



Junior Achievement’s Approach to Evaluation

Overview

Junior Achievement (JA) is often asked about the proof of impact of its programs. Traditionally, this was communicated through pre- and post-tests of students. While such tests are adequate for assessing short-term knowledge gain, they do not speak to the long-term outcomes many stakeholders are seeking. As a result, JA has enhanced its approach to evaluation by focusing on causal, predictive, and comparative measurements.

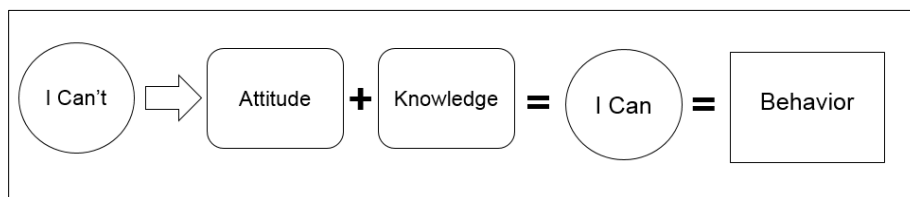
Causal

Causal research is the most definitive form of research when it comes to assessing impact. This is accomplished using longitudinal data, which involves following a cohort of students over multiple years to see how they progress as a result of their exposure to Junior Achievement. Because of Federal restrictions to student data, and the expense involved, JA has historically not been able to conduct this type of research. However, in recent years, school districts have entered into data sharing agreements with JA. This means JA can use student ID numbers to look through existing data which covers several years of those students’ academic careers. JA will be undertaking this research in the near future.

Predictive

Next to causal research, predictive is one of the best ways to assess anticipated behavioral outcomes. JA is using a model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, which has been effectively used for more than 40 years in the public health arena to influence behavior toward a variety of public health issues, such as managing the spread of HIV, smoking, healthy eating, etc.

JA is using the model to increase students’ self-efficacy to improve their circumstances. This intention to improve their lives by changing certain behaviors related to financial responsibility, educational attainment and career readiness, and entrepreneurship, is represented by a simple formula of taking a student from a mindset of “I Can’t” and, by influencing their attitudes and knowledge, helping them achieve an understanding of “I Can,” or, in scientific terms, increasing their self-efficacy so that they make



needed changes to their behavior (e.g. making a concerted effort to complete high school and pursue higher education, acquire the skills necessary to be consistently employable). Because JA is able to measure changes in attitude, knowledge, and other key characteristics, we are able to assess how well our programs are doing at increasing a student’s self-efficacy, which leads to positive behavioral outcomes.

Comparative

Comparative research is one of the most common and commonly known forms of assessment. It can take the form of meta-studies, where JA looks at existing research and pulls similar data points to compare to the data JA collects on its students, volunteers, etc. This approach has been used to determine how effective the JA volunteer model is and how JA alumni compare to the general population in terms of educational attainment, median income, and business ownership.