

Research Statement: Sarah King

I am primarily interested in research broadly relating to education. I grew up in an affluent suburban community with great schools so it was not until I was tutoring at a local high school during college that I came to realize that not all students receive the same educational experience. In addition, I grew up with my mother being a teacher, so I am familiar not only with the student experience in public education but also with the teacher experience. Therefore, my research specifically focuses on equity issues in education and issues facing teachers in public education. However, I have developed a passion for teaching myself, so I also have a separate line of research which focuses on pedagogy, and particularly the efficacy of active learning methods.

Education Policy Research

During graduate school, I have had the opportunity to work with Metro Atlanta Policy Labs for Education (MAPLE)¹, a research practice partnership which works with five large, diverse school districts in the Metro Atlanta area. This organization is focused on policy-driven research with the intention of informing decisions in the affiliated school districts and beyond. My affiliation with MAPLE has led my individual research interests to be more focused on policy evaluation and therefore topics which are based on policies in education. Currently, my research is focused around policy relating to education during the COVID-19 era.

Two of my dissertation chapters directly relate to education policy issues with one looking at the effectiveness of a summer school program during the COVID-19 era and the other examining the impact of the pandemic on teacher labor markets. The evaluation of a summer school program examines the impact of the program, which was developed in response to lowered achievement growth during the pandemic, using a regression discontinuity design. This paper also takes an equity-minded approach by looking at who attended the program and by examining student subgroups to better understand how the program impacted achievement gaps that widened as a result of the pandemic. We find that invitation did not significantly impact student achievement at the margin. Further, we find that, among attendees, achievement gaps did not change much. We also note that the majority of attendees qualified for free or reduced price meals so the program likely provided non-academic impacts to students. This paper contributes to the on remediation programs by examining the impact on student subgroups and by looking at how the program impacts students who have been impacted by a crisis learning situation.

The paper on teacher labor markets is intended to be a descriptive design to provide information to school districts who are still facing impacts from the pandemic on teacher retention, recruitment, and satisfaction. This paper also has an equity angle as teacher quality and supply is often related to student income and race, two factors that are also related to differential educational impacts during the pandemic. In addition, this paper may be used to inform policy in the participating school districts and others through both understanding the current environment surrounding teachers but also the potential impact of incentive programs for recruiting and retaining teachers. Further, this paper will contribute to the literature by providing a deeper evaluation of the impacts of the pandemic on various groups of teachers.

¹ <https://gpl.gsu.edu/maple/>

Beyond my dissertation, I have engaged in collaborative research relating to engagement with virtual learning. In this paper, we focused in on differential experiences that minoritized students and less affluent students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As for other ideas, I intend on continuing to understand which students receive certain experiences and the impacts of those experiences as well as the importance of teacher experiences in their efficacy and roles in student success in my future research. Specifically, I have thought about topics such as gender differences in educational experiences, access to and impacts of arts education, and substitute teacher labor markets. I hope to develop a portfolio that is both policy-relevant and equity-minded and welcome the opportunity to engage with other faculty as well as undergraduate students in policy-relevant research.

Economics Pedagogy Research

Aside from my interest in education policy, I have also developed a passion for teaching and thus have begun to develop a research portfolio around economics pedagogy. My intent in this line of research is to better my teaching and improve the economics experience for students. One of my dissertation chapters evaluates the impact of a classroom game on student knowledge of environmental policy and contributes to the literature on active learning methods and classroom games for improving student learning and engagement, particularly in environmental economics. I plan to continue with similar studies on effective teaching methods as I move further into my career. Specifically, I plan on pursuing topics that relate to active learning methods in the classroom and intend to study topics relating to both principles courses and upper-level courses.