LESSONS LEARNED

Instructional Improvement and Student Learning in 2018-19
Lessons Learned: *Instructional Improvement and Student Learning in 2018-19*

At Instruction Partners, we support system and school leaders to put in place instructional supports that help teachers continuously improve instruction and students learn more. We believe that if we can help educators in our partner schools get better every year, we can transform learning and opportunities for students across the country.

After every school year, we look at the results at each level of impact in order to support the continuous improvement of our programs and add to our collective understanding of what powers student learning. This analysis shares the data from the 2018-19 school year and the high-level relationships we are finding between leadership actions, classroom observations, and student learning.

**Problem**
Daily instruction is not preparing all students for success.

**If** *Instruction Partners* provides effective support for system and school leaders...

Then system and school *Leaders* will provide more effective instructional support for teachers...

Then *Teachers* will provide more effective instruction for all students...

Then *Students’* effort will lead to more learning...

**Vision**
Then we will be one step closer to all students having the preparation they need to contribute to their community, achieve economic security, and pursue their dreams.
We track and analyze data across multiple levels of impact so that we can assess our progress and better understand what is driving our results. A deeper understanding of what drives results allows us to repeat successes more reliably.

We track and analyze the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Impact</th>
<th>Date We Collect</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning</td>
<td>• Student growth as measured by state test scores (at the school level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student work analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>• Observed teaching using the Instructional Practice Guide (a content-specific observation rubric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School &amp; System Supports</td>
<td>• Curriculum pathway (options can include adopting a curriculum, constrained choice, making a curriculum, and/or individual teachers lesson planning)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Existence of teacher support structures (training, planning, coaching)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Follow-through on plans to improve instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Service Delivery</td>
<td>• Service intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service satisfaction</td>
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</tbody>
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**IN SUMMARY, WHAT DID WE FIND?**

- For the second year in a row, our partners improved their growth rate at a slightly higher rate than the state’s average. However, year-to-year growth still shows high variability between schools.

- The schools that saw higher student growth had stronger instruction across the year, as measured by the Instructional Practice Guides. Certain aspects of instruction appeared to be the differentiators between high and low student growth—particularly the level of rigor and student engagement with grade-level content.

- Schools that followed through with their plan for improving instruction saw more improvement than those that did not follow through.

- Schools where we conducted at least three classroom walkthroughs over the course of the year saw greater instructional improvements and student growth than schools that conducted fewer walkthroughs.
**DID OUR PARTNERS IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING?**

To examine student learning, we look at state-reported growth measures wherever the data exists. We aim to help our partners improve their rate of growth and/or maintain a rate of student learning faster than the state. The student learning data we reference throughout this report will focus on our work with more than 100 schools in Tennessee, where we have the most partners with the longest track records. Tennessee uses the TVAAS system to measure student growth.

For the past two years, our partners improved their growth rate at a slightly higher rate than the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Our Partners</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017-18 Percent of Schools Whose Students Grew Faster Than Previous Year</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2018-19 Percent of Schools Whose Students Grew Faster Than Previous Year</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017-18 Percent of Schools Whose Students Grew Faster Than Previous Year</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2018-19 Percent of Schools Whose Students Grew Faster Than Previous Year</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This kind of relative growth does seem to suggest that our program is providing value. We know that seeing change at the full-school level is rare for any interventions in education, so we are glad to see positive directional evidence about our early impact for students. At the same time, we by no means feel that the impact is sufficient or entirely conclusive.
As is true of schools across the state, improvement among our partners was not consistent. Some schools’ growth accelerated, some stayed the same, and some slowed.

While we strive for every partner to achieve significant growth every year, we know we can learn from the variation to better understand the actions common to higher growth stories.

**DID INSTRUCTION IMPROVE ACROSS OUR PARTNERS?**

The central premise of our work with partners is that better daily instruction leads to more student learning. We measure the strength of daily instruction using the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG), a content-specific classroom observation tool that focuses on the essentials of strong content instruction. One of the ways we measure the strength of instruction is by the percent positive indicators, or the percent of indicators that are scored on the positive half of the IPG (3s or 4s on indicators with a 4-point scale and a “yes” on indicators that are “yes” or “no”).
This past year, we saw improved instruction across our partner schools as measured by observations with the IPG.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPG Indicators</th>
<th>2018-2019 Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math Percent Positive Indicators</td>
<td>+11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA Percent Positive Indicators</td>
<td>+11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like student growth, instructional improvement was not always consistent—with notable drops across the summer.
Improved instruction is cause for optimism, but this improvement is only valuable if better instruction leads to more student learning.

We found that schools that saw higher student growth had stronger instruction, as measured by the IPG across the year. This relationship was slightly stronger in math but true (and statistically significant) in both subjects.
Certain aspects of instruction appeared to be the differentiators between high and low student growth. In math, there were clear differences in the quality of instruction between high and low growth schools’ performance on Core Action 1 of the IPG, which focuses on whether the content is on grade level, coherent, and targets the correct aspect of rigor. There were also differences in Core Action 3, which focuses on whether students are engaging deeply in standards-aligned content.

Similar to math, in ELA, we saw differences between high and low growth schools’ performance on Core Action 3, which focuses on whether students are engaging deeply in standards-aligned content. Unlike in math, we also saw differences in levels of student mastery of the observed lesson.
WHAT ACTIONS CORRELATED WITH FASTER INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT?

We work with our partner schools’ leadership teams to develop plans to improve instruction. Each plan is tailored to the partner’s needs and current capacity, and contains a clear timeline for implementation. School action plans leverage a variety of supports, including:

- High-quality instructional materials
- Aligned assessments and data practices
- Teacher capacity-building: professional development, collaborative planning support, and coaching
- Culture of high expectations for all students

At first review, there are emerging relationships between instructional supports and improvements in teaching and learning.

Schools that had collaborative, content-specific planning support (i.e. PLCs that are content-specific, frequent, and provide the opportunity to review student work and/or practice lessons) tended to see higher-quality instruction overall in both ELA and math. In ELA specifically, they also saw a higher rate of improvement of instruction.

Meanwhile, in math, we saw that schools that had content coaching (content-specific observation and feedback from a designated coach or other teacher supporter) saw a higher rate of instructional improvement.

We know that one year does not make a trend, so we will be watching this over the coming years to see if this early observation continues.
While each partner’s action plan is unique to their specific context, it is crucial for all partners that action plans are feasible and have systems in place to support accountability and follow-through. We found that schools that did not fully implement their action plans saw significantly lower instructional growth, especially in ELA.
WHICH OF OUR SERVICES LED TO FASTER INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT AND STUDENT OUTCOMES?

We design our services in collaboration with our partners. This allows us to offer a wide variety of support options, which in turn helps us adjust future services to focus on what works best.

Classroom walkthroughs are one of our core services. Walkthroughs involve visiting classrooms with school and system leaders, using the IPG to understand the instruction we observe, and identifying trends to inform future action. We believe walkthroughs serve several valuable purposes: they keep us and our partners grounded in what is happening in classrooms, they build the capacity of school and system leaders to understand the instruction students are experiencing, and they signal to the entire school a focus on the instructional core. Schools where we conducted at least three walkthroughs saw larger improvements in instruction. They also saw a 3 percentage point increase in student proficiency, compared to a 0.7 percentage point increase in schools with fewer than three walkthroughs.
**WHAT COMES NEXT?**

We believe we can get better at getting better in education with the right information. Too often, teachers and leaders do not know what they can do to improve teaching and learning. While the results may not always paint a simple picture, we know that examining impact at each level of change and the relationships across the sets of data can add to our collective understanding of what actions correlate with stronger teaching and learning as a field. We commit to following the data and sharing our learning as we go.

We are a non-profit organization that partners with school systems to strengthen teaching and learning. We work with school teams through cycles of improvement to **observe** teaching and learning, make a practical **plan** for improvement, **develop** teacher and leader capacity to carry out the plan, and **support** follow-through.

We focus on small school systems—both traditional districts and autonomous schools—that can move quickly but have unique capacity constraints. You can find out more about our work and team [here](#).