

What is the community challenge?

OnTrack Greenville middle schools located in the White Horse Community of Greenville County, South Carolina serve a higher proportion of low-income and minority students than other middle schools in the district. Overall, students attending these four schools have placed behind their peers in key academic measures of attendance, behavior, and course performance. These early warning indicators of disengagement in middle school are connected to increased risks of high school dropout (Balfanz & Fox, 2011).

What is the promising solution?

To help improve student academic performance, Public Education Partners (PEP) offered Literacy Coaching at three OnTrack Greenville middle schools. In its literacy coaching approach, PEP specialists trained and coached ELA and math teachers in Balanced and Disciplinary Literacy strategies, two research-supported methods of instruction. Coaches engaged teachers in student-centered coaching cycles that included planning activities, in-class support, and debriefing activities. Through Literacy Coaching, PEP aimed to increase teachers' awareness, advocacy, and use of literacy strategies, leading to improved student course performance in ELA and math.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Public Education Partners Literacy Coaching by the Riley Institute at Furman University began in 2016 and finished reporting in 2019. The implementation study of Literacy Coaching strived to achieve two goals: (1) assess the level of fidelity to the specific literacy coaching model that was proposed, and (2) provide implementation recommendations to strengthen model fidelity and maximize the impact of services provided to students. The implementation study used focus groups, surveys, semi-structured interviews, and monthly literacy coach observations. The impact study used a non-experimental single-site design that included descriptive analyses of post-program teacher surveys and interviews to measure changes in teacher knowledge, advocacy, and use of literacy strategies and improvements in classroom culture.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, United Way of Greenville County engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate Public Education Partners Literacy Coaching. The evaluation observed the following key findings:

- PEP coaches completed a total of 1,253 coaching activities in academic years 2016-17 and 2017-18. Among these, 47 percent of activities were planning activities, 32 percent were in-class support, and 21 percent were debriefing, indicating some coaching cycles did not include all three components.
- PEP coaches reported working with 94 teachers over a total of 289 coaching cycles across both academic years.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Literacy Coaching

Subgrantee: Public Education Partners

Intermediary: United Way of Greenville County

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Middle school youth

Community Served: White Horse Community of Greenville County, South Carolina

- Teachers rated “sharing of resources” and “observation of your teaching/students” as the most valuable of the coaching activities offered. More than half of teachers (57%) reported that they were likely or very likely to recommend literacy coaching to a teaching colleague. A majority (71%) of teachers agreed that participation in literacy coaching was beneficial and enhanced their instruction.
- Several impediments to valuable coaching sessions emerged, including a lack of understanding of the coaching model and desired student outcomes, misunderstanding over the role of PEP coaches, and a lack of overall consistency in coaching sessions.
- Most teachers who participated in coaching (81%) reported incorporating literacy strategies in their instruction, and 76 percent advocated for more teachers at their school to participate in coaching.
- Most teachers interviewed (71%) perceived an improvement in student communicative interactions attributed to the use of literacy strategies. Teachers described using more appropriate vocabulary with students, having a stronger overall framework for communicating with students, and using a more positive tone to communicate with students.
- Similarly, 71 percent of teachers interviewed perceived an improvement in student-teacher relationships attributed to their use of literacy strategies.

Notes on the evaluation

The evaluation did not include statistical analyses of impacts using a quasi-experimental matching analysis as planned due to insufficient model fidelity of implementation, and therefore, was unable to determine the impact of Literacy Coaching on student course performance in ELA and math. The implementation of the model deviated from the intended design, causing the study to revise data collection instruments and timelines. Teachers invited to participate in one-on-one interviews were a convenience sample based on program data provided by PEP.

How is Public Education Partners using the evaluation findings to improve?

The evaluation of the Literacy Coaching Program identified three key lessons learned for the implementation of future similar programs. These include:

- Ensuring that districts, schools, programs, and partners are ready and open to growth and change.
- Leveraging ongoing collaborative inquiry groups with stakeholders so that the literacy coaching can be integrated into a well-planned model of professional learning for teachers with shared goals and clear roles for coaches.
- Using student-centered coaching practices to empower groups of teachers.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Non-Experimental Single Group Design

Study Population: Middle School Teachers

Independent Evaluator: The Riley Institute at Furman University and Clemson University

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.