

Key Findings from the Literacy and Learning Centers Project, 2016-17 to 2017-18

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The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) received a grant from the William Penn Foundation to redesign 34 pre-kindergarten to second grade classrooms at four schools into interactive learning environments. Teachers also received professional development sessions on incorporating the new equipment and using centers throughout the 2017-2018 school year. Physical renovations and classroom set-ups were completed by the end of summer 2017.

The classroom renovations and professional development activities built upon the District-wide Early Literacy Initiative already underway in the District, which includes implementation of the Balanced Literacy Framework, a weeklong Summer Literacy Institute¹, and a full-time Early Literacy Coach² in every school. The Literacy and Learning Centers project was designed to be an extension of the Early Literacy Initiative and to provide teachers with the opportunity to integrate high quality literacy instruction in a renovated, interactive learning environment.

This document highlights three key findings from the full evaluation [report](#). These findings come from observations conducted using the [CLASS tool](#), student AIMSweb data, and results from teacher surveys and focus groups (see Box 1 for more information).

Key Finding 1: Classrooms demonstrated small but significant growth on domains measured by the CLASS tool.

1a. Treatment classrooms showed statistically significant growth from spring 2017 to fall 2017 in two out of three CLASS domains.

In the matched group of 36 teachers (19 treatment and 17 comparison), treatment classrooms showed statistically significant growth in both the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains from spring 2017 to fall 2017. Treatment and comparison classrooms remained flat in their Instructional Support domain scores, and comparison classrooms did not show any statistically significant growth.

¹ For more information, visit <https://www.philasd.org/research/evaluation-of-the-annual-summer-literacy-institute/>

² For more information, visit <https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/projects/els-evaluation/>

Box 1: Data and Methods for the Literacy and Learning Centers Project

Data Collection:

The key findings came from three data sources.



The CLASS Observation Rubric

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a nationally validated tool developed to assess classroom quality, was used to measure changes in teachers' interactions with students. The three domains on the CLASS are Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. We conducted classroom visits at three time points: spring 2017, fall/winter 2017-18, and spring 2018.



Student AIMSweb Data

AIMSweb is an early literacy screening, benchmarking, and progress-monitoring tool used to assess literacy proficiency. Teachers score students' performance on each assessment according to the number of cues students identify correctly or incorrectly in a 60-second period. During the study period, SDP administered the AIMSweb assessment to all K-3 students. Each grade is administered one core assessment (in addition to other standardized measures) at three time points across the year (fall, winter, and spring).



Teacher Surveys and Focus Groups

We surveyed treatment teachers in February 2018 about their experience with the project and conducted focus groups with teachers in May 2018.

Methods:

Treatment Versus Comparison Classrooms

Four schools received renovated PK-2 classrooms (the "treatment" schools). We also observed classrooms in four comparison schools (who did not receive renovations). ORE conducted 172 observations of 78 teachers at treatment and comparison schools across the three time points.

Matched Group of Teachers

The results here are for a matched group (i.e., teachers who had all three observations, one at each time period). Only 36 teachers (19 treatment, 17 comparison) had observations at all three time points and were included in the matched group.

1b. Treatment classrooms showed statistically significant growth from spring 2017 to spring 2018 in two out of ten CLASS dimensions.

The three domains are further divided into ten dimensions. From spring 2017 to spring 2018, treatment classrooms showed statistically significant growth in two dimensions: Regard for Student Perspectives (Emotional Support domain) and Instructional Learning Formats (Classroom Organization Domain). Comparison classrooms also showed statistically significant growth in Instructional Learning Formats from spring 2017 to spring 2018.



Key Finding 2: Students in treatment classrooms generally grew at a faster rate on early literacy assessments in the first school year after their classrooms were renovated.

Students in treatment schools grew at a faster rate than the previous year as measured by their rate of improvement on AIMSweb core assessments in the 2017-18 school year.

Treatment students in all grades had higher rates of improvement in SY 2017-18 than in SY 2016-17, which indicates that they were learning literacy skills faster in the first school year after their classrooms were renovated. First grade had the largest increase in the average rates of improvement between years.



Key Finding 3: Teachers had mixed feelings about the renovations and wanted more support and communication.

3a. Teachers loved the new lighting but had concerns about the furniture, storage space, and room arrangement possibilities.

In focus groups, teachers told us they loved the brightness of the new lighting in their rooms, as well as having multiple switches to turn off only some of the lights depending on the activity. Teachers were less pleased with the decrease in storage space in their new classrooms, especially for teacher materials and bookshelves. Some teachers also mentioned either receiving too much furniture or that their room was laid out in a way that made it hard for both teachers and students to navigate the space.

3b. Teachers would have liked more support once the renovations were over, especially replacing broken or damaged materials and troubleshooting issues with equipment and technology.

Teachers asked for support with replacing broken and damaged materials. They had similar concerns with replacing materials each year such as manipulatives and seat sacks. Teachers also mentioned needing more support with technology, including professional development and fixing broken materials. In the survey, 70% of teachers identified technology as at least a slight challenge, and this was also the top area where teachers would have liked more professional development.

3c. Teachers wanted more of a voice in planning and clearer communication.

A common theme that arose in both the surveys and teacher focus groups was including teacher voice in the project planning, especially around designing classrooms. Although teachers were asked to provide suggestions for materials and furniture for their classrooms, it was not clear to teachers how this information would be used. Some teachers thought they were picking exactly what would be in their rooms, and were disappointed when they saw what they received. Teachers also told us they would have liked to have clearer communication about the materials that would be included in the renovated classroom. This could have informed what materials to keep, throw away, or buy over the summer.