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The Fiscal Cost of Weak Governance: Evidence from Teacher Absence in India[☆]

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Abstract

The relative return to strategies that augment inputs versus those that reduce inefficiencies remains a key open question for education policy in low-income countries. Using a new nationally-representative panel dataset of schools across 1297 villages in India, we show that the large public investments in education over the past decade have led to substantial improvements in input-based measures of school quality, but only a modest reduction in inefficiency as measured by teacher absence. In our data, 23.6% of teachers were absent during unannounced school visits, and we estimate that the salary cost of unauthorized teacher absence is \$1.5 billion/year. We find two robust correlations in the nationally-representative panel data that corroborate findings from smaller-

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