

Teach For America

Scaling Teach For America: Growing the Talent Force to Ensure All Our Nation's Students Have Access to a Quality Education

IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE TEACH FOR AMERICA (TFA) SCALE-UP, DID TFA TEACHERS IMPROVE THE MATHEMATICS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT OF PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 5TH GRADE STUDENTS IN HIGH-NEEDS SCHOOLS RELATIVE TO NON-TFA TEACHERS?

Project Overview

THE PROBLEM: What Challenge Did the Program Try to Address?

Teach For America (TFA) seeks to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students by recruiting and training teachers to work in low-income schools for a minimum of two years. Although these teachers (also known as “corps members”) generally do not have formal training in education, they participate in an intensive initial five-week training program and receive ongoing training and support. Research prior to this award indicated that TFA teachers were more effective than their non-TFA counterparts at teaching math and about equal in reading.¹ At the same time, critics have argued that TFA teachers are underprepared for the challenges of teaching in high-needs schools and tend to leave the profession at the end of their two-year commitment

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

TFA received an i3 scale-up grant² from 2010–2015 to increase the size of its teaching corps by over 80% by September of 2014. With the support of the grant, TFA expanded its teaching placements by 25% by the 2012–2013 school year, increasing its pool of corps members from 8,217 to 10,251. The scale-up also included an impact evaluation of TFA elementary school teachers in its second year, conducted via a randomized controlled trial where students were assigned to either TFA or non-TFA teachers in the same high-poverty schools.

¹ Clark, M.A., Isenberg, E., Liu, A.Y., Makowsky, L., & Zukiewicz, M. (2017). Impacts of the Teach For America Investing in Innovation scale-up. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, p. 2.

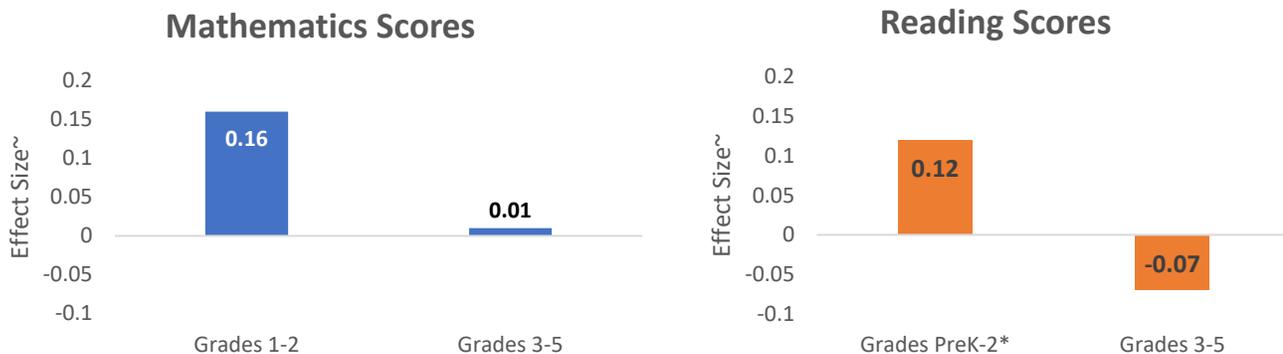
² Scale-up grants provide funding to support expansion of projects with strong evidence of effectiveness to the national level. All i3 grantees are required to conduct rigorous evaluations of their projects. The quality of evidence required to demonstrate a project's effectiveness depends on a project's level of scale or grant type.

TFA COMPONENTS

- **Recruitment.** Undergraduate and graduate students were recruited at colleges across the U.S. The recruitment process ensured a racially and economically diverse set of recruits and focused on subjects that are more difficult to teach, such as science, math, and special education.
- **Preservice Training.** New corps members participated in several training activities, chief among them a five-week summer program known as summer institute. The institute instructed new members on curriculum, literacy, and diversity. It also gave new members the opportunity to teach summer school students under the supervision of more experienced teachers, receive feedback on their teaching, and observe other teachers.
- **Selection.** TFA's rigorous applicant screening process included a web-based writing activity, a telephone interview, and a day-long in-person interview.
- **Placement.** When they were accepted to the program, new teachers were assigned to the region where they taught. Within their regions, new TFA teachers applied for positions in public school districts, charter schools, and community-based organizations that have partnered with TFA.
- **Ongoing Training and Support.** After TFA partner schools and districts hired new TFA corps members, TFA regional staff provided them with ongoing training and support. This support included one-on-one coaching, group meetings for specific grades and subjects, and an online portal containing additional classroom resources and assessments.

Summary of Results

IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF TFA SCALE-UP, DID TFA TEACHERS IMPROVE THE MATHEMATICS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT OF PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 5TH GRADE STUDENTS IN HIGH-NEEDS SCHOOLS RELATIVE TO NON-TFA TEACHERS?



*Significantly different from zero

~Education researchers generally interpret effect sizes as follows: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, and 0.8 = large. If the impact does not have an effect size of 0.2 or greater, it is not meaningful, even if it is statistically significant.³

Based on end-of-year reading and math test scores for the randomly assigned students, the evaluation analyzed the performance of students assigned to TFA teachers versus those assigned to comparison teachers. The results indicated that the TFA teachers in the study were as effective as non-TFA teachers in teaching reading and math.

- **IMPACT BY GRADE.** First and second grade TFA teachers appeared to have a positive, but not statistically significant, impact on student math achievement. The effect size of 0.16 was approximately equal to 1.5 additional months of learning in a 10-month school year. TFA teachers in Pre-K through second grade had a positive and statistically significant impact on student reading achievement. The effect size of 0.12 was roughly equal to 1.3 months of additional learning in a 10-month school year.
- **OVERALL MATH IMPACT.** There was no meaningful difference overall between the math test scores of students assigned to TFA teachers and those assigned to comparison teachers. Students of TFA teachers scored in the 39th percentile of math, compared to 37th percentile of non-TA teachers.
- **OVERALL READING IMPACT.** There was no meaningful difference overall between the reading test scores of students assigned to TFA teachers and those assigned to comparison teachers. Students of TFA teachers scored in the 35th percentile, compared to 34th percentile of non-TA teachers.

³ Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 155-159.

Please see Appendices B and C for information about the evaluation's design and the quality of the evidence, respectively.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation report noted the following aspects of the impact study and the initial phase of the scale-up.

- **TFA RECRUITMENT GROUPS.** The evaluators did not attempt to distinguish between TFA teachers hired as a result of the scale-up versus those who would have been hired anyway in the absence of the scale-up. The results reflect the combined impact of both groups.
- **TEACHER COMPARISON.** Relative to non-TFA teachers in the study sample, TFA teachers were younger, less likely to be female or a member of a racial or ethnic minority, more likely to have graduated from a selective college or university, less likely to have majored in early childhood or elementary education, and had fewer years of teaching experience.
- **TFA COMPONENTS.** During the first two years of the scale-up, TFA maintained its standards for selection, pre-service training, ongoing support, placement of corps members in low-income schools, and retention. For ongoing support, the authors noted that TFA maintained a low ratio of corps members to support staff during the first two years of the scale-up, even while the corps grew.
- **MATH SCORES BY GRADE.** The evaluators could not include pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students in their analysis of math scores because of an error in administering the Woodcock-Johnson III Applied Problems math subtest for students in these grades.
- **TFA SELECTION – UNIVERSITIES.** Just as in the two years before the scale-up, during the first two years of the expansion, over 90% of corps members had a degree from a "selective," "more selective," or "most selective" university.
- **TFA SELECTION – DEMOGRAPHICS.** In line with the scale-up's goal of increasing recruitment of racial and ethnic minorities as well as candidates from low-income backgrounds, the diversity of corps members increased during the first two years of the scale-up. The percentage of corps members from racial or ethnic minorities rose from 30% to 37% and the percentage from a low-income background (measured by Pell Grant receipt) went up from 24% to 34%.

For More Information

Evaluation Reports

[Final Impact Evaluation Report](#) (Mathematica Policy Research, February 2017)⁴

Additional Reports

[Final Implementation Evaluation Report](#) (Mathematica Policy Research, March 2015)

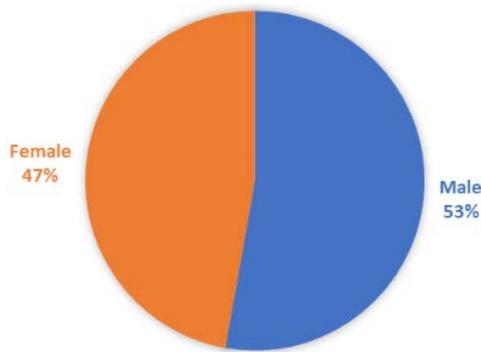
⁴ The information and data for this result summary was collected from the most recent report as of 01/23/2020: Mathematica Policy Research. (2017, February). *Impacts of the Teach For America Investing in Innovation Scale-Up*. Retrieved from http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~media/publications/pdfs/education/tfa_investing_innovation.pdf. The final impact evaluation report was originally released in March of 2015 but corrected, revised, and re-released in February of 2017.

Appendix A: Students Served by the Project⁵

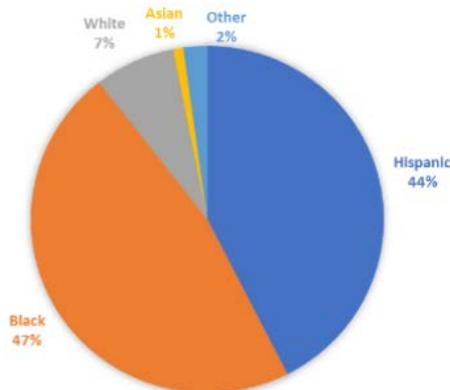
GRADE(S)

PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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GENDER



RACE/ETHNICITY



COMMUNITY

Not reported

HIGH-HIGH-NEED STUDENTSⁱ

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	English Learners	Students with Disabilities
84.5%	33.2%	7.8%

⁵These data reflect the entire student population served by the intervention, not just the evaluation sample used in the impact study.

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Methodology⁶

RESEARCH DESIGN

Design: Randomized Controlled Trial and Quasi-Experimental Design

Approach:

- During the second year of the scale-up, the evaluation assessed the effectiveness of TFA teachers selected during the first two years. At the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year, TFA randomly assigned students in each participating school and grade level (Pre-K-5) to either a class taught by a TFA teacher or a non-TFA teacher (a “comparison” teacher). Based on end-of-year reading and math test scores for the randomly assigned students, the evaluation analyzed the performance of students assigned to TFA teachers versus those assigned to comparison teachers.

Study Length: One year

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Study Setting: 13 placement partners in 10 States: 36 elementary schools, 156 teachers (66 TFA, 90 non-TFA), 3,724 students, of whom 2,152 had valid test score outcomes

Final Sample Sizes:

- Intervention Group – 895
- Comparison Group – 1,257

Intervention Group Characteristics:

- Free/Reduced Priced Lunch: 84.5
- Individualized Education Program: 7.8
- Limited English Proficiency: 33.2
- Female: 47.2
- Asian: 0.9
- Black: 47.0
- Hispanic: 42.5
- White (non-Hispanic): 7.4
- Other Race/Ethnicity (non-Hispanic): 2.2

Comparison Group Characteristics

- Free/Reduced Priced Lunch: 82.9
- Individualized Education Program: 6.0
- Limited English Proficiency: 34.1
- Female: 47.2
- Asian: 2.5
- Black: 46.1
- Hispanic: 40.9
- White (non-Hispanic): 7.1
- Other Race/Ethnicity (non-Hispanic): 3.3

Data Sources:

- Student assessments (reading and math)

⁶ These data reflect only the evaluation sample in the impact study, not the entire population served.

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary

Scale-up, 2010-2015

Key Measures:

- Grade Pre-K-2 reading (Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III)
- Grade 1-2 math (Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III)
- Grade 3-5 reading (State assessment results in district records)
- Grade 3-5 math (State assessment results in district records)

Appendix C: Quality of the Evidence

Although an evaluation may not have been reviewed by the time of publication for this summary, it is possible that the study will be reviewed at a later date. Please visit the websites found in the footnotes on this page to check for updates.

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW⁷

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/23/2020	■ N/A

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW⁸

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/23/2020	N/A

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW⁹

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/23/2020	N/A

⁷ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW>

⁸ <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

⁹ <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary

Scale-up, 2010-2015

The [**Investing in Innovation Fund \(i3\)**](#), established under Section 14007 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is a Federal discretionary grant program at the U.S. Department of Education within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). i3 grants help schools and local education agencies work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community to develop and expand innovative practices that improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, and/or increase college enrollment and completion rates for high-need students.

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ⁱ “High-need student” refers to a student at risk of academic failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, attend high-minority schools, are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, or who are English learners. For more information see: [Applications for New Awards; Investing in Innovation Fund-Development Grants, 81 FR 24070 \(April 25, 2016\)](#).