

## Dr. Josh Hollinger

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# Dr. Josh Hollinger

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

Dr. Joshua Hollinger is an applied microeconomist interested in labor, education, and public economics—specifically, how educators affect student outcomes in the short and long run as well as the effects of policies aimed at incentives for educators.

In his job market paper—a paper featuring original research that demonstrated Hollinger’s aptitude as an economist—Hollinger examined school accountability, test scores and long-run outcomes. There is evidence to show that if a teacher helps students increase their test scores, then teachers might have a positive impact on future student income, potentially providing a way for students to experience upward mobility. But what if students don’t acquire the broader skills that could improve their outcomes?

“Then the question becomes, what are the net effects if you try to prioritize test score improvement?” explains Hollinger.



Hollinger examined data from No Child Left Behind, the nationwide school accountability policy from 2002, which gave schools a strong incentive to focus on improving students' test scores as a measure of success. He combined data on policy standards and student outcomes over time to try to determine how pressuring a school to increase elementary students' test scores affects those students both immediately and through the end of their high school years.

"What I found is that you see the improvements you'd expect when focusing on improving test scores, but you don't see much improvement in things like an increase in college attendance, and there is no effect on high school graduation rates," he says.

Hollinger also found that putting pressure to improve test scores beginning in elementary school led to persistently higher math and reading test scores, all the way through to higher SAT and ACT scores in high schools.

As he writes in his paper summary, "these results lend support to a mixed story for No Child Left Behind: while accountability pressure led to a long-run increase in skills captured by tests, these learning gains were not strong or broad enough to yield meaningful improvement in other long-run outcomes like educational attainment."

With the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was signed into law in 2015, momentum shifted away from accountability through test scores.

"There's an understanding now that pressuring students, teachers, and schools to focus on testable learning isn't always beneficial. But on the other hand, how do we gather and then use data in a way that can help improve our school systems? It's a tough balance of providing enough accountability and incentives, but also giving enough freedom and not narrowly focusing on measurement too much."

Hollinger completed his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Rochester in 2022 and began teaching at Dordt this past fall. He enjoys teaching and getting to know students, but he's also looking forward to making more connections with schools and policymakers about his research.

"One of the ways I want to grow as a new professor is to make connections and learn what's going on on the ground," he says. "I'd love for my research to have a tangible impact with schools and teachers. These are practical, important issues that affect schools and teachers, and what they implement will impact students."

## ALUMNI NOTES

### Luke Vander Leest

('98) was named South Dakota's Girls' Cross Country High School Coach of the Year. He coached girls' cross country at Sioux Falls Christian School to their first state title.



### Michael Van Wyk

('95) was hired as Vice President of Commercial Lending at Lake Michigan Credit Union. He has spent 20 years in commercial lending and business banking.



**Darla** (De Yager, '90) and **Darren** ('90) **Van't Hul** started their own real estate brokerage, 712 Realty, this past spring.

**Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra** ('83), who has been nominated for a Grammy Award on organ, performed for the American Guild of Organists National Convention this past summer. Ruiter-Feenstra is also the co-founder of Healing Bells, where she and two journalists collaborate regarding social work and agency storytelling work. For more information, visit [pamelaruiterfeenstra.com](http://pamelaruiterfeenstra.com).

**Terry Crull** ('79) was recently promoted to Professor of Music at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas. He was also



selected as the director for the Salzburg Choral Festival in Salzburg, Austria, which will take place in June 2024.

**Mark Kauk** ('76) was recently inducted into the Iowa Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Hall of Fame for his 44 years of coaching at Unity Christian High School in Orange City.