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**COORDINATION-BASED PLACE POLICIES
AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES:
EVIDENCE FROM THE
CITES EDUCATIVES PROGRAM**

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Coordination-Based Place Policies and Educational Outcomes: Evidence from the Cités éducatives Program

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Abstract

This paper examines whether coordination-based place policies improve educational outcomes in deprived areas. We evaluate the *Cités éducatives* program, introduced in France in 2019 to enhance coordination between educational and social actors in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Using administrative data at the middle-school level and exploiting the program's staggered rollout, we estimate its causal effects with a staggered difference-in-differences design.

We find no evidence of average effects on student performance or on post-grade-nine tracking decisions. However, the program generates heterogeneous effects: outcomes improve for lower-performing students, while effects are null or slightly negative for higher-performing students. These patterns are robust across specifications. Overall, effect sizes are small, suggesting that coordination-based interventions with limited additional resources have a weak impact on average outcomes. This paper contributes to the literature on place-based policies by highlighting the limited aggregate effects of coordination-focused interventions.

Keywords: Education, Cités éducatives, Disadvantaged neighborhoods (QPV), Priority education policy, Urban policy.

JEL: I28, C21, C23, R58

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1 Introduction

This paper evaluates whether a coordination-based place policy can improve educational outcomes in deprived areas. We study the *Cités éducatives* program, introduced in France in 2019 following the Borloo Report, which primarily targets neighborhoods already covered by priority education policies and aims to reduce socio-economic inequalities in academic achievement.

Place-based educational policies have a long history in France, starting with the introduction of priority education (PE) in the early 1980s. These policies allocate additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged populations, with the objective of reducing achievement gaps linked to social background. These additional resources are primarily used to reduce class sizes and increase teacher compensation through bonuses. Despite substantial and sustained funding—representing around 3.6% of the total education budget in 2023 (Commission des Finances, 2025)—existing evidence finds limited effects on student outcomes (Beffy & Davezies, 2013; Caille et al., 2016; Stefanou, 2022), with persistent achievement gaps across areas. A large empirical literature evaluates these policies across several dimensions, including resource allocation (Behaghel et al., 2017), academic achievement (Beffy & Davezies, 2013; Caille et al., 2016), and school composition (Davezies & Garrouste, 2020). Overall, these studies find little evidence of significant improvements in student performance.

The *Cités éducatives* program differs from earlier interventions in that it does not primarily increase resources allocated to targeted schools but instead aims to improve coordination across existing policies at the neighborhood level. This provides an opportunity to evaluate whether improving policy coordination—rather than increasing inputs—affects educational outcomes. More broadly, the program relates to a “last-mile” perspective in public policy (Conseil d’État, 2023), emphasizing the effectiveness of policy delivery at the point of implementation.

We make two contributions. First, we estimate the effect of a policy that operates through coordination rather than resource expansion, contributing to the literature on place-based interventions and priority education (Beffy & Davezies, 2013; Bénabou et al., 2004, 2009; Caille et al., 2016; Davezies & Garrouste, 2020). Second, we provide the first causal evidence on the impact of the *Cités éducatives* program at the national level, exploiting its staggered rollout. While local analyses exist, evidence remains scarce and largely qualitative (Stromboni & Louhab, 2024).

We use administrative data at the middle-school level and implement a staggered difference-in-differences design comparing schools that receive the label to similar schools located in priority neighborhoods and already part of the priority education system. Identification relies on variation in the timing of program adoption across areas. We find no evidence of an average effect of the program on student performance, consistent with the literature on priority education policies (Beffy & Davezies, 2013; Bénabou et al., 2009; Caille et al., 2016). We document heterogeneous effects across the achievement distribution: outcomes improve for the lowest-performing students but, in some cases, decrease at

the top of the distribution. These results are consistent with a policy that raises minimum achievement while generating distributional trade-offs.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the institutional background and related literature. Section 3 describes the data and empirical strategy. Section 4 reports the results. Section 5 concludes.

2 Literature review

2.1 Mixed evidence on priority education policies

Since the seminal contribution of Coleman (1966), a large body of work has examined policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities associated with socio-economic backgrounds. These policies seek to compensate for structural disadvantages affecting students from disadvantaged environments and are motivated by the objective of reducing achievement gaps across socio-economic groups. A wide range of interventions has been implemented in both developed (Gilleece et al., 2025; Verelst et al., 2020) and developing countries (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2018; Bellei, 2011). These policies can target individuals—through interventions directed at students or households (De Ree et al., 2023; Khiem et al., 2020; Klopfenstein, 2004; Nielsen, 2023)—or operate at the place level by allocating additional resources to deprived areas (Coleman, 1966; Gilleece et al., 2025; Matsudaira et al., 2012; Van der Klaauw, 2008). The latter approach typically relies on socio-economic or demographic criteria to identify target populations and aims to compensate for disparities in initial conditions.

The empirical literature on place-based educational policies yields mixed results. In the United States, Title I programs constitute one of the earliest large-scale compensatory policies. Existing evaluations find no significant effects on student achievement in several contexts (Matsudaira et al., 2012; Van der Klaauw, 2008). Similarly, in Ireland, Gilleece et al. (2025) exploit a regression discontinuity design to evaluate the DEIS program and find no significant effects on test scores, examination outcomes, or school retention rates. Evidence from the Netherlands also points to limited effectiveness. Leuven et al. (2007) analyze two compensatory funding schemes using a regression discontinuity design and find no positive effects, with some negative impacts depending on the type of resources provided. These findings highlight that the nature of inputs may matter for policy effectiveness. More positive evidence exists in some contexts. In England, the Pupil Premium has been associated with reductions in achievement gaps, particularly at the primary level (Gorard, 2022). One proposed mechanism is that per-pupil funding may create incentives for schools to enroll disadvantaged students, although the extent to which this explains the observed effects remains debated.

The French case is broadly consistent with these international findings. Early evaluations of priority education zones (ZEP¹) show no significant effects on student achievement

¹ZEP (Zones d'éducation prioritaire) were areas targeted by early French education priority policies, introduced in the 1980s to allocate additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged students.

and document changes in teacher composition (Bénabou et al., 2004, 2009), including increased teacher mobility despite financial incentives (Prost, 2013). Subsequent programs, such as *réseaux ambition réussite* (RAR²), also fail to generate improvements in academic outcomes and may produce unintended signaling effects (Befy & Davezies, 2013; Caille et al., 2016). In addition, Davezies and Garrouste (2020) show that more advantaged households may engage in avoidance behaviors, affecting school composition. More recent studies suggest heterogeneous effects. Class size reductions in REP+ schools lead to improvements in French and mathematics, particularly for initially lower-performing students (Andreu et al., 2021). Financial incentives for teachers increase applications to disadvantaged schools (Silhol & Wilner, 2023). Targeted interventions such as boarding schools also generate positive effects, largely driven by increased supervised study time rather than changes in instructional content (Behaghel et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature suggests that place-based educational policies relying primarily on additional resources tend to generate modest and heterogeneous effects, with outcomes depending on both policy design and implementation.

2.2 Modest Effects of Urban Place-Based Policies

In parallel to educational policies, place-based urban policies have targeted deprived areas since the 1980s. These policies rely on socio-economic indicators—such as income levels, poverty rates, and crime—to identify target neighborhoods and aim to promote local development and reduce territorial inequalities (L’Horty & Morin, 2016). They typically combine interventions across multiple domains, including education, employment, housing, and urban renewal, reflecting a multidimensional approach to disadvantage.

In France, the geography of priority education and urban policy often overlaps. A large majority of priority education schools are located in or in close proximity to priority urban neighborhoods³ (Cour des comptes, 2018). These policies are implemented through partnerships between the central government, local authorities, and non-state actors, reflecting a multi-level governance structure that is intended to facilitate coordination across sectors (David, 2001). However, this institutional complexity also raises challenges in terms of both implementation and evaluation.

Empirical evidence on the effects of such policies remains mixed. For instance, evaluations of "Zones Franches Urbaines" (ZFU) in France show positive effects on local economic activity, but these gains appear to be partly driven by spatial reallocation rather than net creation, and their impact on residents’ employment outcomes remains uncertain

²RAR (Réseaux ambition réussite) were a subset of priority education networks introduced in the mid-2000s in France, targeting the most disadvantaged schools with additional resources and support. They were later replaced by the REP and REP+ classification. REP (Réseaux d’éducation prioritaire) are school networks serving disadvantaged students, introduced in 2015 as part of a reform of education priority policies, providing additional resources and support to participating schools. REP+ (Réseaux d’éducation prioritaire renforcés) are the most disadvantaged subset of REP networks, receiving additional resources and stronger support measures compared to standard REP schools.

³99% of REP+ schools are located less than one kilometer from a disadvantaged area, compared with 81.5% of REP schools

(Malgouyres & Py, 2016). This highlights a broader concern in the evaluation of place-based policies: measured effects at the local level may not translate into aggregate gains.

More generally, institutional reports emphasize that existing evaluations of priority urban neighborhoods are often partial and fragmented, focusing on specific dimensions or limited geographic areas, and frequently lacking credible counterfactuals (Cour des comptes, 2020). These limitations complicate the interpretation of estimated effects and contribute to the heterogeneity of findings across studies.

This pattern is consistent with the broader international literature on place-based policies. In the United States, large-scale urban programs such as Choice Neighborhoods aim to revitalize disadvantaged areas through integrated interventions. Available evaluations, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, find limited effects on residents' socio-economic trajectories despite observable improvements in physical infrastructure (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & Urban Institute, 2024). One interpretation is that the scale and duration of funding may be insufficient relative to the structural challenges faced by targeted neighborhoods.

In Europe, similar policies also yield heterogeneous results. Evidence from the Netherlands suggests that targeted neighborhoods are not necessarily characterized by strong social isolation, raising questions about the relevance of certain policy objectives such as social mixing (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008). In the United Kingdom, the New Deal for Communities program generated modest improvements in employment outcomes, but identifying causal effects remains challenging due to the coexistence of multiple interventions and the absence of convincing counterfactuals (Romero & Noble, 2008).

A common feature of these policies is their reliance on a multiplicity of instruments and actors. While this integrated approach is intended to address complex forms of disadvantage, it also creates coordination challenges and complicates both implementation and evaluation. In particular, the coexistence of multiple programs targeting the same populations makes it difficult to isolate the marginal effect of any single intervention. This limitation is central to understanding the modest and heterogeneous effects documented in the literature.

2.3 The Cités éducatives Program

The Cités éducatives program (hereafter CE) is a public policy intervention aimed at strengthening coordination between educational and social policies in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (*quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville*⁴ (QPV)). The program operates through the attribution of a label to selected territories, which grants local authorities access to public funding to support educational and socio-educational initiatives targeting individuals aged 0 to 25.

⁴QPV (Quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville) are officially designated disadvantaged neighborhoods in France, defined using income-based thresholds. They constitute the main geographic target of French place-based policies aimed at reducing socio-economic disparities.

Access to the program is based on a competitive application process initiated by local governments. Municipalities apply by submitting a project focused on a specific priority neighborhood within their jurisdiction. Applications are then evaluated and selected by the *Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires* (ANCT⁵) according to nationally defined criteria. As participation is voluntary, labeled territories may differ systematically from non-labeled ones. This selection process raises concerns about endogenous program placement, which constitutes a central challenge for the empirical identification of program effects.

The CE program operates at the intersection of two policy frameworks: priority education and urban policy. Prior to its introduction, many stakeholders in priority neighborhoods had developed educational initiatives that often overlapped in scope and objectives. Unlike traditional priority education policies, which mainly rely on allocating additional resources to schools, CE seeks to improve the coordination and articulation of existing interventions at the neighborhood level. Its underlying rationale is that policy effectiveness may be constrained not only by the level of resources available, but also by the capacity to coordinate delivery across actors and sectors. This approach is consistent with a “last-mile” perspective on public policy implementation, which emphasizes the effectiveness of delivery at the point of contact with beneficiaries (Conseil d’État, 2023). Rather than substituting for existing policies, CE seeks to complement them by reinforcing educational support at the neighborhood level and financing initiatives that are not covered by other programs.

From a budgetary perspective, the program relies primarily on funding from urban policy budgets. Over the period 2019–2024, total state funding amounts to approximately €291.8 million, corresponding to an average of about €350,000 per area per year (Cour des comptes, 2025). These resources are used to finance a wide range of locally defined interventions, including parental support programs, extracurricular activities, educational projects, and prevention initiatives. The decentralized and heterogeneous nature of these actions implies that the CE label does not correspond to a single, standardized treatment, but rather to a bundle of coordinated interventions whose content varies across territories.

The program was rolled out gradually through successive waves of designation: 80 territories were labeled in 2019–2020, 46 in 2020–2021, and 82 in 2021–2022. A fourth wave took place in 2025 but is not included in the empirical analysis. This staggered implementation generates variation in the timing of exposure to the program across territories, which we exploit for identification.

Eligibility criteria for the first waves of the program were defined by a central government instruction (Gouvernement français, 2020). Eligible territories were required to belong to a priority urban neighborhood with more than 5,000 inhabitants, face significant urban and social challenges—often within the framework of urban renewal programs—and include at least one school in the most disadvantaged category of priority education (REP+). In later waves, these criteria were partially relaxed, broadening eligibility while maintaining a

⁵The Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires (ANCT) is a French government agency supporting local authorities in disadvantaged neighborhoods to coordinate social, educational, and urban development policies.

focus on disadvantaged areas (Cour des comptes, 2025). These eligibility rules contribute to shaping the population of treated areas and are relevant for assessing the comparability of treated and non-treated units.

The program is implemented at the neighborhood level, but its operational structure is closely tied to the school system. In practice, a middle school within the designated area is typically identified as a lead institution responsible for coordinating local actions. This school receives a dedicated annual grant (€30,000) and plays a central role in organizing and implementing program activities. As a result, middle schools constitute a natural unit of analysis for evaluating the program.

This institutional structure has two important implications for the empirical analysis. First, treatment can be defined at the level of schools located within labeled neighborhoods, even though the policy itself is assigned at the neighborhood level. Second, the outcomes we observe reflect not only direct educational interventions but also broader changes in the local coordination of policies affecting students. In this paper, we therefore evaluate the impact of exposure to the CE label on school-level outcomes, using middle schools located in priority neighborhoods as the unit of observation. The estimated effects should be interpreted as the impact of improved coordination and associated local interventions, rather than the effect of a single, clearly defined policy input.

Finally, the staggered rollout of the program across territories provides a source of quasi-experimental variation. By comparing schools in labeled areas to similar schools in non-labeled priority neighborhoods and exploiting differences in the timing of program adoption, we implement a staggered difference-in-differences strategy to estimate the causal impact of the program.

3 Data and Empirical Strategy

3.1 Data and Descriptive Statistics

Our analysis draws on a dataset that combines national administrative sources (INSEE⁶) with detailed territorial information from the geographic information systems of the Politique de la ville (SIG⁷) and the Archipel Database⁸, covering the period 2017–2024. These data allow us to document educational outcomes aggregated at the lower-secondary-school level (success at the Diplôme national du brevet (DNB)⁹), post-middle school track choices), school characteristics (average teacher age, mobility and transfer requests, share of part-

⁶INSEE (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques) is the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, responsible for producing official statistics on the French economy, population, and society.

⁷<https://sig.ville.gouv.fr>

⁸Archipel Database is an administrative dataset managed by the French Ministry of Education, containing detailed school-level information on students, staff, resources, and programs in French middle schools.

⁹Diplôme national du brevet (DNB) is the national examination taken at the end of lower secondary school (grade nine) in France, assessing students' knowledge in core subjects before entering upper secondary education.

time teachers, social position index), as well as local socioeconomic contexts (employment rate and demographic structure within QPV).

We use the following outcomes to measure student achievement: pass rate at the brevet, rates of honors ('satisfactory', 'good', and 'very good'¹⁰), continuous assessment scores, written exam scores in mathematics and French, and the distribution of test scores (below 8, between 8 and 10, and between 10 and 12 out of 20). We also construct indicators of students' educational transitions, such as the proportion of pupils continuing to general, vocational, or CAP¹¹ tracks and the share of students repeating ninth grade. All outcome variables are aggregated at the school-by-year level.

To geolocate middle schools associated with a QPV, we use the SIG to identify schools located within QPV boundaries or within a 500-meter buffer zone.

The final sample includes 1,965 middle schools. This figure, smaller than the 6,950 public middle schools in France, reflects a deliberate restriction to institutions belonging to at least one of the following policy categories: *Éducation prioritaire* (EP), QPV, or CE. We introduce these labels once and subsequently refer to them by their acronyms.

Among these 1,965 schools, the first CE cohort comprises 214 treated institutions (10.89%). The first wave consists of 179 schools that are both in EP and located within a QPV, 16 EP schools outside QPVs, 14 QPV schools outside EP areas, and 5 schools that are neither in EP nor in QPV zones (Figure 1).

The observed distribution indicates that belonging to an EP or QPV area was de facto a requirement to obtain CE labeling: 97.66% of first-wave schools have at least one of these statuses, compared with 90.08% in the second wave and 86.86% in the third. This pattern shows that applications and approvals were not random: schools in more deprived areas were more likely to obtain the label. This tendency is particularly strong in the first wave, while subsequent waves exhibit a gradual relaxation of selection criteria. Across all waves, the dominant institutional status combines EP and QPV affiliation (72.94%), suggesting that labeling primarily targeted schools facing cumulative disadvantages. However, this dual status becomes less prevalent over successive waves: 83.64% in the first cohort, 69.42% in the second, and 62.29% in the last. As a result, selection into CE status must be explicitly accounted for in our empirical strategy.

¹⁰These are the official distinctions awarded in the French *Diplôme national du brevet*, reflecting increasing levels of student performance.

¹¹CAP means *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*. It is a vocational certificate typically completed in two years after lower secondary school (grade nine), preparing students to enter the labor market.

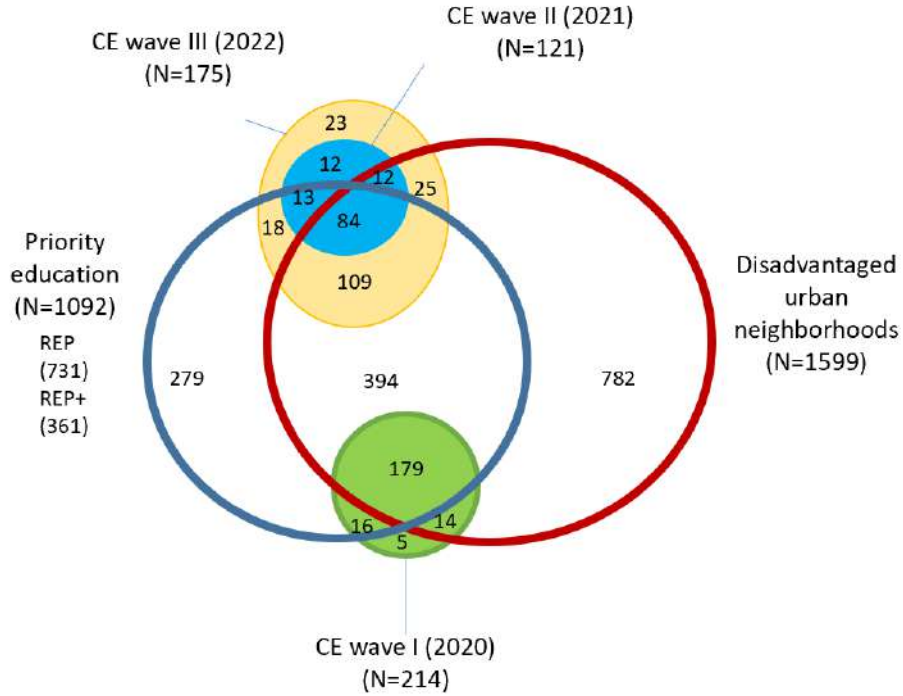


Figure 1: Distribution of middle schools by status

3.2 Empirical strategy

Evaluating a program that builds on France’s EP raises several methodological challenges, most notably related to selection bias and composition effects. Schools covered by EP serve students from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and, on average, enroll pupils with lower prior achievement than schools outside EP. As a result, even in the absence of any policy intervention, these schools would tend to display weaker academic performance.

This selection problem is well documented in the literature on priority education. For instance, middle schools in RAR were selected based on strict criteria, including at least two-thirds of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds and at least 10% of students who had repeated a grade two times or more by the time they entered sixth grade. These criteria imply that schools covered by such schemes are structurally different in both their social and academic profiles from other schools. A baseline regression comparison between schools benefiting from the program and other schools would therefore yield a biased estimate of the program’s effect.

In the case of CE, the labeling process operates in two stages: local authorities first apply voluntarily, and applications are then screened and approved by central and regional administrations. This two-step mechanism implies that territories receiving the label may systematically differ from those that do not. Not all eligible areas chose to apply, which explains the presence, in our data, of comparable middle schools that were never labeled.

To limit the resulting selection bias, it is therefore necessary to construct a control group made up of schools that are as similar as possible to treated schools.

In this study, we exploit the program’s eligibility criteria to define a relevant comparison group. During the first three waves of labeling, two conditions remained relatively stable: the size of the QPV and the presence of at least one middle school under EP. On this basis, we construct a control group of EP middle schools attached to QPV that satisfy these criteria but did not receive the CE label. The treatment group is defined using the same logic. The resulting sample consists of 296 labeled middle schools and 139 comparable non-labeled schools (see Section 3.1). This restriction entails a standard trade-off between internal and external validity. Our analysis does not estimate the average impact of the program on all French middle schools, but rather on a subset of comparable schools that satisfy the eligibility conditions. In return, this design enhances the credibility of our empirical identification. Moreover, since all schools in our sample are located in QPV and belong to EP, this approach also limits the influence of other territorial initiatives that could simultaneously affect these areas. In addition, by construction, this strategy nets out any direct effects that could be attributed to EP status itself.

To identify the causal effect of CE labeling, we rely on a difference-in-differences framework. Identification rests on the standard parallel trends assumption, according to which, in the absence of the program, treated and control schools would have followed similar trajectories. Three features of our setting strengthen the plausibility of this assumption. First, by constructing the control group from EP schools located in comparable QPV, we limit structural differences between treated and non-treated schools. Second, the staggered rollout of the program across several labeling waves generates temporal variation in exposure to CE that can be exploited to identify its impact. Third, because all schools in the sample operate within a similar institutional environment — in particular, in terms of territorial policies and education reforms — the risk that the estimated effects reflect concurrent, unobserved shocks is reduced.

We estimate the impact of CE using several econometric specifications, including a two-way fixed effects difference-in-differences model (TWFE) with school and year fixed effects:

$$Y_{g,t} = \gamma_t + \lambda_g + \beta^{fe} \cdot CE_{g,t} + \varepsilon_{g,t} \quad (1)$$

where :

- $Y_{g,t}$ denotes the outcome variable for unit g at time t ;
- $CE_{g,t}$ is a treatment indicator equal to 1 if unit g is labeled at period t , and β^{fe} is the coefficient capturing the average effect of the policy;
- γ_t represents time fixed effects capturing shocks common to all units in period t ;
- λ_g denotes school fixed effects accounting for unobserved time-invariant characteristics;

- $\varepsilon_{g,t}$ is the error term.

In its canonical form with two groups and two periods, a TWFE model identifies the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) under the standard assumptions of parallel trends and no anticipation. However, the recent difference-in-differences literature (Borusyak et al. (2024), Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021), and Goodman-Bacon (2021)) has shown that, in the presence of staggered treatment adoption and heterogeneous treatment effects, the conventional TWFE estimator no longer recovers a simple average of treatment effects but rather a linear combination of group-by-period effects, with weights that can be negative. In such settings, the TWFE estimate can deviate substantially from the ATT (and even have the opposite sign), even when parallel trends and no-anticipation assumptions hold. When treatment is staggered, negative weights arise because already-treated units are used as controls for units that have just switched into treatment.

In our context, CE status is rolled out in a staggered fashion (Figure 8), and given the volatility of funding over time, it is important to rely on estimators that are robust to this structure. The recent literature has proposed several estimators tailored to staggered adoption designs (Borusyak et al. (2024), Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021), De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille (2023), and Sun and Abraham (2021)).

To estimate the impact of CE labeling for the first three waves (2020, 2021, and 2022), we use the estimator proposed by De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille (2023) (henceforth CH). This estimator avoids negative weighting by comparing schools that have just been treated ("switchers") to schools that remain untreated at a given date ("stayers"). Under the assumptions of parallel trends and no anticipation, this estimator identifies the causal effect of the policy for the treated units. However, this approach is relatively demanding in terms of statistical power, as it relies only on a subset of comparisons. To gain robustness, we also estimate the ATT using the estimator proposed by Sun and Abraham (2021) (henceforth SA):

$$Y_{g,t} = \sum_{c \in \mathcal{C}} \hat{\alpha}_c \mathbf{1}\{g \in c\} + \sum_{t'=1}^T \hat{\gamma}_{t'} \mathbf{1}\{t = t'\} + \sum_{c \in \mathcal{C}} \sum_{\ell=-(c-2), \ell \neq 0}^{T-(c-1)} \hat{\beta}_{c,\ell}^{\text{did}} \mathbf{1}\{F_g = c, t = c-1+\ell\} + \hat{\varepsilon}_{g,t}. \quad (2)$$

where:

- $\hat{\alpha}_c$ denotes cohort fixed effects;
- $\hat{\gamma}_{t'}$ denotes time fixed effects;
- $\hat{\beta}_{c,\ell}^{\text{did}}$ represents the treatment effects for cohort c after ℓ periods of exposure to the treatment;
- $\hat{\varepsilon}_{gt}$ is the error term.

The SA estimator computes an ATT aggregated at the cohort level (a cohort means a group that is treated at the same time) for each treatment period. The control group can be constructed in two ways: either using the last treatment cohort or the never-treated

group. We opt for the never-treated group, as it provides a larger and more stable control set.

CE effects may vary over time, as the program likely requires several years to yield detectable outcomes. Unlike the TWFE estimator, which collapses all post-treatment variation into a single coefficient, an event-study design allows us to trace the dynamic effects of treatment year by year. Although imperfectly testable, this approach also enables us to assess the validity of the parallel trends and no-anticipation assumptions by examining whether pre-treatment coefficients are jointly equal to zero. To implement these tests, we rely on the event-study specification proposed by De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille (2023).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): CE effects primarily manifest at the middle school level, as these are the main beneficiaries of the program. This hypothesis is grounded in the program’s governance structure, which systematically designates a middle school as the lead school, as well as in several evaluation reports documenting the predominance of interventions at the lower secondary level (Cour des comptes, 2025; Stromboni & Louhab, 2024).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Consistent with the program’s design, CE labeling does not constitute an additional intervention but rather serves as a coordination tool intended to improve the articulation of existing programs (REP, REP+, PRE). We therefore posit that CE generates indirect effects by enhancing the effectiveness of these pre-existing schemes.

4 Results

The CE label operates through multiple channels and may influence student outcomes across several dimensions. Guided by our hypotheses (H1 and H2), we first examine the effects on standardized academic performance measures, including pass rates and honors at the DNB. This focus reflects H1, which posits that impacts should primarily manifest at the middle school level, the main target of the program. We then assess the effects on post-middle school track choices, capturing the program’s objective of broadening students’ future educational prospects and testing H2, which predicts that CE generates indirect effects by enhancing the effectiveness of pre-existing education priority programs (REP, REP+, PRE).

4.1 Impact of CE on overall DNB performance

In the Table 1, Column 1 reports TWFE estimates to illustrate potential biases arising from negative weights. Column 2 presents the ATT from the CH estimator, and Column 3 reports the ATT from the SA estimator.

TWFE estimates are generally similar to those from columns 2 and 3, though in some cases they display opposite signs. This discrepancy reflects the presence of negative weights. In other instances, TWFE yields statistically significant estimates while the staggered DiD estimators do not, reflecting its efficiency as the best linear unbiased estimator (BLUE). By

minimizing variance, TWFE incorporates all available 2×2 comparisons, including those between newly treated units and already-treated units.

Outcome	TWFE	CH	SA
Brevet pass rate	-0.890* (0.509)	-0.482 (0.607)	-0.489 (0.657)
Brevet honors rate	-0.358 (0.606)	0.443 (0.702)	0.649 (0.744)
Pass rate without honors	-0.533 (0.435)	-0.924* (0.555)	-1.139* (0.589)
Pass rate with honors ‘satisfactory’	-0.221 (0.385)	-0.162 (0.450)	0.002 (0.480)
Pass rate with honors ‘good’	0.644** (0.327)	0.856** (0.389)	0.795* (0.408)
Pass rate with honors ‘very good’	-0.843** (0.373)	-0.378 (0.437)	-0.307 (0.452)
N	3458	2156	3458

Notes : Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. ***
p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. CH = De Chaisemartin & D’Haultfoeuille,
SA = Sun & Abraham.

Table 1: Average Effect of CE Labels (ATT) on Brevet Pass Rates

Staggered DiD estimators reveal limited or no effects of CE labeling on overall DNB performance (parallel trends are validated at the 5% level across all outcomes). The CH and SA estimates deliver highly consistent results, which is reassuring. CE has no detectable impact on the DNB pass rate, overall honors rate, or ‘satisfactory’ honors rate. However, small-magnitude effects emerge for admission without honors and ‘good’ honors. Specifically, CE reduces the share of students admitted without honors by approximately 1 percentage point (significant at 10% for both estimators). This reduction appears to shift toward higher honors categories, with a statistically significant increase in the ‘good’ honors rate of roughly 1 percentage point (10% for SA, 5% for CH). Effects on overall DNB performance thus appear modest in magnitude.

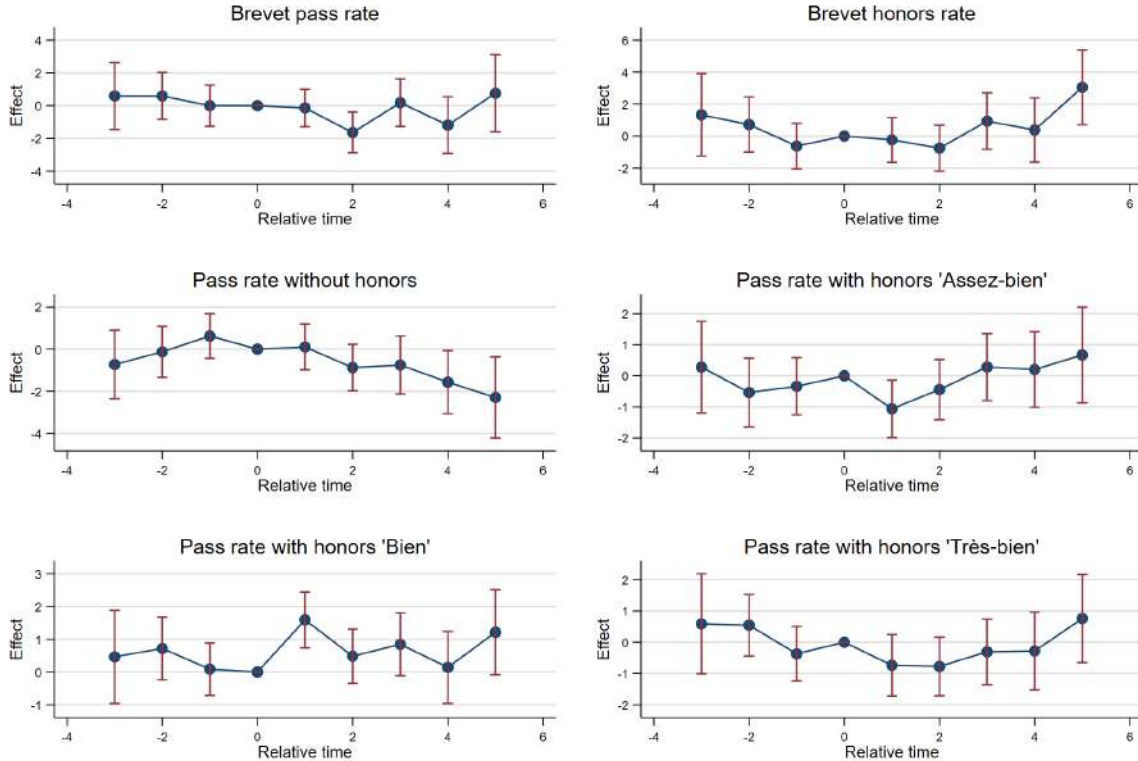


Figure 2: Event-study for the overall DNB performance

Event-study estimates provide additional insights into treatment dynamics. Pre-treatment coefficients are jointly indistinguishable from zero at the 5% level across all outcomes (Figure 2). While ATT estimates suggested no effect on the pass rate, the event study reveals a negative impact of -1.63 percentage points in the second year post-treatment (significant at 5%). For the overall honors rate, a positive effect of 3.05 percentage points emerges only in the fifth year post-treatment (significant at 1%). The ‘satisfactory’ honors rate declines by -1.06 percentage points immediately upon treatment entry (significant at 5%). The positive ‘good’ honors effect identified in the ATT is concentrated in the first treatment year, though coefficients for years 2, 3, and 5 remain significant at 10%. No effects are detected for ‘very good’ honors at any horizon.

4.2 Effects of CE on DNB written exam scores

We extend the analysis to written exam scores from the DNB, which provide an objective measure of student achievement. The final DNB score combines two components: (i) continuous assessment over the school year, weighted at 50% of the final grade (reduced from 60% in 2017); and (ii) standardized written terminal exams accounting for the remaining 50%, covering French, mathematics, history-geography-EMC, and sciences (we observe scores for mathematics and French only). Since continuous assessment scores may reflect heterogeneous grading practices across schools, terminal exam scores offer a particularly

informative and comparable measure of learning outcomes¹².

As shown by Murat (1998), grades can depend on average class ability. Terminal exams thus provide a cleaner measure of student skills, less susceptible to cross-school differences in grading standards. We therefore examine CE effects on French and mathematics exam scores, as well as on their distributions.

Outcome	TWFE	CH	SA
Math written exam score	-0.002 (0.071)	-0.019 (0.079)	-0.013 (0.080)
French written exam score	-0.008 (0.058)	-0.030 (0.066)	-0.028 (0.067)
Share scoring below 8 on the written exam <8	-0.842 (0.583)	-1.299* (0.690)	-1.476** (0.713)
Share scoring between 8 and 10 on the written exam	0.893*** (0.327)	1.760*** (0.417)	2.017*** (0.439)
Share scoring between 10 and 12 on the written exam	0.508* (0.305)	0.341 (0.403)	0.316 (0.407)
Share scoring above 12 on the written exam	-0.583 (0.445)	-0.797 (0.510)	-0.881* (0.516)
N	3265	2034	3265

Note : Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. CH = De Chaisemartin & D’Haultfoeuille, SA = Sun & Abraham.

Table 2: Average treatment effects of CE (ATT) on DNB written exam performance

CE labeling yields negative but statistically insignificant effects on both mathematics and French exam scores. However, effects emerge when examining the distribution of written exam scores. The share of scores below 8 declines by 1.3 percentage points (significant at 5% for SA, 10% for CH). This reduction is accompanied by an increase in the share of scores between 8 and 10 of nearly 2 percentage points (significant at 1%) and a smaller, insignificant rise in the 10–12 range.

These results should be interpreted cautiously, as parallel trends hold for CH and TWFE (at 5%) but not for SA. This discrepancy reflects differences in control group construction: CH uses ‘stayers’ (never-treated and not-yet-treated schools), while SA relies exclusively on never-treated schools.

Finally, we detect a small negative effect (-0.8 percentage points) on the share of scores above 12, significant at 10% only for SA. Overall, CE appears to generate heterogeneous effects on written exams, modestly benefiting students at the lower end of the distribution while marginally penalizing those at the upper end.

¹²We verified that no effects exist on continuous assessment scores. Results are available upon request.

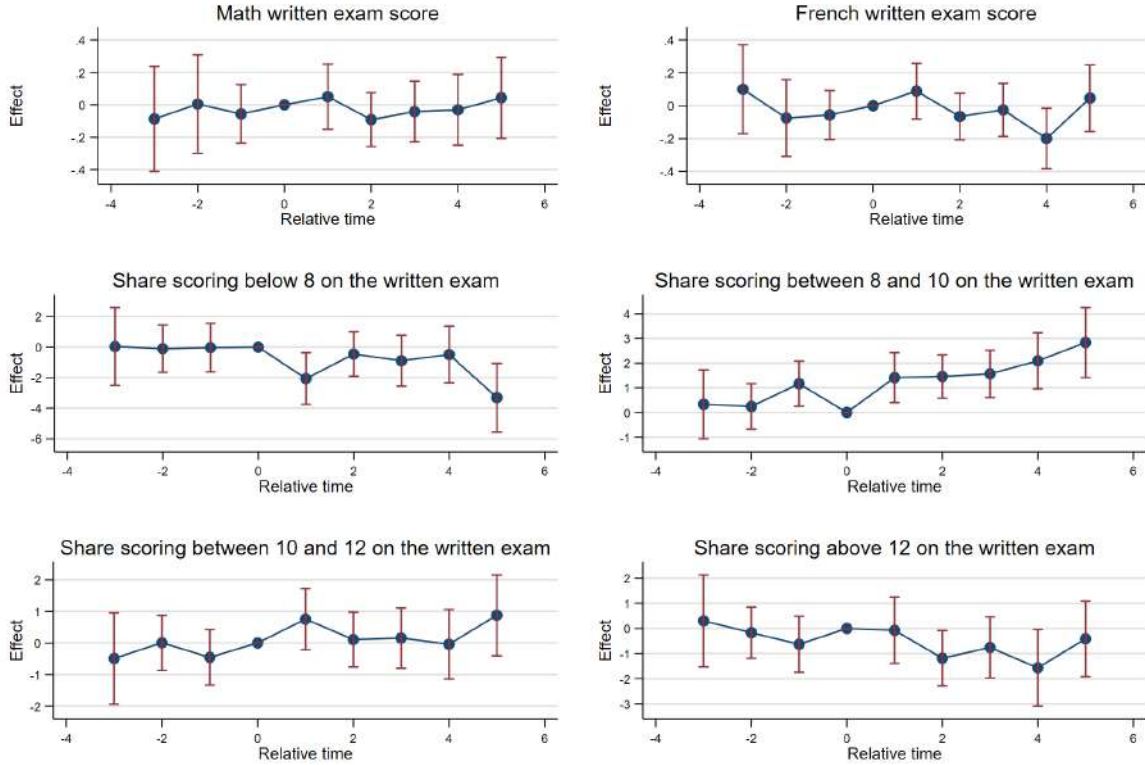


Figure 3: Event-study for the DNB written exam scores

As shown in Figure 3, both the parallel trends and no anticipation assumptions hold prior to treatment for all outcome variables (at the 5% significance level). In mathematics, the label did not produce any statistically significant effect in any treatment period. In contrast, in French, the label slightly lowered scores by about 0.20 points in period 4. For the share of scores below 8, the negative effect observed in the ATT estimates is, in fact, significant only in periods 1 and 5. For the share of scores between 8 and 10, all post-treatment coefficients are statistically different from zero at the 5% level. Finally, for the share of scores above 12, it appear to have reduced the proportion by around one percentage point in periods 2 and 4.

4.3 Effects of CE Labels on Students' Educational Trajectories

The CE label explicitly aims, through its 'Opening up possibilities' axis, to foster students' educational and professional ambitions. Socially disadvantaged students often have less information about post-secondary options than their peers. We therefore assess the impact of the program on students' track choices after grade nine. CE labels may also influence school dropout, which we examine by analyzing grade repetition rates in labeled schools.

Outcome	TWFE	CH	SA
Share entering the general and technological track	-0.519 (0.511)	-0.692 (0.612)	-0.795 (0.653)
Share entering the vocational track	0.406 (0.457)	0.437 (0.585)	0.571 (0.623)
Share entering a CAP apprenticeship program	0.428 (0.306)	0.516* (0.306)	0.458 (0.329)
Grade repetition rate	-0.060 (0.153)	0.089 (0.195)	0.109 (0.213)
N	3265	2034	3265

Notes : Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. CH = De Chaisemartin & D'Haultfoeuille, SA = Sun & Abraham.

Table 3: Average effect of CE labels (ATT) on educational trajectories

Our results indicate that the program does not produce detectable effects on the share of students enrolling in general or technological tracks, nor on vocational tracks leading to a high school diploma equivalency. The label has a small positive effect on the share of students pursuing a CAP (vocational certificate), but the magnitude is limited (0.5 percentage points). Finally, using grade repetition as a proxy, the label does not reduce school dropout. For all outcomes in this section, the parallel trends assumption is not rejected at the 10% significance level.

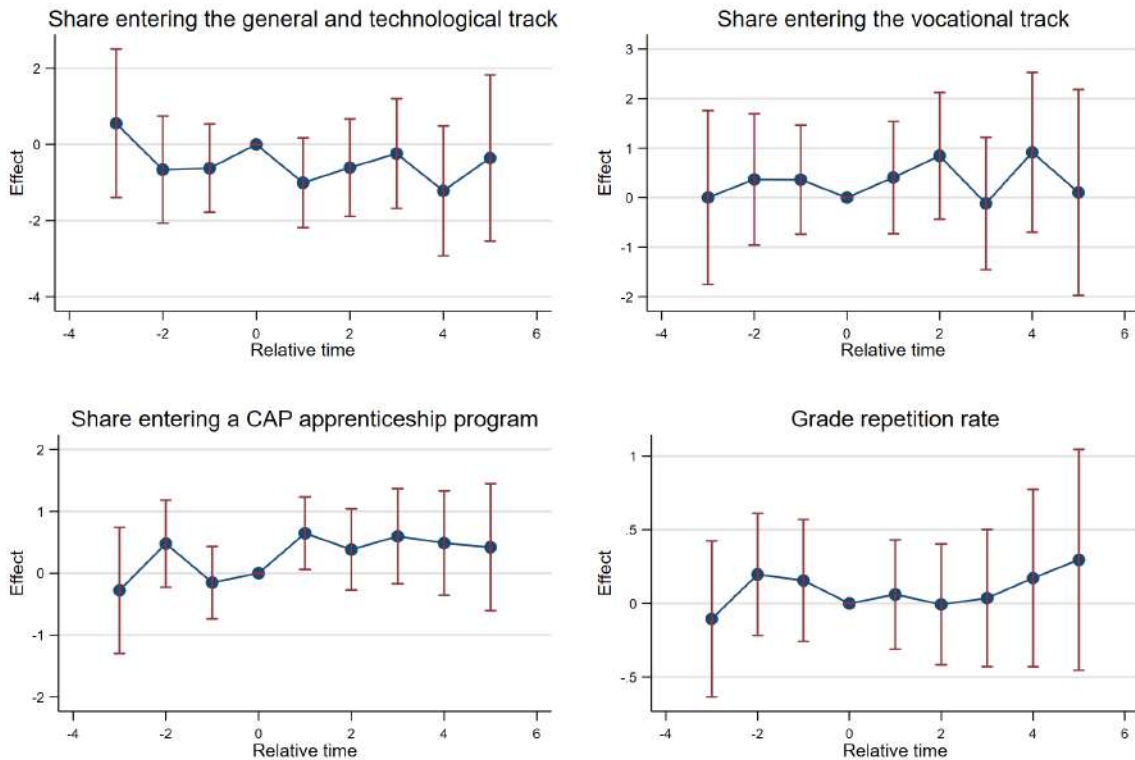


Figure 4: Event-study for the Students Educational Trajectories

Pre-treatment marginal effects are not statistically significant, confirming that the parallel trends assumption holds for all outcomes. Post-treatment coefficients are not significantly different from zero for any outcome or period, except for the proportion of students pursuing a CAP in period 1. Overall, these results suggest that the CE label had little impact on students' post-grade-nine track choices and did not reduce dropout rates.

4.4 Heterogeneous Effects of CE Labels

When a CE is created, one school is designated as the lead school and receives €30,000 to coordinate CE activities. Lead schools therefore receive stronger treatment than other schools. We examine whether this differential exposure generates detectable heterogeneous effects by restricting the treatment group to lead schools only.

The results for Lead Schools (Table 4) are consistent with previous findings. The CE label affects the share of students receiving honors, which was not observed in the full sample. Specifically, the program increased the share of students receiving honors in lead schools by 1.5 percentage points, a marginal effect significant at the 10% level. Symmetrically, the label significantly decreased (at the 5% level) the share of students admitted without honors. As these effects are of similar magnitude, no effect is detected on overall diploma pass rates. For the 'good' honors category, treatment increased the share by 1 percentage point. Consistent with earlier results, the program decreased the share of exam scores below 8 by approximately 2 percentage points and increased the share of scores between 8 and 10 by a similar magnitude. The only previously significant outcome that is no longer significant in this restricted sample is the share of students pursuing a CAP.

Outcome	TWFE	CH	SA
Brevet pass rate	-0.756 (0.676)	-0.125 (0.781)	-0.029 (0.849)
Brevet honors rate	0.257 (0.769)	1.018 (0.878)	1.551* (0.921)
Pass rate without honors	-1.013* (0.604)	-1.142 (0.728)	-1.580** (0.757)
Pass rate with honors ‘satisfactory’	-0.445 (0.495)	-0.884 (0.578)	-0.544 (0.606)
Pass rate with honors ‘good’	0.672 (0.411)	1.015* (0.525)	1.047* (0.536)
Pass rate with honors ‘very good’	-0.675 (0.463)	0.108 (0.549)	0.171 (0.554)
Math written exam score	0.029 (0.091)	0.005 (0.103)	0.015 (0.101)
French written exam score	0.006 (0.074)	0.079 (0.091)	0.084 (0.090)
Share scoring below 8 on the written exam <8	-1.035 (0.776)	-1.994** (0.871)	-2.082** (0.904)
Share scoring between 8 and 10 on the written exam	0.758* (0.400)	1.926*** (0.502)	2.198*** (0.528)
Share scoring between 10 and 12 on the written exam	0.429 (0.354)	-0.017 (0.491)	0.017 (0.500)
Share scoring above 12 on the written exam	-0.177 (0.536)	0.090 (0.668)	-0.157 (0.667)
Share entering the general and technological track	-0.555 (0.677)	-0.277 (0.796)	-0.318 (0.851)
Share entering the vocational track	0.225 (0.580)	-0.332 (0.768)	-0.151 (0.804)
Share entering a CAP apprenticeship program	0.572 (0.395)	0.641 (0.398)	0.556 (0.411)
Grade repetition rate	-0.203 (0.200)	-0.057 (0.259)	-0.121 (0.277)
N	2235	1396	2235

Notes : Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. CH = De Chaisemartin & D’Haultfoeuille, SA = Sun & Abraham.

Table 4: Average Treatment Effect of CE Labels (ATT) for Schools Designated as Lead Schools

As of today, our analysis has focused on all eligible schools and we didn’t find much evidence of the positive impact of the CE. However, schools with a larger share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds may respond differently to the program. To explore this

potential heterogeneity, we restrict the sample to schools with an IPS below the median.¹³

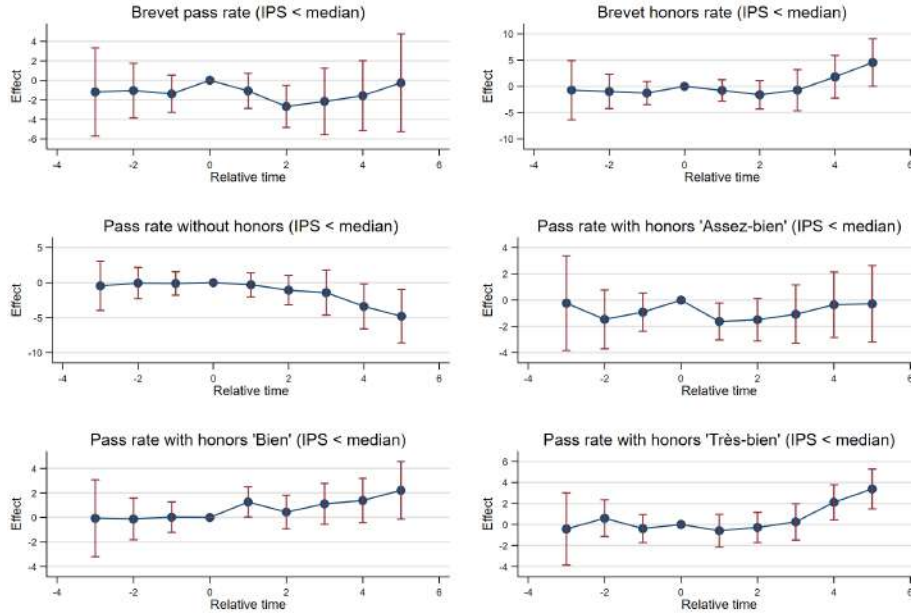


Figure 5: Event-study for the overall DNB performance for school who have an IPS < median

For all outcomes, the parallel trends and no-anticipation assumptions hold at the 10% level. Overall, the effects of the program are broadly similar for schools with a larger share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The main difference lies in the magnitude of the estimated effects. In particular, for these schools, the treatment has a positive effect on the “Très bien” pass rate, although only after four and five periods of exposure. The program increases this outcome by more than 2 percentage points in period 4 and by more than 3 percentage points in period 5.

5 Conclusion and discussion

This paper estimates the effect of the Cités éducatives program, a place-based policy aimed at improving educational outcomes through enhanced coordination among public actors in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Using administrative data and a difference-in-differences design exploiting the staggered introduction of the program, we compare treated schools to similar institutions within priority neighborhoods and the priority education system.

We find no evidence of an average effect of the program on student performance, in line with previous findings on priority education policies (Beffy & Davezies, 2013; Bénabou et al., 2004, 2009; Caille et al., 2016; Gilleece et al., 2025; Matsudaira et al., 2012;

¹³The *Indice de position sociale* (IPS) is an indicator constructed by the *Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance* (DEPP) based on parents' socioeconomic status.

Van der Klaauw, 2008). However, we document heterogeneous effects: the program improves outcomes for lower-performing students while reducing performance at the top of the distribution (but not for schools that have a large share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds), with no detectable impact on tracking decisions. These results are robust across specifications and sample restrictions.

One potential explanation for these results is the limited scale of the financial resources involved. The average funding per student remains low relative to overall education spending (Commission des Finances, 2025), suggesting that coordination alone may be insufficient to generate large average effects. In fact, the budget per student varies substantially across *Cités éducatives*, ranging from €18 to €373 (Cour des comptes, 2025). Moreover, the program covers a very broad age range, from children aged 0 to 25. Given these limited resources, it is therefore not surprising that the estimated effects are relatively small.

Several limitations should be noted. First, the analysis focuses on middle schools in deprived areas, limiting external validity. Second, the data do not allow us to identify the mechanisms underlying the estimated effects, as the program finances a heterogeneous set of local interventions. Third, although the empirical strategy mitigates selection concerns, participation is based on voluntary applications, and residual selection bias cannot be fully excluded. Spillover effects may also attenuate estimated impacts.

Future research could examine the mechanisms driving these effects, including the role of coordination, family involvement, and complementary policies, as well as impacts at other educational levels. In addition, longer-term outcomes—such as access to higher education—remain an open question.

Overall, these results indicate that improving coordination across policies may benefit the most disadvantaged students but is unlikely to substantially affect average outcomes in the absence of additional resources. The findings contribute to the literature on place-based policies and highlight the limits of coordination-based interventions as a standalone policy tool.

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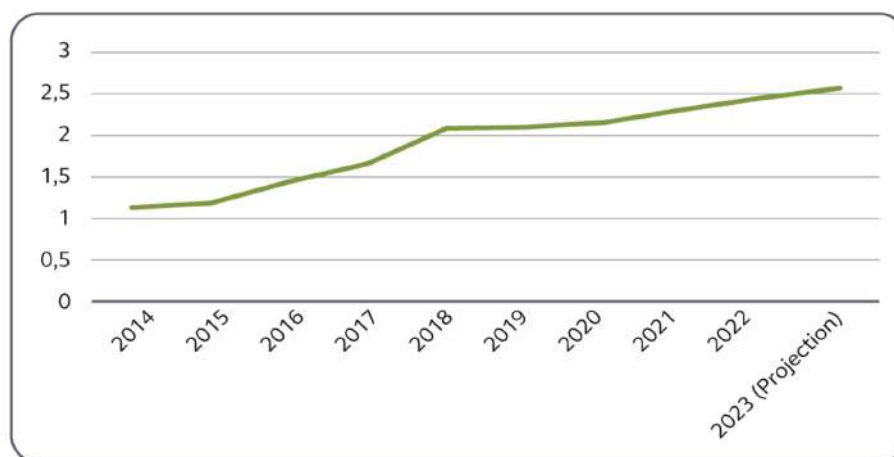
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Appendix



Source : Cour des comptes, d'après les données du ministère de l'éducation nationale

Figure 7: Trends in National Education Spending on Priority Education since 2014 (€ billions)

A Additional Descriptive Statistics



Figure 6: Structure of the CE Program - municipal communication (Source: Municipality of Sevran)

Axis	Project	Costs (€)
Axis 1	Parenting Support Workshops	
	Early childhood structures in the neighborhood meet with families to discuss challenges faced by parents.	1,070
Axis 2	Road Safety in Sevrans!	13,500
	Awareness workshops on road safety and risky behaviors.	
	From Sevrans to Roland Garros	13,200
	Introducing first-grade classes to Roland Garros.	
	High School – Futuroscope Educational Trip	
Axis 3	Two-day, one-night trip to Futuroscope park with meetings with technicians and/or engineers from the park.	3,418
	Awareness on Risks of Prostitution and Soliciting	
	Specialists address issues of youth prostitution and soliciting with both professionals and families.	16,667
	A weekly drop-in service named “ado sexo” is provided.	
	Middle School – <i>Musée en Herbe</i>	
Axis 3	Introduction to the arts and discovery of Parisian museums on Wednesday afternoons.	2,458
	Sixth- and Fourth-Grade Integration Day	9,160
	Workshops for Students, Teachers, and Parents	
	Parents are invited to participate with their children in workshops to strengthen the connection between school, children, and families.	61,600
	Mini-Stays and Educational Trips	
	Creation of mini-stays from age 3 and reinforcement of existing ones.	36,000
	Two trips organized: All Saints’ holidays + Christmas holidays.	
	Foreign Language Skill Development	
	Organization of individual language lessons by a school teacher, including language immersion courses and specialization classes.	2,100
	Sport and Disability	
Implementation of sports workshops for children with disabilities.	16,100	

Table 5: Example of QPV Initiatives: Les Beaudottes Neighborhood

	CE number	€ millions	QPV
2019	80	8,2	164
2020	80	28,8	164
2021	126	36,4	282
2022	208	69,3	479
2023	208	71,1	479
2024	208	78	479
2025	248	86,7	565
2026	302	105,7	646
2027	805	281,7	1609

Executed amounts in € millions (central government share, BOP 147).
Sources: Senate, Cour des comptes, National Assembly, authors’ calculations.

Table 6: Rollout of the Cités éducatives Program

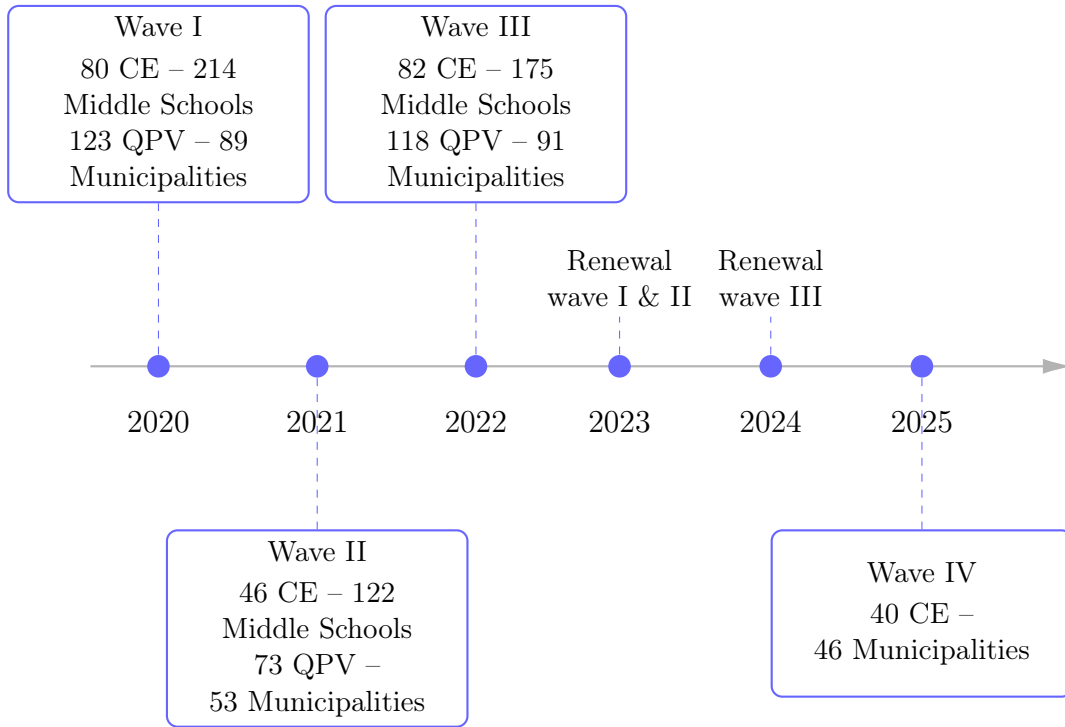


Figure 8: Rollout of the 248 Cités éducatives (2020–2025)

Budget (€ millions)	P140	P141	P230	P214	Total Share National Education	CE-P147	%CE
2015	19,874.9	30,912.9	4,810.6	2,273.2	57,871.6		
2016	20,443.4	31,466.2	4,905.6	2,287.7	59,102.9		
2017	21,573.8	32,436.3	5,167.6	2,277.6	61,455.3		
2018	22,000.9	32,916.8	5,418.0	2,331.1	62,666.8		
2019	22,549.4	33,204.0	5,638.9	2,263.9	63,656.2	8.2	
2020	23,101.3	33,452.2	6,041.2	2,188.8	64,783.5	28.8	
2021	23,587.6	33,976.3	6,384.1	2,701.2	66,649.2	36.4	
2022	24,392.0	34,927.0	6,875.0	2,725.0	68,919.0	69.3	0.001%
2023	25,456.0	36,343.0	7,468.0	2,784.0	72,051.0	71.1	0.001%
2024	26,686.0	38,247.0	7,934.0	2,910.0	75,777.0	78	0.001%

Sources: Cour des comptes (2025), Finance Bill for 2025 ('Cohesion of Territories' mission). P140, P141, P230, and P214 refer to budget programs within the French Finance Bill ('Projet de Loi de Finances'). P140 corresponds to general primary and secondary education, P141 to vocational and technical education, P230 to policy actions targeting cohesion and urban policy, and P214 to higher education and research. These codes are used by the French Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Budget to track executed expenditures by program.

Table 7: Education Budget vs. CE Program Budget

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