

Beaverton School District

Arts for Learning (A4L) Lessons Project

DOES THE A4L LESSONS PROJECT IMPROVE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' READING ACHIEVEMENT?

Project Overview

THE INTERVENTION

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

The Arts for Learning (A4L) Lessons project, developed by Young Audiences, Inc., and University of Washington, and implemented in the Beaverton School District¹ in Oregon, was designed to improve students' reading and writing achievement, as well as develop learning and life skills.

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

The A4L Lessons program, funded through a 2010–2015 i3 development grant, is a supplementary literacy curriculum for 3rd–5th grade students that blended the creativity and discipline of the arts with a learning approach to support achievement in reading, writing, and developing 21st Century skills, including critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration with peers. The program employs the "How People Learn"² framework; this foundation promotes independent and student-initiated learning and inquiry and provides students with tools and strategies to approach challenging schoolwork. Students receive two A4L Units and one teaching artist Residency each school year. The evaluation was a cluster-randomized trial in which 32 elementary schools were assigned to either the A4L Lessons project or the status quo comparison to test three research questions about reading achievement over one, two, or three years of exposure.

¹ Beaverton School District received an i3 development grant supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation program through Grant Number U396C100900. 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 Bransford, J.D., Brown A. L., & Cocking R.R. (Eds.). (1999). *How People Learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

THE A4L PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- **A4L LESSONS UNITS OF INSTRUCTION.** Units of instruction focus on a particular art form, such as dance, music, or visual arts, and are built around a central text or texts. Each unit consists of 10-19 lessons. The lessons were administered by teachers trained by A4L program staff and assisted by teaching artists in residence.
- **TEACHING ARTIST RESIDENCY.** The role of the resident teaching artist was designed to support classroom teachers with art expertise in alignment with each A4L unit. The artist in residency worked alongside the classroom teacher during five one-hour sessions. Residencies provided more emphasis on the study and experience of an art form.

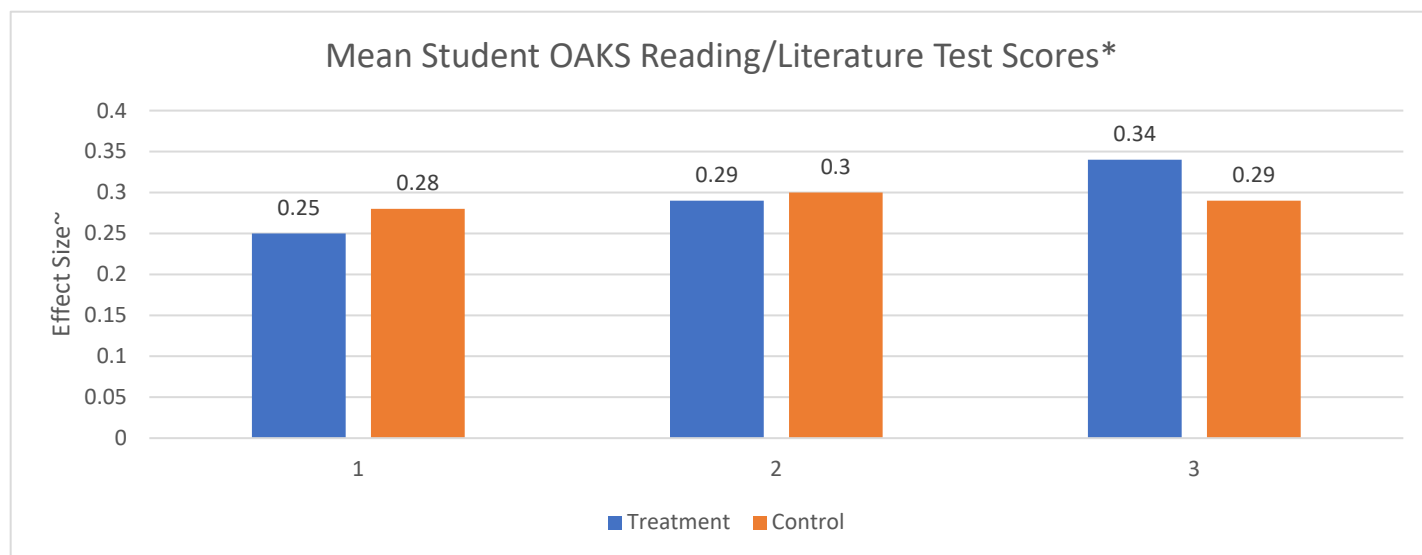
Summary of Results

DID THE A4L PROGRAM IMPROVE STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT?

After A4L lessons were administered, students in the A4L program did not differ from comparison students in reading and writing achievement

- **READING ACHIEVEMENT.** The impact study demonstrated no impact on 3rd, 4th, or 5th graders' reading achievement, based on standardized test scores. No differences were found after one, two, or three years of program participation

* Results not statistically significant



~ 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

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

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

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **LIFE SKILLS.** In addition to reading proficiency, the A4L project emphasizes students' practice of critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and life-skills such as planning and working as a team. Literacy and life skills were measured using the Comprehensive Cross Unit (CCU) Assessments developed at the University of Washington. Results were mixed. Third-graders who received the A4L lessons performed better than those in the control group though the differences were not statistically significant. Fourth-graders receiving the A4L lessons performed better than controls resulting in a moderate effect size that was statistically significant.
- **LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.** The free/reduced-price lunch subgroup analyses based on the CCU Assessments with the students in 4th grade did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the free/reduced-price lunch and non-free/reduced-price lunch students. In other words, the results indicated that the A4L Lessons Project had an equally positive impact on the free/reduced-price lunch and non-free/reduced-price lunch students' performance on the CCU Assessments.
- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.** Using the CCU, subgroup analyses were conducted for 4th grade students. The results showed that the impact of the program differed significantly across ELL and non-ELL students in years 1 and 2, but not in year 3. In years 1 and 2, the impact of the A4L Lessons Project was substantially higher for ELL students, suggesting that the program had a greater impact on the literacy and life skills of ELL students. The effect sizes for ELL students were 0.87 and 0.69 compared to 0.23 and 0.31 for the non-ELL students in years 1 and 2, respectively. The effect sizes for the ELL students are considered large program impacts by educational research standards but should be viewed extremely cautiously because the findings are based on a very small number of ELL students.

For More Information

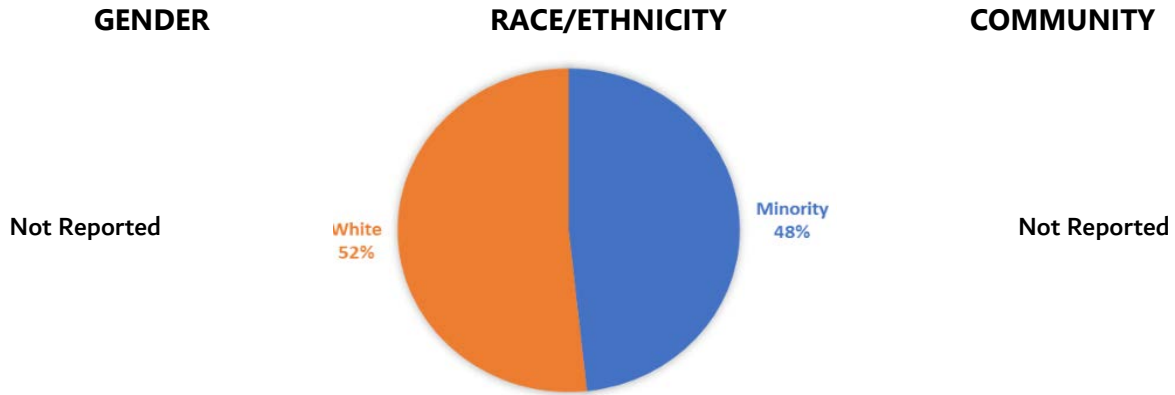
Evaluation Reports

[Final Evaluation Report \(PDF\) \(2015\)](#) (WestEd, October 2015)⁴

⁴ The information and data for this report was collected from the most recent report as of 01/23/2020, The Beaverton School District Arts for Learning (A4L) Lessons Project: An Investing in Innovation (i3) Development Grant, WestEd, 2015.

Appendix A: Students Served by the Project⁵

GRADE(S)													
PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12



HIGH-NEED STUDENTS ⁱ		
Economically Disadvantaged	English Learners	Students with Disabilities
41.7%	19%	Not Reported/Not Applicable

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
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cluster-randomized trial assigned 32 elementary schools in the district to either the A4L Lessons project or the status quo comparison to test three confirmatory research questions about reading achievement over one, two, or three years of exposure.
Study Length:	Three years –2011–12 school year through 2013–14 school year

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Study Setting	32 elementary schools in Beaverton School District
Final Sample Sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention: One Year: 5,719 Students, Two Years: 3,325 Students, Three Years: 1,077 Students Comparison: One Year: 6,110 Students, Two Years: 3,590 Students, Three Years: 1,208 Students
Intervention Group Characteristics at Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention: Percent ELL: 19%, Percent Economically Disadvantaged: 41.8%, Percent Minority: 48.3%
Comparison Group Characteristics at Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison: Percent ELL: 20.4%, Percent Economically Disadvantaged: 40.63%, Percent Minority: 47.8%
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) Reading/Literature Test Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) (pre-test data) Comprehensive Cross Unit (CCU) Assessment
Key Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved Reading Scores (OAKS) Improved Literacy and Life Skills (CCU – exploratory study only)

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

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 REVIEWⁱⁱ

STUDY	RATING
The Beaverton School District Arts for Learning (A4L) lessons project: An Investing in Innovation (i3) development grant. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/84094	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Study meets WWC standards without reservationsAt least one statistically significant positive finding

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW⁷

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

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW⁸

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

⁷ <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

⁸ <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary

Development, 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 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.

This summary was prepared by the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Program Dissemination Project. The project is conducted by the [*Manhattan Strategy Group*](#), in partnership with [*Westat*](#) and [*EdScale*](#), with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, [*Office of Innovation and Improvement*](#), under Contract No. ED-ESE-15-A-0012/0004. The evaluation results presented herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education should be inferred.

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 \(April 25, 2016\)*](#).

ⁱⁱ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW>