SC EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Reporting facts. Measuring change. Promoting progress.
PO Box 11867 | 227 Blatt Building
Columbia SC 29211 | WWW.SCEOC.ORG

AGENDA

Academic Standards & Assessments Subcommittee

Monday, September 19, 2016
10:00 a.m.
Room 433, Blatt Building

I. Welcome and Introductions ..... Dr. Danny Merck

II. Approval of Minutes of July 11, 2016..... Dr. Danny Merck

III. Public Input on K-12 Accountability ..... Dr. Danny Merck

Dr. Gerrita Postlewait, Superintendent
Charleston County Public Schools

Members, High School Taskforce
Dr. Sean Alford, Superintendent
Aiken County Public Schools

Other Members

IV. Measuring College and Career Readiness

V. Measuring Early Readiness

VI. Adjournment

Subcommittee Members: Danny Merck, Chair
Neil Robinson, Vice Chair Sen. Mike Fair
Barbara Hairfield Sen. Wes Hayes
John Stockwell
Patti Tate

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Academic Standards and Assessment Subcommittee

Minutes of the Meeting

July 11, 2016

Subcommittee Members Present: Dr. Danny Merck, Mr. Neil Robinson, and Ms. Barbara Hair field via teleconference.

Other EOC Members Present: Rep. Dwight Loftis and Dr. Bob Couch

Staff Present: Dr. Kevin Andrews, Ms. Melanie Barton, Ms. Hope Johnson-Jones, Dr. Rainey Knight, Ms. Bunnie Ward, and Ms. Dana Yow

I. Welcome and introductions / Approval of minutes

Dr. Merck called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked for condolences for the recent death of Senator Fair's mother.

II. Action: Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the November 16, 2015 ASA subcommittee meeting were approved as submitted.

III. Action: Criteria to Identify Underperforming Schools and Districts

Dr. Merck stated that the subcommittee was here today to discuss the criteria for performing underperforming schools and school districts. He noted that the action was necessary based on a proviso in the state budget for Fiscal Year 2016-17 and due to passage of Act 281 of 2016. He noted that the staffs of the EOC and South Carolina Department of Education were working toward merging the state and federal accountability systems. Dr. Merck asked Ms. Barton to review the criteria for identifying low performing schools and districts in detail.

Ms. Barton introduced the criterion, telling the subcommittee members that ESSA requires the identification of the lowest performing five percent of schools. In anticipation of a merged system, the EOC staff recommended that the lowest five percent rule be applied to elementary, middle and high schools. This proposal would impact the 2016 report cards, based on results from school year 2015-16.

Ms. Barton first went through the proposal for elementary and middle schools. Elementary and middle schools would be identified by looking at the percentages of students in each school who scored "Does Not Meet Expectations" on the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics sections of the SC Ready assessment in the 2015-16 school year. The percentages of students scoring "Does Not Meet Expectations" for these tests would be averaged, with the percent for each area, reading and mathematics, weighted equally. Only schools that tested at least two grade levels would be identified in 2016; therefore, no primary school would be identified.

Ms. Barton then summarized the staff proposal for identifying high schools. The law requires the EOC to look at graduation rates and college and career readiness indicators. For high schools, the following information would be used to identify "potentially underperforming" high schools: 1.) On-time graduation rate for school year 2015-16; 2.) the percentage of juniors earning a WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate of Silver or better in 2015-16; 3.) the percentage of juniors who on the ACT met or exceeded the benchmarks scores in Reading (22) or Mathematics (22) in 2015-16; and 4.) the percentage of students scoring a "D" or "F" on the end-of-course assessments in English I and Algebra I. Ms. Barton stated that that a "C" or below in a course implies that a student is not college- or career-ready.

For school districts, Ms. Barton discussed the proposed criteria. The following information would be used to identify "underperforming" school districts: 1.) any district that had an on-time graduation rate of

less than 70% would be identified; 2.) any district that had more than an average of 50 percent of students in grades 3 through 8 scoring “Does Not Meet Expectations” on SC Ready in reading and mathematics in 2015-16 would be identified; 3) any district that had less than 20 percent of its 11th graders earning a WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate of Silver or better in 2015-16 would be identified; 4.) or any district that had 5 percent or less of its 11th graders who on the ACT met or exceeded the benchmark scores in Reading (22) or mathematics (22) would be identified.

Ms. Barton stated that 70 percent was identified as the graduation retreat cap because it set a rigorous standard considering the current statewide graduation rate. Additionally, ACT Aspire results were used for last year to make comparisons. Within the packet, members can see how many schools would have been identified based on simulations. They can also see the names of school districts that would be identified based on the four criteria.

Mr. Loftis questioned how much weight the graduation rate carries since some schools have a high graduation rate but kids are not graduating college and career ready. Ms. Barton agreed more emphasis should be placed on the second and third criterion.

Dr. Couch talked about KeyTrain, a remedial course for students who struggle with WorkKeys. He said there has to be a way to support schools and student at the state level with something like KeyTrain. He wasn’t sure who held the statewide contract for KeyTrain.

Ms. Hairfield wanted to clarify part of the high school criteria, which used End-of-Course as a criterion. She wanted to make sure that end-of-courses assessments were not part of the district identification criteria. She also pointed out that three examples were written in the positive, but one was in the negative. Ms. Barton said staff would work that out. Ms. Hairfield asked what a “z score” was. Ms. Barton explained the term translates percentages into a score.

Mr. Robinson stated that if the group considers school districts meeting two or more criteria that would be more representative of the lowest five percent of districts.

Mr. Loftis discussed the challenges that children in poverty have, inquiring whether we needed to look at instructional methodologies for high poverty schools. At this point, Dr. Merck and Ms. Barton suggested that Dr. Sheila Quinn from the SCDE address this question. Dr. Quinn stated that the SCDE has never before supported districts, just schools. They have received $4 million in additional technical assistance monies that will help them hire 30 transformational coaches, both full and part-time. Dr. Quinn stated that the SCDE is in support of the recommendations before the subcommittee.

Ms. Haifield commented that the proposal meets the federal requirement but she thinks many people will be looking for criteria to determine if students are meeting the characteristics of the Profile of the SC Graduate. Recognizing it was difficult to measure, she suggested that we include something in the transitional report card that addresses the Profile of the SC Graduate. She stated that the whole reason that the Profile came up was because graduates did not have the soft skills that the business community needs.

Ms. Barton addressed the presence of representatives from the Commission on Higher Education. We know that business is interested in soft skills of students, but what about college admissions counselors? The EOC has surveyed these counselors to find out what they value in student admission applications. The results will be presented at the EOC Retreat.

Dr. Couch said his district along with a couple of others was participating in a beta study with MicroBurst on a soft skills assessment. The trick is to understand how to deliver instruction that is

different. He said children in poverty are taught better when they are taught like adults. These students often challenge authority because they often deal with adult issues. He said money is not going to solve problems; teaching methodology must change.

Mr. Loftis stated that young people are able to achieve when are stimulated to learn; they often don't get that from lecture. He stated that he has witnessed true learning in classrooms where children are engaged and that is important for us to help students adapt to new technologies. Ms. Barton said that we are looking at student engagement as a non-academic indicator within the merged accountability system.

Mr. Robinson moved to approve the staff recommendation with a clarification to identify school districts meeting two or more criteria. Ms. Hairfield seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Other Business

Ms. Barton discussed plans for the upcoming retreat. The first day will focus on where we are in SC. The second day will be focused on setting goals for the future and the big picture. The discussion will help frame the work of the ASA subcommittee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Charleston County School District Board of Education - Student Achievement Results

Board Result	What We Will Measure and Report
Overall Goal: Students graduate as responsible citizens prepared for college or career.	The percentage of students who are on target to: • Enter the military • Enter Trident Technical College without remediation • Receive a LIFE Scholarship • Be a National Merit Scholarship semi-finalist
Each Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten student will demonstrate readiness in: • Language skills • Mathematical skills • Social skills • Emotional development	Head Start (3 year olds): • Percent scoring Meeting or Above in literacy • Percent scoring Meeting or Above in numeracy • Percent scoring Meeting or Above in social/emotional skills Pre-Kindergarten (CD, 4 year olds): • Percent scoring Tier 1 on language task (MyIGDIs) • Percent scoring at or above 60th percentile on MAP Math • Percent of students with no discipline referrals Kindergarten (5 year olds): • Percent scoring 3 or better on spring text level on DRA2 • Percent scoring Tier 1 on numeracy task on MyIGDIs • BESS – Percent scoring in the normal risk range
Each student will achieve one year's academic gain or more each year.	Grades Kindergarten through 8 – MAP Scores in Math and Reading • For students at or above the 40th percentile: Percent making at least one year's growth • For students below the 40th percentile: Percent making at least 1.5 years' growth

Achieve language and mathematical literacy, and apply the resulting knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired across all academic disciplines.	For all grades tested: • SC READY ELA and Math: Percent scoring Met/Exceeded • SC PASS Science and Social Studies: Percent scoring Met/Exemplary • Percent scoring C or higher on standardized End-of-Course Exams • ASVAB, ACCUPLACER, ACT, WorkKeys, and/or SAT
Contribute to the well-being of the community. Lead and follow, as appropriate, able to develop and maintain positive relationships with other individuals and groups in order to manage conflict and to reach consensus in the pursuit of common goals.	• Percent of students participating in extracurricular activities such as clubs, service organizations, band, athletics, faith-based youth groups • Percent of students with no discipline referrals
Demonstrate understanding of the political and governmental foundations of the United States and how our democratic political system works	• Percent passing the US Citizenship Test
• Demonstrate a strong work ethic • Take responsibility for personal decisions and actions • Exhibit self-control, self-monitor and self-correct personal behavior and performance • Be technologically fluent	• In addition to measures mentioned above, student self-reporting surveys • Technological fluency measure from BrightBytes survey

Memorandum

TO: Members, High School Task Force

FROM: Melanie Barton

DATE: August 30, 2016

IN RE: Accountability

Neil Robinson, Chairman, and Danny Merck, Vice Chairman of the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) invite you to participate in upcoming meetings regarding the merging of the state and federal accountability systems. Because the recommendations of the Task Force addressed assessments and because the Task Force represented public education, higher education and business, your input would be most helpful to the EOC in making recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on how the state and federal accountability systems should be merged. The meeting dates are as follows with the Subcommittee meeting at 10:00 in Room 433 of the Blatt Building:

September 19, 2016
October 3, 2016
November 7, 2016
November 28, 2016

I also want to refer you to Act 195 of 2016 that the General Assembly enacted this spring and is attached. Act 195 establishes that the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate sets "the standards by which our state's high school graduates should be measured and are this state's achievement goals for all high school students."

If you are able to attend any of the above meetings, just let me know. We need your input into the process and metrics that South Carolina should use to determine if our K-12 public education system is meeting the needs of our students. Please call or email me if you have questions.

Cc: Neil Robinson
Dr. Danny Merck

Attachment

DRAFT
Ensuring Students are Prepared for Success in the 21st Century

(Last Updated September 6, 2016)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015

***Summary: Proposed Regulations on Accountability, State Plans, and Data Reporting Under ESSA*, US Department of Education, May 17, 2016.**

- "All students are prepared for college and careers while giving states and districts the opportunity to move beyond No Child Left Behind's reliance on a limited range of metrics"

- "Ensures use of multiple measures of school success based on academic outcomes, student progress, and school quality, thereby reinforce that all students deserve a high-quality and well-rounded education that will prepare them for success."

Act 195 of 2016 – Profile of the SC Graduate

"Section 59-1-50. (A) The General Assembly declares that the principles outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, published by the South Carolina Association of School Administrators and approved by the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the South Carolina Council on Competitiveness, the Education Oversight Committee, the State Board of Education and Transform SC schools and districts, are the standards by which our state's high school graduates should be measured and are this state's achievement goals for all high school students. The State shall make a reasonable and concerted effort to ensure that graduates have world class knowledge based on rigorous standards in language arts and math for college and career readiness. Students should have the opportunity to learn one of a number of foreign languages, and have offerings in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, arts, and social sciences that afford them the knowledge needed to be successful.

(B) Students also must be offered the ability to obtain world class skills such as:

(1) creativity and innovation;
(2) critical thinking and problem solving;
(3) collaboration and teamwork;
(4) communication, information, media, and technology; and
(5) knowing how to learn.

(C) Students finally also must be offered reasonable exposure, examples, and information on the state's vision of life and career characteristics such as:

(1) integrity;
(2) self-direction;
(3) global perspective;
(4) perseverance;
(5) work ethic; and
(6) interpersonal skills."

Question 1: What should South Carolina measure or report for college and career readiness?

South Carolina

Goal: By 2030 90% of students will graduate in four years and will be College & Career Ready

	World Class Knowledge	World Class Skills and Life and Career Characteristics	
	Accountability	**Report Only**	
		Existing Data	**New Data**
College Ready	The ACT	% Students taking an AP or IB exam and passage rates % Students taking a dual enrollment course and earning college credit % Graduates enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions fall after graduating (*Freshman Report)*	% Graduates who earn postsecondary degree 5 years after graduating *
	SAT **?** Accuplacer **?**		
Career Ready	Four-Course CATE Completer and: • WorkKeys – Silver or Better **OR** • ASVAB – 50th Percentile or Better	% of Students taking a National Industry Certification Exam and Passage Rates % of Students completing apprenticeship programs % of Students in STEM Premier	% of Graduates who earn postsecondary credential * % of Graduates who are gainfully employed 5 years after graduating *

* Will require longitudinal reporting system

Examples from Other States:

College-Ready Benchmarks

Subjects	ACT	Kentucky	North Carolina	Alabama	Tennessee
English	**18**	**18**	*	**18**	
Mathematics	**22**	**19**	*	**22**	
Reading	**22**	**20**	*	**22**	
Science	**23**		*	**23**	
Composite			**17**		**21**

Kentucky – Student must meet each of the ACT college-ready benchmarks in English, mathematics and reading.

North Carolina - For accountability reporting purposes, a student must earn a composite score of 17 across all four assessments. A Composite Score of 17 is the University of North Carolina (UNC) System's minimum requirement for admission. Additionally, on the reporting website, the percent of students meeting the ACT college-readiness benchmarks on each of the subject tests is reported along with total percent of benchmarks met.

Alabama – A student meeting any one of the four ACT benchmarks is “college ready.”

Tennessee – Tennessee has established two overriding goals:

- By 2020 the average composite score on the ACT (or equivalent on the SAT) will be a 21.
- By 2020, the majority of high school graduates will be on track to receive a postsecondary degree or credential.

As part of the Tennessee Student Assessment Transparency Act of 2016, the General Assembly voted to allow each student who takes a postsecondary readiness assessment as a high school junior to be provided the opportunity to retake it as a senior free of cost.

Question 2: What should South Carolina measure for early readiness and early literacy?

	World Class Knowledge	World Class Skills and Life and Career Characteristics	
	Accountability	**Report Only**	
		Existing Data	**New Data**
Kindergarten		Results of 5K readiness assessment in early literacy	Results of 5K readiness assessment in numeracy, social & emotional & physical development
Beginning of Grades 1, 2 and 3	For schools or districts with 5% or more of kindergartners not on track to be reading on grade level by end of 3rd grade, use assessment results from **reading diagnostic** assessments given to all students in fall of 1st through 3rd grades to report the number of students who moved from not on-track to on-track from one year to the next. Also should be used by teachers to inform instruction and comply with Read to Succeed	Growth from fall to spring each year of students **but not collected at state level**	

See Ohio's Plan.

Ohio | Department of Education

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: Achievement

Measures: Indicators Met – Contributes 25% toward component grade
Performance Index – Contributes 75% toward component grade

Description: The **Indicators Met** measure shows how many students have a minimum, or proficient, level of knowledge. These indicators are not new to Ohio students or teachers. They are based on a series of 31 state tests that measure the level of achievement for each student in a grade and subject. Schools and districts also will be evaluated on the new Gifted Indicator for a total of 32 indicators. Each test has a required percentage of students that must score "proficient" or higher to get credit for the corresponding indicator. That is commonly called "meeting" the indicator. The percent necessary to meet an indicator changed in 2016 as the transition to the new tests continues.

The **Performance Index** measures the achievement of every student, not just whether or not they reach "proficient." Schools receive points for every student's level of achievement. The higher the student's level, the more points the school earns towards its index. This encourages schools and districts to work with all students to continue to improve, regardless of the student's level of achievement

Technical Fact: The A-F grade on the report card is determined by the number of indicators "met" out of the total number evaluated. The letter grade for the Performance Index is calculated by dividing the number of points earned by the school or district by 120.

A-F Rating: The ranges for both achievement measure grades are the same and partially prescribed by law.

Score	Letter Grade
90% - 100%	A
80% - 89.9%	B
70% - 79.9%	C
50% - 69.9%	D
Below 50%	F

Ohio | Department of Education

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: Progress

Measures: **All Students – Contributes 55% toward component grade**
Gifted Students – Contributes 15% toward component grade
Students with Disabilities – Contributes 15% toward component grade
Students in the Lowest 20 Percent of Achievement Statewide – Contributes 15% toward component grade

Description: The data from state tests over multiple years are examined through a series of calculations to produce a **Value-Added** designation for each school and district. Additionally, the tests also are examined to determine progress of three specific groups of students.

The five designations – determined in law – are the same ranges of growth that are used to compute teacher Value-Added performance. Also like the teacher Value-Added performance measure, up to three years of growth computations are used to assure the accuracy and precision of the measure. Because of the transition to new assessments only one year of gains will be used to calculate the school, district and teacher ratings in 2016.

Just because a school may have a low achievement level in a given year does not mean that students are not learning. In fact, there may be a great deal of academic growth taking place moving students toward academic success. Conversely, there is a misconception that high achievers have met their potential and can no longer advance their learning. This measure highlights the importance of providing the curriculum and instruction that will help *all* students to grow academically every year.

Technical Fact: Value-Added grades are based on a scale that measures a "Gain Index." This is the same index that has been used for report card purposes since Ohio adopted its use in 2007. A range of "-1 to +1" represents "one year of growth" and is given a "C" grade.

A-F Rating: The grade ranges for all measures in the Progress component are the same and prescribed by law.

Score	Letter Grade
+2 or greater	A
Greater or equal to +1 but less than +2	B
Greater or equal to -1 but less than +1	C
Greater or equal to -2 but less than -1	D
Less than -2	F

Ohio | Department of Education

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: **Graduation Rate**

Measures: **Four-Year Graduation Rate – Contributes 60% toward component grade**
Five-Year Graduation Rate – Contributes 40% toward component grade

Description: The Four-Year Graduation Rate includes students who began 9th grade for the first time in a given school year. Students are counted as graduates in the four- and five-year graduation rates if they earn a diploma within four or five years of entering the 9th grade, respectively.

Technical Fact: Ohio transitioned to a new method of calculating the graduation rate set by the federal government to allow for comparisons between Ohio and other states. The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate high school in four years or less by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. The five-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate high school in five years by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. The adjusted cohort includes all students who are entering 9th grade for the first time in a given school year. The cohort is adjusted by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the 9th grade and the next three years and subtracting students who transfer out. A student can only be assigned to one cohort.

A-F Rating: The ranges for the graduation rate measures are different and partially prescribed in law.

Four-Year Graduation Rate

Score	Letter Grade
93% - 100%	A
89% - 92.9%	B
84% - 88.9%	C
79% - 83.9%	D
Less than 79%	F

Five-Year Graduation Rate

Score	Letter Grade
95% - 100%	A
90% - 94.9%	B
85% - 89.9%	C
80% - 84.9%	D
Less than 80%	F

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: Gap Closing

Measures: Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) – Single measure in component grade

Description: **Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)** measure the academic performance of specific groups of students, such as racial and demographic groups. Each of these groups is compared against the collective performance of all students in Ohio. This allows us to determine if there are gaps in academic achievement between groups of students. Ohio has made strides over the years to reduce these gaps. However, much work still is needed to *eliminate* achievement gaps and bring all students up to the same high level of achievement.

Technical Facts: This component reviews 10 student groups in reading, math and graduation rate and assigns a grade for efforts to close achievement gaps in all groups. A school or district cannot get an "A" on this measure if one of its groups has a significant gap in achievement or graduation. These student groups, which are the same groups measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), are:

- All Students;
- American Indian/Alaskan Native;
- Asian/Pacific Islander;
- Black, non-Hispanic;
- Hispanic;
- Multiracial;
- White, non-Hispanic;
- Economically Disadvantaged;
- Students with Disabilities; and
- Limited English Proficiency.

A-F Rating: The ranges for the Annual Measurable Objectives grades are outlined in Ohio's ESEA flexibility waiver.

Score	Letter Grade
90% - 100%	A
80% - 89.9%	B
70% - 79.9%	C
60% - 69.9%	D
Less than 60%	F

Ohio | Department of Education

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: K-3 Literacy

Measure: K-3 Literacy Improvement – Single measure in component grade

Description: Reading is the foundation for all learning. That is why it is critical to find and address reading issues for a student as early as possible. **K-3 Literacy Improvement** measures how well schools and districts are helping young students who are reading below grade level.

The measure and component relate to Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee which aims to ensure that all students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. The guarantee drives attention to students from kindergarten to third grade who are struggling readers and makes sure they get the help they need to succeed in reading. Through this initiative, school districts and community schools diagnose reading issues, create individualized reading improvement and monitoring plans, and provide intensive reading interventions.

Technical Facts: Any school or district that has less than five percent of their kindergartners reading below grade level will not receive a letter grade for this measure or component. The minimum range of a "C" grade will be the prior year's statewide average value for this measure.

This measure will use results from reading diagnostic assessments given to all students in kindergarten through grade three at the beginning of the year to report the number of students who move from not on-track to on-track from one year to the next.

A-F Rating: This measure was first graded on the report card in 2014. The grade for the measure is based on the prior year's state average. State law requires that the statewide average represents the bottom of the C range and the ranges will change from year to year. The 2016 grade scale is:

Score	Letter Grade
81.4% - 100%	A
62.6% - 81.3%	B
43.8% - 62.5%	C
25% - 43.7%	D
0.0% - 24.9%	F

Ohio | Department of Education

Understanding Ohio's School Report Card

Component: Prepared for Success

Measures:
[1]College Admission Test *(percent receiving non- remediation score)*
[1]Industry-Recognized Credentials *(percent with a credential)*
[1]Honors Diplomas Awarded *(percent with an Honors Diploma)*
*[2]***Advanced Placement** *(percent scoring three or above)*
[2]International Baccalaureate *(percent scoring four or above)*
[2]Dual Enrollment Credits *(percent earning at least three credits)*

[1]Having any or all contributes a weight of 1.0 toward component

[2]Having any item in 1 and any or all in 2 contributes an additional weight of 0.3 toward component

Description: When students graduate from high school, they must be ready for success in college and careers without needing to take remedial classes. This goal is measured by the **Prepared for Success** component.

Prepared for Success is a unique component. It contains six measures that do not receive a grade. Beginning in 2016, the component will be graded based on the percentage of a school's or district's four- and five-year graduation cohorts that demonstrate college- and career-readiness. Using multiple measures for college- and career-readiness allows districts to showcase their unique approaches for preparing students. Some schools may focus on industry credentials while others focus on ACT scores.

Technical Fact: A school earns a point for every student in the four- and five-year graduation cohorts who either: (a) achieves a remediation free score on all parts of the ACT or SAT; (b) earns an industry-recognized credential; or (c) receives an honors diploma. A student earns an additional 0.3 points for completing one or more criteria from the list above and also: (a) earning a three or higher on an AP exam; (b) earning a four or higher on an international baccalaureate exam; or (c) earning three or more college credits through college credit plus. The maximum points that any individual student can earn is 1.3 regardless of how many criteria are met.

A-F Rating: The grade scale increases over the next three years. The 2016 scale is:

Score	Letter Grade
85% - 100%	A
65% - 84.9%	B
34% - 64.9%	C
15% - 33.9%	D
Less than 15%	F

Improving Early Literacy in PreK–3: Lessons Learned

The McKnight Foundation Pathway Schools Initiative
Phase I Report
2016

SRI Education™
A DIVISION OF SRI INTERNATIONAL

Shari Golan
Lauren Cassidy
Katrina Woodworth

Foreword

Over sixty years ago, William and Maude McKnight endowed The McKnight Foundation to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. We live this mission by taking on enormous challenges in areas where we must make progress in order to support a healthy planet, an equitable society, and an economically vibrant future for our cities, our state, and our world.

Accordingly, we see closing educational opportunity gaps from children's earliest years as a critical part of our work. McKnight's early literacy efforts, embedded within our Education & Learning program, aim to support children from PreK–3rd grade, with the goal of developing proficient readers. This work is an outgrowth of McKnight's long-term commitment to early childhood education.

For decades, McKnight invested broadly and deeply in improving access to high-quality early education across Minnesota. We remain committed to a vision of a Minnesota where every child who needs high-quality preschool supports receives them. At the same time, we recognize that getting a child ready for kindergarten is only the first step in preparing her for success in and beyond school. Ample research demonstrates that reading successfully at third grade is a powerful predictor of later academic success. Sadly, too many children in Minnesota fail to meet this critical milestone. To support our children in meeting their full potential, we must sustain and strengthen early learning gains throughout kindergarten, first, second and third grades.

Kate Wolford
President, The McKnight Foundation

Five years ago, McKnight and several partners undertook an ambitious effort that aims to do just that—align and improve the quality of school leadership and literacy instruction from PreK through third grade, especially in schools serving students most impacted by educational disparities across our community. The reasons for doing so were compelling:

- **Our community is becoming increasingly diverse, but educational outcomes are not more equitable.** Young children represent the most culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse segment of Minnesota's population. These children, however, are also most likely to live in poverty and to experience opportunity and achievement gaps—among children living in low-income households and children of color, roughly half do not meet kindergarten readiness standards and approximately two-thirds fail to read successfully at third grade. Yet, we increasingly recognize the significant cognitive benefits that come from speaking multiple languages, and that increased diversity supports children's learning. Imagine, then, how vibrant our social and economic future could be if these young children experience high educational achievement.

Evidence shows that seamless, coordinated learning experiences from PreK–3rd grade make a difference. Researchers from the University of Minnesota and elsewhere have demonstrated the long-term academic and social impact of early childhood experiences characterized by aligned standards, curriculum, and professional development from PreK–3rd grade; high-quality, developmentally appropriate learning environments; effective teachers and leaders; and engaged families.

Since the inception of the Pathway Schools Initiative, the participating schools and districts and our intermediary, the Urban Education Institute at the University of Chicago, have worked aggressively to implement it. As a result of their efforts, children in Pathway schools participate in full-day PreK, teachers have developed a shared understanding of literacy development, and robust formative assessment data provides rapid feedback loops for planning and refining instruction.

At the same time, the last several years have also taught us much about what it takes to create and sustain change in complex, and often challenging, contexts. The lessons articulated in this case study reinforce that complexity, and provide insights into the roles that funders, external partners, and system-leaders play in supporting success.

Over the course of the initiative, McKnight has confronted hard truths about the limits of our influence over the day-to-day realities in schools across our community. We knew from the beginning that meeting such challenges would be a tremendous undertaking. But, McKnight fundamentally believes that every child in our community—no matter her language, culture, race, or economic condition—has the capacity to thrive. And we do see bright spots in the case study that follows. Preschoolers in the Pathway schools are entering kindergarten with increased literacy skills. Teachers are using data in new and sophisticated ways—and are working to adapt their instruction. Leaders are paying attention to the role of early learning across their systems. Admittedly, challenges remain. As we move forward, we'll take the lessons gleaned from the initiative's first five years to inform our future work. We hope our colleagues at peer foundations, in nonprofit organizations, and schools and districts will find useful information and insights in this report. By being transparent with our own experiences we can spark much-needed conversation about what successful investments in school improvement entail.

Contents

Exhibits

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the generous participation of educators across the Pathway districts and schools. We thank them for welcoming us into their schools and for allowing us to learn from their innovative, ambitious, and dedicated efforts to improve outcomes for students. We also benefitted enormously from the Education & Learning National Advisory Committee (ELNAC) members' thoughtful input as we conducted the evaluation and synthesized key findings and lessons. ELNAC members include Robert Bruininks, Ph.D., President Emeritus at the University of Minnesota and a member of the McKnight Foundation's Board of Directors; Eugene Garcia, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at Arizona State University and the University of California Berkeley; Kristie Kauerz, Ed.D., Research Assistant Professor at the University of Washington; Dr. Ruby Takanishi, Senior Fellow at New America; and Vallay Varro, President, 50CAN.

We are grateful to leaders from the Urban Education Institute at the University of Chicago who worked closely with us as we developed our understanding of their work with the Pathway schools. And, we deeply appreciate The McKnight Foundation staff for supporting us to design and execute this independent evaluation and providing us with insights into the vision for the Pathway Schools Initiative.

Finally, many research colleagues contributed to this report. We are grateful to our colleagues Kyla Wahlstrom and Delia Kundin at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota, and to current and former members of the SRI Education team, including Marjorie Wechsler, Rebecca Schmidt, Cyndi Williamson, Wei-Bing Chen, Daniela Torre, Stephanie Nunn, Erin Harless, Janelle Sands, Nicole Arshan, Tejaswini Tiruke, Nicole Fabrikant, Jessica Gonzales, and Crystal Garcia.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

In 2011, The McKnight Foundation partnered with a set of districts and schools in the Twin Cities area, all serving high-needs students, on a PreK–3 literacy initiative. The Pathway Schools Initiative aims to dramatically increase the number of students who reach the critical milestone of third-grade reading proficiency, an indicator predictive of later academic outcomes and high school graduation. This report focuses on findings from Phase I of the Pathway Schools Initiative (2011–2015).

The McKnight Foundation selected the Urban Education Institute (UEI) at the University of Chicago to serve as the initiative's intermediary. UEI was tasked with providing the intellectual, conceptual, and managerial leadership for the initiative as well as professional development and technical assistance focused on literacy and leadership to the Pathway districts and schools. UEI anchored this support on two, validated diagnostic tools developed at the University of Chicago: the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) developmental literacy assessment and the 5Essentials Survey.

Participating Pathway schools and districts carried out the day-to-day work of the initiative. They used grant funds to expand or refine their PreK programs; hire additional staff such as program managers, literacy coaches, classroom aides, and family engagement liaisons; and purchase high-quality instructional materials, such as classroom libraries or tablets.

An advisory group, the Education and Learning National Advisory Committee (ELNAC), was established in 2010 to help inform decisions about the initiative. SRI International has served as the initiative's evaluator since 2010.

Schools with Pathway Schools Initiative implementation grants included in this evaluation are:

- **Brooklyn Center Community Schools (BCCS)**
  - Earle Brown Elementary School
- **Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)**
  - Andersen United Community School
  - Jefferson Community School
- **Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS)**
  - Saint Paul Music Academy
  - Paul & Sheila Wellstone Elementary
- **Community of Peace Academy, PreK–12 Charter School (CPA)**

Key Findings: Progress and Challenges

Coherent PreK–3 Pathways. A primary goal of the Pathway Schools Initiative was to create coherent pathways between PreK and third grade, with sustained enrollment and aligned literacy programs such that students enter each successive grade with the requisite foundation and skills.

- Pathway schools made progress in creating a PreK–3 pipeline by increasing PreK enrollment and matriculation to kindergarten, but they were not able to reduce student mobility after kindergarten.
- Participation in the initiative increased the connections between district-run PreK programs and K–3.
- Use of a common formative assessment, STEP, supported alignment across grades.

Effective Leadership. The Pathway Schools Initiative sought to create effective district and school leadership teams that could support improvements in literacy teaching and learning.

- UEI leadership coaching and collaboratives helped principals manage the multi-faceted PreK–3 literacy initiative.
- Leaders struggled to balance the demands of the initiative with other needs and priorities.
- District and school leadership turnover sometimes hindered progress.
- Despite positive changes in principals' practice, principal leadership ratings remained weak according to 5Essentials survey data.

Shared Professional Development/Strong Professional Community. To facilitate alignment of expectations and practices from PreK to third grade, UEI provided teachers with professional development and support to use student data to inform their literacy instruction. School literacy coaches helped teachers implement the tools and practices they learned from UEI.

- Teachers reported that UEI-led professional development improved their ability to analyze and use student data to inform their literacy instruction.
- School-based literacy coaches reinforced alignment and consistency of literacy practices across teachers, but their influence was limited by access to teachers and time constraints.
- Dedicated common planning and collaboration time facilitated alignment, but the amount of time available was not sufficient in many of the Pathway schools.
- Teachers reported needing more support with developing data-informed lessons for students overall and for dual language learner (DLL) students specifically.
- Turnover among school literacy coaches and teachers made building capacity difficult.

Effective Use of Data to Support Student Learning. The initiative aimed to help teachers more effectively use STEP data to guide and differentiate their literacy instruction and improve student learning.

- STEP helped teachers determine students' needs, individualize instruction, and form small guided reading groups.
- STEP data helped teachers communicate with parents about student progress.
- Teachers often lacked sufficient time and instructional resources to maximize the value of STEP results.
- Teachers had difficulty integrating STEP data with data from other state and district assessments to make instructional decisions.
- Teachers encountered challenges with using STEP with DLL students.

High-Quality Instruction. The initiative was designed to align and improve literacy instruction in all PreK–3 classrooms.

- A substantial amount of class time was dedicated to literacy.
- Teachers learned and increased the use of some general literacy instructional strategies.
- Teachers in some districts lacked curricula, curriculum maps, materials, and other resources to support high-quality instruction.
- *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS®) observations suggest that the quality of classroom instruction remained low, but was comparable to national averages.

Student Progress. The initiative's ultimate goal is to dramatically increase the number of students who become proficient readers by the end of third grade.

- Pathway schools did not outperform similar schools not participating in the initiative on the state assessment of third-grade literacy.
- The percentage of students reaching grade-level STEP goals did not improve over time for students overall, for DLL students, or for most students who took the Spanish STEP.
- Progress on STEP was better for stable teachers and students.
- Students not making the expected progress on STEP each year resulted in the average third grade student being more than 1.5 grade levels behind.

Lessons Learned

Lessons drawn from the Pathway Schools Initiative evaluation have implications for the Foundation and its partners and are informing current Phase II efforts. They also can inform the work of other actors in the field.

Lessons with implications for funders and other initiative leaders

- **Chart a clear course.** A more detailed theory of action that included specific inputs may have supported a more shared understanding of what stakeholders needed to do to produce the intended outcomes.
- **Clarify roles and decision-making processes.** Some confusion may have been avoided if there had been clearer guidance from the Foundation about what types of decisions should be made by districts and schools, the Foundation, the ELNAC, UEI, and SRI.
- **Know your students.** If Pathway leaders had recognized earlier in the planning process the high percentage of DLL students in the participating schools and the specific needs of PreK children, they may have funded a second intermediary or specific professional development aimed at supporting those populations in particular.
- **Take time to till the soil.** While many of the schools and districts had a planning year, they did not understand fully what the work would look like, anticipate what potential conflicts or challenges might exist, or consistently put in place the structures and supports they would need to accomplish initiative goals.
- **Pay attention to the school's eco-system.** Initiative leaders expected Pathway districts and schools would address conflicts that arose around policies (e.g., hiring of qualified teachers, funding and space for full-day PreK, the ability to abstain from certain district initiatives or assessments, and the use of professional development time), but found these issues might have benefitted from explicit discussions and agreements during the planning year.
- **Phase in changes and coordinate supports.** Given the numerous fronts on which teachers and principals were working, it may have been useful to develop a road map that laid out all of the pieces that would eventually be addressed in a manageable, sequential order.
- **Keep curriculum and instruction central.** To improve instructional quality, teachers may have benefitted from more explicit professional development on instructional strategies and teacher-child interaction, in addition to training on the implementation and use of formative assessments.

Lessons with implications for district and school leaders

- **Focus on priorities.** Districts may have missed an opportunity to more closely reflect on how the initiative supports aligned with their strategic plans and fit into their existing literacy supports and areas of needs. Had this reflection occurred, conflicts and needed supports may have been identified and addressed earlier.
- **Prioritize collaborative planning time *and how it is used.*** Teachers did not have the time they needed to analyze data with their peers and use data to plan differentiated lessons for guided reading groups, students' independent work, and whole group instruction. Even when they had the time, teachers may not have had the facilitation skills and protocols needed to effectively review data, develop lessons, and monitor progress.
- **Minimize teacher turnover.** It is important for districts or schools to develop long-term hiring and retention strategies to reduce staff turnover to enable schools to build professional capacity.
- **Ensure coaching happens.** District and school leaders must ensure that school literacy coaches have the capacity, dedicated time, and a non-evaluative role to consistently support teachers and differentiate according to individual teacher needs.
- **Plan for sustainability.** From the beginning of any grant-funded work, district and school leaders should make plans for how they will sustain staff and activities beyond grant funding if the program is effective.

Introduction

Introduction

In 2009, The McKnight Foundation adopted a goal to dramatically increase the number of students who reach the critical milestone of third-grade reading proficiency, an indicator predictive of later academic outcomes and high school graduation (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Research suggests that ensuring third-grade reading proficiency requires starting early—before children even get to kindergarten—and then providing high-quality early elementary instruction to sustain and strengthen those gains (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Camilli, Ryan, Vargas, & Barnett, 2010).

The McKnight Foundation understood that improving outcomes for high-needs students[1] is complex and multi-faceted work, and would take significant time. The Foundation sought a long-term partnership (up to 10 years) with a set of local schools and districts, all serving high-needs students, to put research into practice by providing high-quality, aligned, and coherent literacy experiences from PreK–3. The Pathway Schools Initiative emerged from this vision. This report focuses on findings from Phase I (2011–2015) of this endeavor.[2]

In 2010, the Foundation established an advisory panel, the Education & Learning National Advisory Committee (ELNAC) to help inform decisions about the initiative. The ELNAC conceptualized how to operationalize the Pathway Schools Initiative and set the initiative's goals. In 2011, the Foundation

asked the Urban Education Institute (UEI) at the University of Chicago to serve as its intermediary because of its similar work with high-needs schools in Chicago. UEI was tasked with providing the intellectual, conceptual, and managerial leadership for the initiative. However, the primary focus of UEI's responsibilities was providing ongoing professional development and technical assistance in literacy and leadership to participating Pathway schools. In 2011, the Foundation also hired SRI International (SRI), and its subcontractor, the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota, to conduct an external evaluation of the initiative. In 2013, the Foundation hired a program officer who began to play a key role in managing relationships between the Foundation, ELNAC, intermediary, and evaluator.

[1] The U.S. Department of Education (2012) defines high-needs students as "students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools..., who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English learners."

[2] Phase II of the initiative began in fall 2015 and goes through 2018. The Foundation will decide whether to fund Phase III closer to the end of Phase II.

The Foundation, UEI, and SRI staff developed a theory of action in 2011 that articulated a comprehensive set of actions that Pathway districts and schools were expected to take to produce an effective PreK–3 literacy model and improve outcomes for students. The theory of action envisioned successful implementation of district and school plans in several areas:

- **Coherent PreK–3 pathways** with aligned learning standards, curriculum and instruction, assessments and data systems, professional development, and targeted interventions; and continuity of PreK–3 student enrollment.
- **Effective leadership** teams comprised of both PreK and K–3 leaders at the school and district levels who are committed to the initiative's goals and strategies.
- **Shared professional development** of early childhood education and elementary school teachers and dedicated time for teachers to collaborate and receive coaching on the use of formative assessments, curriculum, instruction, and intervention strategies.
- **Effective use of student formative assessment data** by giving teachers access to formative assessment tools and building their capacity to accurately collect and use progress monitoring data to diagnose students' strengths and needs, plan and differentiate literacy instruction, and determine when students need higher levels of intervention.
- **High-quality literacy instruction** characterized by use of research-based instructional strategies; student-centered and culturally-responsive learning climates; ambitious instruction for all students; and effective approaches for dual language learner (DLL) students.
- **Extended and improved use of instructional time** by offering full-day PreK, extending and reorganizing literacy instructional time, and extending aligned literacy support to after-school and summer programs.
- **Access to tiered interventions** for struggling readers and research-based literacy programs for DLL students and children with special needs.
- **Family-school partnerships** around supporting children's development of literacy skills at home.

Ultimately, the theory of action predicted that if successfully implemented, the initiative would result in an increase in the percentage of proficient third-grade readers and a narrowing of the achievement gap for historically underperforming groups of students.

Independent evaluation. The Foundation invested in an independent evaluation to show that the effective implementation of this comprehensive set of actions leads to improved literacy outcomes. As the independent evaluator, SRI, with support from CAREI, used the theory of action to guide its formative evaluation, which tracked progress on implementation, and its summative evaluation, which measured the initiative's impact on teacher and student outcomes. Over the course of the initiative, the evaluation team collected and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data from a range of sources: site visits and interviews with district and school staff; interviews with UEI and Foundation staff and ELNAC members; parent focus groups; observations of UEI professional development; student enrollment and demographic data; teacher turnover data; teacher logs and survey; classroom observations; STEP data; and student MCA-III achievement data (see the **extended version** of this report for more information on research methods).

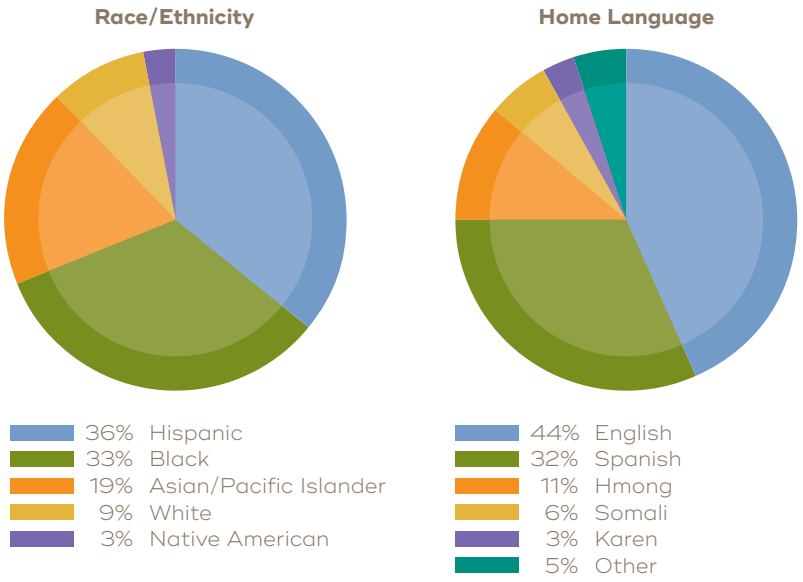
Partner districts and schools. The Foundation sought to identify districts and schools that could serve as potential long-term partners in developing exemplary, sustainable, and replicable models for PreK–3 literacy. In spring 2011, several traditional districts were invited to participate in a competitive process that required applicants to engage in a self-assessment and provide initial plans for strengthening areas of need. In 2012, several charter schools had an opportunity to apply. In particular, district and school applicants assessed their current capacity according to the implementation areas of the theory of action.

Applicants also provided initial plans for establishing a PreK–3 literacy model during Phase I that would increase students' reading skills. The Foundation awarded 12-month planning grants to support districts and schools in continuing to assess their strengths and weaknesses in PreK–3 literacy development and developing implementation plans aligned to the initiative's goals and theory of action. Ultimately, the Foundation awarded Phase I implementation grants to three traditional districts (which encompassed five participating schools) and two charter schools, one of which participated in the evaluation:

School	PreK–3 Students
Brooklyn Center Community Schools (BCCS)	
Earle Brown Elementary School	837
Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)	
Andersen United Community School	558
Jefferson Community School	371
Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS)	
Saint Paul Music Academy	382
Paul & Sheila Wellstone Elementary	404
Community of Peace Academy, PreK-12 Charter School (CPA)	
Community of Peace Academy, PreK-12 Charter School (CPA)	243

The Foundation sought to support schools that serve a high percentage of children who are at risk for poor literacy outcomes. Across the initiative, in 2014–15, participating schools served approximately 91 percent students of color (Exhibit 1) and 89 percent low-income students. Approximately 51 percent of students in the Pathway schools were DLLs, with schools serving high numbers of children whose home languages are Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. This represents a larger concentration of DLL students than the Twin Cities metro area as a whole, where roughly 30 percent of students are DLL.

Exhibit 1. PreK–3 Student Demographics in 2014–15, by Race/Ethnicity and Home Language



n = 2,795

The Pathway districts and schools varied in their planning and implementation timelines and approaches. BCCS and MPS both had a planning year in 2011–12 and began implementation in 2012–13 with all of their PreK–3 teachers. SPPS joined the initiative during the first implementation year, without the benefit of a planning year, and used a phased-in approach to bring the Pathway Schools Initiative to their two school sites (i.e., PreK and kindergarten teachers participated in the first year, first grade teachers joined in the second year, and second and third grade teachers joined in the third year). In addition, SPPS used its district assessment, Mondo Bookshop Reading Program, rather than STEP for the first 2 years of implementation. Finally, CPA joined the initiative later than the other districts; it used the 2012–13 school year as a planning year and began full implementation in fall 2013. Exhibit 2 presents more detail on the initiative timeline.

Participating Pathway schools and districts carried out the day-to-day work of the initiative. They used grant funds to expand or refine their PreK programs; hire additional staff such as program managers, literacy coaches, classroom aides, and family engagement coordinators; and purchase high-quality instructional materials, such as classroom libraries or tablets. Districts and schools were expected to address some components of the theory of action on their own, such as engaging families, supporting DLL students, extending instructional time and leveraging out of school time, and ensuring use of developmentally appropriate practices in the early grades. Districts and schools received little concrete support through the initiative for how to operationalize these components.

Initiative intermediary. The Foundation funded UEI to manage the initiative and to provide Pathway districts and schools with professional development and technical support focused on literacy and leadership. While the nature and focus of UEI supports evolved over the course of the initiative, the primary supports districts and schools received addressed the use of formative assessments to inform classroom literacy instruction and district and school leadership of PreK–3 literacy work. UEI anchored this professional development and technical assistance on two, validated diagnostic tools developed at the University of Chicago: the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) developmental literacy assessment for grades PreK–3 and the 5Essentials Survey.

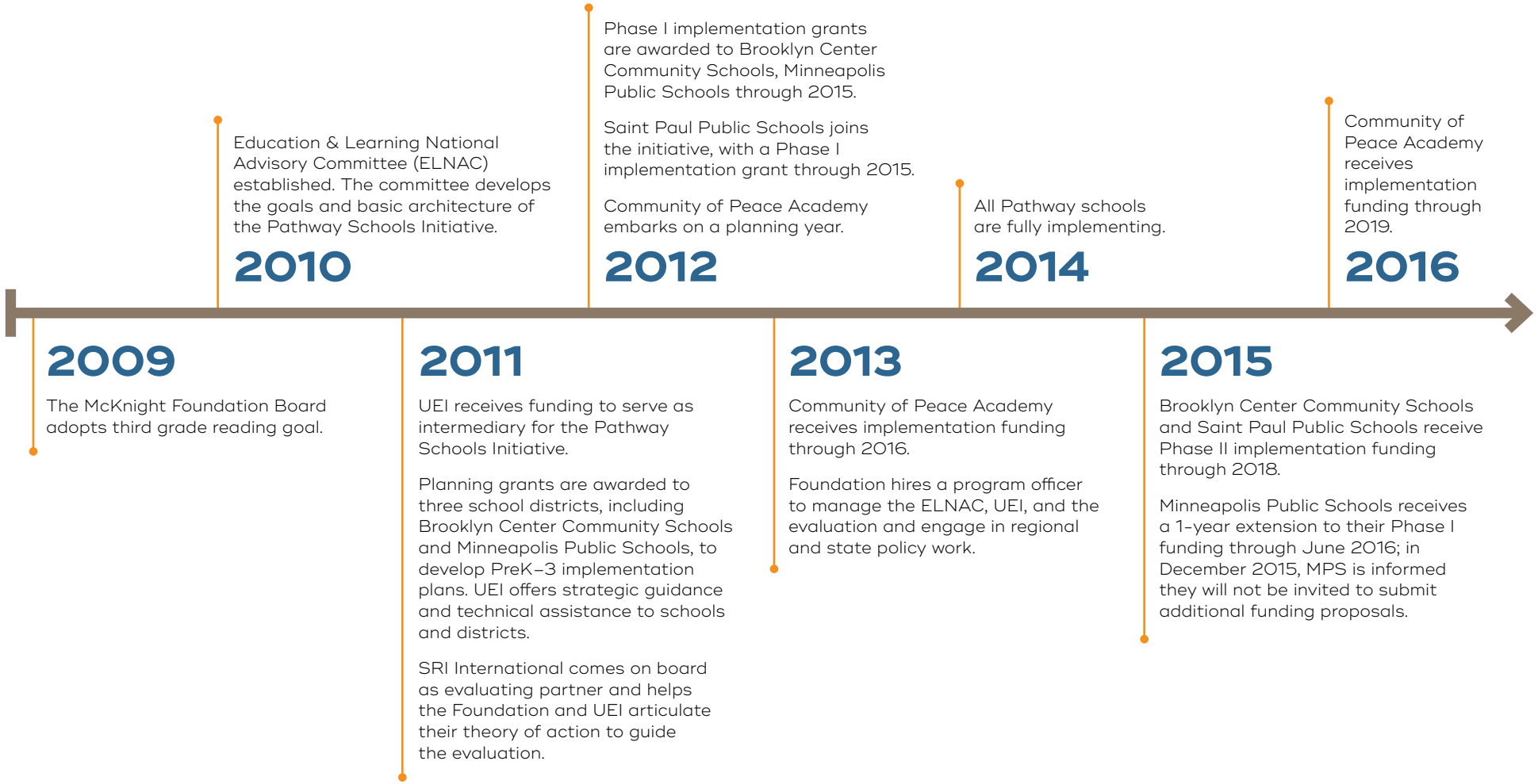
The STEP Assessment System

A major strategy of the Pathway Schools Initiative was to inform instruction through the collection of high-quality formative assessment data using the STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) assessment system developed by UEI. The STEP system includes tools to assess and track how students are developing as readers along a 13-step trajectory from PreK through third grade. Students are expected to progress one STEP level in PreK and three STEP levels per year in kindergarten through grade 3. Each STEP level denotes specific reading skills or strategies students have mastered and informs teachers of the skills and strategies students must learn to continue developing as readers. UEI provides schools using the assessment with STEP trainers who offer ongoing support with the system and with data-driven literacy instruction. STEP is offered in both English and Spanish. For additional information on the STEP tool visit: https://uchicagoimpact.org/step

The 5Essentials Survey

5Essentials is a research-based system designed to drive improvement in schools. The 5Essentials survey was based on a 10-year study (Bryk et al., 2010) that used multiple years of survey data to show how a combination of essential supports were related to improvements in elementary schools in Chicago. The 5Essentials system measures strengths, weaknesses, and changes in a school's organization on five essential components: effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction. Districts and schools receive 5Essentials reports that indicate levels of strength from very weak to very strong for each essential component and subscale and training on the use of those reports to inform school planning. For additional information on the 5Essentials survey visit: https://uchicagoimpact.org/5essentials

Exhibit 2. Initiative Timeline



Key Findings: Progress and Challenges

Key Findings: Progress and Challenges

Given the scope and breadth of the initiative, schools were only able to address deeply some components of the initiative's theory of action. Here, we present findings related to those components the Pathway districts and schools did address in their effort to improve literacy outcomes: coherent PreK–3 pathways, effective leadership, shared professional development, effective use of data, and high-quality instruction. We then describe Pathway students' progress in literacy achievement during Phase I.

Coherent PreK–3 Pathways

A primary goal of the Pathway Schools Initiative was to create coherent pathways between PreK and third grade, with sustained enrollment and aligned literacy programs such that students enter each successive grade with the requisite foundation and skills. For students to receive the cumulative benefits of aligned practices across years and successfully transition from one grade to the next, the Pathway districts and schools had to both substantially reduce student mobility and create programmatic coherence from PreK to third grade.

The Pathway schools made progress in creating a PreK–3 pipeline by increasing PreK enrollment and matriculation to kindergarten, but they were not able to reduce student mobility after kindergarten.

To create a strong PreK–3 enrollment pipeline, Pathway districts and schools focused on PreK, the beginning of the pipeline. Pathway schools tried to increase their enrollment in PreK programs located within each Pathway school and the percentage of PreK children who stayed for kindergarten. BCCS and SPPS transitioned to a full-day PreK model during the first year of their implementation grants and expanded their PreK programs substantially. CPA changed its PreK offerings to include two 5-day full-day classrooms. However, MPS continued to offer half-day PreK, expressing concerns about space and ensuring consistent program offerings across the district.

To increase the proportion of PreK students at the Pathway schools who stay for kindergarten, districts and schools changed enrollment policies and practices. Prior to the Initiative, a large percentage of the PreK students in BCCS, MPS, and SPPS came from outside the schools' local attendance area and did not continue on for kindergarten. These districts began prioritizing enrolling students into PreK from the local catchment area and making enrollment processes from PreK to kindergarten easier and in some cases automatic. As a result of these efforts, in three districts (CPA, BCCS, and SPPS), the size of the PreK cohorts that continued on to kindergarten in the same Pathway schools increased from 65 percent before initiative implementation to 82 percent after initiative implementation.

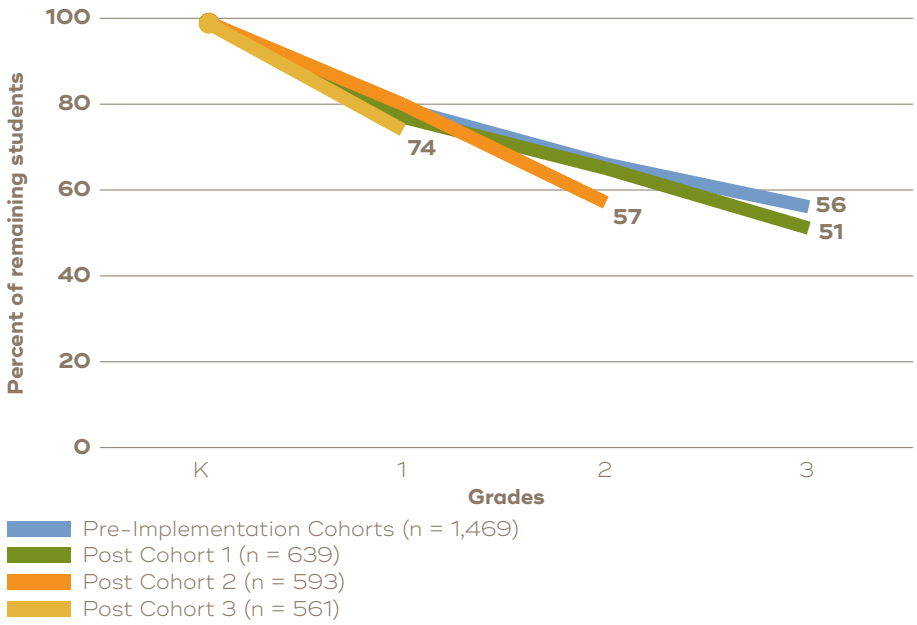
Despite improvements in the PreK to kindergarten pipeline, however, Pathway schools still saw 49 percent of students exiting between kindergarten and third grade (Exhibit 3).[3] The Pathway schools served highly-mobile populations, and the many factors contributing to mobility could not be overcome by school or

[3] SRI analyzed sustained enrollment for the kindergarten cohorts starting in 2012, 2013, and 2014, with pre-implementation kindergarten cohorts that started in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

district policies alone. An initiative leader noted the challenges of creating a pipeline with mobile populations:

> **"Looking back, I think [student mobility] was under-estimated in relation to what it is that we're doing in the schools in which we're working."**

Exhibit 3. Student Enrollment Pipeline: Sustained Enrollment of Kindergarten Cohorts



Note: CPA Cohort 1 and 2 were measured differently and CPA is not included in Cohort 3; SPPS is not included in the pre-implementation total; n for pre-implementation is the total cohort size across 3 years, and n for cohort 1 and cohort 2 is the sum of kindergarten cohorts in each district.

Exhibit reads: Of the 1,469 students who started kindergarten in the 3 years preceding initiative implementation, 56 percent remained enrolled at the Pathway schools in third grade.

Participation in the Pathway Schools Initiative increased the connections between district-run PreK programs and K–3 in the Pathway districts and schools.

The Pathway Schools Initiative placed more focus on the integration of PreK with K–3. PreK historically operated in a separate sphere from K–3, with its own leadership, professional development, schedule, budget, and instructional programming. The inclusion of early childhood education in this initiative strengthened the voice of PreK leaders and helped align PreK human capital policies with K–3 to facilitate the inclusion of PreK teachers in the professional community. One leader described the effect of including early childhood education leadership in the governance of the literacy work. Referring to PreK, she said, "What has traditionally been an afterthought is [at the] forefront… Now I feel like [the PreK] input is valuable and needed." To make it possible for PreK teachers to participate in initiative and alignment activities, the Pathway districts and schools had to address PreK teachers' schedules, calendars, and salaries. Once PreK and K–3 began collaborating, some Pathway districts and schools realized that some PreK practices such as social and behavioral curricula and early literacy environmental rating systems could be beneficial for kindergarten students.

The use of a common formative assessment supported alignment across grades by facilitating shared language, expectations, and understanding of the progression of literacy skills.

With the adoption of STEP in each Pathway school, all grades PreK–3 came to use the same literacy assessment. STEP replaced or augmented the various assessments that schools had been using and, for several of the schools, it was the first time the schools had a common assessment across all grade levels and programs.[4,5] Staff at all Pathway schools noted that the use of STEP and the accompanying training by UEI provided teachers with a common language, expectations for students, and understanding of literacy skills development and progression. For example, a BCCS teacher described how STEP promoted cross-teacher discussions of students' literacy development:

> **"The best lever for our school has been the implementation of the STEP assessment. We truly had as a building no understanding of how readers develop on a continuum. The STEP assessment has created a common language around milestones for readers."**

Effective Leadership

The Pathway Schools Initiative sought to create effective district and school leadership teams led by school principals who could support improvements in literacy teaching and learning. To support Pathway district and school leaders, UEI provided them with coaching support, delivered targeted professional development, kept them informed about initiative activities, and increased their access to data.

UEI leadership coaching and collaboratives helped principals manage the multi-faceted PreK–3 literacy initiative.

Building the capacity of principals to support the literacy work was a major focus of UEI's support. In interviews, principals reported that UEI support helped them manage the change effort, prioritize and coordinate school and district initiatives, develop as instructional leaders, provide difficult feedback to teachers, and more clearly communicate a coherent vision about literacy efforts in the school.

Through the leadership collaborative, principals, together with other school leaders, visited districts with successful PreK–3 models and reviewed 5Essentials survey data to set school-level goals and plan targeted supports on areas deemed weaker by the survey data. One principal noted the value of "networking with people and collaborating with people outside of our building and seeing what works." The 5Essentials survey data provided further information on areas that needed to improve for successful alignment, such as leadership practices and structures. One principal's goal, for example, was to develop more shared leadership with teachers.

[4] The dual language programs in the MPS Pathway schools used the Spanish STEP in PreK–3 and English STEP in grades 2 and 3.

[5] SPPS chose not to adopt STEP in the first 2 years of implementation. The district eventually shifted to using STEP in its two Pathway schools in 2014–15. The dual language program in one of the SPPS Pathway schools used the Spanish STEP.

One-on-one principal coaching from UEI helped principals bolster their instructional leadership by using data to guide instructional goals and practices and hold teachers more accountable for their instructional practices. Some principals, with support from UEI principal coaches, used STEP data to set instructional priorities aligned with their school's goals. Principal coaching also helped principals to become more adept at encouraging teachers to accept coaching and holding teachers more accountable for their instructional practices and student growth. One principal said that through monthly phone conversations and visits, the UEI principal coach helped her hold teachers accountable for their performance:

"[My coach] has pushed me to look at the data and look at teacher performance and, for those who aren't performing, to push the envelope and have serious conversations with them. They have to do better."

Similarly, another Pathway school principal described a leadership strategy she learned from her UEI principal coach: "He's taught me a really good strategy: if the teacher is saying, 'Nope, I don't want coaching, I already know how to do all those strategies,' then as administrators, we say 'Yep, we're going to check to see how well you're doing.' Then I suggest, 'I'll follow up in another week [and in the meantime] I want you to observe a certain teacher or I want you to get coaching in this,' and I don't really give them an option [to decline]."

Leaders struggled to balance the demands of the initiative with other needs and priorities.

Both district and school leaders had to balance the demands of the initiative with other district and school needs and priorities. In MPS and SPPS, the Pathway schools were just 2 among approximately 40 elementary schools each district had to support. District leaders were challenged with how to support the Pathway schools in implementing the unique strategies supported by the initiative while still considering the implications those efforts would have for the other schools in the district and the district as a whole. For example, district leaders in MPS were reluctant to add full-day PreK programs at the two Pathway schools because it would create inconsistencies across PreK programs districtwide and because of space constraints.

At the school level, Pathway principals needed to address many different areas of the PreK–3 literacy system, in addition to meeting numerous other districtwide and curricular expectations. School leaders recognized that they did not have the bandwidth to do everything at the same time or to the same degree, as described by one principal:

"Because we're a needy school, the district gives us many opportunities for many new things, which is great, but how do we fit all of that in? ...Since we're doing the [Pathway Schools Initiative] and we have UEI here, can we put a hold on everything else? No, everything keeps moving, all of the moving parts go as fast as ever."

UEI staff and 5Essentials survey results helped district and school leaders see that incoherence was stemming from districts and schools having too many initiatives. UEI advised principals to inventory their programs and discontinue or minimize effort on those that did not align with their school's goals.

District and school leadership turnover sometimes hindered progress.

All of the Pathway districts and schools experienced turnover among key personnel (e.g., principals, Pathway program managers, school literacy coaches, and district leaders). In some cases, the turnover was unavoidable, part of the natural progression of careers, or part of larger district plans beyond the initiative. In others, staffing changes were intended to better support implementation of the initiative. However, when turnover happened frequently or when leaders were replaced by individuals who had not been part of the initiative previously, it had the unintended effect of diminishing trust and creating confusion about the roles of key personnel and the priorities and goals of their work.

During Phase I, BCCS experienced turnover of its leadership, including having three different principals, two superintendents, and three Pathway program managers, and the addition of a new Executive Director of Teaching and Learning. Even though changes in personnel allowed the district to build a leadership team with stronger backgrounds in literacy development, teachers expressed confusion about the roles of the various leaders and frustration at not receiving more communication about the changes. In MPS and SPPS, district reorganization sometimes unintentionally hampered the progress of the initiative. For example, in MPS and SPPS, the associate superintendents originally assigned to supervise the Pathway schools were reassigned in the second year of the initiative. The newly assigned associate superintendents for the Pathway schools had to learn the history, goals, and implementation of the initiative, form relationships with school leadership, and understand why the schools needed flexibility to meet initiative goals.

Despite positive changes in principals' practice, principal leadership ratings remained weak according to 5Essentials survey data.

Although UEI principal coaches and principals themselves reported that principals' leadership skills grew as a result of the initiative, most Pathway principals received low ratings on the effective leaders domain of the 5Essentials survey that was completed by all school staff. Despite principal progress on streamlining and focusing school efforts, in 2015–16 only one principal of the six Pathway schools received a rating higher than weak.

The weak leadership ratings may have stemmed from teachers continuing to feel overwhelmed by the many demands placed on them, increased accountability for student performance, and confusion and distrust amidst leadership turnover. For example, in one school, leaders reported that the initiative shifted the mindset and culture by holding teachers more accountable for their performance, which in turn affected teacher morale and trust. A leader described the evolution over the course of the initiative: "In Year 1, we weren't able to tease out where we had achievement problems, teasing out whether it was a systems issue or a teachers issue. By Year 2, we know where teachers are shining and where they are struggling… [The] McKnight [grant] has started to peel away the onion and allowed us to have honest conservations about, 'Well, this can't just be the kids.'"

Shared Professional Development/ Strong Professional Community

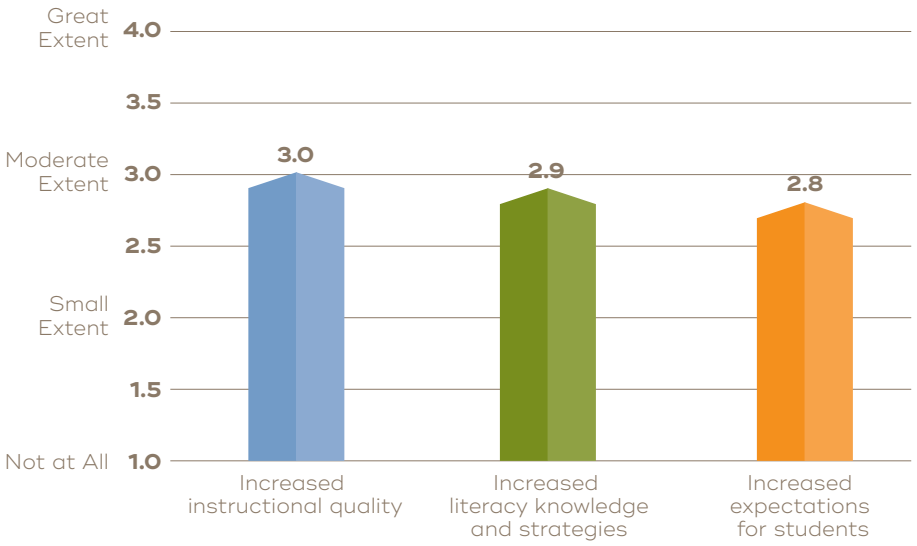
To facilitate alignment of expectations and practices from PreK to third grade, UEI provided teachers with professional development and support in reviewing and using student data to inform their literacy instruction, as well as content trainings related to a range of instructional practices. School literacy coaches were intended to help teachers use the tools and practices they learned from UEI. To assimilate new information and plan aligned lessons, the Pathway teachers also needed time dedicated to collaboration and shared learning.

Teachers reported that UEI-led professional development improved their ability to analyze and use student data to inform their literacy instruction.

UEI provided support to teachers through school-based workshops, lesson modeling, data review days following each STEP administration, individual classroom observations and coaching, and cross-district professional development. UEI trainers helped teachers learn to administer the STEP assessment and use its data and later to improve their reliability with STEP administration through data review meetings.[6] The UEI STEP trainers also helped teachers analyze data to create and inform guided reading groups and worked with teachers on using the data to inform other literacy activities, such as shared reading, literacy centers, and independent reading. Before SPPS adopted STEP, UEI provided SPPS teachers with professional development on how to break down Mondo oral language and Concepts About Print (CAP) assessment data in ways that helped teachers identify students' specific instructional needs.

The majority of interviewed teachers said that the greatest takeaway from the UEI professional development was gaining the ability to analyze data and tailor teaching based on those data. Teachers reported becoming more adept at using data to identify learning goals, narrow the focus of lessons, select texts and develop guiding questions about the texts, and use data to differentiate lessons for guided reading groups and small group instruction. On average, teachers surveyed in spring 2015 reported that UEI-led professional development in 2014–15 helped increase their literacy instructional quality, literacy knowledge, and expectations of students to a moderate extent (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Teacher-Perceived Impact of UEI-Led Professional Development



n=74

Source: 2015 Teacher Survey

[6] SPPS did not adopt STEP until 2014–15. In the first 2 years, UEI helped SPPS Pathway teachers analyze and interpret Mondo data.

School literacy coaches reinforced alignment and consistency of literacy practices across teachers, but their influence was limited by access to teachers and time constraints.

UEI trainers focused on developing the capacity of school literacy coaches with the expectation that the coaches would eventually take over most of the direct training of teachers as related to STEP assessment data analysis and instructional planning. The intent of this approach was for schools to be able to sustain the changes and learning that came from participating in the initiative after the grant ended and because some district and school leaders thought that some teachers would be more receptive to coaches who were more familiar with the school and classroom context. To build coach capacity, UEI STEP trainers provided support to school literacy coaches through professional development meetings, co-observing classrooms with coaches, debriefs with coaches after the observations, and literacy collaborative meetings. One school literacy coach said the UEI STEP trainers helped increase her capacity as a coach through modeling:

> **"I would say the support from the [UEI] coaches [was the most useful] because they were able to teach me how to observe classrooms and look-fors for improving reading instruction [and] how to look through the data. If we had to do that on our own I wouldn't be using the assessments as effectively as I do now."**

School literacy coaches then worked with teachers individually, during common planning time, and in professional learning community (PLC) meetings on strategies and skills introduced by UEI, which facilitated coherence. School literacy coaches conducted observations and debriefs to promote consistent strategies, such as habits of discussion, accountable talk, and word solving strategies, and provided feedback during teachers' PLC meetings. Teachers who received this coaching valued the support they received. One SPPS teacher said, "I go to [my literacy coach] all the time. She observes me teaching guided reading and then we have discussions about it. I feel like being able to use her as a resource has increased my knowledge as a literacy teacher."

Despite the reported benefits of coaching by those teachers who received it, Pathway schools experienced challenges in using coaching to its full potential. Spring 2015 teacher survey results showed that the average teacher met with their coach once or twice a month and that one-fifth of teachers did not meet with a coach at all. In interviews, some teachers reported that coaches were often too busy working with new teachers or handling other duties to meet with them. Several coaches reported not being able to achieve the breadth and volume of their responsibilities, which included training new teachers on the initiative, helping teachers administer STEP, analyzing data, facilitating meetings, and observing teachers. Moreover, some teachers were reluctant to work with coaches because the coaches were reporting directly to school administrators, and therefore, coaching felt "evaluative." Finally, coach turnover meant that coaches had to build new relationships and trust with teachers in order for teachers to be comfortable working with them.

Dedicated common planning and collaboration time facilitated alignment, but the amount of time available was not sufficient in many of the Pathway schools.

In districts with common planning time, respondents cited it as one of the primary facilitators of grade-level coherence. It enabled teachers to collaborate and calibrate their instruction, discuss assessment data, align expectations and understanding of literacy goals, and plan together. According to the spring 2015 teacher survey, 78 percent of teachers in Pathway schools participated in a PLC focused on literacy. They reported most frequently collaborating with other teachers to review student assessment data to make instructional decisions, create literacy lesson plans, and develop materials or activities for literacy instruction (all 1-2 times per month) as part of a PLC or grade-level team.

Conversely, teachers reported a lack of collaboration time as a key barrier to PreK–3 coherence. Unlike CPA, which adjusted its master schedule to provide teachers with 70 minutes of common planning time with their grade-level peers, other districts decreased the amount of collaboration time during the initiative because of changes in schedules, contracts, and professional development structures. Lack of shared collaboration time also impeded the ability of teachers who participated in the UEI Literacy Collaborative to share their new learning with other teachers.

Across districts, teachers also expressed a need for time to collaborate across grade levels, and with special education and English Language (EL) teachers, in order to ensure that instructional practices are similar and build on each other.

Teachers reported needing more support with developing data-informed lessons for students overall and for DLL students specifically.

By fall 2015, most interviewed teachers felt they had a good understanding of how to use STEP data and were interested in receiving help from UEI and school literacy coaches with instructional strategies and example lessons to better address the specific literacy skills students need to develop. For example, one teacher stated her readiness to move beyond data analysis:

> **"I feel like I'm pretty good at data analysis and knowing what my kids need, so I don't really enjoy when people come in and pick apart the data... A better way to go about it would be to say, 'We've looked through your data, too. We know you know what's important. Let's think about instructional strategies.'"**

Interviewed teachers mentioned desiring modeling of instructional strategies and model lessons. Teachers also noted that it would be helpful to have suggested texts for working on certain STEP Bottom Line skills and accompanying discussion questions or activities to promote those skills. In fall 2015, interviewed teachers reported wanting more support with developing independent work (55 percent were highly interested) and teaching comprehension strategies (53 percent).

Teachers also reported wanting more assistance with implementing effective instructional strategies for DLL students in particular. Thirty-seven percent of interviewed teachers in fall 2015 were highly interested in receiving more support for working with DLL students. Teachers received little guidance in how to support DLL students with their literacy development, even though accelerating English language acquisition for DLL students was a major goal and expressed need of most of the Pathway schools, as they all faced large achievement gaps for their DLL students. The need for professional development around supporting DLL students increased as the MPS Pathway schools saw a dramatic increase in the enrollment of Somali students. Three years into implementation, MPS teachers still felt like they did not have the right support for DLL students. One MPS teacher said:

> **"We don't understand, nor do we have the right supports financially or on the professional development side, for doing the best by dual language learners, especially those in early grades. It requires such a level of expertise in practitioner understanding."**

Trying to fill this gap, some districts used initiative funds to provide professional development opportunities for teachers.

Turnover among school literacy coaches and teachers made building capacity difficult.

The initiative invested considerable resources into building the capacity of coaches to support teachers in implementing new literacy practices and of teachers to learn and use assessment data to drive their literacy instruction. Although some turnover may have been intended to enhance coach or teacher capacity by replacing low-capacity staff, high coach and teacher turnover at some Pathway schools made it difficult for the schools to build on gains made in the previous years.

All Pathway schools experienced some turnover among their literacy coaches. In all, the six schools had nine coach positions funded by the McKnight Foundation and made 13 coach replacements between 2012–13 and 2014–15. New coaches had to learn the initiative's strategies and forge new relationships with teachers. In some cases, teachers did not want to work with school literacy coaches they did not know and trust.

The extent of teacher turnover varied considerably across the six Pathway schools from 2012–13 to 2014–15, ranging from only 26 percent of the PreK–3 faculty in 2012–13 remaining at one Pathway school in 2014–15 to 66% remaining at another Pathway school. With new teachers, coaches had to focus much of their time on bringing new staff up to speed on STEP administration, the use of STEP results, and certain literacy instructional practices. As one teacher explained:

> **"We've had so much turnover among the staff that we're reinventing the wheel every year. And that first year [implementing STEP] is rough, because it's unwieldy at first."**

Despite its profound effect on the initiative's progress, principals had limited control over staff turnover and replacements for outgoing teachers.

Effective Use of Data to Support Student Learning

The Pathway Schools Initiative aimed to help teachers more effectively use data to guide and differentiate their literacy instruction and improve student learning. Pathway districts and schools adopted the English STEP to monitor students' literacy progress and formatively assess student learning at regular intervals throughout the school year. The dual language programs in the MPS Pathway schools used the Spanish STEP in grades PreK–3, and the English STEP in grades 2 and 3. SPPS used Mondo's formative literacy assessment until it adopted the English STEP in 2014–15. In one of the SPPS Pathway schools, the dual language program used the Spanish STEP.

STEP helped teachers determine students' needs, individualize instruction, and form small guided reading groups.

Teachers reported that the STEP system improved their use of data to inform and individualize literacy instruction and form guided reading groups, their ability to diagnose gaps in literacy skills, and their knowledge of how to support students' literacy needs. On the spring 2015 teacher survey, on average teachers found STEP assessment results most useful for determining instructional groups (3.85), individualizing instruction for students (3.70), and informing literacy curricular and lesson planning (3.57).[7] In interviews, teachers also reported that the detailed assessment data, coupled with professional development on how to use those data to inform instruction, helped them develop learning goals for their lessons and narrow the focus of lessons to the skills they identified in the data as needing attention. Teachers also reported becoming more adept at using data to individualize lessons for guided reading groups and small group instruction. Teachers in all Pathway schools reported using STEP data to inform both text selection and the questions they asked students about the text. One teacher described how STEP influenced her instruction:

> **"I'm far more aware of the exact areas that I need to work on with the students rather than a generalized feeling of what they need to proceed... It has made me more concentrated in my effort and deliberate in my guided reading groups."**

[7] On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is "not at all," 2 is "to a small extent," 3 is "to a moderate extent," and 4 is "to a great extent."

STEP data helped teachers communicate with parents about student progress.

STEP gave teachers across grades a common language and a communication tool for working with parents and discussing their children's literacy achievement. Teachers reported that the clarity and specificity of the information STEP provides was useful for communicating with parents. A program manager said:

> **"Parents are aware of their child's STEP levels and they have never had these types of conversations before."**

Teachers were able to explain to parents where children were in their literacy development and how they were doing on specific skills. A year into using STEP, one teacher explained, "Parents enjoy knowing where their kids are for STEP… They know a six is this, a nine is that. And they're pushing them [children] along and seeing those markers go up."

Teachers primarily communicated STEP scores with parents during biannual parent-teacher conferences and a few Pathway schools also offered informational sessions on the assessment system. During conferences, teachers presented parents with children's literacy goals and communicated how parents could best support their children in achieving them. In BCCS and MPS, teachers provided parents with their children's STEP levels and gave them information about books and concrete activities to use at home based on those levels.

In focus groups, several parents reported appreciating receiving STEP results from teachers because it gave them concrete information about where their children are in the literacy progression and what areas they need to work on at home and in school. However, some parents remained confused by the STEP results. Some had limited knowledge of STEP in general, and others questioned why their children were not progressing on STEP, despite teachers' attempts to explain it to them at conferences and opportunities to learn about it at school events.

Teachers often lacked sufficient time and instructional resources to maximize the value of STEP results.

STEP provided a wealth of information, but teachers reported needing more time or tools to support the use of the formative assessment data. During fall 2015 interviews, teachers noted that they spent a considerable amount of time gathering STEP data and did not have enough time to make use of it. Overall, teachers were expected to administer the STEP four times a year, per UEI's guidelines, though some schools administered the STEP less often at different points in time. During each assessment window, teachers pulled students out individually to read through increasingly difficult texts to determine their STEP level. The majority of interviewed teachers reported that administration averaged approximately 15 hours total per assessment window, with more time needed in the first year, with older students, and larger class sizes. Some teachers felt that they were spending too much time away from instruction, while others felt the time spent was worth it for the information STEP provided. Pathway schools tried to support teachers by providing substitutes so teachers could administer STEP or having other school staff lead small group instruction while teachers assessed other students.

In addition to administration time, teachers reported that planning lessons based on the STEP data required a significant time investment. Teachers had to develop a plan for each guided reading group, and many classrooms could have as many as five or six different groups. To support their use of STEP results and help limit their planning time, teachers sought model lessons and exemplar texts tied to STEP skills to help them more efficiently develop multiple differentiated lessons. For example, one teacher described the challenge of planning for differentiated instruction:

> **"I am working with each group two to three times a week, the lower levels more often... To plan and implement things for every group based on STEP, which is the goal in our school, is very challenging. Just finding different activities when I don't have the time to plan is a challenge."**

Teachers had difficulty integrating STEP data with data from state and district assessments to make instructional decisions.

STEP was one assessment in addition to many others that schools administered, and teachers encountered challenges with integrating the data. In some cases, assessments were duplicative—assessing the same skills or serving similar purposes. In BCCS, CPA, and MPS, intervention teachers used different assessments than classroom teachers to identify students for support and monitor progress, and staff noted that this duplication of assessments was repetitive and reduced coherence.

In other cases, teachers were concerned about misalignment across assessments. For instance, teachers and school leaders questioned how well STEP could inform student preparation for the MCA-III achievement test, and the districts came up with conflicting results when they looked at the correlation between the two. Additionally, MPS teachers reported a lack of alignment between STEP and the district's Focused Instruction benchmark tests, with STEP focusing on literacy development and the benchmark assessments focusing on grade-level standards. School staff in several districts also reported the challenge of integrating English language proficiency assessments (WIDA/Access) with STEP because they measure different skills. Finally, in BCCS and SPPS, STEP was not in the districts' data systems, making it difficult for teachers to pull out data in order to compare and group students.

Teachers encountered challenges in using STEP with DLL students.

Teachers encountered difficulties in using English STEP with DLL students and questioned some of the strategies embedded in the Spanish STEP for teaching literacy to Spanish-speaking students. All Pathway schools used English STEP with their DLL students in their English-only programs, and the MPS and SPPS Pathway schools adopted the Spanish STEP for their dual language programs. Although STEP was intended to be a tool to support the literacy growth of all students, some teachers questioned the validity of the English STEP assessment for DLL students. Teachers were concerned that DLL students often stalled at particular STEP levels for reasons that teachers perceived to be related to language (e.g., rhyming) and not literacy. For example, one teacher described her experience using the English STEP with DLL students:

"I'd say a major stumbling block of the STEP testing is that it can hold a [DLL] student back. It doesn't take into account second language learners well ... things like rhyming or segmentation... I've had kids where they could read really well, but they kept staying in STEP 2 because they couldn't do the segmentation."

Also, SPPS teachers noted that STEP does not have an oral language component or focus on vocabulary development, which, given their high DLL populations, had been a particular focus at the SPPS Pathway schools. Therefore, they continued to use another assessment along with the STEP to capture this information.

The Spanish STEP was intended to broker alignment between the English-language and dual language programs in MPS and SPPS. However, dual language program teachers in MPS disagreed with some aspects of the strategies embedded in STEP for teaching literacy to Spanish-speaking students, such as focusing on phonemes rather than syllables. Finally, dual language program teachers in both MPS and SPPS voiced frustration with errors they found in the Spanish STEP materials. Taken together, these issues undermined some teachers' confidence in the STEP system.

High-Quality Instruction

The initiative was designed to align and improve literacy instruction in all PreK–3 classrooms. The evaluation team learned about the focus of teachers' instruction through an instructional log and a teacher survey,[8] and measured the quality of teachers' instruction through observations using the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS®).

A substantial amount of class time was dedicated to literacy.

Throughout the initiative, the amount of time teachers spent on literacy instruction remained high, and teachers shifted from engaging in whole group instruction to spending more time instructing small groups. Both instructional log data and survey data indicated that teachers spent a large amount of time instructing students in literacy. Instructional log data showed that teachers in BCCS, MPS, and SPPS[9] all spent more than 90 minutes on literacy instruction. On the teacher survey in spring 2015, on average teachers reported spending 115 minutes per day on literacy instruction. This amount of time could be interpreted as a significant and sufficient amount of time.[10]

Regarding the instructional formats in which they spent this time, from fall 2012 to spring 2015 teachers moved to spending more instructional time leading small reading groups (35 to 43 percent of literacy time), and less instructional time providing whole-class instruction (33 to 27 percent) and monitoring independent work (17 to 10 percent). On the survey, teachers reported that the most frequently occurring literacy instruction activities in their classrooms were independent reading, guided reading with leveled texts, and read-alouds; on average, they engaged in these

[8] In 2012–13 and 2013–14, the evaluation team gathered information about teachers' literacy instruction through an instructional log that teachers completed for one week each in the spring and fall. However, low participation rates hindered generalization across the teacher sample. In 2014–15, the evaluation team replaced the log with an annual teacher survey and was able to achieve greater teacher representation.

[9] Instructional log data from SPPS in 2012–13 included only PreK and kindergarten teachers. The evaluation team did not collect instructional log data from CPA teachers, as CPA did not join the evaluation until 2014–15. CPA teachers were included in the 2015 survey.

[10] For example, a study of first-grade literacy instruction found that the most effective classrooms dedicated 45 minutes or more to an English language arts block (Pressley, et al., 1998).

almost daily. Teacher-led writing (teacher controlling the pen writes and thinks aloud but may ask students for ideas) and guided writing (students create and write in small groups while the teacher guides the process) activities occurred, on average, once or twice a week.

Teachers learned and increased the use of some general literacy instructional strategies.

Teachers described learning some strategies through the professional development from UEI, including the use of turn and talk and sentence starters and sentence stems to foster oral language development; the use of inference and critical thinking questions and visualization tools (e.g., anchor charts) to promote comprehension; a focus on word solving skills to improve vocabulary; and the use of dots under words to support reading. On the spring 2015 survey, teachers reported using certain literacy strategies (e.g., turn and talk, sentence starters, visualization tools, think-pair-share) promoted by STEP trainers on average between 3–4 times a week and daily.

SPPS teachers more explicitly taught oral language skills; for example, the teachers reported talking less and encouraging students to talk more. A SPPS PreK teacher described strategies UEI coaches encouraged her to use with her DLL students:

> **"Instead of saying 'Flower' say, 'You are making a flower, can you say "I am making a flower?"' It has made such a difference on their language skills. … Taking the time to get them to recognize not only the vocabulary but also the structure of conversations."**

Teachers in some districts lacked curricula, curriculum maps, materials, and other resources to support high-quality instruction.

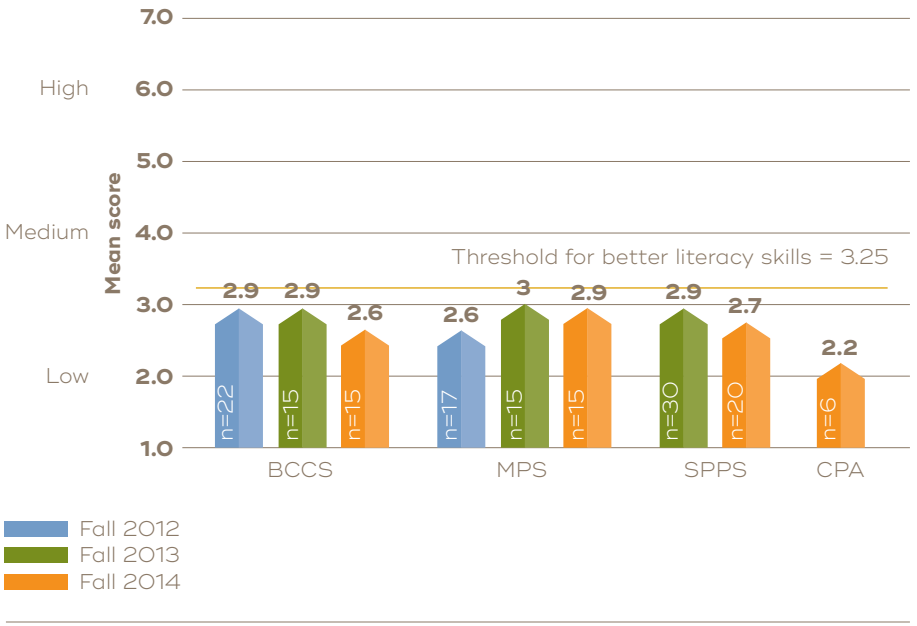
The initiative did not provide or recommend a curriculum for Pathway districts and schools to use in support of the literacy effort. Rather, the Foundation and UEI left the choice of literacy curriculum to the Pathway districts. In BCCS, teachers lacked curricular materials for early literacy for much (if not all) of Phase I of the initiative, and teachers struggled to implement the instructional strategies and assessment pieces without a curriculum. One teacher said, "Finding the time to plan and do it all, especially without a curriculum, and trying to fit it all into your day has been challenging." MPS discontinued their early literacy curriculum (a Reader's Workshop model) when the district adopted the Common Core standards but had not replaced it with another early literacy curriculum.

Compounding the curricular challenges was the lack of resources and strategies for DLL instruction. In particular, the dual language programs in MPS and SPPS lacked some of the common resources that existed in English-medium settings.[11] In SPPS, the dual language classrooms lacked Spanish instructional materials, and in MPS, Focused Instruction was not fully developed for Spanish classrooms. Some schools (BCCS and CPA) grappled with what instructional model would be most appropriate for their DLL students (e.g., push-in versus pull-out), and used several different approaches over the course of the initiative. BCCS switched between a pull-out and push-in approach over the years, and in fall 2015 CPA changed from having EL teachers pull out students for directed support to having a co-teaching model in which the EL teachers were in the regular classroom.

CLASS observation data suggest that the quality of classroom instruction remained low, but was comparable to national averages.

CLASS ratings of instructional support were low and remained low across the first 3 years of the initiative (Exhibit 5). None of the changes in scores was statistically significant. Instructional support scores reflect ratings of instructional practices focused on concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling. Low scores for instructional support are common; in fact, Pathway schools were similar to or exceeded the average of 2.2 for the instructional support domain in K–3 classrooms found in a national study (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Nevertheless, research studies have found that better reading skills in early childhood classrooms are associated with an instructional support score of 3.25 or higher (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010).

Exhibit 5. CLASS Instructional Support Scores



[11] SPPS offered two language instruction models in its Pathway schools. An English-only model was used in all classrooms in SPMA and some classrooms in Wellstone. EL teachers pushed-in during reading and writing lessons and pulled out the lowest-level DLLs for additional support. Wellstone also operated a dual immersion program that served both native English-speaking and native Spanish-speaking students.

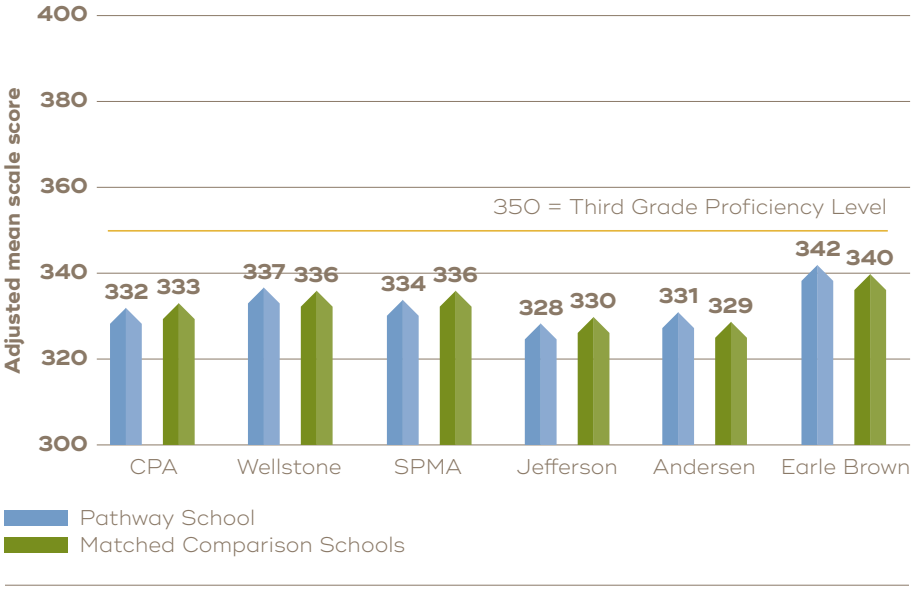
Student Progress

The initiative's ultimate goal is to dramatically increase the number of students who become proficient readers by the end of third grade. To gauge student progress, the evaluation compared students' performance in Pathway schools to similar students in matched schools on standardized third grade reading tests and analyzed the percentage of Pathway school students reaching year-end proficiency goals on the STEP.

Pathway schools did not outperform similar schools not participating in the initiative on the state assessment of third-grade literacy.

To better understand the difference the Pathway Schools Initiative may be having on students' literacy performance, the evaluation compared third-grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA-III) scores in Pathway schools to those in matched comparison schools in 2012–13, 2013–14, 2014–15, statistically adjusting for the individual students' race/ethnicity, English proficiency status, and free or reduced-price lunch eligibility. There was no significant difference between MCA-III reading scores at any of the Pathway schools and their matched comparison schools (Exhibit 6). This pattern held for DLL students, with no significant differences in scores between DLL students at Pathway schools and DLL students at non-Pathway schools. Across both Pathway schools and matched comparison schools, non-DLL students performed better than DLL students on the MCA-III. On average, none of the Pathway schools' students reached third-grade proficiency levels.

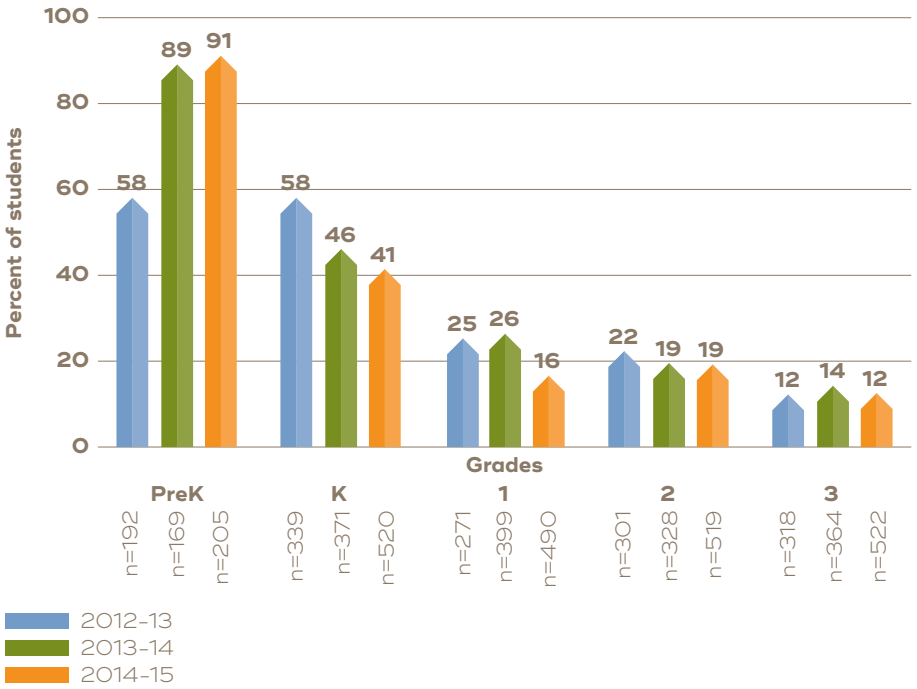
Exhibit 6. Pathway and Matched Comparison Schools Mean Student Achievement on Third-Grade Reading Assessment, 2014–15



The percentage of students reaching grade-level STEP goals did not improve over time for students overall, for DLL students, or for most students who took the Spanish STEP.

In each of the first 3 years of the Pathway Schools Initiative, the proportion of students that met their grade-level end-of-year goal on the English STEP decreased with each subsequent grade-level (Exhibit 7). In the third year of the initiative, only 13 percent of third-grade students met their grade-level goal of STEP 12. The percentage of students meeting end-of-year goals decreased over time because K–3 students did not make the three steps per year of progress needed. Students in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade progressed an average of 2.1 to 2.8 steps, which was significantly lower than their expected progress of 3.0 steps in each grade. Further, with the exception of PreK, the number of steps progressed each year did not increase in later years of the initiative (i.e., in 2014–15 compared with 2012–13). This trend was also true for DLL students taking the English STEP. Additionally, three of the Pathway schools housed Spanish-English dual language programs that relied on the Spanish STEP to track progress on Spanish literacy skills. In general, the patterns of proficiency on the Spanish STEP were similar to the overall patterns on the English STEP: an improvement in PreK and no change in grades K–2. However, there was a larger improvement in grade 3 on the Spanish STEP than on the English STEP.

Exhibit 7. Students Meeting English STEP Grade-Level Year-End Proficiency Goals

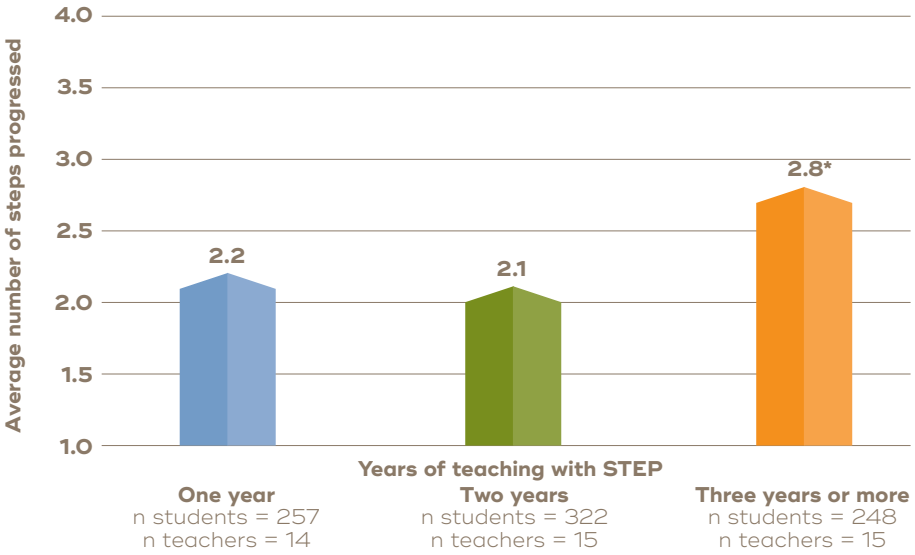


Notes: (1) 2012–13 data include BCCS and MPS, 2013–14 data include BCCS, MPS, and CPA, and 2014–15 data include BCCS, MPS, CPA, and SPPS. (2) Grade-level year-end proficiency goals: Pre-reading in PreK; STEP 3 in kindergarten; STEP 6 in first grade; STEP 9 in second grade; and STEP 12 in third grade.

Progress on STEP was better for stable teachers and students.

Students of teachers with 3 years of experience with the initiative made significantly more progress than students of teachers with 1 or 2 years of experience (Exhibit 8). Moreover, students who were in the Pathway schools for all 3 years were significantly more likely to meet their grade-level end-of-year proficiency goals than students who entered or left the schools during this time. For example, students who started at the school in kindergarten or first grade and stayed for 3 years outperformed their mobile peers by the third year of the initiative (Exhibit 9). "Stable" students may differ in other important ways from more mobile students, so one cannot conclude that consistent exposure to the Pathway Schools Initiative *caused* the group differences.

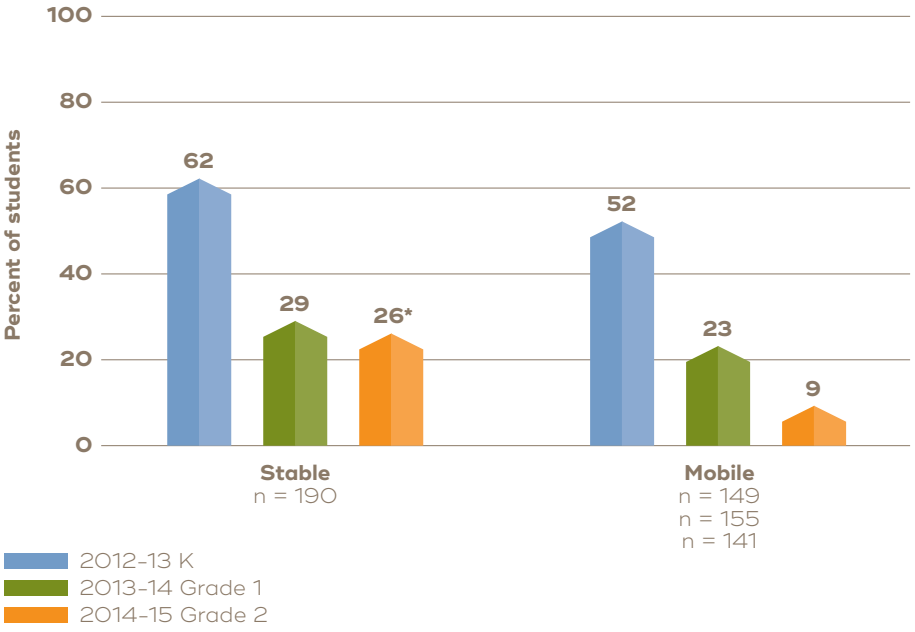
Exhibit 8. Average Number of Steps Progressed on the English STEP for K–3 Students in 2014–15, by Years of Teacher Experience with STEP



* p ≤ .05

Note: Includes only students from BCCS and MPS schools because only these schools used STEP for at least 3 years.

Exhibit 9. Stable and Mobile Students (K–Grade 2) Meeting STEP Grade-Level Year-End Proficiency Goals



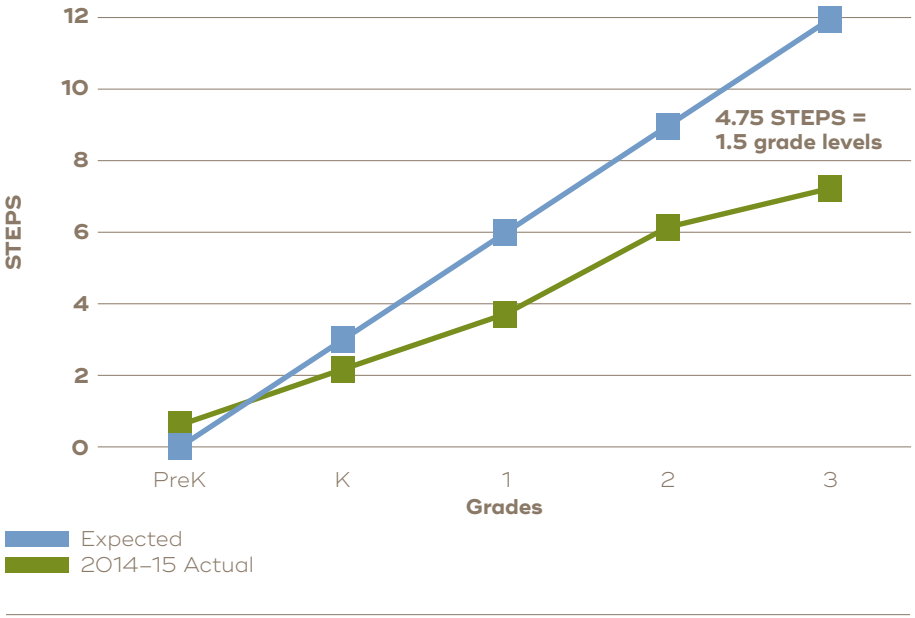
* p ≤ .05

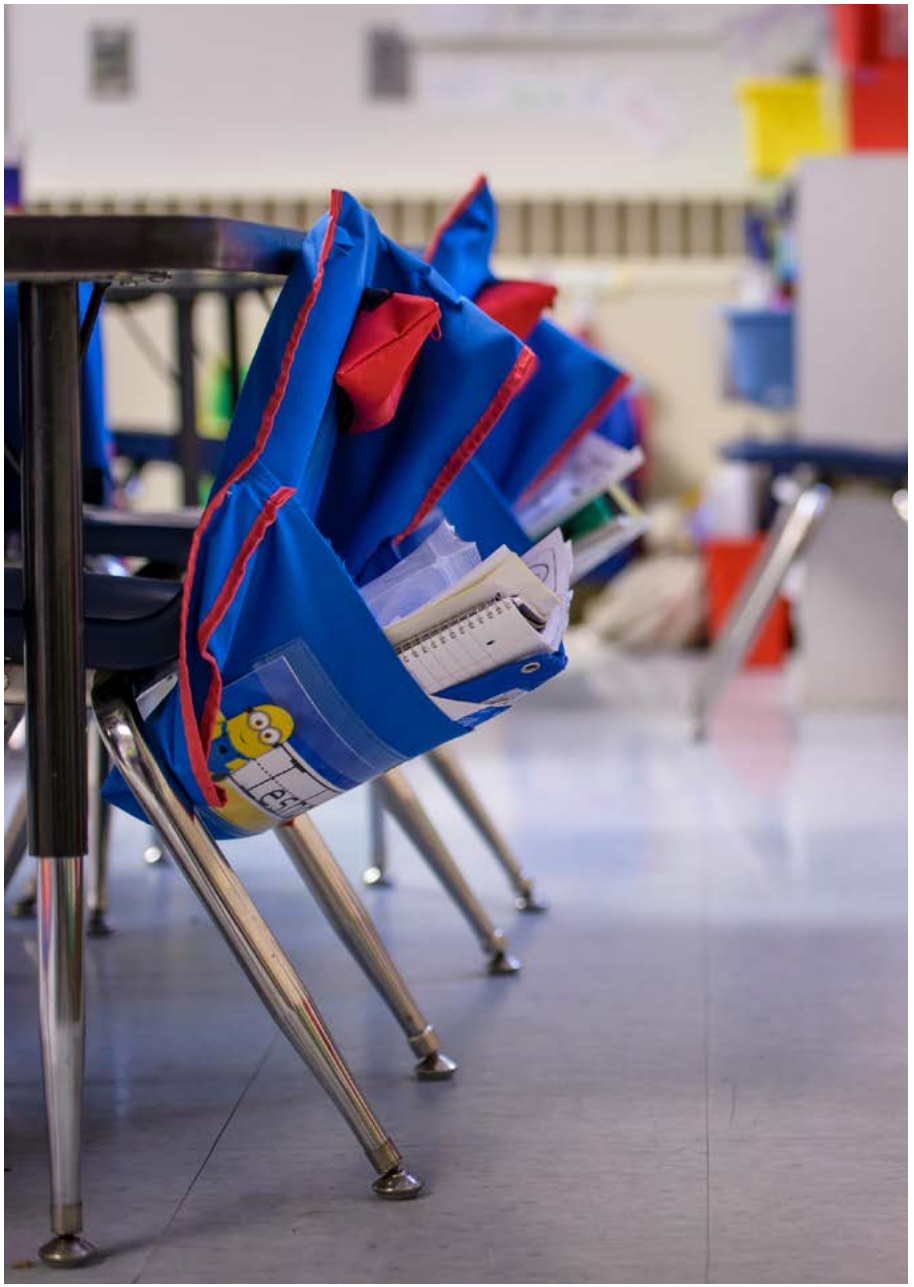
Note: Includes only students from BCCS and MPS schools because only these schools used STEP for at least 3 years.

Students not making the expected progress on STEP each year resulted in the average third-grade student being more than 1.5 grade levels behind.

Students' insufficient progress on STEP had a cumulative impact as students moved through the grades. While PreK students, on average, attained above the expected end-of-year STEP, by kindergarten students were behind expected attainment. (Exhibit 10) By third grade, students, on average, began the year a grade level behind (at STEP 6 instead of STEP 9), and they ended the year more than 1.5 grade levels behind (at STEP 7.25 rather than STEP 12). Moreover, students whose home language was Spanish ended third grade farther behind grade-level expectations on the English STEP than their peers whose home language was English (1.7 versus 1.3 grade levels behind).

Exhibit 10. Expected and Average Actual End-of-Year STEP, by Grade





Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

This section presents lessons learned by the evaluation that can inform the Pathway Schools Initiative's Phase II work as well as others interested in building aligned PreK–3 literacy efforts to improve third grade reading in high-need communities. These lessons have implications for initiative leaders (i.e., Foundation staff, national advisers, and intermediaries) and district and school leaders.

Lessons for Funders and Other Initiative Leaders

Chart a clear course

Although the initial theory of action clearly articulated the desired outcomes, it did not specify in sufficient detail what inputs were needed to produce them. For example, the theory did not specify the mechanisms for strengthening student enrollment from PreK through grade 3, alignment across grades in instructional practices, family engagement, targeted supports for struggling readers, or increasing instructional time outside of school.

Rather, the supports offered reflected the tools and expertise of the intermediary (i.e., a strong formative literacy assessment system with training and a school leadership and organizational framework with data and coaching), and districts and schools were tasked with addressing the other components of the theory of action. A more detailed theory of action that included specific inputs and outlined which organization was responsible for which components may have supported a more shared understanding of what stakeholders (the funder, intermediary, and partner districts and schools) needed to do to produce the intended outcomes.

In addition, district leaders, Foundation staff, and national advisers noted that the initiative shifted from a primary focus on literacy to a greater focus on leadership development and school improvement over time. While this shift was made in response to initiative leaders' assessment that schools needed more support with alignment and leadership to be able to fully benefit from the formative literacy assessment, the focus may have shifted too far towards leadership at the expense of sufficient attention to literacy and instruction. One initiative leader shared:

> **"My impression of the initiative is that the organizational development work is paramount or has just taken on a larger part of the work than the focus on literacy."**

Other initiative leaders saw it as a systemic approach to supporting classroom and school improvement.

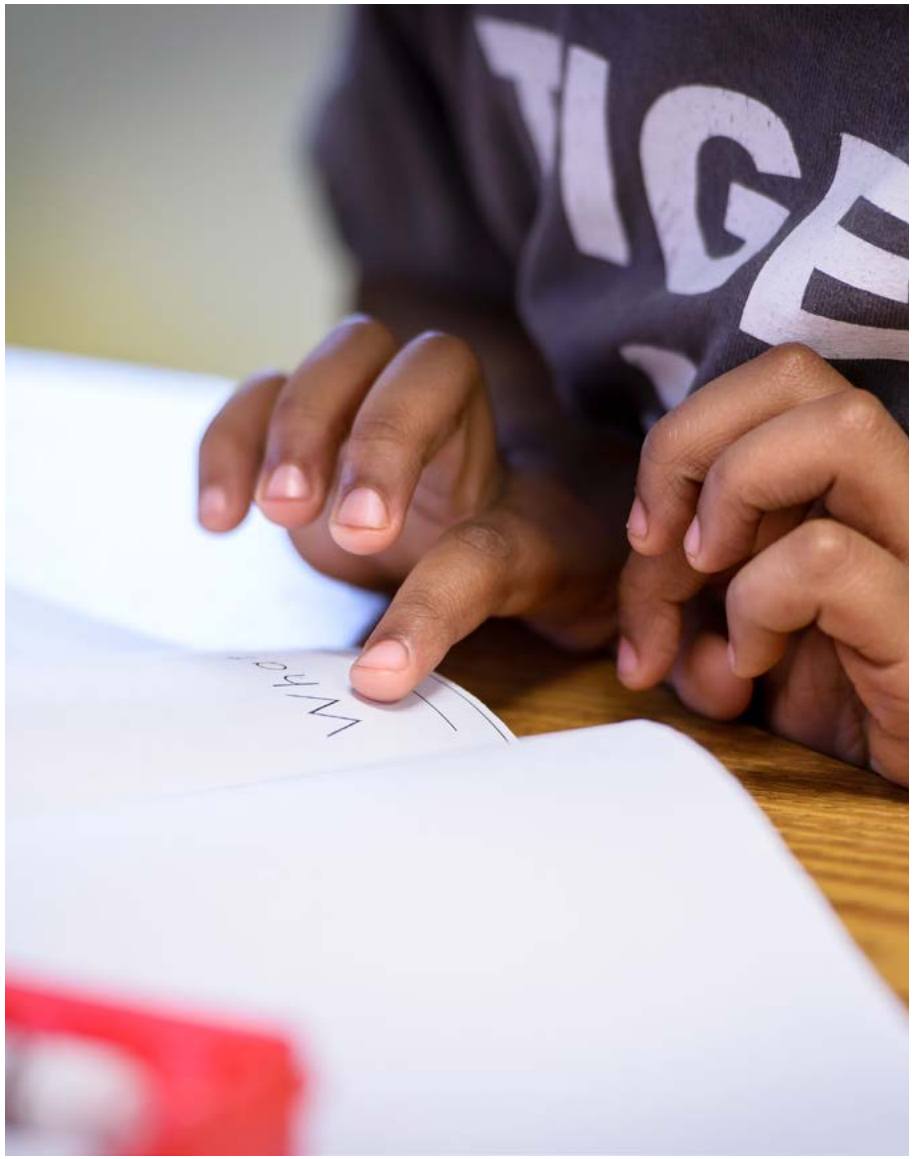
↘ Clarify roles and decision-making processes

As discrepancies were identified between the supports offered and the desired outcomes, there was not a clear process through which organizations could take corrective actions. To ensure the capacity to lead this complex initiative, the McKnight Foundation created a distributed leadership model, but the collaborative model led to stakeholder confusion in roles and responsibilities.

With multiple entities providing leadership, an adviser explained that it was unclear who was supposed to act or make decisions based on the ELNAC's advice:

> **"We were trying to be as strong advisers as possible but nobody was pulling the trigger to create change, and change was needed."**

Another adviser expressed how she thought McKnight could have more directly engaged with the district and school leadership teams to direct action based on ELNAC advice or evaluation findings: "There is a much stronger role that McKnight could play, although they do not see themselves in that way." Ultimately, some confusion may have been avoided if there had been clearer guidance from the Foundation about what types of decisions should have been made by districts and schools, by the Foundation and its Board, by the ELNAC, by UEI, and by SRI, and who was responsible for ensuring those decisions are carried out.



↘ Know your students

UEI helped the Foundation identify schools that met certain criteria (e.g., served a high-need population including DLLs and had or would adopt a PreK program). However, the initiative encountered challenges in serving DLL students, PreK students, and an overall highly-mobile student population. During the planning phase, the initiative leaders did not fully consider the implications of the large DLL student population for the amount and types of supports that would be needed to increase third-grade reading proficiency. As a result, there was a missed opportunity to assess the match between the supports available to the schools and their need for guidance, tools, and professional development to effectively support DLL students.

Although the initiative significantly improved the connections between PreK and K–3, it did not fully integrate PreK into the work or consider the implications of improved early childhood practices across PreK–3. A national adviser remarked that based on the small numbers of PreK students compared to kindergarten students in most of the Pathway schools and the minimal focus on the quality of the PreK programs, "[The initiative leaders are] just trying to change the relationship between K–3 teachers without deeply having them [the schools] embrace the value of that PreK education." The initiative supports reflected the lack of attention to PreK. The intermediary acknowledged that "early childhood isn't necessarily a primary expertise that UEI brings," and a national adviser speculated that the STEP tool is not as precise in PreK to help teachers monitor progress. If initiative leaders had recognized during the planning year the high percentage of DLL students in the participating schools and the specific needs of PreK children, they may have considered funding a second intermediary or specific professional development aimed at supporting those populations in particular.

Finally, the initiative did not take into account the high rates of student mobility experienced by the participating schools. Given the external factors that cause student mobility, initiative leaders may have needed to design or select an intervention model or approach that works even when there is high student mobility (e.g., a model that provides high dosage and focuses on a highly defined set of skills or use of a model across all district schools so mobility between schools is not as disruptive). Alternatively, initiative leaders could have considered partnering with schools with more stable student populations to test the theory of action.

↘ Take time to till the soil

Individuals at all levels of the initiative, from national advisers, to the intermediary, to staff at the districts and schools, felt that the planning process should have been longer and more rigorous. An adviser said, "It was clear the superintendents didn't know what they were getting into, didn't understand what they were trying to do, so there was a lot of ground work that needed to be laid. The implementation was premature."

The need for more effective planning was also felt by the intermediary, who reported that a better needs assessment and time with teachers to prepare them for STEP during the planning year might have helped them better anticipate the level of support needed during implementation. School leaders also wished they could have received a roadmap from UEI for what to expect with the launching of STEP.

Thus, while many of the schools and districts had a planning year and had discussions with the Foundation, ELNAC, and intermediary about strengths and needs, the schools and districts did not understand fully what the work would look like, what potential conflicts or challenges might exist, and what specific structures and supports they would need to accomplish initiative goals.

↘ Pay attention to the school's ecosystem

Initiative leaders knew they could not ignore that schools exist within a larger, complex system of state and district policies and priorities, but underestimated how challenging it was going to be to make headway with systemic issues. The intermediary was often in a position to see the tensions between schools' needs or desires and those of their districts. Reflecting on this tension, a UEI leader said:

> **"I think there is a takeaway here about operating an initiative that is school based without trying to account for the relationship of that school in the system in which it lives, the district. I think our principals live on the bleeding edge of that, because they are caught between both."**

The initiative leaders may have benefitted from agreements with districts about certain policies—for example, around hiring of qualified teachers, funding and space for full-day PreK, enrollment requirements and processes for kindergarten, the ability to abstain from certain district initiatives or assessments, and the use of professional development time—before the initiative work began. Alternatively, initiative leaders may have needed to think more about what the initiative could realistically accomplish in the face of systemic challenges.

Phase in changes and coordinate supports

School leaders and teachers found it highly difficult to attend to all of the components of the initiative at once, especially given the amount of time they were spending on the integration of STEP and on using their 5Essentials data to improve school organization. Given the numerous fronts on which teachers and principals were working, it may have been useful to develop a road map that laid out all of the pieces that would eventually be addressed in a manageable, sequential order.

Similarly, the schools and districts received supports from different entities at UEI. In the second year of the initiative, UEI began aligning its supports to streamline the various initiative activities for leaders and teachers and coordinated the numerous UEI staff working with the districts and schools to ensure consistent messaging. The coordination of the UEI supports helped the districts and schools to better manage the multiple demands the initiative placed on time and staff.

Keep curriculum and instruction central

To improve instructional quality, the initiative may have needed to focus more explicitly on instructional strategies and teacher–child interaction. While the initiative did provide some professional development on general instructional strategies and expand teachers' toolbox of instructional strategies in literacy, its primary focus was on collecting and using formative assessment data. Formative assessment had significant impacts on teachers' understanding of literacy development and awareness of gaps in student skills, but teachers who had participated in the initiative for multiple years were eager for a greater focus on improving literacy instruction and identifying curricular resources to help teachers develop appropriate lessons and materials.

An initiative leader recognized that an early hypothesis of the initiative may have been that improving the assessment piece first would drive change in other practices, like instruction. She said, "The assessment piece probably activated the Trojan Horse in terms of revealing glaring needs, but doesn't necessarily provide the guidance and the direction that I think our teachers and our coaches and even our principals need at this point." A national adviser echoed the importance of linking assessment to curriculum and instruction:

> **"What will teachers do once they have this assessment data? What are the instructional strategies that will improve student learning? I mean, that seems to be a missing link."**

Lessons for District and School Leaders

Focus on priorities

All of the Pathway districts and schools were asked by the Foundation to consider the fit of the initiative for their local priorities before signing on to the initiative. Although the goal of improving third-grade reading proficiency rates was shared deeply by all districts and schools, the strategies by which to improve student outcomes were not always aligned to districts' strategic plans. One district official said:

> **"We need to lead with students' purpose in mind. An investment has to align with what we think our students need, and not just the opportunity to receive resources."**

For example, the rollout of instructional frameworks (e.g., Focused Instruction in MPS and Mondo in SPPS) was not aligned with the strategy of using STEP. The lack of an early literacy curriculum in MPS and BCCS did not align with the notion that STEP would help teachers use curricula more effectively. Thus, districts may have missed an opportunity to more closely reflect on how the initiative supports would fit into their existing supports and areas of needs. Had increased reflection occurred in the beginning and at various checkpoints, conflicts and gaps may have been identified and addressed earlier.

In addition, a continuous improvement strategy like STEP required schoolwide buy-in to be successful. Reflecting back, Foundation staff, the intermediary, and even districts all had questions about how well they had assessed the readiness of districts and schools for change before implementation began, including the readiness of administrators, teachers, and unions.

Prioritize collaborative planning time *and how it is used*

Teachers noted they did not have the time they needed to analyze data with their peers and use data to plan differentiated lessons for guided reading groups, students' independent work, and whole group instruction.

Even when teachers had collaborative planning time, school administrators and coaches reported that teachers may not have had the facilitation skills and protocols needed to effectively review data, develop lessons, and monitor progress. Thus, when introducing a formative assessment, district and school leaders need to build in the time, structures, and supports teachers will need to use the data to inform instruction. Leaders also need to work with teacher unions to negotiate time for teachers to regularly collaborate on shared professional development and instructional planning.

Minimize teacher turnover

Although teacher turnover in a large, urban district is not uncommon, it can detract from reform efforts underway. Some of the Pathway schools experienced a high degree of staff turnover from year to year, which presented a number of challenges. New teachers required extensive professional development resources, as they had to be trained on school procedures, curriculum, and the STEP assessment tool. Principals experienced difficulty building a strong culture of data-driven instruction and collaboration when they lost staff each year. Schools will have trouble benefitting from any external professional development if they cannot improve the stability of teacher workforce.

Ensure coaching happens

Coaching can support teachers' implementation of new instructional practices when it is provided on a consistent basis, the coaches and teachers have a positive and trusting relationship, and expectations for teachers' work with coaches are clear. However, in the Pathway schools, coaches were not able to work with all of the teachers who needed or wanted their support. Yet, according to the intermediary and the coaches, for many teachers it was their first time engaging in data-informed and differentiated instruction, and helping them required much more support and time than was expected.

When coaching is a key strategy to help teachers adopt new instructional practices in their classrooms, district and school leaders must ensure that coaches have the capacity and dedicated time to consistently support teachers and to differentiate according to individual teacher needs. They also should clarify the parameters of the coaches' role to support them in building trust with teachers.

Plan for sustainability

Pathway district and school staff questioned the feasibility of sustaining staff and activities supported by the Pathway Schools Initiative once the grant funding ends. Administrators and teachers stressed the importance of the positions funded by the grant, such as literacy coaches and teaching assistants, who were integral to the success of program implementation. Relatedly, district staff wondered if they could sustain the current level of PreK programs, professional development, and frequency of staff meetings without Pathway Schools Initiative grant funding. Further, district administrators noted that districts should consider how to sustain investments from the beginning: "If there is going to be an investment on the part of the school, we need to recognize that we will still need that after the grant. We need to ask, 'Do you think that this training adds enough value that you are willing to set aside dollars for that? What will be the challenges and opportunities for sustainability?' We sometimes haven't prepared ourselves for independence and sustainability."

***

A final lesson that applies to all stakeholders—funders, other initiative leaders, and district and school leaders—is to **continue learning and improving.** Initiative stakeholders agreed that the Pathway Schools Initiative has moved their knowledge and thinking forward. Principals and teachers have expanded their understanding of data-informed instruction and the literacy development continuum. Schools leaders and teachers appreciated the learning they have gained from UEI and working together with other districts and schools in an intensive way on such an important and complex problem. The Foundation, ELNAC, intermediary, and school leaders have also embraced the evaluation and used the evaluation briefs and presentations to refine their work and try to better support the schools, teachers, and students.

The lessons learned from the first phase of the initiative have informed current efforts. For example, as a result of the lessons learned, the initiative has engaged in more professional development focused on supporting DLL students, districts have been filling curricular gaps, and schools are focusing on improving the quality of instruction. Further, the initiative has adopted a developmental evaluation in which the evaluation team is working collaboratively with district and school leaders, the intermediary, and Foundation staff to study high-priority questions of practical interest that support continuous improvement.

References

References

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early warning! Why reading by the end of third grade matters. A KIDS COUNT special report from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.* Baltimore, MD: Author.

Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R., & Mashburn, A. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25,* 166–176.

Bryk, A., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Camilli, G., Vargas, S., Ryan, S., & Barnett, W.S. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development. *Teachers College Record, 112*(3), 579–620.

Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) manual, Pre-k.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Pressley, M., Allington, R., Morrow, L., Baker, K., Nelson, E., Wharton-McDonald, R., Block, C. C., Tracey, D., Brooks, G., Cronin, J., & Woo, D. (1998). *The nature of effective first-grade literacy instruction.* Albany, NY: The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, The University of Albany.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Race to the Top district competition draft—definitions.* Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition/definitions

SRI Education™

A DIVISION OF SRI INTERNATIONAL

SRI International, founded as Stanford Research Institute in 1946, is a leading independent research institute. SRI conducts sponsored R&D for its government, business, and foundation clients in information and engineering technologies, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, chemistry and materials, education, health sciences, and economics. **SRI Education,** a division of SRI, is tackling the most complex issues in education to help students succeed. We work with federal and state agencies, school districts, major foundations, nonprofit organizations, and international and commercial clients to assess learning gains, use technology for educational innovation, and address risk factors that impede learning.

The McKnight Foundation provided funding for this evaluation.

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

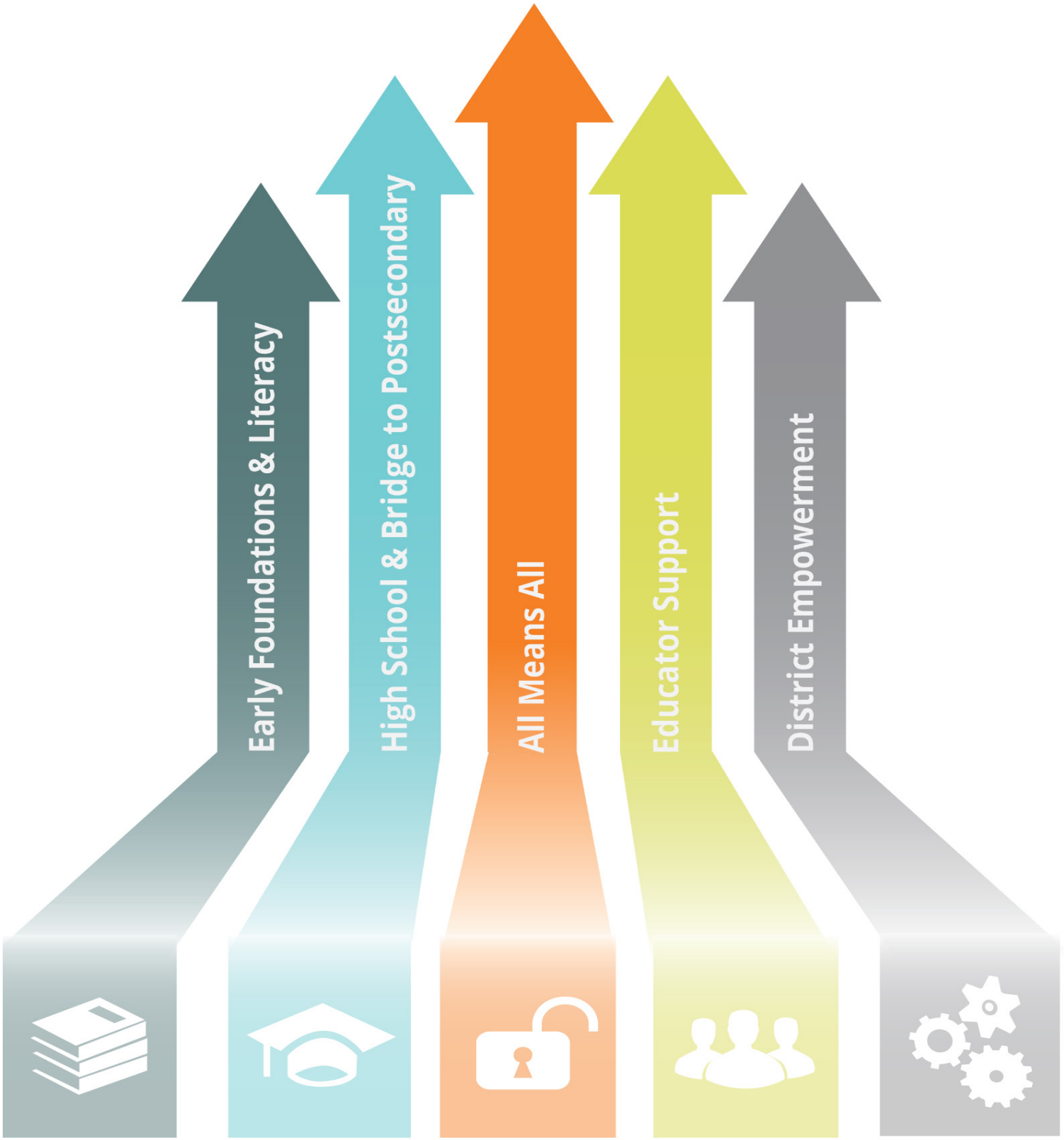
TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?
HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

TN Department of Education

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

1. Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on NAEP by 2019.
2. The average ACT composite score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.
3. The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree.



STANDARDS | ASSESSMENT | ACCOUNTABILITY

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Education in Tennessee is on the rise. With the close of the Race to the Top era, we celebrate a period of groundbreaking change. During this period, Tennessee saw striking successes in student achievement that also called attention to the continued need to ensure students' long-term success. We now launch a new chapter where we will build on the strong foundation in each of our schools and districts to realize our goals for Tennessee students. If we are successful:

Districts and schools in Tennessee will exemplify excellence and equity such that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully embark upon their chosen path in life.

This is our unifying vision: success for all students upon graduation from high school. This is how Tennessee Succeeds.

To this end, we have set three ambitious goals to guide our work through the next five years:

1

Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 2019.

In 2013, our state posted the largest improvements ever recorded on the NAEP test, also known as the Nation's Report Card. These gains brought the state's ranking from the mid-40s (rankings vary by subject) into the mid-30s. We hope to see the state's ranking continue to increase so that our students' achievement places Tennessee in the top half of states by 2019.

2

The average ACT composite score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.

The ACT serves as a gateway to college and career in Tennessee, determining students' eligibility for the HOPE scholarship, requirements for postsecondary remedial or developmental coursework, and sometimes entry-level salary. Between 2011 and 2015, we have seen the average Tennessee ACT score for public students increase from 19.0 to 19.4. By 2020, we will raise this number to 21, signaling that the average student in Tennessee is prepared for postsecondary coursework.

3

The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree.

Governor Haslam's Tennessee Promise initiative, which makes community and technical college free to all Tennessee high school graduates, signals the commitment across the state to prepare students for a future where most Tennessee jobs require postsecondary success. Yet, we are far from this goal. While almost 60 percent of high school graduates enroll in postsecondary, only 24 percent complete. For the graduating class of 2020, we aim to shift the balance so that the majority of students earn a certificate, diploma, or degree within six years of graduation.

GOAL 1

Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 2019.

In 2013, our state posted the largest improvements ever recorded on the NAEP test, also known as the Nation's Report Card. These gains brought the state's ranking from the mid-40s (rankings vary by subject) into the mid-30s. We hope to see the state's ranking continue to increase so that our students' achievement places Tennessee in the top half of states by 2019.

Reading

Grade 4

Past Performance & Path to Ranking in the Top Half of States by 2019

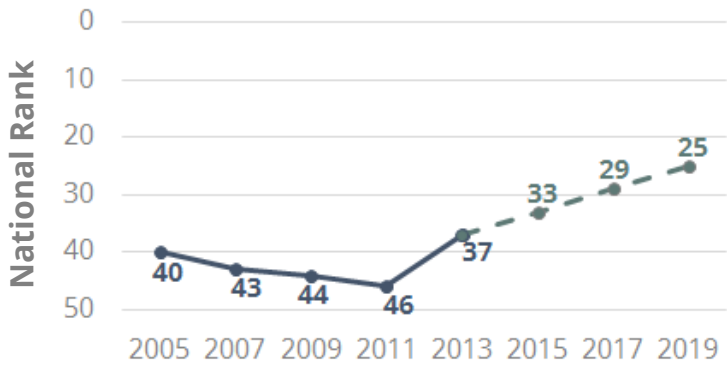
Grade 8

Past Performance & Path to Ranking in the Top Half of States by 2019

Mathematics

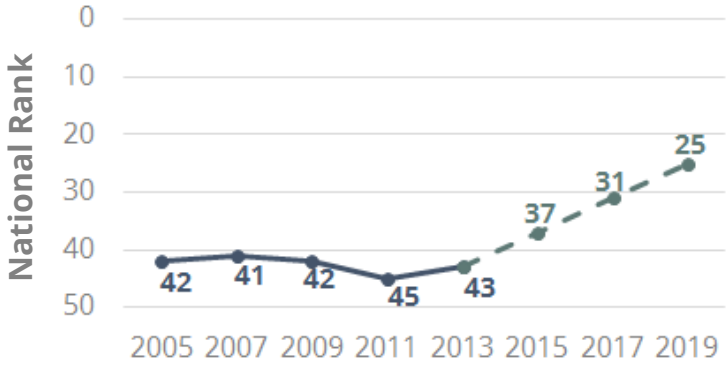
Grade 4

Past Performance & Path to Ranking in the Top Half of States by 2019



Grade 8

Past Performance & Path to Ranking in the Top Half of States by 2019



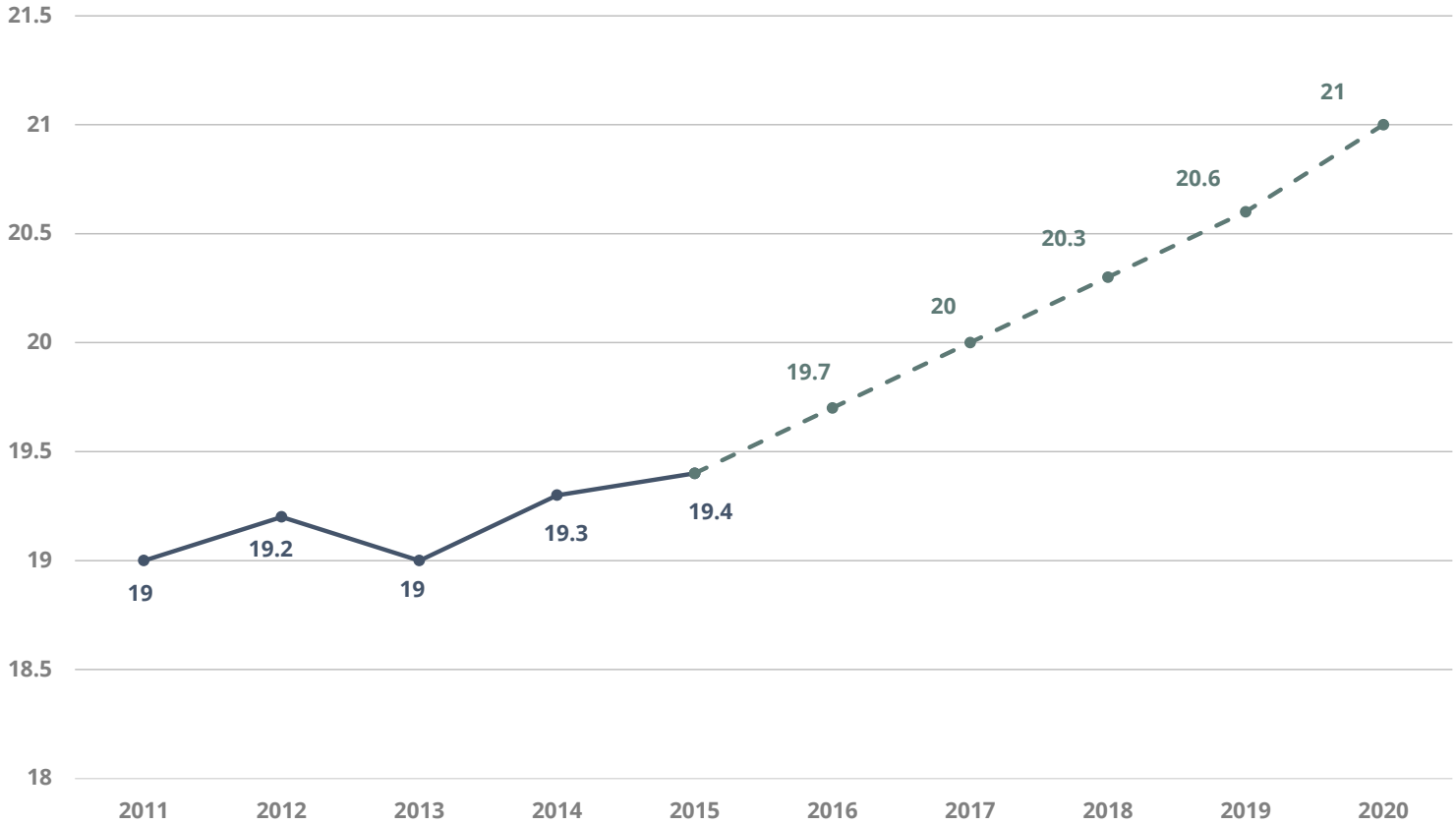
GOAL 2

The average ACT composite score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.

The ACT serves as a gateway to college and career in Tennessee, determining students' eligibility for the HOPE scholarship, requirements for postsecondary remedial or developmental coursework, and sometimes entry-level salary. Between 2011 and 2015, we have seen the average Tennessee ACT score for public students increase from 19.0 to 19.4. By 2020, we will raise this number to 21, signaling that the average student in Tennessee is prepared for postsecondary coursework.

ACT Composite Scores Over Time

Past Performance & Path to Achieving a Statewide Average of 21 on the ACT by 2020

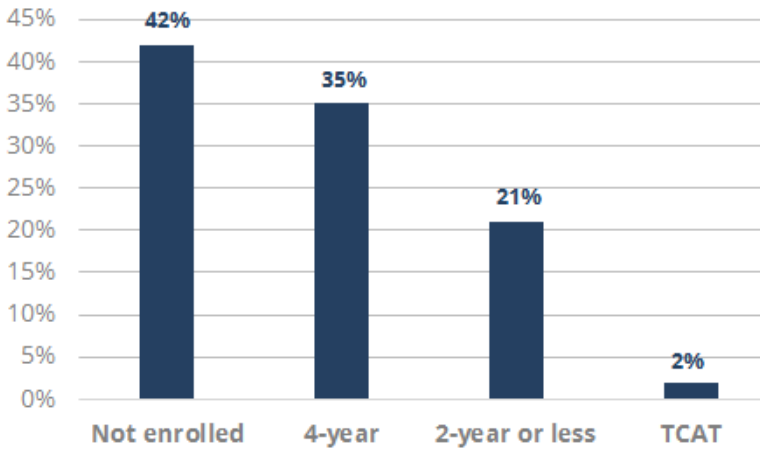


GOAL 3

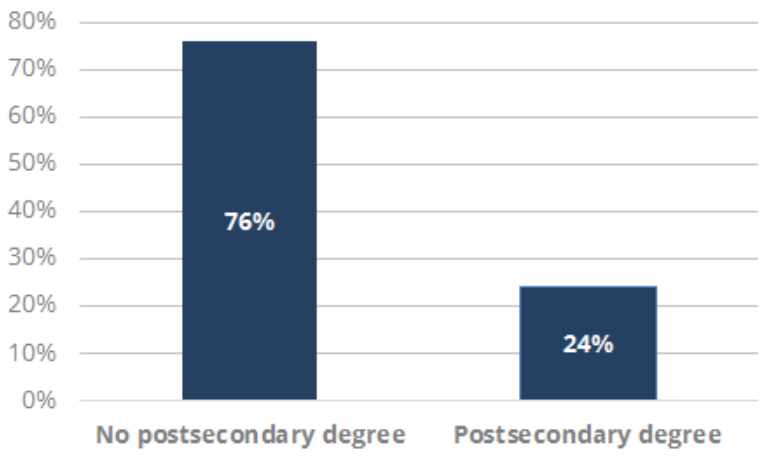
The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree.

Governor Haslam's Tennessee Promise initiative, which makes community and technical college free to all Tennessee high school graduates, signals the commitment across the state to prepare students for a future where most Tennessee jobs require postsecondary success. Yet, we are far from this goal. While almost 60 percent of high school graduates enroll in postsecondary, only 24 percent complete. For the graduating class of 2020, we aim to shift the balance so that the majority of students earn a certificate, diploma, or degree within six years of graduation.

Postsecondary Enrollment
Next Steps After High School Graduation
Based on the Graduates from Class of 2014



Postsecondary Attainment
Six Years After High School Graduation
Based on the Graduates from Class of 2008



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

We will accomplish these goals by maintaining the department's current emphasis on rigorous standards, aligned assessment, and strong accountability, and by focusing on five priority areas: **early foundations and literacy**, **high school and bridge to postsecondary**, **all means all**, **educator support**, and **district empowerment**. As part of this work, the department will continue to support the governor's goal of becoming the fastest improving state in the nation in raising teacher pay.

STANDARDS

We will maintain high standards in Tennessee to ensure students are ready for postsecondary and the workforce.

- Review current math and English language arts standards
- Review new science standards and current social studies standards
- Continue reviews of all standards on a six-year cycle

ASSESSMENT

We will align statewide assessments to Tennessee's standards with a keen focus on improving assessments to give better information about critical thinking, problem solving, and authentic skills necessary for postsecondary and the workforce.

- Administer a new and improved TCAP in math and English language arts, TNReady, in 2016
- Continue to improve online testing and TNReady during transition years
- Enhance TNReady student reports and the feedback to educators, parents, and students

ACCOUNTABILITY

We will maintain strong accountability and continue to improve processes and feedback associated with accountability systems.

- Continue to improve the teacher evaluation process
- Assist and support districts in evaluation training, implementation, and flexibility
- Pilot first grade and career and technical education portfolio models in 2016, and continue to develop additional portfolio options for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects
- Develop additional valid and reliable student growth measures for those areas that do not currently have them

PRIORITY AREAS

Early Foundations & Literacy
Building skills in early grades to contribute to future success

High School & Bridge to Postsecondary
Preparing significantly more students for postsecondary completion

All Means All
Providing individualized support and opportunities for all students with a focus on those who are furthest behind

Educator Support
Supporting the preparation and development of an exceptional educator workforce

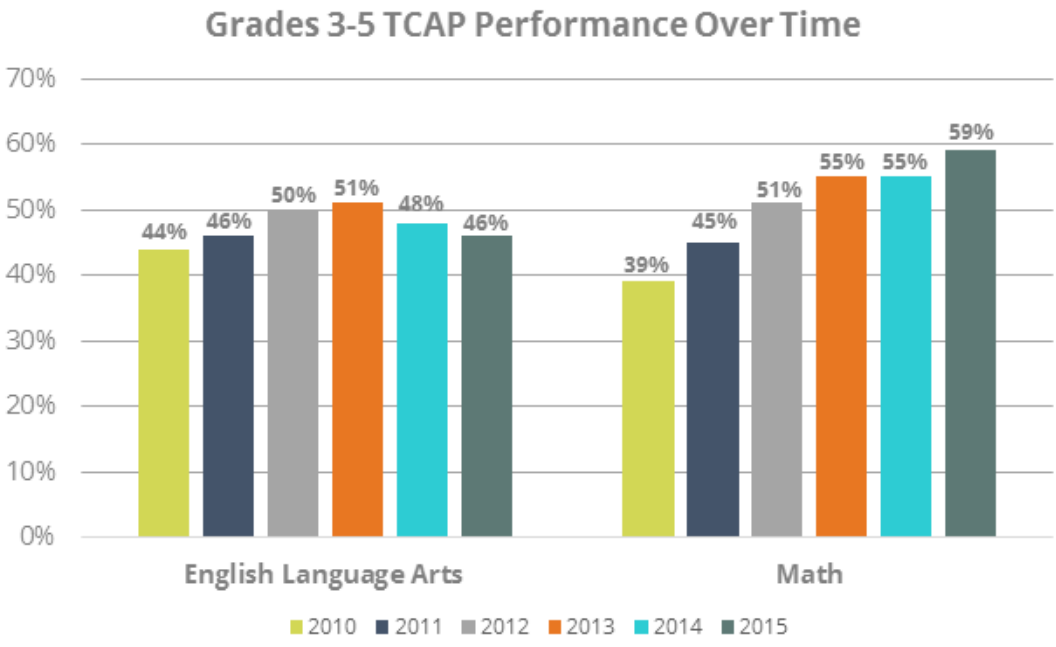
District Empowerment
Providing districts with the tools and autonomy they need to make the best decisions for students

PRIORITY AREA: EARLY FOUNDATIONS & LITERACY

WHY THIS MATTERS.

Patterns of student performance in elementary school demonstrate clear areas for improvement and underscore the need to prioritize early intervention to ensure all 600,000 students enrolled in grades K-5 are on a path to success.

Over the past several years, we have seen steady gains in math performance in grades 3-5; however, English language arts performance has remained stagnant or declined.



KEY FACTS:

Of the almost 6,000 Tennessee students rated *below basic* in third grade English language arts, **less than three percent** reach *proficiency* by fifth grade.

National data show that children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are **four times less likely** than their peers to graduate from high school by age 19.

For many students, early intervention is a key element of later success.
Research has demonstrated that reading and vocabulary skills in kindergarten are predictive of reading outcomes in the primary grades and reading comprehension in middle and high school.

Statewide assessments to measure student learning do not begin until third grade.
While we know students enter kindergarten with a wide range of skills and knowledge, we do not have a statewide gauge of student needs in the early grades.

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

Building skills in early grades to contribute to future success

Strategy A. **Increase department support and monitoring of programs that serve children from birth to age four to ensure a solid foundation for learning.**
This strategy focuses department attention on the vast gaps in student readiness that exist before students enter kindergarten. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Creation of a Tennessee-specific definition of kindergarten readiness with associated metrics
- Greater monitoring, training, and support for family-centered early intervention providers
- An enhanced measurement process to increase pre-K programs understanding and accountability for student readiness
- High-impact professional development for early grade educators and school leaders

Strategy B. **Measure and ensure a shared definition and usable data for kindergarten readiness and third-grade proficiency.**
This strategy aims to create statewide consensus around the knowledge and skills that provide the foundation for learning in later grades. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- A Tennessee-specific kindergarten readiness screener used statewide by 2017-18 with explicit readiness benchmarks and metrics in literacy, language, and math
- An Early Literacy Council that defines third-grade reading proficiency and offers examples of best practices from Tennessee districts and schools

Strategy C. **Provide high-quality assessments and usable data in early grades.**
This strategy acknowledges the lack of actionable data to monitor progress in the early grades. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- New trainings and guidance related to Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) universal screeners
- An optional Tennessee-specific second grade assessment available to districts by 2016-17

Strategy D. **Strengthen reading instruction through quality training options and the expansion of a statewide literacy coach initiative.**
This strategy will provide high-quality support for early grades teachers around teaching foundational skills to every student and for intermediate and middle grades teachers to build literacy skills across content areas. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Continued improvements to the reading courses taught in each CORE region
- Reading instruction training modules for district redelivery offered by summer 2016
- Support and training for a statewide literacy coach initiative starting in fall 2016

Strategy E. **Deepen literacy instruction requirements within licensure and educator preparation.**
This strategy will ensure that the state's need for high-quality literacy instruction is met by our educator preparation programs. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- New reading standards for all educator preparation programs
- Clarified expectations around literacy content to be included in preparation program curriculum

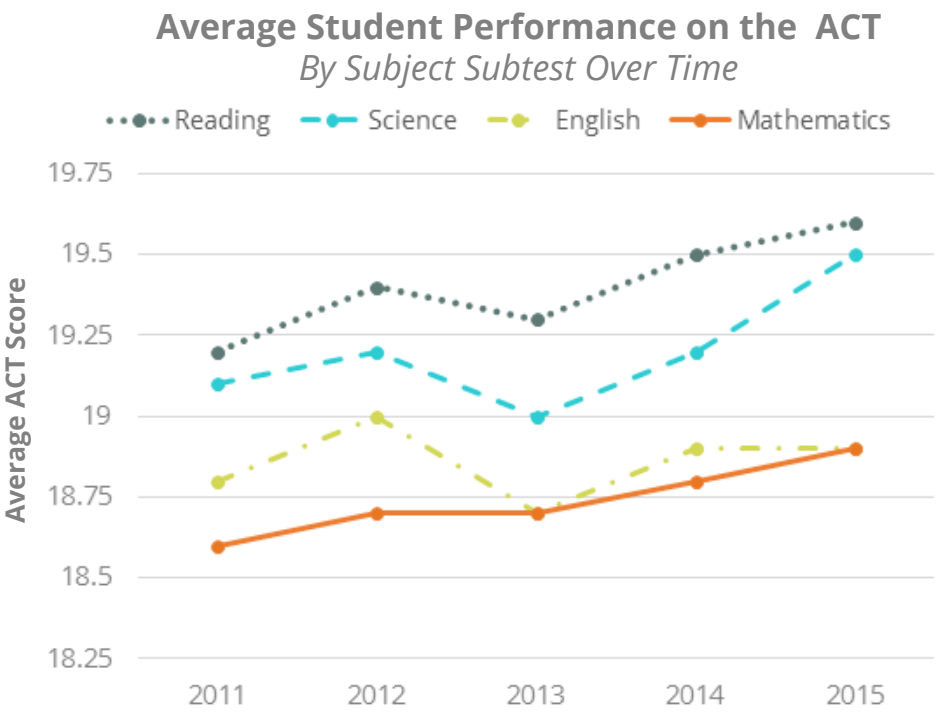
Early Foundations & Literacy

PRIORITY AREA: HIGH SCHOOL & BRIDGE TO POSTSECONDARY

WHY THIS MATTERS.

Recent data demonstrate the challenges that students face when they leave high school. If we allow current trends to continue, only 24 percent of high school graduates will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree within six years of their high school graduation.

Tennessee students are performing far below our goal of a 21 composite score on the ACT.



A student's ACT score is a key determinant for placement in remedial or developmental coursework.
For most postsecondary institutions in Tennessee, students must score a 19 or higher on the math and reading portions of the ACT and an 18 or higher on the English portion of the ACT – scored on a scale from 1 to 36. Currently, 60 percent of seniors do not reach this bar in math, and 48 and 46 percent of seniors do not reach this bar in reading and English, respectively.

KEY FACTS:

Among students from the graduating class of 2012...

Students who only earned a high school diploma averaged an annual salary of just over $9,000, placing them well below the poverty line.

Over 25 percent of students who enrolled in a postsecondary program dropped out before the second year.

Among students from the graduating class of 2015...

Of the 12 percent of students who took Advanced Placement tests for early postsecondary credit, only half earned a passing score.

Less than half of students who completed a Tennessee Promise application for free attendance at any Tennessee community or technical college fulfilled all requirements to qualify for the scholarship.

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

Preparing significantly more students for postsecondary completion

Strategy A. **Expand the number of high school students earning early postsecondary credits and industry certifications and broaden the reach of these programs to include students who lacked these opportunities in the past.**
This strategy will ensure all students have access to high-quality opportunities in high school that bridge the gap between K-12 and postsecondary. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Public reporting at the district and school level about students' early postsecondary credits and industry certifications
- More opportunities for schools to take part in statewide dual credit courses
- Increased access to fee waivers for early postsecondary exams
- More academic partnerships between high schools and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs)

Strategy B. **Measure and ensure a common definition of postsecondary and workforce readiness.**
This strategy aims to create statewide consensus around the knowledge, skills, and actions necessary to demonstrate readiness for success following high school graduation.
As part of this strategy, you will see:

- A cross-agency taskforce that will define postsecondary and workforce readiness for Tennessee students
- Vertical and horizontal alignment across all Tennessee standards and assessments

---

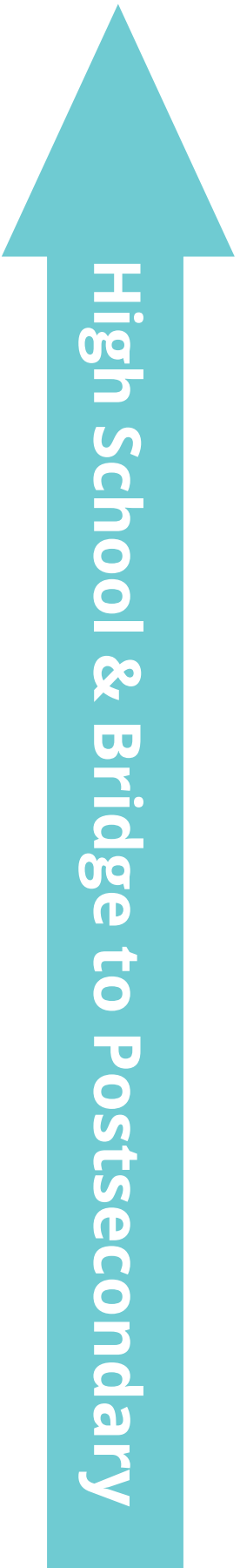
Strategy C. **Expand access to and use of personalized information for students, parents, and counselors about progress along the postsecondary trajectory.**
This strategy will provide multiple stakeholders with necessary data about whether individual students are successfully moving along the path to postsecondary and information about the academic and career opportunities that are available. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- A robust, interactive CollegeforTN.org portal and support pathway that allows students, parents, and counselors to determine how students are progressing in comparison to key college-readiness benchmarks
- Postsecondary and career planning requirements for middle and high school students
- Greater support, training, and networking opportunities for school counselors

---

Strategy D. **Expand opportunities and supports for student ACT preparation and test-taking**.
This strategy ensures that districts and schools recognize the central role that the ACT can play in determining students' paths during and after high school. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- The ACT added as a measure within the state's district accountability framework
- Funding to give every student an opportunity to retake the ACT
- Guidance to districts and schools on best practices for ACT preparation

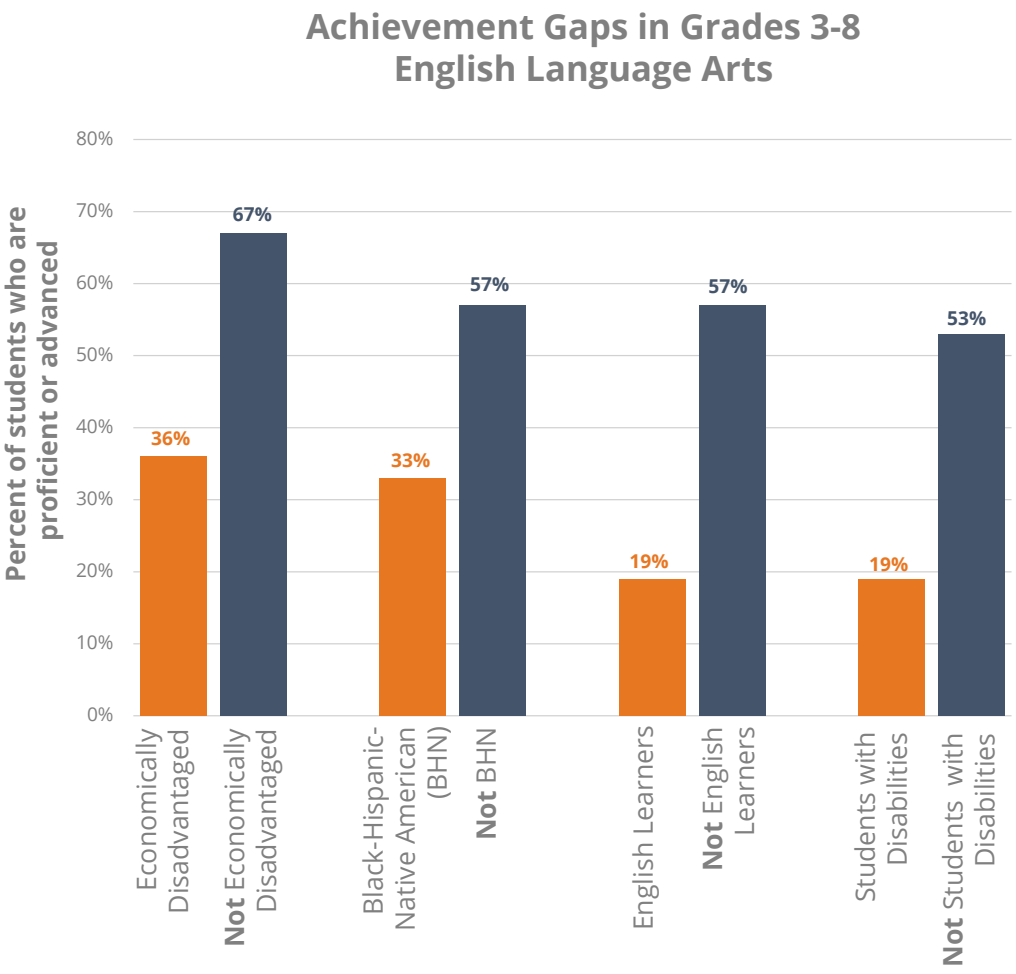


PRIORITY AREA: ALL MEANS ALL

WHY THIS MATTERS.

We see troubling clusters of underperformance across the state. The patterns point to an urgent need to address systemic inequities among groups of students that prevent all students from reaching their full potential.

While average student performance has risen in past years, we continue to see substantial achievement gaps between students in historically underserved subgroups and their comparison groups.



KEY FACTS:

In grades 3-8, **nearly 35,000 of the 450,000** total students tested *below basic* in both math and English language arts. **All but 2,000** of these students fall into one of our four historically underserved subgroups.

In ninth grade, where disciplinary rates are the highest, black students make up one-quarter of the student population but **over 80 percent** of expulsions.

In one-third of districts, students who score *below basic* in 3-8 math are more than **10 percentage points less likely** to be placed with a highly effective teacher than students who score at the advanced level.

We cannot improve overall outcomes without improving outcomes for our historically underserved subgroups.

Over two-thirds of the state's nearly 1 million students identify with one or more of the following subgroup classifications: economically disadvantaged, Black-Hispanic-Native American, English Learners, or students with disabilities.

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

Providing individualized support and opportunities for all students with a focus on those who are furthest behind

Strategy A. **Improve the quality of interventions and implementation of RTI^2 beginning at the elementary-school level.**
This strategy improves upon the guidance and support offered by the department around district RTI^2 programs. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- Best-practice sharing around RTI^2 in specific grade levels
- Training for RTI^2 B that includes climate, attendance, anti-bullying, and behavioral supports

Strategy B. **Increase access to high-quality core instruction and aligned, intensive intervention for students with disabilities and English Learners (ELs).**
This strategy extends the department's work to ensure students with disabilities and ELs receive appropriate access to rigorous programs of study. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- Training opportunities around instructionally appropriate IEPs, differentiation, appropriate accommodations, intense reading and math intervention, and behavioral interventions
- Teacher training to increase access to core instruction for ELs

Strategy C. **Expand access to and understanding of personalized learning to support the needs of all students.**
This strategy enhances department support for differentiated learning plans that support all students. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- Pilot personalized learning programs to support student remediation and acceleration
- Increased state support for blended learning options, starting with Algebra I coursework

Strategy D. **Increase access to highly effective teachers across student subgroups.**
This strategy calls attention to systemic gaps in different student groups' access to highly effective teachers. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- Data sharing and best practice networking aimed at closing districts' teaching equity gaps

Strategy E. **Increase teacher, school, and district access to resources that meet students' non-academic needs.**
This strategy ensures that stakeholders have access to resources they need to support students' non-academic needs. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- A state-facilitated student advisory group to advise the department on student needs
- Further development of educator data dashboards and early warning data systems

Strategy F. **Target improvement in all Priority and Focus Schools through a mix of interventions, including the Achievement School District and district iZones.**
This strategy continues efforts to support high-need schools. As part of this strategy, you will see:
- Continued expansion of the Achievement School District and support for district iZones
- Funding, intervention, and networking support for all Priority and Focus Schools

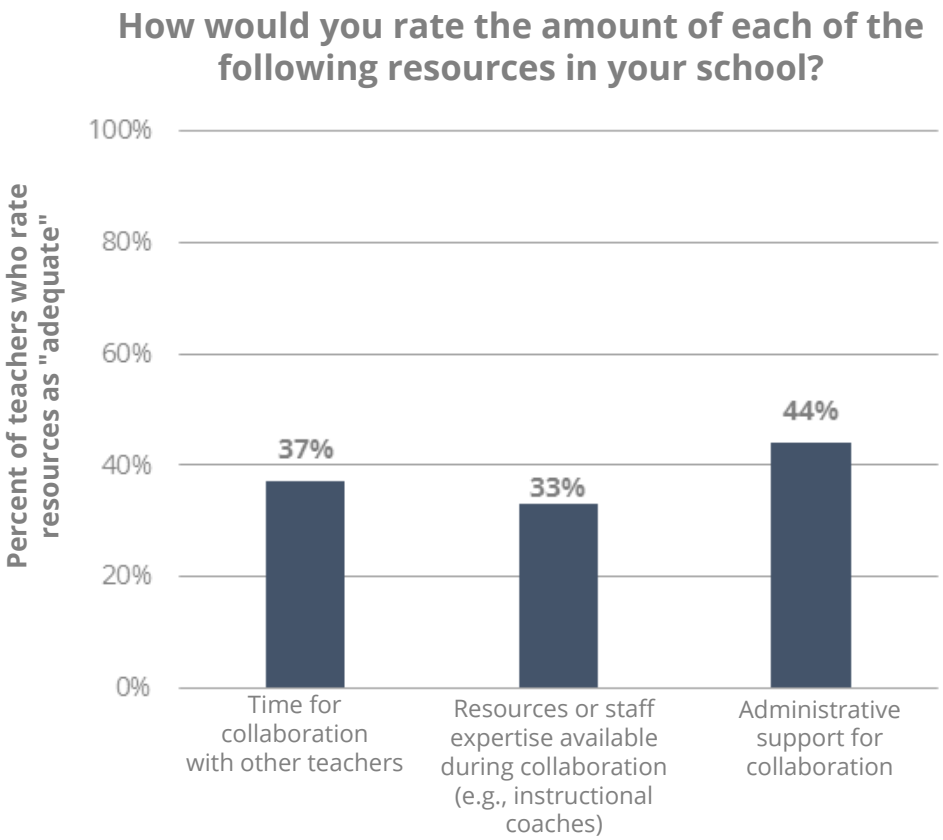
All Means All

PRIORITY AREA: EDUCATOR SUPPORT

WHY THIS MATTERS.

Ensuring student success means ensuring that the more than 65,000 teachers and almost 5,000 administrators across the state receive the support they need to continuously improve their practice.

Most teachers across the state report that they are provided with inadequate resources for collaboration and professional improvement.



Since 2010,15,000 educators have entered Tennessee public schools through 40 state-approved preparation programs. Improving teaching across the state will require improving teacher preparation.

The State Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs reports substantial variation across preparation programs, with several programs consistently graduating candidates who underperform when they reach the classroom.

KEY FACTS:

Nearly one-third of Tennessee teachers have **less than five years** of teaching experience, and 7 percent are in their first year on the job.

While 90 percent of teachers say they changed the way they plan and teach after meeting with other teachers, **fewer than 40 percent** say they are provided with adequate time to collaborate or adequate access to instructional resources and expertise.

The percentage of teachers who say the process of teacher evaluation improves their teaching has **risen steadily to 68 percent** of educators since the introduction of a new statewide evaluation system in 2012.

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

Supporting the preparation and development of an exceptional educator workforce

Strategy A. **Focus educator preparation providers on outcome measures via program accreditation and the educator preparation program report card.**
This strategy will raise the number of classroom-ready teaching candidates graduating from Tennessee educator preparation programs. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- An improved public report card evaluating the performance of educator preparation programs
- A more rigorous process of program accreditation based on rigorous, outcome-based reviews
- Emphasis on teacher recruitment and selection and on providers' partnerships with school districts

Strategy B. **Improve the accuracy of educator evaluation and the quality of the feedback educators receive.**
This strategy will continue the process of continuous improvement around the state's teacher evaluation system. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Additional TEAM coach support
- New portfolio evaluation options and enhanced training around pre-K/kindergarten portfolios
- Promotion of student surveys as a component of teacher evaluation

Strategy C. **Support district development of more effective, personalized professional learning components through tools that allow for better tracking and evaluation of results.**
This strategy promotes best practices around embedded teacher professional learning opportunities. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- A rubric designed to support districts and schools in evaluating professional learning options
- Differentiated mentoring and learning opportunities for beginning teachers
- Opportunities to use state-developed, research-based models for rigorous and differentiated professional learning

Strategy D. **Support districts in creating greater differentiation of teacher roles, responsibilities, and salaries.**
This strategy continues to develop a cadre of teacher-leaders across the state. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Technical assistance to districts to support the creation of teacher-leader models
- Support for differentiated pay plans aligned to instructional priorities

Strategy E. **Create statewide and regional leadership pipelines that produce transformational school leaders.**
This strategy aims to increase the supply of high-quality school leaders across the state. As part of this strategy, you will see:

- Development of a transformational leadership advisory council
- Support and development of regional transformational school leadership hubs
- Development of a Governor's Academy for School Leadership to train aspiring school principals

Educator Support

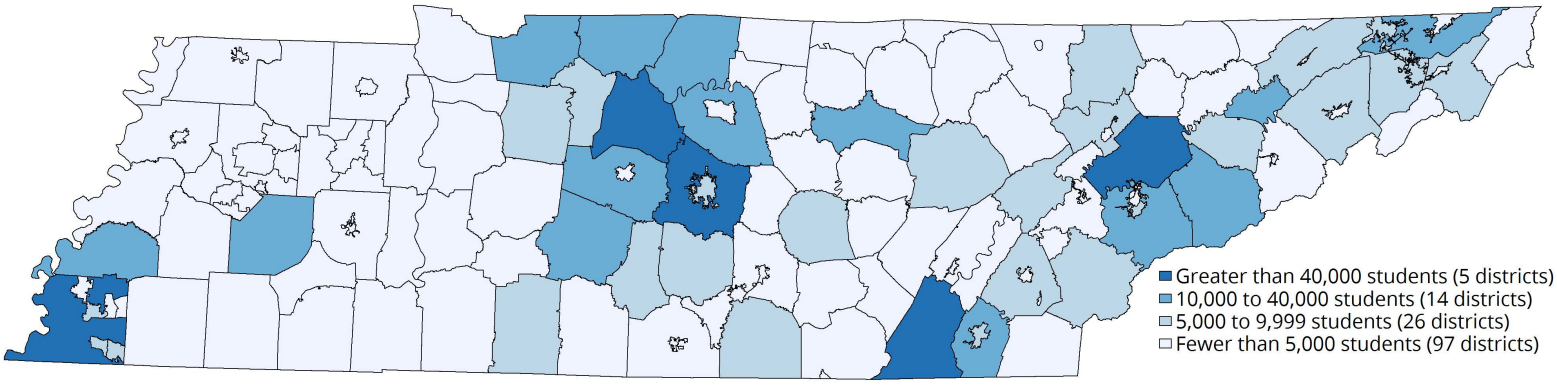
PRIORITY AREA: DISTRICT EMPOWERMENT

WHY THIS MATTERS.

Serving the state means serving a diverse group of 142 districts. We cannot achieve our collective goals without building flexibility and district ownership into all that we do. There is no one-size-fits-all model.

The vast majority of Tennessee districts serve fewer than 5,000 students; however, we see considerable variation in the size of district enrollments and geographical area across all Tennessee regions.

Tennessee School Districts
By Student Enrollment Numbers



The department actively measures ongoing progress to ensure a department orientation toward empowerment rather than compliance.

Currently, 25 districts are using an alternative, district-selected model for teacher evaluation, and 114 districts are making use of state-provided evaluation support tools.

Over a hundred districts have integrated with the state data system to allow real-time educator dashboards and fully-automated state reporting.

KEY FACTS:

The department serves the **eight varied regions** of Tennessee through Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE offices) established in 2012.

Our biggest district is Shelby County with almost 200 schools serving 115,000 students. Our smallest is Richard City with 300 students housed in one school.

Driving across the state takes **more than eight hours** – from the edge of the Mississippi Delta, through several major metropolitan areas, and into the Great Smoky Mountains.

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

Providing districts with the tools and autonomy they need to make the best decisions for students

Strategy A. **Increase district- and school-level data transparency and usability.**
This strategy increases the department's ability to deliver actionable data to stakeholders. As a part of this strategy, you will see:

- A collaborative process to build out a new, online state report card
- Communication toolkits to assist districts in sharing their own data
- Targeted data sharing in areas such as human capital and postsecondary progressions

Strategy B. **Provide districts with opportunities to strategically plan for effective and efficient use of resources.**
This strategy offers department support to help districts make the best use of federal and state funding options. As a part of this strategy, you will see:

- Increased opportunities for district-earned autonomy and flexibility
- Tools and guidance documents detailing acceptable uses of different funding streams
- Technical assistance on creating comprehensive multi-year plans using the coordinated spending guide
- Support for school-wide consolidation to provide optimal flexibility in using all resources

Strategy C. **Simplify access to and usability of state-provided technology platforms and tools that support and automate district work.**
This strategy increases both the instructional value and the operational simplicity of state-provided systems available to districts. As a part of this strategy, you will see:

- Real-time educator dashboards providing 360-degree views of student data
- Single sign-on access and increased automation for state applications and reporting systems
- Platforms for secure information sharing and collaboration statewide

Strategy D. **Promote innovation and idea-sharing via district "networked improvement communities."**
This strategy draws on developing research in improvement science to develop a statewide knowledge base around top priority problems of practice. As a part of this strategy, you will see:

- Opportunities to take part in district networks aimed at making change in high-need areas
- Pilot programs organized around innovative practices

Strategy E. **Explore innovative options for the delivery of holistic, industry-leading initiatives designed to help Tennessee educators deliver compelling adaptive instruction.**
This strategy acknowledges the increasing role that technology can play as an aid to high-quality instruction. As a part of this strategy, you will see:

- Development of a Learning Management Platform to support adaptive instruction pilots
- Experimentation with new forms of digital content development that includes initial authoring by subject-matter experts and "crowd-sourced" content evolution
- A large-scale blended learning pilot program in Algebra I

TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

To meet the needs of the future, we must move together toward a unifying vision of student progress. We will succeed if students are equipped with foundational knowledge and skills. We will succeed if students are set on a path toward postsecondary completion. We will succeed if the needs of all students are valued equally. We will succeed if educators receive adequate support. We will succeed if schools and districts are empowered to make the right decisions for students. This is our story in Tennessee and this will continue to be how Tennessee Succeeds.

College and Career Readiness for All

College Ready

(1 Point)

A student must meet benchmarks on one of the following:

ACT

or

COMPASS

or

KYOTE

Career Ready

(1 Point)

A student must meet benchmarks on one from each of the following columns:

Career Ready Academic	Career Ready Technical
ASVAB or WorkKeys	KOSSA or Industry Certificate

College & Career Ready

(1.5 Points)

A student must meet benchmarks on one from each of the following columns:

College Ready Academic	Career Ready Technical
ACT or COMPASS or KYOTE	KOSSA or Industry Certificate

2016 READY Accountability Background Brief

This briefing paper provides basic background information to help you understand the 2015-16 school accountability data, including how the test data are used.

The 2015-16 school year was the fourth year under the state's READY accountability model.

The READY initiative has three components:

- *A Standard Course of Study* focused on the most critical knowledge and skills that students need to be successful at the next grade level and after high school.
- End-of-grade and end-of-course assessments with rigorous open-ended questions and real-world applications that require students to express their ideas clearly with supporting facts.
- An accountability model that measures how well schools are doing to ensure that students are career and college ready upon high school graduation.

Data being released to State Board of Education members at their Sept. 1 meeting will provide insight into student academic progress and school performance in 2015-16. This includes student performance on end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments based on five achievement levels, overall student proficiency on end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments, academic growth, School Performance Grades, and graduation rates.

With respect to School Performance Grades, schools will be graded using a 15-point grading scale, and grades will be based on the school's achievement score (80 percent) and students' academic growth (20 percent).

Information contained in this background brief will provide more details into the state's READY accountability model.

Achievement Levels

To better report students' career and college readiness, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction uses a five-level achievement scale:

Achievement Level 1: Limited Command

Achievement Level 2: Partial Command

Achievement Level 3: Sufficient Command (Grade-Level Proficiency)

Achievement Level 4: Solid Command (Career and College Readiness)

Achievement Level 5: Superior Command (Career and College Readiness)

Achievement Level 3 identifies students who have a sufficient command of grade-level knowledge and skills in the tested content areas (English language arts, math and science) to move on to the next grade but who may need additional support to be on track for career and college readiness. Achievement Levels 4 and 5 indicate students are on track to be career and college ready by the time they graduate from high school.

TIMELINE

June 30, 2016
Local school systems submit accountability data to the NCDPI

July-August 2016
NCDPI engages in data checks for local districts

September 1, 2016
End-of-grade proficiency, end-of-course proficiency, high school indicators, academic growth, School Performance Grades, as well as graduation rate presented at State Board of Education meeting

Fall 2016
NC School Report Cards released

Here are the state assessments that students take:

GRADE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)	MATHEMATICS	SCIENCE	OTHER
3	Beginning-of-Grade/End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
4	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
5	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–
6	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
7	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
8	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–
9	–	Math I	–	–
10	English II	–	Biology	ACT Plan
11	–	–	–	ACT
12	–	–	–	ACT WorkKeys

Here are the measures that are included in North Carolina's reports:

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL INDICATORS			HIGH SCHOOL INDICATORS	
			ASSESSMENTS	**OTHER MEASURES**
3rd Grade ELA	3rd Grade Math	5th Grade Science	Biology	4-year and 5-year Graduation Rates
4th Grade ELA	4th Grade Math	8th Grade Science	English II	Successful completion of high-level
5th Grade ELA	5th Grade Math	Math I	Math I	math courses
6th Grade ELA	6th Grade Math	Biology	ACT	
7th Grade ELA	7th Grade Math		ACT WorkKeys	
8th Grade ELA	8th Grade Math			

Annual Measurable Objectives

States are not required to report Annual Measures of Objectives during the transition from *No Child Left Behind* to *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (2014-15 – 2016-17); however, beginning in 2017-18, North Carolina's ESSA plan will include long-term goals for closing achievement gaps and interim targets for achieving these goals.

Read to Achieve

The goal of the state's Read to Achieve program is to ensure that every third grader is reading at or above grade level. Students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade receive extra support, including reading camps, multiple opportunities to show proficiency, guaranteed uninterrupted blocks of reading time, and intensive reading interventions so that they will be more prepared to do fourth-grade work.

At their October meeting, State Board of Education members will receive a report on the success of the program's third year that will include:

- the number and percentage of students demonstrating and not demonstrating proficiency on end-of-grade;
- the number and percentage of students who take and pass an alternative assessment;
- the number and percentage of students retained (this would include students who are retained in third grade and students placed in fourth grade with a retained reading label); and
- the number and percentage of students with a Good Cause Exemption (this would include portfolio, limited English proficient, exceptional children and multiple retentions).

School Performance Grades

The 2015-16 school year is the third year for which public schools and charter schools will receive a letter grade under the General Assembly's A-F School Performance Grades. The grades will be based on the school's achievement score and on students' academic growth. The final grade will continue to be based on a 15-point scale.

Schools also have the opportunity to earn an A^{+NG} for their School Performance Grade. Schools receiving this grade earned an A and did not have a significant achievement gap that was larger than the largest state average achievement gap. This additional designation was added in 2014-15 to address federal requirements that the highest designation not be awarded to schools with significant achievement gaps.

K-8 READY Accountability Model Components

- Statewide accountability testing is done in grades 3-8 only. For students in grades K-2, special age-appropriate assessments are used to chart students' academic progress and are not included in the READY accountability model.
- End-of-grade assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and science assessments in grades 5 and 8 are counted for academic growth and performance. NCEXTEND1 is an alternate assessment for certain students with disabilities and is included in performance only, not in growth.

High School READY Accountability Model Components

- **End-of-Course Tests** – Student performance on three end-of-course assessments: English II, Biology and Math I is counted for growth and performance. NCEXTEND1 is an alternate assessment for certain students with disabilities and is included in performance only, not in growth.
- **ACT** – The percentage of students meeting the UNC system admissions minimum requirement of a composite score of 17.
- **Graduation Rates** – The percentage of students who graduate in four years or less and five years or less.
- **Math Course Rigor** – The percentage of graduates taking and passing high-level math courses such as Math III.
- **ACT WorkKeys** – For Career and Technical Education concentrators (students who have earned four CTE credits in a career cluster), the percentage of concentrator graduates who were awarded at least a Silver Level Career Readiness Certificate based on ACT WorkKeys assessments.
- **Graduation Project** – The accountability report will note whether a school requires students to complete a graduation project.

Understanding the Two Accountability Measures

- **Performance** – The percentage of students in the school who score at Achievement Levels 1-5. Achievement Level 3 is considered grade-level proficiency and Achievement Levels 4 and 5 are considered on track to be college and career ready.
- **Growth** – An indication of the rate at which students in the school learned over the past year. The standard is roughly equivalent to a year's worth of growth for a year of instruction. Growth is reported for each school as Exceeded Growth Expectations, Met Growth Expectations, or Did Not Meet Growth Expectations.

How Test Data are Used

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and local school districts use end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) test data in a number of ways.

- **Meeting Federal Reporting Requirements** – At the state level, student performance on EOG/EOC assessments must be reported to the US Department of Education as required under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (formerly known as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB)). As the state develops North Carolina's ESSA plan, consideration will be given regarding reporting of reading, mathematics and science proficiency rates.

  States are not required to report Annual Measures of Objectives during the transition from NCLB to ESSA (2014-15 – 2016-17); however, beginning in 2017-18, North Carolina's ESSA plan will include long-term goals for closing achievement gaps and interim targets for achieving these goals.
- **Providing READY Accountability Reporting** – The State Board of Education's READY Accountability Model requires that student performance on EOG/EOC assessments be reported by school, district and state. The information also is reported by assessment, grade and student group.
- **Assigning School Performance Grades** – Since 2013-14, student performance data have been used to assign letter grades to North Carolina public schools as required by the NC General Assembly. The grades are based on each school's achievement score (80 percent) and each school's students' academic growth (20 percent).

  The total school performance score is converted to a 100-point scale and then used to determine a school performance grade of A, B, C, D or F. The final grade is based on a 15-point scale:

  A: 85-100
  B: 70-84
  C: 55-69
  D: 40-54
  F: Less than 40

  Schools also may earn an A^{+NG} if the school did not have an achievement gap larger than the largest state average achievement gap. This additional designation was added in 2014-15 to address federal requirements that excludes schools with significant achievement gaps from earning a state's highest achievement designation.

  In addition to the overall performance score and grade, a separate score and grade for reading and mathematics is reported for schools containing K-8 grade levels. Schools with no data available to calculate at least a School Achievement Score will not receive a School Performance Grade (e.g. K-2 schools and alternative schools).
- **Identifying Low-Performing Schools and Districts** – NCDPI staff use the data to identify low-performing schools and districts, which, under state law, are based on the School Performance Grade and Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) growth calculations.

  Low-performing schools are those that receive a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of "met expected growth" or "not met expected growth" as defined by General Statute 115C-105.37. To avoid a low-performing designation, schools must earn a school performance grade of C or better.

  Schools identified as low performing must develop a plan for improvement that specifically addresses the strategies the school will implement to improve both its School Performance Grade and School Growth designation (G.S. 115C-105.37(a1)). Schools also must notify parents of the school's low-performing status and actions it is taking to improve student performance.

Low-performing districts are those in which the majority of schools that receive a school performance grade and school growth score are identified as low performing as defined by General Statute 115C-105.39A. Districts identified as low performing must develop a district plan for improving both the school performance grade and school growth score of each low-performing school in the district (G.S. 115C-105.39A(b2)).

School and district improvement plans are to be shared with the public, including parents, guardians, and staff and made available through the districts' website and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's website.

Additional strategies for reform, changes to personnel, supports and interventions may apply to schools and districts that are continually low performing.

- **Identifying Third Graders for Support Under Read to Achieve** – EOG assessment data are used to identify third grade students who need additional support to achieve reading proficiency. The goal of the state's Read to Achieve program is to ensure that every third grade student is reading at or above grade level by the end of the school year.

  Students who are not reading at grade level will have multiple opportunities to show proficiency. In addition, students may receive support through one or more of the following options:
  - guaranteed uninterrupted blocks of reading time and other intensive reading interventions;
  - reading camps;
  - teachers selected based on demonstrated student outcomes in reading proficiency;
  - placement in a transition class or a 4th grade accelerated class for the entire 4th grade year;
  - promoted to fourth grade with a Good Cause Exemption but continue to receive instructional supports and services and reading interventions; or
  - retention in the third grade.

- **Evaluating North Carolina Educators** – North Carolina educators participate in an annual evaluation process to assess their performance relative to the North Carolina Professional Standards and to design an annual plan for professional growth.

  Student academic growth data are one indicator included in annual professional development plans of teachers and principals. Educators who are responsible for evaluating teachers, assistant principals and principals are encouraged to use academic growth data when they are evaluating the performance of teachers, assistant principals and principals.

- **Assessing District Initiatives to Improve Student Proficiency** – Districts use student performance data to assess the success of initiatives they have implemented to increase student reading and mathematics proficiency, close academic achievement gaps between groups of students and gauge the effectiveness of professional development.

RESOURCES

READY INITIATIVE – http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ready/

READY ANIMATION – The animated READY logo tells the story of why North Carolina has raised standards and made other key changes in public schools in a 2.5 minute video clip. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCNYt5_K6CU

NORTH CAROLINA STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY – http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/

TESTING PROGRAM GENERAL INFORMATION AND POLICIES – http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/policies/geninfopoliciesindex

RELEASED TEST FORMS AND ANSWER KEYS FOR END-OF-GRADE AND END-OF-COURSE TESTS – Parents and educators can see firsthand the rigor of questions on the assessments. http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/releasedforms

READ TO ACHIEVE – http://www.ncpublicschools.org/k-3literacy/achieve/

2016 READY INFORMATION CONTACTS

READY ACCOUNTABILITY/BASIS FOR STATUS – Accountability Services Division, Tammy Howard, Director, 919.807.3787

COMMUNICATIONS AND GENERAL INFORMATION – Communication and Information Services, Vanessa Jeter, Director, 919.807.3450

READY DATA BY SCHOOL/DISTRICT/STATE AND PRESS RELEASE – http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION – http://www.ncpublicschools.org