IDEA Public Schools

Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence

DID RIO GRANDE VALLEY CENTER'S TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPROVE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Project Overview

THE INTERVENTION

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

The Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence was designed to raise the quality of teaching in one of the poorest regions of the country. Its goal was to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders in the region through training, ongoing support, and professional development opportunities. By supporting and strengthening the teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders in the region, the program hoped to improve student outcomes in learning achievement and college readiness.

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

The Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence (the Center), a partnership between IDEA Public Schools, a charter management organization, and the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD), was awarded an i3-funded development grant[1] from 2010–2014.[2] Under the Center, the two organizations revised their teacher hiring practices and developed trainings, including the New Teacher Training (NTT) and the Teacher Leader Training (TLT) programs. The Center offered the trainings for three years, starting in 2011. The combination of both training programs was designed to promote system-wide goals such as higher student achievement and greater teacher self-efficacy. Both trainings were evaluated through randomized controlled trials. For the NTT, PSJA ISD students were randomized into classrooms; for the TLT, teachers were randomly assigned to Leadership Skills Training (LST), Skillful Teacher Training (STT), or delayed treatment.

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[1] Development grants provide funding to support the development or testing of novel or substantially more effective practices that address widely shared education challenges. 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.

[2] The IDEA Public Schools received an i3 development grant supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation program through Grant Number U396C100748.

The Rio Grande Valley Center Model

- **New Teacher Training.** The Center's New Teacher Training (NTT) consisted of a five-day summer institute, three ongoing professional development sessions, and one-on-one coaching for novice teachers and those new to the district with fewer than five years' experience. The purpose of the training was to improve classroom instruction, teacher efficacy, and job satisfaction. The training sessions focused on classroom management, lesson planning, data-driven decision-making, and assessment.

- **School Leader Training.** The Center also provided training and support for experienced, new, and aspiring principals.

- **Teacher Leader Training.** The Teacher Leader Training (TLT) included two types of training: Leadership Skills Training (LST) and Skillful Teacher Training (STT). Both LST and STT were delivered through a summer institute to district-identified teacher leaders and supported via ongoing professional development. These trainings had the goal of improving team management skills and instructional supports. LST helped teacher leaders with team management, constructive feedback, and problem-solving, while STT focused on instructional leadership.

Summary of Results

DID RIO GRANDE VALLEY CENTER'S TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPROVE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Mean Elementary School Student Outcomes

Mean Middle School Student Outcomes
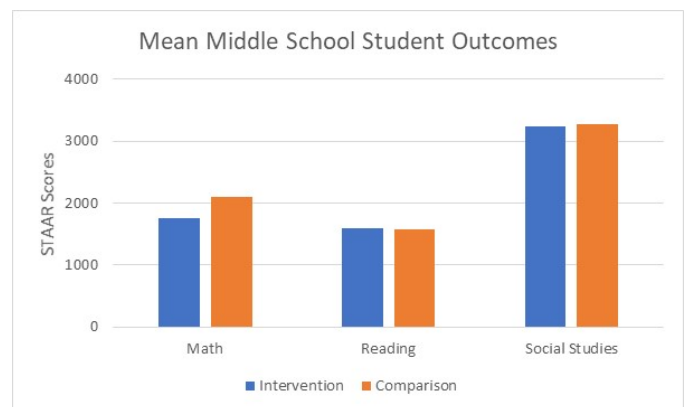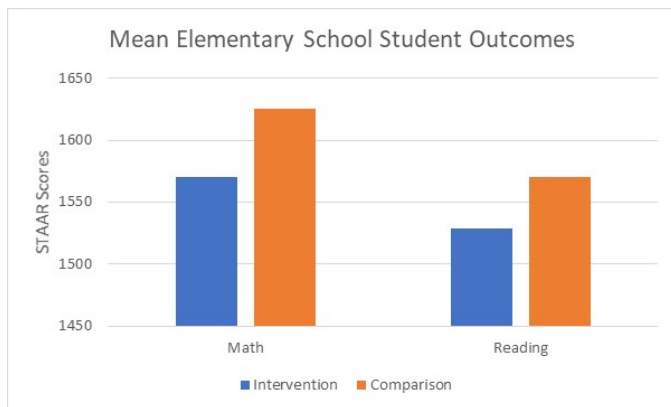
- **READING AND MATH ACHIEVEMENT.** There were no differences in 4th-8th grade math and reading performance between PSJA ISD students who had NTT teachers versus those who had non-program teachers. In IDEA schools, where the evaluators were only able to conduct descriptive analyses, there were also no meaningful differences on reading and math performance.
- **SOCIAL STUDIES.** Eighth grade PSJA ISD students of NTT participants did not exhibit significantly different social studies performance than students of non-NTT participants. The result was the same for IDEA schools.

- **PRE VS. POST-CENTER.** Relative to other schools in the South Texas region, reading and math achievement across grades 4-8 in PSJA ISD did not change in the three years after the Center was set up versus the three years prior to its establishment. The gap in reading performance between PSJA ISD and the larger region increased slightly over this time period while staying the same for math. The gap in grades 6-8 reading and math performance for IDEA schools, compared to the larger region, also stayed the same over this time period, with a slight downward trend in math performance in IDEA schools.

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

SECONDARY FINDINGS

The teacher trainings had mixed impacts on outcomes such as teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

- **NTT TEACHER OUTCOMES.** NTT participants in PSJA ISD reported higher job satisfaction ratings than teachers who did not participate in the program. The difference, 3.3 versus 3.2 on a 4-point scale, was statistically significant, with an effect size of 0.20. However, NTT teachers also reported lower self-efficacy rates, 3.35 versus 3.52 on a 4-point scale. This difference was also statistically significant, with an effect size of -0.39. In IDEA schools, there were no differences in job satisfaction and self-efficacy between NTT participants and non-participants.

- **TLT TEACHER OUTCOMES.** STT participants in PSJA ISD had a statistically significant lower teacher efficacy rating than non-STT participants (3.4 versus 3.6 on a 4-point scale). On the other hand, there were no differences in job satisfaction, instructional leadership efficacy, management efficacy, and problem-solving efficacy for LST and STT participants relative to the comparison group in both PSJA ISD and IDEA schools.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation shared a variety of takeaways regarding implementation and limitations.

- **PARTNERING ACROSS DISTRICTS.** The partnership between two school organizations provided numerous opportunities for collaboration but created a number of places where buy-in was needed. The study noted that having leaders with parallel authority in each organization was helpful or joint decision-making.

- **LEADERSHIP BUY-IN.** While teachers reported that trainings were interactive, practice-based, and useful, attendance was very low in some cases. Teachers reported long distances and scheduling conflicts with other events at their schools as barriers to participation. This challenge speaks to the importance of leader buy-in, which may have helped mitigate some of these conflicts, since schedules could have been aligned with the required trainings.

- **SELF-EFFICACY.** The evaluators suggested that many intervention teachers may have reported lower self-efficacy than comparison teachers partly because they had less experience. In that case, the intervention may have provided teachers with an accurate sense of their teaching practice.

- **COACHING.** Coaching was noted as one of the most powerful teacher supports in the intervention program. When implemented with high fidelity, coaching was an effective resource for helping new teachers feel a sense of efficacy, growth, and satisfaction.

- **NTT IMPLEMENTATION.** NTT was implemented with fidelity all three years across the majority of the indicators. Teachers reported that the training was useful, of consistent quality, and valuable for improving instruction.

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary: Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching & Leading Excellence (Development grant, U396C100748)

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For More Information

Evaluation Reports

Final Evaluation Report (2015) (PDF) (SRI International, July 2015)[3]

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[3] The information and data for this result summary was collected from the most recent report as of 01/23/2020: SRI International (2015). *Developing Educators Throughout Their Careers: Evaluation of the Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence*. Retrieved from https://www.sri.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/idea_i3_final_report_revised_july_2015_v2.pdf

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary: Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching & Leading Excellence (Development grant, U396C100748)

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Appendix A: Students Served by the Project[4]

GRADE(S)

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

GENDER	RACE/ETHNICITY	COMMUNITY
Not Reported	Not Reported	Not reported

High-Need Students[i]

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	English Learners	Students with Disabilities
Not reported/Not applicable	Not reported/Not applicable	Not reported/Not applicable

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

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Methodology[5]

RESEARCH DESIGN:

Design:	Randomized Controlled Trial
Approach:	▪ NTT: Students in PSJA ISD were randomly assigned to classrooms, so that they were taught either by new teachers trained by the Center or non-NTT participants teaching in the same grade, subject, and school. ▪ TLT: teachers were randomly assigned to Leadership Skills Training (LST), Skillful Teacher Training (STT), or delayed treatment (i.e. the comparison group).
Study Length:	Three years: 2011–12 school year through the 2013–14 school year

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Study Setting:	Elementary and middle schools in IDEA Public Schools and Pharr-San Jan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD)
Final Sample Sizes:	▪ *Intervention:* • Reading, grades 4-5: 358 • Reading, grades 6-8: 592 • Math, grades 4-5: 321 • Math, grades 6-8: 938 • Social Studies, grade 8: 149 ▪ *Comparison:* • Reading, grades 4-5: 1,522 • Reading, grades 6-8: 5,273 • Math, grades 4-5: 1,481 • Math, grades 6-8: 3,563 • Social Studies, grade 8: 182
Intervention Group Characteristics:	▪ Not reported
Comparison Group Characteristics	▪ Not reported
Data Sources:	▪ Student assessments ▪ Teacher surveys
Key Measures:	▪ Student achievement in Reading, Math, and Social Studies – State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) ▪ Teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction – survey

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

Appendix C: Quality of the Evidence

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW[6]

STUDY	RATING
The Investing in Innovation Fund: Summary of 67 Evaluations. Final Report. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20184013/pdf/20184013.pdf	Unofficially Meets WWC Standards without Reservations

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW[7]

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

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW[8]

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

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[6] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW
[7] https://www.evidenceforessa.org/
[8] https://intensiveintervention.org/

*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 Innovation and Improvement. 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).