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ACADEMIC DECLINE (PART 2)



The BBS campaign sees that Jim May has published a response to the thorough analysis put together to address his three points about the comparability of 2021 and 2022 iLEARN data to 2019, the effect of the pandemic on iLEARN scores, as well as the effect of re-districting and the shift in student populations between schools from 3 specific subsets of the student population.

This will be our last response to him, not just because the election takes place a week from today, but also because it is entirely pointless to continue to respond to someone who takes such a biased approach to his responses and analysis. Further, we will not be removing or editing anything because we stand behind the analysis and we will show in detail below that is Mr. May, and not our campaign, who should edit or remove his posts.

Before we get into the points that we want to raise in response to his latest response, we want to point out a couple of interesting things for readers to consider as they assess the trustworthiness of Mr. May's claims:

1. Our campaign response specifically addressed each one of the three points that Mr. May's "Academic Decline – Part 2" made and provided thorough counterpoints and analysis for each. However, in Mr. May's response back, he does not address the following in our analysis: (1) In spite of the COVID conditions between 2019 and 2021 OR 2021 and 2022, the wide variability in each school's change in iLEARN scores for each of those periods. He walks into inadvertently addressing that (and agreeing with us, which we will show later) because he emotionally reacts to a single sentence he cherry-picks. (2) The analysis done that used change in iLEARN scores relative to the net effect of re-districting changes to dispute Mr. May's assertion that changes in iLEARN scores between 2021 and 2022 were due to re-districting and cannot be compared. Why does he provide an incomplete response when we have provided a very thorough and complete response? Only you as a reader can decide why.
2. May chooses to cherry-pick pieces of information from the analysis provided to poke holes in logic provided by our campaign. He likely does so because he thinks that by cherry-picking smaller pieces of an overall story, it will make the reader believe he is right about the overarching discussion. It's an interesting tactic to take, but dishonest at that. As an example, he pulls ONE QUOTE from TWO AND A HALF pages of analysis to try to refute the entirety of our position about the impact of COVID on iLEARN scores. Why is it that he pulls two sentences from two and half pages of analysis to try to refute? Only you as a reader can decide why.
3. Just about the entirety of Mr. May's response is HIS OWN OPINION. Are we really expected to believe that he is operating without bias when he has created a site called "No BBS for CCS"? To go further, there are no studies or references to back up his opinion. He states it as fact and hopes that the reader will believe him. We will address this later in our response. Conversely, our response provided source after source to support our claims. So we ask – why is a vast majority of his analysis his own BIASED opinion, unsubstantiated by sources or references? Only you as a reader can decide why.
4. Finally, in addition to a vast majority of his response being HIS OWN BIASED OPINION, Mr. May provides ONE analysis in his response. ONE. Further, he does not show the reader the math behind his analysis. He does not show his work. Our campaign showed all the work behind our analyses. Why does Mr. May not show his work? Only you as a reader can decide that.

Now that we have addressed the flaws in Mr. May's approach that should leave readers to seriously question his credibility and motivation, let's address some of the points he makes.

POINT 1: The dispute over the validity of year over year data:

The first issue that Mr. May takes with our response is "I'm not sure why the BBS campaign is addressing me here. Clearly their issue is with the State of Indiana, as the state issues the data." This is simply deflection; we are addressing him because he made this a topic of focus to attempt to invalidate any comparisons of 2021 or 2022 iLEARN data to 2019.

He goes on take issue with our provision of data that shows the number of test takers and CCS total population in each year between 2018-2021 to show that there were no significant changes in populations and therefore the IDOE guidance that data should not be compared due to potential issues with split enrollment in a given year should not apply to CCS.

He says ***"Additionally, in their presentation of two sets of raw numbers that they encourage people to eyeball, they demonstrate yet again their lack of knowledge of the school system they want to run. Enrollment is measured in the fall and iLEARN is administered in the spring. The way they've tabled the numbers they present, they're aligning each year's iLEARN scores with enrollment of the following school year."***

This demonstrates either Mr. May's inability to read what we wrote or is just a dishonest effort to discredit the fact that we provided numbers to call into question the IDOE guidance as it relates to CCS. What we said was ***"You can see below from the IDOE data that the 3rd-8th grade student population data within CCS remains stable year over year, as does the number of test takers for iSTEP in 2018 and iLEARN in 2019 and 2021. There aren't any significant changes or differences in any of the data points shown below."*** As such, one should clearly understand that it was not our intent to compare enrollment and iLEARN population numbers, but simply to show both year over year. Mr. May either does not comprehend this based on our statement, or he is just making another dishonest effort to discredit what we've put together.

Ironically enough, this is all he can put together on this point: to deflect to IDOE and (likely) intentionally misinterpret or misrepresent what we've said about the populations within CCS. This is the best he can do in his "analysis" that attempts to refute ours.

Point 2: Dispute over the impact of COVID on iLEARN scores:

The ironic part about this part of his analysis is he agrees with the point we are trying to make but does not know it or doesn't want to admit it to the reader.

Here is what he says: ***"I expect that at least a significant majority of current CCS middle and high school students could do better. Let's hypothetically say that the pandemic reduced every school's iLEARN proficiency to 10% lower than it would have been otherwise. Then let's say that without the pandemic, score changes would have ranged from 15% declines to 15% improvements. Under those conditions, even though the pandemic negatively affected every school by 10%, the actual range of changes would be from a 25% decline to a 5% improvement."*** Now let us break this down:

COVID IMPACT: -10 percentage points for each school

Range of score change without COVID impact: -15 percentage point to + 15 percentage points

Range of score change with COVID impact: -25 percentage points to +5 percentage points

Sounds like the point we have been making all along about the range of change in iLEARN scores at each school for both 2021 (+4.0% to -17.5%) as well as 2022 (+9.2% to -6.0%). As such, Mr. May agrees with us on the following points:

1. The impact of COVID (-10 percentage points) only contributed to PART of the score change for each of the schools
2. When you remove the COVID impact, the range of score change is -15 to + 15 percentage points. That would indicate there are OTHER FACTORS at play that made one school decrease fifteen percentage points and another increase 15 percentage points. As such, we should seek to understand what that is.
3. Finally, and we quote him: ***"I expect that at least a significant majority of current CCS middle and high school students could do better."*** SO DO WE JIM! That's what we've been pointing out all along because only some of the variability in iLEARN score changes across schools can likely be explained by the impact of COVID.

This is precisely why our campaign has criticized those who want to seem to blame the entirety of the iLEARN test scores and test scores changes on the pandemic or ignore the need to look deeper than the pandemic. We believe that we should be asking questions as to why the scores and changes in scores were SO markedly different across the two testing periods during COVID to understand what else might be contributing and what can be learned and thereby acted upon. **Thanks for agreeing with us Jim (whether you intended to or not)!**

The second point that Mr. May attempts to make is that ***"it was the significant and sustained disruptions to in-person learning that set students back. Outside of the BBS candidates, I honestly have not encountered a single person who does not understand this."*** What Mr. May does not realize is that he walks himself into it with these statements. Let's look at the data he provides regarding the mix of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning:

- Due to the pandemic, CCS closed schools on March 16, 2020, and remained wholly virtual for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.
- For the 2020-2021 school year, CCS was forced to provide a mix of in-person, virtual and hybrid instruction, subject to parental choice as well as active cases within schools.
- For the 2021-2022 school year, CCS resumed in-person learning for all students.

What this would mean is that between the end of the iLEARN testing period in 2019 and the beginning of the iLEARN testing period in 2021, there were approximately 6 months of in-person learning from the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year through March 16th 2020, 2 months of virtual learning from March 16th through the end of the 2019-2020 school year, and another 7 months of hybrid learning from the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year to the beginning of the iLEARN testing period in 2021. That is a total of 15 months of total learning between the 2019 and 2021 testing periods. Now, looking at the time between the end of the 2021 iLEARN testing period and the start of the 2022 iLEARN testing period, we have about 7 months of in-person learning and a total of 7 months of learning. So, let's break this down:

2019 – 2021:

- 6 months of in person, 2 months of remote, 7 months of hybrid, 15 total months of learning
- 13 of 14 schools had decreases in iLEARN scores

2021-2022:

- 7 months of in-person and 7 total months of learning
- 10 of 13 schools had increases in iLEARN scores

So, is Mr. May REALLY trying to say that 1 month less of in-person learning, 2 months MORE of remote learning, 7 months MORE of hybrid learning and 8 more months of total learning is what caused our scores to decline as versus grow? How would 8 additional months of learning lead to lower scores?

Or is he saying that the quality of instruction during the remote and hybrid timeframes contributed to learning loss? If we as a school district weren't able to handle properly instructing and educating our children via a hybrid approach during the pandemic, and that was a consistent issue across schools, again, we ask, why was one school able to grow their proficiency scores (West Clay, 71.3% of students meeting proficiency standards in 2019) and why did another 2 schools experience negligible declines in proficiency scores (College Wood, 72.7% and Towne Meadow, 67.3%) during this time period? It is not due to what Mr. May claims in a previous article:

"That said, while the pandemic in aggregate set learning back two decades there were schools that either improved their proficiency or suffered smaller declines. Generally, in Indiana, these were schools that were either smaller or already had very low proficiency."

Further, why was our range of score changes so wide despite all schools being subject to the same conditions (+4.0% to -17.5%)?

Again, despite all his protesting, Mr. May's claim that due to the pandemic "our schools' year over year (iLEARN) scores are an invalid way to measure results" just simply does not hold water. We absolutely SHOULD be measuring results during this time as there are plenty of indicators that there were other factors at play that contributed to iLEARN score changes across each of the schools.

Point 3: Dispute over the impact of FRL/SE/ELL students and re-districting on test scores:

The first and easiest point to make here is that Mr. May does not even address the analysis we previously completed that analyzed the relationship between iLEARN test scores changes and the net effect of re-districting on each school. What we demonstrated was that there was no relationship between the change in iLEARN scores and the net effect of re-districting.

The second point to address is Mr. May's lame attempt to attack the regression analysis that we completed to show there is also NOT a relationship between the change in iLEARN scores and the change in FRL, SE and ELL students within a school.

The first thing that Mr. May does is show 2022 Math and ELA proficiency Rates by each of these three subgroups for Indiana and CCS. While this is a nice visual way to try to show that these groups have LOWER iLEARN scores as compared to their peers, that does not address the question at hand, which is "Is there a relationship between the change (not addressed in his graphic) in iLEARN scores have a relationship to the change (not addressed in his graphic) in each of these student groups within each school (not addressed by Indiana or CCS aggregate data)." As such, this is a dishonest way to present data visually that seems to make a point but has nothing to do with the question at hand.

He then goes on to try to throw shade at the model and model builder by saying: **"As for the reason my previous article 'didn't go deeper,' I was attempting to explain the effect in such a way that someone with little to no knowledge of statistics would be able to understand it. What I did not count on was someone with little to no knowledge of statistics attempting to build a model to refute it."** We will return that shade in a moment because it is Mr. May who either does not have a knowledge of statistics OR he conveniently ignores expert guidance.

He goes on to make two points:

- ***You need to measure percentage changes in each school's student population, not absolute numbers. With absolute numbers, the differences in school size render a comparison invalid.***

- ***You need to create a cumulative effect to sum changes across all three subgroups. There is obviously a difference between a school that increases each subgroup population by 3% and a school that increases one subgroup population by 4% while the other two decrease by 2%.***

His first point is reversed according to the experts. Our use of absolute numbers to represent differences in school size is correct, whereas using percentage changes from baseline is “statistically inefficient” and “should not be used in statistical analysis.” Note that we quote experts in the stats arena AND we provide links to the articles we are quoting to provide sources and citations rather than our own opinion.

The use of percentage change from baseline as an outcome in a controlled trial is statistically inefficient: a simulation study | BMC Medical Research Methodology | Full Text (biomedcentral.com) (<https://bmcmmedresmethodol.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2288-1-6>)

Why is use of percentage changes statistically inefficient and not to be used in statistical analysis? Perhaps counterintuitively, it does not correct for imbalance between groups at baseline. It may also create a non-normally distributed statistic from normally distributed data.

So, what have we learned here? In spite of this campaign providing a detailed point by point response to Mr. May's post about academic decline, he has (1) deflected away from himself and onto IDOE, (2) misrepresented how we used data, (3) unknowingly agreed a substantial portion of our perspective about the impact of COVID on change in iLEARN scores across schools, (4) wasn't thoughtful about the impact of the number and types of learning days due to COVID on changes in iLEARN scores and raised an argument that now looks silly, (5) didn't address our analysis on re-districting, and finally, (6) uses his unsubstantiated opinion unsupported by citations or sources, an incomplete single statistical analysis that doesn't show his work, and a completely incorrect assertion about our use of data which we prove to be wrong to try to persuade readers that our points are incorrect.

The most ironic part of his response is that Mr. May tries to throw shade at our analysis through his repeated use of sarcasm, most notably by comparing the relevance of our analysis to that of a high school kid who whose sole contextual knowledge of the pandemic of 2020-2021 is having read a couple of paragraphs about it in a history book, stating that he would fare better.

We find this to be quite ironic given that in his latest response, Mr. May has provided no analyses that show his work, no citations or sources for his claims, no correct representations of our work, no response to 2 of our analyses and thereby has provided very little than his own UNSUBSTANTIATED and BIASED opinion to try to convince readers of his position. We see right through it, have demonstrated as such, and hereby are finished responding to someone who takes the dishonest approach that Mr. May does in this discussion.

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