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'Deeper Learning' Approach Improves Graduation Rates, Study Finds

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on March 9, 2016 12:47 PM | [1 Comment](#)

Students who attend schools in networks that focus on "deeper learning" graduate in four years at rates that are about 8 percentage points higher than those of their peers, according to a [study released Wednesday by the American Institutes for Research](#).

The report is the latest in a series of studies that examine outcomes in schools that use a "deeper learning" approach. It confirms the findings of [another study in the series, released in 2014](#), which found that students who attend schools that shape instruction this way graduate in four years at rates that are about 9 percentage points higher than those of peers in schools that are not in "deeper learning" networks.

The 2014 study also found that "deeper learning" network school students score higher on state and international tests than their peers, were more likely to enroll in four-year and selective colleges, and were more likely to report that they felt academically engaged and motivated to learn.

The studies, based on samples of more than 20,000 students in 27 schools in New York and California, are funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which has been exploring the "deeper learning" idea in recent years. (The Hewlett Foundation also supports *Education Week's* coverage of the topic.)

Researchers focused on students who entered the 9th grade between 2007-08 and 2010-11 in schools that are [networked around key principles of deeper learning](#), such as mastery of core content and problem-solving skills, and in similar schools that are not in such networks.

The 2014 report that found a graduation-rate advantage for students in "deeper learning" network schools followed them through the fall of 2013. The report released March 9 followed an additional cohort of students through the spring of 2014.

The new study found that the graduation-rate effect wasn't quite as pronounced for students from low-income families, but found that those students still graduated at higher rates than similar students in non-network schools.

Schools focused on deeper learning aim to enable students to transfer knowledge and skills across contexts through the development of academic and problem solving skills, their ability to communicate and work with others, and their self-knowledge and ability to manage their own time and effort.

The first study in the series explored the practices and strategies of educators in "deeper learning" network schools. The second study examined the kinds of distinct opportunities students in those schools experienced. The third documented the differing outcomes for students in those schools, compared with those of non-network schools. All three of the earlier studies are [available on a special page of AIR's website](#).

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