



EDUCATION

Partners in Pittsburgh Public Schools' Excellence for All Initiative: First Year Implementation Findings

Shannah Tharp-Taylor, Catherine Nelson,
Jacob Dembosky, Brian Gill

RAND

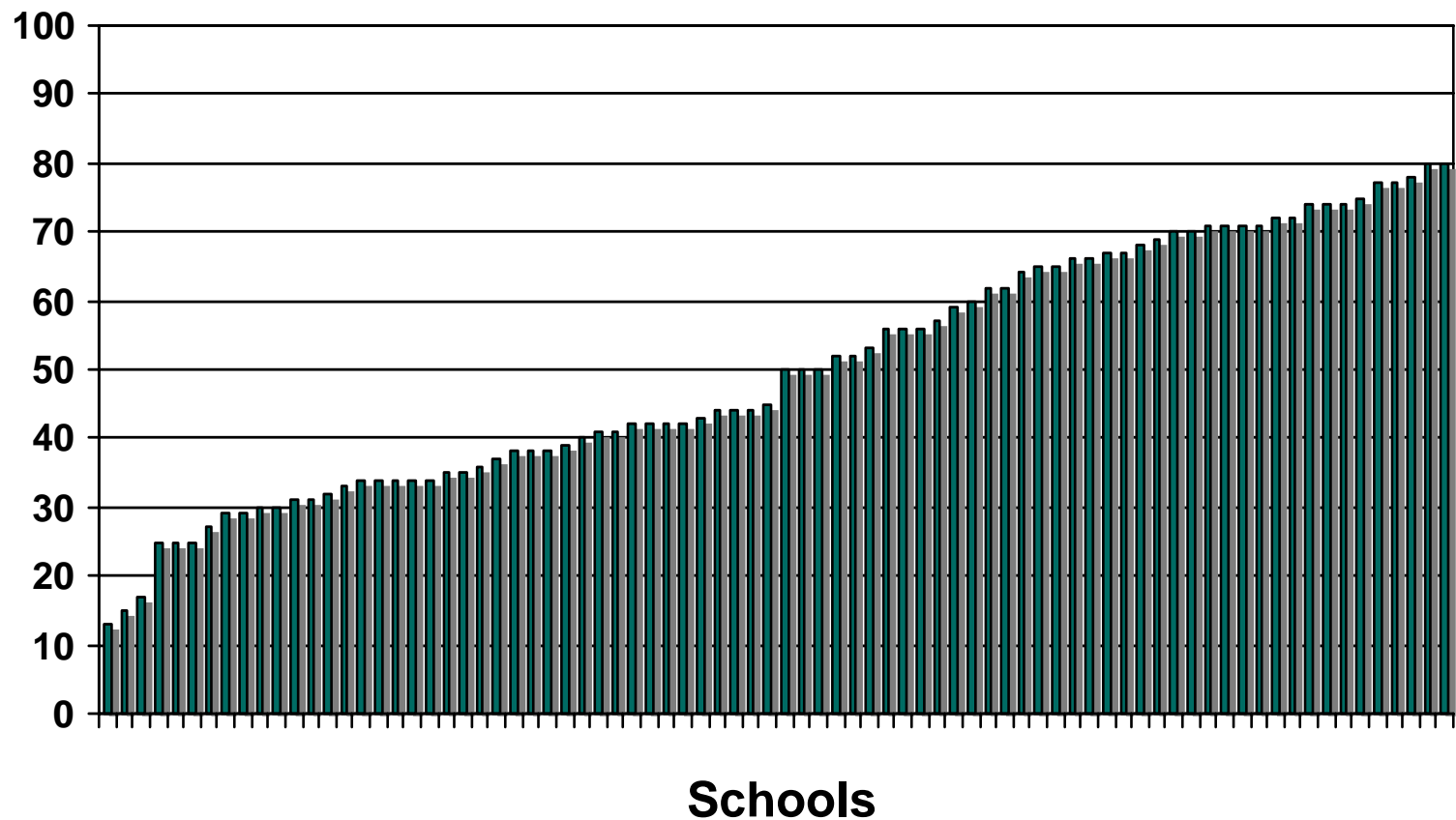
June 2007

Excellence for All motivated by desire to improve achievement district-wide and reduce gaps in achievement

- ▣ PPS proficiency levels are substantially below state averages; many schools fall short of Adequate Yearly Progress standards
- ▣ Large differences in achievement across schools
- ▣ Council of Great City Schools cited absence of coherent and consistent district-wide instructional model
- ▣ Substantial student mobility suggests need for district-wide consistency in content and pacing of instruction
- ▣ Sense of urgency motivated a decision to introduce district-wide interventions at all grade levels simultaneously

Average Achievement in PPS Schools Varies Widely

2004 and 2005 Results Across Grades, Subjects, and Tests



EFA aims to increase student achievement by improving classroom teaching across the district through managed instruction (MI)

Managed instruction includes:	
Consistent curriculum (what and when to teach)	Consistency across the district in curriculum content, use, delivery, and pacing
Proven pedagogy (how to teach)	Consistent use of scientifically validated pedagogy
Assessment & data use (testing what was taught/ using data to improve)	Systematic use of assessment data to differentiate instruction to students with different needs
Accountability Structure	Leadership, oversight, monitoring, and coordination mechanisms to promote implementation

EFA: Building the capacity for managed instruction

- ▣ Substantial investments in professional development for all role groups
- ▣ Site based curriculum coaches to provide customized support for rollout of strategy
- ▣ Accelerated Learning Academies
- ▣ Support and monitoring by Executive Directors to promote consistently high level of implementation across the district

Four key external partners vary in their expected contributions to MI

	Macmillan	Kaplan	IFL	America's Choice
Consistent curriculum (what and when)	x	x		Selected materials only
Proven pedagogy (how)	x	x	x	x
Assessment & data use	x	x	Promotes use of data from existing assessments	
Accountability structure	PPS central office responsibility			x

EFA involves ambitious scale-up of multiple programs across grades and subjects

PARTNER (# of Schools)	Grade Level												
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Kaplan (43)							E	E	E/M	E/M	E/M		
Macmillan (43)	E	E	E	E	E	E							
America's Choice (8)	●—————●												
Inst. for Learning (57)	●—————●												

Curriculum reform is focusing on Math (M) and Reading/English Language Arts (E) within those levels

Purposes of this evaluation

- To provide formative feedback on the first year of implementation of four partner initiatives that are key components of Excellence for All (EFA)
- To identify key issues related to implementation that may affect academic achievement
- To suggest opportunities to strengthen implementation in Year 2
- This is *not* an evaluation of effectiveness/impact of the overall strategy or individual providers
 - Achievement impact will take time
 - PPS can't wait for achievement impact to assess whether EFA is moving forward as intended
 - Impact assessment planned to begin in year 2

Evaluating year 1 EFA implementation

Research Questions

- ▣ How is each partner intervention being received and rolled out by school staff?
- ▣ How are partner interventions advancing the overall EFA strategy (curriculum, pedagogy, data use, accountability)?
- ▣ What have been key supports for and barriers to implementation?

Year 1 implementation challenges mirror those documented by other studies

- ▣ Full implementation—yielding substantial changes in classroom practices—often takes 3 years or more
- ▣ Implementation of different reform elements typically varies
- ▣ Teachers often struggle with implementing new curricula and instructional practices
 - Teachers often perceive even substantial amounts of PD to be insufficient
- ▣ Ongoing (multi-year) PD and other forms of support are necessary for successful implementation

Data collection examined implementation through interviews in 16 schools

- Schools randomly sampled by grade level; 100% of selected schools participated
 - 5 K-5 schools
 - 5 K-8 schools
 - 3 middle schools
 - 3 high schools
 - Sample included two Accelerated Learning Academies
- Interviewees included all principals, 28 instructional coaches, and 48 randomly selected classroom teachers
- Confidentiality was assured for all participating staff and schools

Key Findings

Deep instructional improvement is a long, hard task, but first year saw encouraging signs

- ▣ Differentiated instruction widely implemented—at least in grades K-5
- ▣ Macmillan curriculum, AC framework, and Kaplan data have all provided useful, concrete support
- ▣ Use of data remains highly dependent on individual staff skills, background, and initiative
- ▣ Support from Kaplan and AC needs improvement
- ▣ PPS needs to make clear how school staff are expected to use IFL
- ▣ Coaches are key to deepening and institutionalizing the changes
- ▣ Principals need guidance on balancing their roles as instructional leaders and building managers



EDUCATION

Partner-Specific Findings

Macmillan: Strong 1st year rollout

- ▣ Materials valued as comprehensive, well-integrated, and effectively sequenced
- ▣ Both curriculum and assessment data support teachers in doing more differentiated instruction, a major EFA goal
- ▣ PD needs to go deeper on classroom use
- ▣ Provider seen as responsive to Year 1 glitches

Kaplan: Considerable improvement needed

- ▣ Data system is valued but use needs more support
- ▣ Materials vague and difficult to navigate
- ▣ Just in time delivery has made instructional planning challenging
- ▣ PD seen as shallow

IFL: Buy-in at leadership level, but classroom impact minimal in year 1

- ▣ IFL PD helped coaches define their role
- ▣ Building a common language of instructional leadership, teamwork among principals and coaches, and a network among coaches
- ▣ Training needs more differentiation by experience
- ▣ Many teachers are unfamiliar with IFL or see it as having limited practical utility
- ▣ Need for clearer expectations for classroom transfer

America's Choice: Framework in place, but increased support needed

- ▣ Tangible elements are in place
- ▣ Useful framework for instruction and instructional leadership
- ▣ Seen as consistent with EFA strategy
- ▣ Writing approach valued
- ▣ Depth of implementation hindered by limited PD and support
- ▣ AC's use of its accountability plan provided less guidance than needed



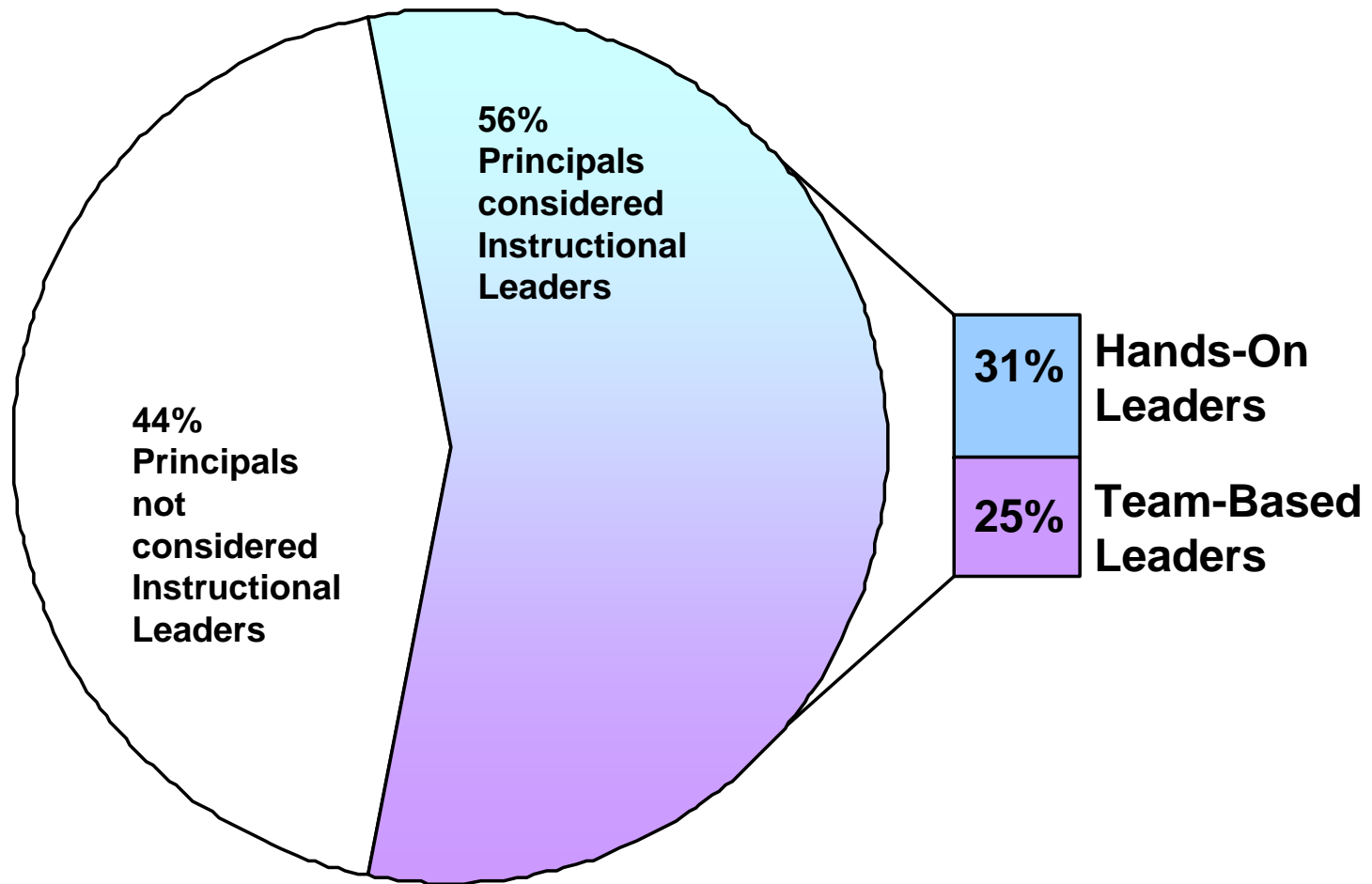
EDUCATION

Findings on District Accountability and Support Systems for EFA

Coaches are the linchpin of EFA

- ▣ 26 of 28 coaches (93%) in 16 schools were valued by teachers and principals as resources
- ▣ In all schools coaches mediate roll-out of new programs and transfer PD
- ▣ In most schools coaches are also key players in data use and co-instructional leaders
- ▣ However, 1/3 of coaches in our sample faced significant distractions from their core role of developing instructional capacity
 - Principals are key to protecting the integrity of the role.
- ▣ For maximum impact, coaches believe that coach PD needs
 - More differentiation by experience
 - More focus on practical how-to's of partner programs and how to train teachers

Just over half (56%) of principals in our sample seen as instructional leaders



Concerns about unrealistic expectations for instructional leadership are common

Challenges to Instructional Leadership

- ▣ All principals face significant competing role demands → “running the building”
- ▣ Some also lack specific knowledge of content and pedagogy
- ▣ Unrealistic/unclear expectations may breed cynicism about the concept
- ▣ Effective instructional leaders recognize the realities of time constraints and capitalize on distributed expertise
- ▣ Principals and their staff need clarity on which functions are core expectations

Central office valued for supporting implementation but school staff suggest improvements

- ▣ Increased expectations have been balanced with increased support from Central office
- ▣ Expectations and accountability have been clearer for curriculum than for the pedagogy and data use
- ▣ Staff request more
 - Opportunities to inform district of implementation problems
 - Input into decisionmaking regarding the initiatives
- ▣ Staff suggest
 - PPS capitalize on knowledge and capacity built through past initiatives
 - Best practices used in individual schools be disseminated through District PD

Staff perceive increased value of PD, but changes may be needed to maximize the investment

- ▣ Staff report significant increase in quality and quantity of PD for all role groups compared to training before EFA
- ▣ Coaches and principals can motivate but not require attendance to training sessions
- ▣ Teachers want deeper training on classroom how-to's, especially data use and differentiated instruction
- ▣ School-based professional collaboration may support and sustain classroom transfer

Recommendations for strengthening implementation in year 2

- ▣ Broaden and deepen use of valued data tools through
 - Targeted PD
 - Site-based support
 - Dissemination of existing best practices and tools
 - Clear accountability for use
- ▣ Build on strong start on differentiated instruction in Year 1 through
 - PD more focused on classroom “how to’s”
 - Clear focus on coaching and learning walks
- ▣ Build on existing coach networks to
 - Disseminate best practices
 - Create cross-district consistency
 - Strengthen cross-district professional learning community

Recommendations for strengthening implementation in year 2

- ▣ Broaden and deepen instructional leadership capacity through
 - Continuing to invest in coaches
 - Promoting team-based leadership
- ▣ Ensure coach time with teachers/core role focus
- ▣ Provide and protect more school-based professional collaboration time to support deep, sustainable transfer
- ▣ Ensure all staff understand EFA as a coherent strategy
 - Components are mutually reinforcing
 - Connections and consistency across providers