve following passage of an amendment, there is no increase in appellate litigation.

Amendments create higher standards for courts to enforce

In instances where state legislatures failed to provide education services through equitable school financing, there is evidence that courts intervened to enforce the newly enacted constitutional standards to improve outcomes. This enforcement mechanism worked better in states that had higher constitutional minimum standards, thus demonstrating that strong constitutional language can improve outcomes.

Why do constitutional amendments have these effects?

The underlying mechanism driving these positive policy responses and improvements in educational outcomes is that strong constitutional provisions improve the bargaining position of citizens vis-à-vis elected leaders. If citizens do not receive education services as described in the constitution, they can go to court to enforce the minimum constitutional standards. The mere presence of a threat that citizens can litigate and win against the state government results in the enactment of policies that meet constitutional standards.

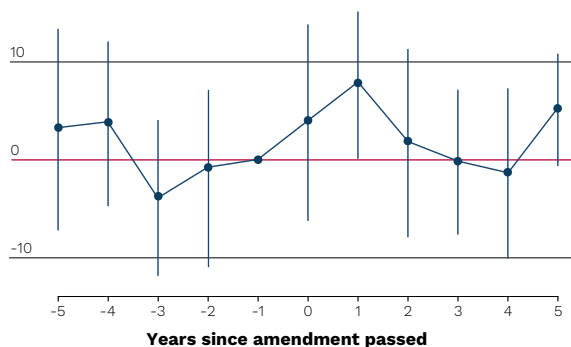
Thus, when an amendment is passed, the legislature responds by enacting education policies that meet the new standards, and appellate litigation does not, in fact, increase.

To read the full paper, go to <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/research/staff-reports/the-effect-of-constitutional-provisions-on-education-policy-and-outcomes>.

For additional research and information, visit www.minneapolisfed.org/policy/education-achievement-gaps.

Number of legislative bills enacted

20 Estimated coefficients



Number of appellate court cases

8 Estimated coefficients

