

'The Blob' Distorts our Beliefs about how Incentives Influence Schooling Outcomes

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The Fall 2011 *Journal of Economic Perspectives* provides another reminder that [context is everything](#). On page 195-199, Uri Gneezy, Stephen Meier, and Pedro Rey-Biel discuss how incentives influence students and educators. Because our [system is so deeply ingrained](#), they present their findings as general. They do not point out how specific features of the system, specifically key elements of the [roots of the problem](#) (of [Nation at Risk](#) outcomes) of low performance likely influence their findings.

For example, they find that tangible incentives improve attendance, but not performance. Duh!! Those with spotty attendance probably did not attend until the incentive boosted their motivation because the comprehensive uniformity was not working for them; one-size didn't fit all. Attendance and performance would likely be higher without tangible rewards if parents/students could choose a good fit from a dynamic menu of schooling options (instead of being assigned to a comprehensively uniform traditional public school), and then tangible rewards for better academic performance would likely further improve actual and measured performance.