Evaluation of the Florida Master Teacher Initiative
Formative Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Florida Master Plan Initiative (FMTI) partners have developed and implemented a set of strategic programs to enhance early learning instruction for high-need students. Specifically, these are a job-embedded graduate degree program with an early childhood specialization, a Teacher Fellows program through which teachers use inquiry to reflect on and improve their practice, and a Principal Fellows program that enhances principals' ability to effect change in their schools by helping them adopt a facilitative leadership approach. Feedback on the programs from most teachers and principals was very positive, and many expressed interest in continued involvement in them. Teachers and principals also shared many examples of how these programs are starting to affect them, their instruction, and students. Presented here are a summary of the many accomplishments and a description of next steps for the initiative and evaluation.

Major Programmatic Accomplishments

Since the launch of FMTI, the program has accomplished a great deal. These accomplishments include the following:

Master's Degree Program

- **Course development.** University of Florida (UF) faculty developed four new early childhood courses and adapted several other of their job-embedded master's degree program classes to place a stronger emphasis on early education. Course development and adaptation were based on results from interviews and focus groups with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) stakeholders and on the Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- **Online tools for coursework and collaboration.** UF faculty redesigned the website they use for supporting online learning and collaboration to allow for easier use and greater collaboration.

- **Recruitment and retention of graduate students.** Teachers from 14 of the 20 FMTI schools were recruited and accepted into the master's degree program, which currently has 57 teachers enrolled. Thirty of 35 Cohort 1 teachers (81%) continued the program in Year 2.

Teacher Fellows Program

- **Recruitment and participation.** The Teacher Fellows program was implemented at 19 of the 20 FMTI schools. On average, more than a quarter (28%) of teaching staff participated in the program at each school. Further, Teacher Fellows were actively engaged: 93% attended all six sessions, 92% presented at the Learning Showcase, and 94% wrote and submitted a summary of their inquiry.

- **Learning Showcase.** A total of 269 staff members from FMTI schools delivered at total of 130 presentations at the showcase. They comprised a third of the 800 attendees at the showcase.

Principal Fellows Program

- **Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) meetings.** Almost two-thirds of the principals in the 20 treatment schools attended all five PPLC meetings.

- **Statewide Leadership Institutes.** Most (70%) of the principals attended both statewide principal institutes, and all but two principals attended at least one of the statewide institutes.

- **Principal inquiry projects.** Most (85%) of the principals did an inquiry project, and 70% of the principals presented their inquiry findings at the Learning Showcase.

- **Summer Leadership Institute.** The majority of schools sent representatives to the Summer Leadership Institutes held annually: 19 of 20 schools in 2011 and 17 of 20 schools in 2012. Only 40% of schools (8 of 20), however, sent their principals. All schools that were represented developed school action plans using data from the Instructional Practices Inventory, School Culture Survey, and other data sources.

Early Outcomes

Benefits for Teachers

- **Increased collaboration among teachers.** Teachers in the master's program and in the Teacher Fellows program reported increased collaboration and communication among teachers, especially across grade levels, in their schools and beyond.

- **New classroom strategies for instruction.** Teachers learned new strategies for classroom management, family engagement, and instruction for specific content areas from their master's degree courses, their inquiry projects, and the Learning Showcase.

- **Increased reflection on practice**. The inquiry process used in the master's degree program and the Teacher Fellow's program has made teachers more aware of multiple perspectives to the problems they face and of more options for solutions.

- **Improved attitudes about teaching.** Teachers and their principals observed increased excitement and motivation in teachers about their work. Teachers seemed to be working harder because of this newfound enthusiasm.

Other Benefits

- **Benefits for students.** Although it is too early to measure improvements in student achievement, teachers participating in the master's degree program and the Teacher Fellows program reported that their new instructional strategies are already having some positive effects on their students. Specifically, teachers reported that the strategies they implemented as part of their inquiry resulted in academic and behavioral or attitudinal improvement for their students.

- **Benefits for principals**. Principals reported that getting outside the M-DCPS district and their buildings helped them develop a deeper sense of camaraderie with each other and made them more open to thinking about new strategies. Principals reported that the inquiry projects have changed their practices and funding decisions about specific interventions.

- **Benefits for schools.** In some of the schools, teachers in the master's degree program have been able to formally and informally share ideas with their colleagues and spread the specific strategies and approaches they are learning. Also, through Summer Leadership Institutes, school staff have been able to develop action plans for student

engagement, school culture, and student achievement based on data-driven decision making.

Supports and Challenges

Supports for Implementation

- **UF faculty support.** Teachers in the master's program cited UF faculty, both the professors-in-residence and Gainesville-based faculty, as the most important factor in the success of the program. Similarly, participants in the Teacher Fellows program cited high-quality training and facilitation by UF faculty as key to the program's success.

- **Relevant, high-quality course and program materials.** Teachers in the master's degree program reported that the applicability of course content to their instructional practices made the program easier and very useful. Teacher Fellows program participants also remarked on the high quality of the program materials.

- **Program norms focused on learning and sharing.** The culture and values of the program made Teacher Fellows meetings and the Learning Showcase a welcoming and comfortable environment for teachers to present and share "wonderings" (i.e., inquiry questions about their own teaching practices and student learning) and results.

- **History of work together in the district.** Existing strong collaborative relationships across FMTI partners formed through work on Ready Schools Miami supported ongoing collaboration, including joint decision making and problem solving. Also, from past work in the district, FMTI partners had credibility with teachers, principals, and district administrators. By having established positive relationships and understanding how to effectively work with the district, the FMTI partners were able to obtain support from many district entities (e.g., central administration, regional superintendents, teachers union, and school board).

- **Established programs to build on.** Because of Ready Schools Miami, UF already had well-designed programs that could be adapted for an early childhood emphasis. These included the master's program, the Teacher Fellows program, the Principal Fellows program, the Summer Leadership Institutes, and the Learning Showcase.

- **Talents and diversity of FMTI partners.** The strong and diverse talents of the FMTI team in terms of content, skills, and perspectives supported course development and thinking through implementation of the Teacher Fellows and Principal Fellows programs. Positive and well-organized leadership also was important in facilitating the FMTI team to achieve it implementation goals.

Challenges for Implementation

- **Time commitments.** Given their many competing demands, finding enough time to fully engage in FMTI activities was a challenge for teachers in the master's program, Teacher Fellows, and principals. However, most of the participants found the time they spent on program activities highly worthwhile.

- **UF graduate program requirements**. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) remains the greatest hurdle for teachers interested in the master's program. Many of the

teachers were intimidated by the prospect of studying for and taking the GRE and had a difficult time doing well enough to meet UF requirements. In addition, several applicants could not meet the university's requirement for an undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.0. In response, UF devised multiple conditional plans to facilitate admissions for candidates with weak GRE scores or low GPAs. Over time, UF faculty may be able to demonstrate to the university how successful students admitted under these conditional admission plans are in their courses and in their schools.

- **Strict district communication protocols.** Because of district communication protocols, communication about FMTI needed to go through regional superintendents and through the district. FMTI staff could not communicate directly to schools about the program. Given these constraints, it was difficult to convey the proper message about what the FMTI was offering, and many principals did not get an accurate understanding of the program during the recruitment window.

- **Delays in hiring.** Because of a hiring freeze, the FMTI project had to operate without a project coordinator at the same time the district was trying to recruit schools. Without someone in this critical position, managing the district communication protocols described above was even more challenging. Communications with regional superintendents and principals lagged because there was no dedicated person to support outreach within the district, resulting in fewer principals volunteering to participate in FMTI.

- **Showcase scheduling.** The popularity of the Learning Showcase created challenges concerning the length of the event, teachers' ability to see more than their colleagues' presentations, and teachers having enough time after the showcase to share learning with other teachers at their school or trying new ideas out in their classroom.

FMTI partners have had a very successful start and continue to be on a promising trajectory. FMTI staff are already making inroads on several of the challenges they faced in its first year of implementation. Future evaluation reports will provide additional formative feedback as well as findings on impacts of the initiative on student achievement and teacher quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

High-quality instruction in early learning programs is fundamental for positive child outcomes. The Florida Master Teacher Initiative (FMTI), supported by a development grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) program, is specifically intended to improve early learning instruction for high-need preschool through grade 3 students in Miami-Dade County. The FMTI is a collaborative professional development and quality improvement effort of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the University of Florida (UF), and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The FMTI enhances early learning instruction for high-need students through its three main components:

- A job-embedded graduate degree program with an early childhood specialization—the Early Childhood Teacher Leadership for School Improvement Program—offered through UF. The graduate program combines online instruction, face-to-face pedagogy, and a professor-in-residence who works in schools with teachers and principals. The program also provides school-based leadership opportunities for graduate students to share program content and practices with colleagues.

- A Teacher Fellows program, through which a subset of teachers throughout the school engage in yearlong inquiry projects to examine new instructional approaches together with peers. This program culminates in a districtwide Learning Showcase in which teachers—as well as principals, assistant principals, and other school staff who also engaged in inquiry—present their projects.

- A Principal Fellows program, which builds leadership skills and provides an opportunity to interact with principals from other Florida school districts to support teacher leadership and instructional improvements. The Principal Fellows program supports principals' efforts to adopt a facilitative leadership approach and enhance their ability to effect change within their schools.

In addition, the FMTI provides leadership development for teacher leaders in facilitating professional learning communities, guiding teacher inquiry, and using formal protocols to guide meetings. It supports shared leadership at schools through facilitation of joint analysis of formative assessments to support data-driven decision making and development of school action plans at summer institutes.

SRI International is conducting an independent evaluation of the FMTI. The multifaceted evaluation will measure the impact of the FMTI on students' reading and math achievement in grades K–6 using a cluster random assignment design, in which 40 elementary schools are randomly assigned to the FMTI program or a status quo control condition. In addition, the effects of participation in the early childhood master's degree program on student reading and math scores will be evaluated using an embedded quasi-experimental design using propensity score matching and difference-in-differences approaches. Classroom instruction outcomes will be examined as part of the quasi-experimental design using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations and survey measures. The CLASS will be used to track outcomes in each of the following domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. A teacher survey will be used to examine differences in teachers' practice in

differentiated instruction, emphasis on higher order thinking skills, student-centered instruction, culturally responsive instruction, developmentally appropriate instruction, and assessment-informed instruction.

The evaluation also includes an implementation study, which will describe the program as implemented under i3 and examine the extent to which the program was implemented as intended. Finally, a formative evaluation is also under way to identify implementation challenges, make midcourse corrections, assess progress, and document program functioning to support replication. This report presents findings from the formative evaluation.

In the remainder of this introduction, we present the logic model undergirding the FMTI, the research questions addressed in this report, and a description of the data sources.

Logic Model for the Florida Master Teacher Initiative

The logic model (Exhibit 1) presents how the FMTI program components are expected to eventually lead to increased student achievement, stronger emotional and social foundations for student learning, and greater student engagement. According to the model, the FMTI activities are hypothesized to support the development of a professional learning community among school staff and the professionalism and effectiveness of teachers. The FMTI is intended to develop the capacity of teachers to serve as master teachers who use effective teaching practices, including those focused on early childhood. It also encourages teachers to become leaders in their schools and communities on issues of improving instruction and promoting high-quality education from prekindergarten through third grade. The initiative also works with principals to develop a school culture that values teacher leadership, inquiry-based and data-driven decision making, and collaboration on instruction. Finally, the FMTI helps teachers improve their teaching through participation in a guided inquiry that enables them to research instructional topics that are relevant and important to their practice.

Professional learning communities are intended to provide teachers with support and cross-teacher learning to improve their skills in teaching, research, and leadership. As a result, it is hypothesized that teachers will be able to establish classrooms in which instruction is more research based, differentiated, focused on higher order thinking skills, learner centered, culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, guided by data from meaningful assessments, and supportive of social-emotional development. Further, teachers in these schools should be more able to establish classrooms with positive climates, be able to establish stronger partnerships with parents and the community, and be able to more effectively engage with the early education community. It is hypothesized that these improvements in classroom instruction will contribute to improvements in student achievement, children's emotional and social development, and student engagement.

Exhibit 1. Logic Model

Florida Master Teacher Initiative

**Project Supports
(Guided by TLSI principles)**

Early Childhood Education Master's Degree Program
- Job-embedded graduate coursework situated within teachers' contexts and that meets NAEYC guidelines
- Online and in-person implementation support from professors-in-residence
- Demonstration of inquiry and reflection through completion of a portfolio of projects
- Training to facilitate professional learning communities
- Facilitation of teacher fellow program or other PD
- Cohort of school-based, preK-3rd grade teachers

Teacher Fellows Program
- Year-long inquiry project
- 6 onsite facilitated learning community meetings to support inquiry
- Cross-school presentation of projects at inquiry showcase

Principal Fellows Program
- Professional development meetings on leadership skills (5 a year)
- Inquiry projects
- Interactions with principals across the state at statewide institute

Summer Leadership Institutes
- Leadership institutes for administrators and teacher leaders to review data and develop plans

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Meetings

Professional Learning Community
- Distributed leadership
- Dedicated time for structured collaboration within and across grades
- Data-based decision-making about teaching and learning using multiple data sources
- Trusting relationships between teachers
- Administrator and infrastructure support for school-wide implementation

Teacher Professionalism

Master teacher
- Uses effective classroom practices
- Has enhanced knowledge of early childhood education

Teacher leader
- Facilitates professional learning communities
- Advocates for children
- Reaches out to the early childhood community
- Has knowledge of and cross-sector collaboration around early childhood issues
- Supports transitions across early childhood years

Teacher researcher
- Engages in inquiry to improve teaching and learning

Improved Classroom Practices

Instructional practices that are:
- Research-based
- Differentiated
- Emphasizing higher-order thinking skills
- Learner-centered
- Culturally responsive
- Developmentally appropriate
- Based on data and informed by an array of assessment methods
- Supporting social-emotional development

Positive classroom climate
Family-school partnerships
School-early learning partnerships

Learner Outcomes
- **Increased academic achievement**
- **Strong social and emotional foundations for learning**
- **Increased student engagement**

State and Local Policies

Research Focus and Data Sources

This report presents findings from the formative evaluation on the following:

- Implementation of the job-embedded master's degree program
- Implementation of the inquiry-based Teacher Fellows program and Learning Showcase
- Implementation of the Principal Fellows program and Leadership Institutes
- Systemic factors that support and hinder implementation
- Baseline outcomes from the teacher survey and CLASS observations.

Data sources for the formative evaluation were interviews with principals, teachers participating in the job-embedded graduate program and Teacher Fellows program, and professors-in-residence; participation data; teacher surveys; and CLASS observations.

Interviews

In spring 2012, teams of researchers visited six of the 20 schools participating in FMTI. Sampled schools represented the four geographic regions of the M-DCPS district and varied in levels of participation in the FMTI (e.g., from schools that had several teachers in the master's program to schools that had no teachers in it). Across the schools, we interviewed 19 teachers, including eight teachers enrolled in the master's degree program, and all the school principals. We also interviewed district staff managing the initiative and faculty at UF, including professors-in-residence and developers of the master's degree courses.

At the school level, interview topics included professional background, participation in the various FMTI program (e.g., Principal Fellows, summer institute, and master's degree program), challenges to participation, perceived impacts and benefits of the program on staff and students, teacher community and collaboration, and transition and parent outreach. At the initiative level, interviews focused on supports and challenges for implementation, perceived impacts of the initiative on participating schools and the district as a whole, coordination and collaboration across initiative partners, as well as plans to move forward.

Participation Data

To assess the breadth of participation in FMTI, administrative and program participation data were collected from M-DCPS and UF. These data included school participation in the summer institutes, participation in the Teacher Fellows program, participation in the Principal Fellows program and Principal Institutes, information on course completion and academic progress for master's degree teachers, and participation in facilitation training offered by UF through the districts' Ready Schools Miami.

Teacher Surveys

To establish baseline information on teachers, in fall 2011 we administered a survey in all 20 treatment and 20 control schools participating in the FMTI evaluation. Intended survey respondents included all classroom teachers (preschool through sixth grade), education specialists (e.g., reading coaches and curricular leaders), exceptional student education teachers, special subject area teachers (e.g., art, music, media services), and other teachers with instructional responsibilities. Guidance counselors, classroom aides, and school administrators

were not included in the survey. A total of 1,822 teachers were administered the survey, and 1,585 responded, resulting in an overall response rate of 87% (Exhibit 2). The survey included questions about teachers' professional background, the professional learning culture of schools, teachers' involvement in school leadership, teacher engagement in trying and evaluating new instructional practices, and the use of various classroom practices.

Exhibit 2. Fall 2011 Teacher Survey Response Rate

	Treatment	Control	Overall
Eligible (*N*)	883	939	1,822
Respondents (*n*)	759	826	1,585
Response rate (%)	86	88	87

CLASS Observations

Trained observers conducted observations of master's degree teachers using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System[1] in fall 2012 to capture baseline instructional practices. The CLASS tracks outcomes in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instruction support. A total of 34 master's degree teachers were observed, along with 34 matched comparison teachers from the control schools. Matching criteria included years of experience, teaching assignment, academic degrees earned, national board certification, areas of certification, and ethnicity, as well as six classroom practice scales from the baseline teacher survey. One special education master's degree teacher could not be observed because she did not teach in her own classroom. Two teachers admitted conditionally to the master's degree program, referred to as Plan C teachers, also were not observed.

Overview of the Report

Chapters 2 through 4 of this report provide information on the implementation of the key program components—the master's degree program, the Teacher Fellows program and the Learning Showcase, and the Principal Fellows program and other schoolwide supports. In each of the chapters we provide information about participation, participants' assessments of the programs' strengths and weaknesses, and perceived outcomes effected by the programs. Chapter 5 discusses key factors that were supports and challenges in implementing such a complex and large-scale initiative. Chapter 6 presents baseline data from the teacher surveys and CLASS observations. Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of findings.

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[1] Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

2. MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

A key element of the Florida Master Teacher Initiative is the graduate program. Developed and administered by the UF College of Education, the graduate program has an early childhood specialization and specifically meets the needs of early childhood educators (grades pre-K–3) working in high-need communities. The FMTI graduate program is an enhancement of UF's Teacher Leadership in School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program with an emphasis on early childhood (EC), so it is called the EC-TLSI program. The graduate program, like TLSI, blends online instruction with face-to-face pedagogy by a professor-in-residence who works alongside the teachers and administrators in the participating schools. The program is job embedded and designed to help teachers immediately put to use their theories, objectives, and learning to solve the challenges they face in their classrooms.

The master's degree program is a 2.5-year, 39-credit-hour program. It is divided into four terms a year (fall, spring 1, spring 2, and summer), and participants take one course each term except for summer, when they take two courses. In addition, each summer includes a three-day institute focused on developing participants' leadership skills.

Course Development

The master's degree program is a joint venture of two schools within UF: the School of Special Education, School Psychology & Early Childhood Studies and the School of Teaching & Learning. The program was adapted from the existing Teacher Leadership for School Improvement program to include an early childhood focus.

To solicit input for the revision of the graduate program's curriculum for the new early childhood specialization, members of the UF design team conducted focus group interviews in February 2011with numerous community stakeholders in early childhood education, including district and school administrators, teachers, and parents. Graduates of the already existing master's program were also interviewed about their experiences in it.

The curriculum design team, comprising faculty from two schools within the College of Education as well as the three professors-in-residence, used the focus group results and the Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs from the National Association for the Education of Young Children to redesign the graduate program. Data were also organized by structural features, course content, and processes. As one member of the team described:

> *As a design team we looked at all the courses. We had a giant matrix to make sure everything was being covered with the depth and breadth we wanted it to. Then we looked at scope and sequence.*

The resulting scope and sequence map was used to drive the design of four new early childhood courses: Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education, Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education, Family Involvement in Early Childhood Classrooms, and Policy and Transitions in Early Childhood. In addition, this information guided the redesign of existing courses, such as Differentiated Instruction and Transforming the Curriculum, to create a stronger focus on early education by including more examples and texts relevant to the experiences of preschool through grade 3 classroom teachers.

Although the design process was intended to make the courses relevant, the designers also built in processes for course improvement. After each course, students are asked to provide feedback that is analyzed by the teaching professor and the course designer. Where relevant, changes are made. For example, in the Developmentally Appropriate Practice course a lot of video from the lab school was used, which students in the class found informative. In their feedback, the students expressed a desire to pose questions to the lab school teachers about how they set up or planned certain activities. In response, the designers are now building in to a new course the ability to ask questions of the teachers featured in the videos.

In addition to developing new or revised courses, the UF partners redesigned the website they use for supporting online learning and collaboration. Additional program staff with expertise in visual communication strategies and instruction have used innovative educational technology to make online collaborative interactions and discussion easier. For example, they added "voice thread," which allows a discussion thread using video recorded messages and presentations. This addition will allow for more compelling conversations and sharing than a purely written dialogue.

Recruitment of Graduate Students

In contrast to the successful process for course development, the recruitment of graduate students has proven to be a challenge. UF professors-in-residence spent considerable time and effort recruiting teachers for the master's degree program but were unable to meet recruitment goals for either Cohort 1 or Cohort 2. In addition to preparing materials describing the program, recruitment strategies included visiting each school to discuss program structure and benefits with the principal and other staff, having current or past UF TLSI students present information about their experiences in the program, and holding informal information sessions in local restaurants where prospective candidates could learn more about the program.

Understanding why teachers do and do not apply could help inform future recruitment efforts. One of the most widely cited reasons for applying was that the program was part of a grant and would be free to participants. As one participant explained,

> *For many years I wanted to go back to school to get a master's degree. How much it would cost and how long it would take me, the math didn't add up. There was too much sacrifice of time and money; I'd have to pay it off for a long time. … One major reason was finances—I didn't have to pay for it.*

Likewise, a kindergarten teacher said she wanted to continue her education in the past, but she did not have the finances. The FMTI, as a grant program, enabled her to pursue further education. A principal, too, reported that the free master's program was one of the reasons she applied for the program for her school in the first place. As she said, "It granted the opportunity for teachers to get a free master's program, which was a no-brainer."

A second widely cited reason for applying to the program was that the degree was from UF, a school known to offer a quality education. One teacher said his interest in the program was piqued when he learned the degree would be from UF. Another said, "I have always wanted to be a Gator. I love the university." A kindergarten teacher described it as a "reputable program."

There were other less frequently mentioned reasons for applying to the program. One was the ease of completing the program online. One participant with a child at home said, "The ease of it

is a lot of it is online." Another teacher succinctly described the program as "doable." Another reason to apply was a personal drive to become a better teacher. As one first-grade teacher said, "I always wanted to go back to school." A second-grade teacher who aspires to be a principal said she applied

> to become a better teacher. I feel I will need the curriculum as an aspiring
> school principal to know about the trends in curriculum. I have to know about
> inquiry and reaching out to parents. I feel it is has helped me with my career
> goals.

Finally, a few teachers claimed they applied specifically because the program was directly and immediately tied to their work as teachers in the classroom. As a kindergarten teacher explained, "I was attracted by the fact that what I learned could be implemented in the classroom. I liked that my research was based on my experience."

An important finding was that most teachers cited more than one reason for applying. For example, one teacher said

> I intend to go all the way with a doctorate degree, so I wanted a graduate
> degree. ... I did not want any more debt right now, so this gives me a break. I
> like that it's from UF because I already had a masters from [a different
> university]. I knew I wanted something different. When I started reading about
> it, it seemed interesting because it would connect to the school I'm at, a school
> with a high population on free and reduced lunch, parents living in poverty.
> They have many needs. A lot of this stuff would apply.

Understanding why teachers apply to the program can inform future recruitment, but it is equally informative to understand the barriers that keep them from applying. Teachers and principals reported several reasons why they or their colleagues did not apply to the master's degree program. By far the most widely cited reason was the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) requirement. Some teachers were afraid of taking the test. One principal explained, "The GRE is the issue that was holding them back." Another principal likewise said, "I know people were inhibited with taking GRE." One teacher reported that she did not apply because of "The GRE … the math part. If I need to take that and depend on it to pass, I know I won't pass." Although this teacher said she also had personal reasons for not applying, she said that "The GRE is the main thing," and she surmised that "If they got rid of it, it would get a lot more people in."

Some teachers took the GRE but were unable to meet the minimum score. One teacher in the program said of her colleagues, "Most of the ones I know about are afraid of the GRE … and the ones who have taken it haven't got the score they need." A principal also said that "One of the pitfalls was their entrance score to the master's program. They did not score the 500 they needed. A lot have been out of school for a long time, and they struggled to get the entrance score."

The GRE remains one of the most difficult dilemmas for program developers at UF. Another challenge is the university's expectation for applying graduate students to have earned a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) in their undergraduate studies. As a land grant institution, part of the UF mission is to work with elementary schools. On the other hand, as a competitively ranked public research institution, UF needs to maintain strong GRE and GPA scores to maintain its standing. Although the FMTI cannot waive the GRE or GPA requirements altogether, it does

assist candidates in overcoming these barriers. For example, the FMTI provides materials and test preparation courses to help candidates pass the exam. It also has devised multiple admission plans to facilitate admissions for candidates with weak GRE scores. Plan B is a conditional admittance for those candidates with borderline scores but who had a sufficient undergraduate GPA. They are accepted to the program with certain conditions, one being that they must maintain a B average for their first courses. Plan C is for candidates who need higher GRE scores before they can be admitted. These candidates are allowed to take the first course as a non-degree-seeking student while they simultaneously take a rigorous GRE preparation course. Then they have to retake the GRE. Even if their scores remain borderline, it is easier to argue that these candidates will be successful in the program after they demonstrate success in the first courses.

Aside from the GRE requirement, some teachers did not apply because they already had a master's degree or they were on a temporary contract and were not eligible to apply. One principal described the problem this way: "I have either really new teachers or really seasoned teachers. Most of my teachers already have master's degrees or more than one. The teachers who were interested didn't qualify because they hadn't been teaching long enough. They are annual."

Finally, a few teachers cited personal reasons that did not afford them the necessary time to engage in the program, such as having young children at home or other family responsibilities.

UF staff identified an additional barrier to recruitment, which was the focus on pre-K–3. Historically, the TLSI program, on which the FMTI master's program was designed, tended to attract teachers from the upper elementary grades 3–5. Some project staff hypothesized that teachers in the lower grades tend to be weaker in subject matter content because principals often place their stronger teachers in the tested grades. Yet improving the skills of these weaker teachers was the primary goal of the initiative. Another project staff member was concerned that the project had not adequately helped school administrators understand that the master's program is meant to be an early childhood program because of the importance of the early grades on later achievement. She was disappointed that school administrators were not helping recruit primary teachers and rather were complaining about not being able to enroll their upper elementary grade teachers. She wished more administrators were on board.

A second obstacle to recruitment that UF staff identified, at least for the first cohort of teachers, was the delayed timing of identifying schools. The original plan was to begin recruitment in September, but the schools were not selected until January. Part of the delay was due to following strict district protocols for communicating with schools, which include gathering approvals from senior district administrations and having communications to principals packaged appropriately. The professors-in-residence knew from experience that visiting schools, providing information, and encouraging teachers to apply takes considerable time, but they were unable to begin these efforts until February. Further, a miscommunication occurred with some principals who mistaken believed that only teachers who originally expressed interest in the program were allowed to apply, when in fact gathering those names was merely to ensure interest. In response, UF extended the application deadline twice to enable more teachers to apply.

Another issue with recruitment UF faculty identified was the inability to establish a foothold in some schools. Although the schools applied to be part of the FMTI, six schools ended up with no master's degree students. Several UF faculty surmised that these schools, which included

transformation schools, may have been pressured to apply by their regional superintendents. Also, they recognized that these schools are already involved in many other school improvement initiatives, which makes it a challenge for them to engage in the FMTI programs as well.

Additionally, district climate issues may have interfered with teachers' interest in applying. In the fall 2010, teacher performance pay was passed, and some teachers expressed concern that the FMTI would not directly address their needs for this new program.

In the end, the program admitted 37 teachers for Cohort 1, but two of them did not begin the program. Of the 35 participating Cohort 1 teachers, two were Plan C teachers (admitted conditionally as non-degree-seeking students). For Cohort 2, the program admitted 27 teachers, 11 of whom are Plan C teachers. These teachers are housed in 14 of the 20 treatment schools.

Retention of Graduate Students

A total of 30 Cohort 1 teachers are continuing the program in Year 2, including the two Plan C teachers. Two of the teachers who left are moving on to positions as assistant principals and are therefore no longer eligible to participate.

Fidelity

By the end of their program, master degree teachers are expected to maintain a 3.0 GPA, complete scheduled classes, serve as facilitators, engage in formal inquiry projects, and defend a portfolio of projects. Although it is too early to assess whether all teachers have met these goals, data collected show that current teachers seem to be progressing toward these goals. Among the 28 teachers admitted to the program in Cohort 1 under regular conditions, all maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher and completed their scheduled classes this year (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Teacher Progress in Master's Degree Program (n = 28)

Element	Percentage of Master's Degree Teachers
Maintained a 3.0 GPA	100
Completed scheduled classes	100
Participated in facilitator training	65
Presented inquiry at the Learning Showcase	93

Program Strengths

Master's degree students were overwhelmingly positive about the program. The three most widely cited aspects were (1) the collaboration it engendered both within and across schools, (2) the support the students received from UF faculty, both the professors-in-residence and Gainesville-based faculty, and (3) the applicability of the course content to the participants' instructional practices.

Collaboration

Teachers in the master's degree program reported that because of their participation, they are much less isolated. In all the schools with more than one participant, the participants reported working closely together in conducting their inquiries, completing projects and other assignments for their classes, and collaborating on their instructional plans and strategies. For example, one third-grade teacher described how her relationship with the other master's degree teacher in her school changed. Before the program, they were not very close because they did not teach the same grade. Because of the program they have become much closer in working together, even though they still teach different grades. For the program they have worked together on their inquiry and coursework, and for their school they have linked up for cross-grade collaboration and created action plans together. The other teacher concurred, saying that UF is specifically "teaching teachers to share amongst themselves." Teachers at another school described a similar phenomenon. Whereas previously teachers collaborated only on field trips, those in the program are now working together to improve their classrooms and they have codesigned presentations for the entire faculty. Although they worked together before, as one teacher described it was "not in the same capacity as we do now." Her compatriots similarly described an atmosphere of support among the master's degree participants. As one teacher said,

> *We have gotten very close. We have had several papers we had to do as a group. We respond to each other. There is a lot more communication between us. … The group here has gotten very close and supportive. I must say we support each other a lot.*

The collaborative atmosphere is more than psychological support. Teachers are able to learn from one another to improve their practice. One teacher described how working with others provides the opportunity to share successful strategies: "If I get stuck on something like what types of small group structures to use in my ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] class, they might suggest, 'why don't you try this strategy we read about in our book'." Another teacher likewise said, "I'll share ideas with [another teacher] rather than keeping quiet."

While the program engenders collaboration among participants in a single school, teachers who are the sole participants from their schools miss out on this program strength. One teacher in this situation specifically said, "I don't like the isolated aspect of turning in assignments on my own."

Somewhat ameliorating this isolation, teachers in the master's degree program have made connections across school boundaries, both through the online forum of their coursework and the in-person meetings. The same teacher who cited the isolation also mentioned the community she has been able to create across schools:

> *This program opens the opportunity to talk to other teachers. … This program has connected me with other teachers who may be going through similar things, the same insecurities and successes. … Whenever we have a face to face, I try to connect with other people. I exchange e-mails and try to bond and find key people who I can learn from, collaborate with. I did my group activity with teachers from* [a different school]. *I have to search for contacts, but that is how I've been doing this.*

Teachers reported benefits to these connections, including having a broader perspective and caring about the quality of their own work in the program. As one teacher described, "We read an assignment and then respond. Then we respond to the responses of our classmates. Before, my thinking was isolated; but now, reading what is happening in other schools, doing assignments has broadened my horizons." Another teacher said, "When I respond, I put in a lot of care into what I say because I know these people personally and care about them. I am not just doing this for class credit."

Support

A second strength of the program is the support master's degree students receive from the professors-in-residence and other UF faculty. They reported that the professors are available and accessible and that they provide meaningful feedback and support for meeting program expectations and requirements. Even the professors who are based in Gainesville were reported to be readily available online and on the phone. One program participant described how the support she received differed from typical support provided by university faculty:

> [My professor-in-residence] *is very approachable and willing to help. Her feedback has been very productive. I've had the experience that some teachers with doctorate degrees are a little detached from their students. With* [our professor-in-residence] *I don't feel that. I can express what I feel. I ask for her advice.*

Program participants were clear that the professors-in-residence were available to help with any issue, whether it was directly related to the coursework or a more personal issue that was interfering with their coursework. As one teacher said, "The professors are great giving feedback quickly and not just about assignments, but about issues as well. They've been good about responding to personal situations." One teacher elaborated on how much the support meant to her: "[The professor-in-residence] has been my coach. She is fabulous—helpful and caring. When you have that kind of support, it means a lot."

Applicability

The third strength of the program is its job-embedded nature and the fact that learnings from coursework were immediately applicable in teachers' classrooms. As one teacher said, "The material is meant to be applied to what we're doing. We're using it in the classroom; you're to implement as you're doing the classes." Teachers at all grades and schools reported that they appreciate and benefit from this aspect of the program. For example, one teacher said, "Everything is so pertinent to my work and connected to what I'm doing daily. … Courses are very interesting, very exactly about what I'm doing." Another teacher said, "I can apply what I learn in my classroom. Knowing I can do everything in my classroom and get my own data is great."

Several teachers pointed out how the applicability of the coursework was different from traditional professional development or other master's degree programs. One teacher said, "I'm really happy that this applies directly. Many times you get a master's [degree] and it doesn't apply to what you're doing, and that is one of the main reasons I haven't gotten one before. But this is applicable." A teacher at a different school said,

*Right away, we learn something through online courses or through professors,
and you are able to apply it the next day.* [In contrast,] *sometimes you go to
workshops and they give you a million things, but you can't use it the next day.*

Program Challenges

All teachers in the master's degree program spoke highly of the program and its strengths, as described. A few, however, did bring up challenges. Across teachers in the program, the most prevalent challenge was finding time to complete assignments, especially with other school and family obligations. This was specifically mentioned by a few of the teachers. For example, one teacher said she needed someone to watch her young daughter while she completed writing assignments. School obligations, like attending PTA meetings or preparing teaching materials, can also impinge on teachers' time. One teacher described working all day Saturday, sometimes until very late, so that she can have Sunday "for the other things in my and my family's life." As one teacher summed up, "Taking care of it all is a challenge."

The other challenge reported by only two of the teachers was the conflict between school policies, which prevent parents from being in the classroom, and the program's emphasis on parent involvement. One teacher described,

*The county atmosphere is changing. We are now keeping parents at arm's
length, but the program is trying to have us embrace the parents. It is hard to do
that when the administration across the district is more about keeping parents
out.*

A teacher at another school said, "Maybe if the administration will be more open and receptive to everyone's ideas and allow them to get parents more involved, the climate would start changing, and it would have a ripple effect."

Another challenge mentioned by one principal is feeling removed from the program. This principal mentioned wanting to know even more about the master's program. Specifically, she wants to know what the teachers are learning and wants to provide UF input on ways the program could further support teachers' learning.

*It would be beneficial for principals to meet with professors at U of F and give
them feedback on what they wish their teachers would learn, what is lacking. I
wish I could see and have input into curriculum and syllabus. I don't know what
they've learned—I don't like that I don't know what they're learning.*

Self-Reported Benefits and Outcomes

Measurable, standardized outcomes of the master's degree program will not be available for a few years. In the meantime, however, program participants and principals have reported on the effects they attribute to the program. We discuss these self-reported benefits and outcomes here.

Classroom Strategies

Nearly all teachers participating in the master's degree program reported that they learned specific strategies in their courses that they were able to implement immediately in their classrooms. Mirroring the content of the courses completed in the first year of the program, those strategies concerned classroom management, instruction, and methods for involving parents.

In classroom management, teachers implemented new systems to encourage a positive classroom atmosphere. Several teachers described the changes they made in their classes:

> *I used to do red, yellow, and green lights for classroom management. I learned through classes that it's better to accentuate the positive. Now I call students privately if I am having an issue.*

> *One* [change I made] *came from the culturally responsive classroom [course]. The way that they're talking about time out is interesting. Sending a child out of an activity is distracting, but using time out to take away from the distracting behaviors helps the whole group. …. It's working really well, it's excellent. It makes them responsible for their behavior, but it's not punitive. It puts the importance on the activity at hand.*

> *I'm still trying some of the classroom management things I've learned on problem students, like the loads of praise, and they work. I changed how I think. Now I stop to think about what students are feeling and thinking. I have changed my behaviors and my thinking.*

In addition to changing how they approach classroom management, teachers in the master's degree program identified ways they have changed their instruction or how they organize their day. As one teacher said, "Surprisingly, the classes have taught me a lot, and I have noticed I have used several of the strategies that I read about." For example, many of the teachers adopted morning meetings into their daily schedule. Even a prekindergarten teacher who regularly had a circle time changed the nature of that time to incorporate what she was taught. As she described, "In pre-K we do have circle time, but I never incorporated those structured steps." Similarly, many teachers are providing opportunities for a lot more movement during the day, more cooperative learning, and less teacher talk. A second-grade teacher described changes in her instruction: "I push more communication. I let students talk in groups and not just sit with paper and texts."

The instructional changes described by the teachers were also evident to the principals. When asked about the outcomes of the master's degree program, one principal described the changes he is seeing in the teachers: "I see less sit and get. I see more movement. I see different strategies, like music. There are more cooperative learning style approaches for students instead of standing at the chalkboard." Another principal described the benefits he has seen for a particular teacher:

> *It's helped her … the things she learns in the classroom, she literally comes back and practices in her room. Her classroom management and time on task have improved. …. Her instruction has improved. Being able to look at what she wants to do and organize herself in a way to get it done, that's a big part of it.*

Teachers have developed different understandings about the parents of their students and how to engage them in the classroom. Teachers from different schools talked about how they view parents differently and their responsibility as teachers for getting to know the parents:

> *We had to do house interviews. It helped me to understand how to get parents more involved. … You need to engage with parent at home to see how to help them.*

My relationship with the parents in my class has changed, too. I am more accepting and do not automatically stereotype families that are less involved. It has made me understand diversity.

Now I feel more willing to involve the parents.

Other Teacher Outcomes

Besides changing their classroom practices, teachers and principals reported other outcomes to participating in the master's degree program. One was that teachers changed their way of thinking about their work. For example, one teacher said that the course on culturally responsive education changed her way of thinking and helped her be more open-minded. As she said, it "helped me see in a different light." Another teacher said that engaging in inquiry "made me think about the students more and what students were feeling and what I was feeling. It clarified certain thoughts and feelings for me."

A principal similarly said that the difference she is seeing is that participating in the program has prompted the teachers to look at their practice differently:

They're more focused in the classroom—how they're planning and teaching, different styles, different methods. They're trying to apply what they learned from the program. And they're learning how to read data a little bit better, understand more about operations in schools and how their class fits in with the school, and how this impacts and affects their classrooms and the rest of school.

Another outcome attributed to the program is that teachers felt reinvigorated about being teachers. As one teacher said, "Teaching can let you be stagnated. It makes coming to work exciting because you are learning so many new things." Another teacher said,

It fired me up again to teach. Can I do this for 20 more years? What else can I do? I don't know. I was feeling frustrated. And this program has helped me see there are other things you can do. You can go online and get ideas. It fired me up. It got me back to being the teacher I was many years ago.

A principal commented on the motivating role the program has played. He said his teachers were "reenergized with learning, sharing, and networking with their peers."

Two other program outcomes were mentioned but only by a few teachers. One was an increase in knowledge of early childhood. A few teachers reported knowing more about early childhood development, having a larger arsenal of strategies appropriate for early childhood, and understanding the reasons behind some strategies or procedures. The other outcome was that the program helped participants emerge as teacher leaders. Principals at two schools noted that program participants were taking on a leadership role in the school and that other staff members were looking up to them.

A few teachers participating in the master's degree program felt that they did not gain much new knowledge from the program. However, they spoke positively about the program and felt that it reinforced what they already knew or their general approach to education. One teacher, for example, who had previously run a home day care center, said that she already had a solid understanding of child development. Another who has a degree in psychology likewise said she

already had a strong understanding of early childhood growth and development. Another teacher said, "It's just reinforcing what I believe in."

Outcomes for Students

Teachers reported that the changes they are making in their classroom strategies are positively affecting their students. One change teachers saw was that students are more motivated. For example, one teacher said, "The kids are more excited, they are more engaged. I have them participating in activities, and they're learning, they're motivated." Teachers also said that their students are becoming better communicators because of the new strategies being used in the classroom. One teacher said that because of morning meetings, "They are communicating better with each other. … They are more engaged and respectful with each other." Teachers also reported that they are making stronger connections with their students. As one teacher described, "They seem more part of a team rather than the teacher and us." Another teacher similarly said, "I feel we are much more of a family and they connect a lot more and share more."

Outcomes for Schools

The master's degree program, although intended to develop individual teachers' skills, also aims to improve practices schoolwide through the increased leadership role played by the program participants. In some of the schools, teachers in the master's degree program have been able to formally and informally share ideas with their colleagues and spread the strategies and approaches they are learning. Participants in several schools, for example, have shared the idea of morning meetings with their colleagues at grade-level or faculty meetings, which other teachers have subsequently adopted. A teacher not in the program said that the master's degree participants openly shared the material they were exposed to in the programs. As she said, "When they had something they were excited about in their own classroom, they opened up and shared it with us." A principal described how the cohort of master's degree teachers at her school approached the principal and asked to present the idea of effective data chats to the faculty. The principal agreed, and the teachers showed their colleagues how to use the protocols to foster effective data chats. The principal subsequently allowed the teachers to present at two other meetings. Another school adopted an entire program for students transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten that was developed by several master's degree teachers as part of their program requirements.

In other schools, however, teachers in the master's degree program have found their colleagues unreceptive to ideas they are trying to share. One teacher described, "It's a challenge when people are set in their ways." Another teacher at that school said, "They aren't receptive." In some cases, the program participants do have plans to formally present ideas to their colleagues but have not yet had the opportunity. For example, several participants at one school developed a professional development day on the culturally responsive classroom that is planned for a future workday.

Summary and Recommendations

Through the collaboration of faculty across the College of Education, UF successfully transformed its job-embedded master's degree program to include an early childhood focus. Students in the program have successfully met all program requirements and are overwhelmingly positive about the program, citing as strengths the collaboration it engenders, the support it provides, and the immediate applicability of the content to their classrooms. Teachers reported

that because of the program they have learned best practices and new ways of thinking, and they are reinvigorated. They felt that these changes were affecting their students and their colleagues in a positive manner.

Despite the enthusiasm of teachers currently in the program, recruitment of participants remains difficult. Although there will be no more cohorts under the i3 grant, future recruitment efforts may benefit by awareness of those aspects of the program that current teachers said attracted them to it: The master's degree program is free, it is from one of Florida's top universities, it is easier than a traditional program to work into a busy schedule because it is online, and it is designed to improve teachers' practice. The GRE remains the greatest hurdle. Over time, UF faculty may be able to demonstrate to the university how successful the Plan C students were in their courses and in their schools. In the absence of being able to change policy, recruiters should address the hurdle openly with potential applicants, acknowledge their fear, and perhaps use current students who faced the same fears to assuage others. Likewise, current students are probably the best to address other concerns, like how to balance work, family, and a master's degree program. Current students are one of the program's strongest assets, and while they are currently used in recruitment, their message could be tailored to emphasize the strengths and alleviate the most common concerns. Further, if principals were more involved in the program and understood its content and structure better, they, too, could be better advocates.

3. TEACHER FELLOWS PROGRAM AND THE LEARNING SHOWCASE

FMTI seeks to improve the practice of all teachers in its program schools, not just participants in the embedded master's degree program. The Teacher Fellows program provides a means to reach a broader range of teachers at a less intense and more accessible level than the masters' program. Over the course of a year, a Teacher Fellows facilitator leads a group of teachers at a school through a guided inquiry into their teaching practice. Supported by the facilitator and their peers, participating teachers pose questions or "wonderings" about various areas of student learning that they feel could be improved, select a specific student learning area to improve, research potential strategies for doing so, implement a strategy with their students, assess the impact by collecting and analyzing data, and share the results of this inquiry with their peers. The program culminates in a presentation of the inquiries at the end of the school year at the district-wide Learning Showcase. Teachers, frequently teachers in the master's program, serve as the Teacher Fellows facilitator and receive training in facilitation, support, and materials from UF staff. Teacher Fellows earn a $400 stipend and professional development credit hours for participation, and Teacher Fellow facilitators receive a $500 stipend.

Implementation

The Teacher Fellows program has two main components:

- Teacher Fellows professional learning community (PLC) meetings to support teachers in developing, implementing, and reflecting on their inquiries
- The Learning Showcase, which both acknowledges the importance of teachers' inquiries and enables them to share their learning and promising practices with teachers and administrators from all the FMTI and Ready Schools Miami schools.

Teacher Fellows PLC Meetings

Of the 20 treatment schools, all but one ran a Teacher Fellows program. At the 19 participating schools, groups met formally about once a month and all held the required six program PLC meeting sessions. Across the 19 schools, participation rates ranged from 13% to 50% of staff.[2] On average, 28% of teachers in a school participated in the Teacher Fellows program.

Teachers' reasons for participating were varied, and teachers frequently gave more than one reason. The most frequently cited reasons were the opportunity to collaborate, a desire to reflect with or learn from peers, and a desire to improve or learn about their own practice. Only one teacher explicitly mentioned the stipend as one of the reason for participating, although a few of the staff interviewed mentioned the money and the professional development credit hours earned through participation as a draw for others. For the most part, teachers interviewed joined the Teacher Fellows program because its core elements—collaboration and the opportunity to examine their own practice—appealed to them.

For teachers who chose to participate in the Teacher Fellows program, the majority showed active and consistent engagement. Ninety-three percent of teacher fellows attended all six

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[2] The number of teaching staff eligible to participate in the Teacher Fellows program is based on the number of teaching staff working at each school in August 2011.

sessions, 92% presented at the Learning Showcase, and 94% wrote and submitted a summary of their inquiry (Exhibit 4). For the most part, teachers reported that they did not find participating in the Teacher Fellows program to be a challenge. Instead, interviewed teachers cited various program supports that facilitated completion of their inquiries.

Exhibit 4. Participation in Teacher Fellows' Activities

Activity	Teacher Fellows	
	Number (n = 235)	Percentage
Attended all six sessions	219	93
Presented at Learning Showcase	217	92
Submitted written summary of inquiry	220	94

Just over half the interviewed teacher fellows focused their inquiry on topics related to literacy, such as fluency, reading comprehension, or content literacy. Other topics mentioned by only one or two teachers included behavior and increased learning in other content areas.[3] The most frequently mentioned types of strategies investigated included using student grouping or peer work, mentioned by six teachers, followed by use of manipulatives and parental involvement strategies, mentioned by three teachers. The following are a few examples of issues and strategies teacher fellows examined:

- Improving students' reading comprehension through the use of marginal notes
- Improving ESOL students' ability to read and understand math problems using cooperative learning strategies and grouping by home language
- Improving students' fluency through increased parental involvement—specifically, daily home review of high-frequency words.

Learning Showcase

The 2012 Learning Showcase was a one-day districtwide conference held on a Saturday in May that provided an opportunity for K–8 teachers, early education teachers, principals, assistant principals, and community involvement specialists who had conducted inquiry-based projects to present their work. The event acknowledged the efforts of educators to improve their practices and provided an opportunity for them to share best practices and new innovations in education.

The 2012 event was the fourth Learning Showcase to be held in Miami. Earlier showcases had featured the inquiry projects of educators in Ready Schools Miami schools. However, the most

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[3] SRI researchers interviewed 19 teachers across six treatment schools. Of those teachers, 16 participated in the Teacher Fellows program, and eight participated in the master's degree program. All the master's degree teachers reported either being part of the Teacher Fellows program or serving as the Teacher Fellows facilitator for their school. Time during the interview did not permit all master's degree teachers to discuss their inquiry projects.

recent Learning Showcase included both FMTI and Ready Schools Miami participants, making the event the largest showcase to date, with more than 800 attendees and 275 presentations. In addition, district administrators, including the superintendent, were at the showcase and attended many of the presentation sessions.

Of the more than 800 attendees, a third (269 attendees) were from FMTI schools and together they were represented in 130 presentations. Further, a quarter of the attendees (219) were enrolled in the Teacher Fellows program at FMTI schools. Although teachers made up the largest percentage of participants, other staff such as paraprofessionals, community involvement specialists, and administrators presented as well (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Types of Staff From FMTI Schools Who Made Learning Showcase Presentations

Topic Areas	Number of Staff
Teachers*	241
Paraprofessionals	2
Community involvement specialists	8
Assistant principals	2
Principals	16
Total	269

* Includes such staff as reading coaches, media specialists, and classroom and special area teachers.

The showcase presentations were on a broad spectrum of domains, from strategies for teaching language arts, math, science, and technology to early childhood education to student engagement (Exhibit 6). The most common topic area was literacy and language arts.

Exhibit 6. Inquiry Project Topic Areas for FMTI Schools

Topic Area	Staff Whose Inquiry Was on This Topic	
	Number	Percentage
Literacy and language arts	91	34
Early childhood education	68	25
Science, technology, and math	44	15
School culture and student engagement	57	21
Leadership	9	3
Total	269	100

Note: Many teachers did projects and presentations as a group. Therefore, these numbers are higher than the actual number of presentations made by FMTI staff, which was 130.

The Learning Showcase was well received by all teachers interviewed. The teachers and principals reported that they had a very positive experience at the showcase, noting several potential benefits on their instruction or teaching practice—a key intended outcome of the FMTI. The showcase organizers conducted a survey of all participants that also revealed high levels of satisfaction with it. In particular, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *tremendously*, the average ratings for various objectives of the Learning Showcase were as follows.

- Building collaborative school cultures: 4.4
- Stimulating interest in inquiry: 4.6
- Improving instructional practice: 4.6
- Enhancing student learning: 4.6
- Stimulating future work as an educator: 4.6

Finally, the teachers appreciated the support and interest from district administrators and principals. They were particularly impressed at the support from the superintendent. As one teacher said, "I liked that the superintendent was at showcase, and he walked into my presentation when I talked about the concerns that preschools teachers had."

Self-Reported Benefits and Outcomes

The vast majority of teachers interviewed spoke positively about the benefits of participation in the Teacher Fellows program, both for themselves and their students. Some teachers believed the experience helped them develop a stronger professional learning community with their colleagues in which they could share their wonderings and practices more openly. Many teachers reported changing their instructional practice because of their own inquiry project or other teachers' inquiry projects they saw presented at the showcase. Finally, some teachers reported starting to see some benefits for students from the instructional changes they were making.

Teacher Collaboration Outcomes

A key aspect of the Teacher Fellows program is the opportunity for teachers to share and learn from each other, and about a quarter of teachers cited improved collaboration among teachers as a result of the program. As teachers shared,

> *Sometimes in the teaching profession, you only work in your own classroom and see other teachers only at lunch. This program lets you come together with other teachers.*

> *What I got most out of it was … collaborating with the teachers here in the groups. … We would talk not only about what was going on in the school, but what was going on with the students, "My students are doing this. Okay, what can we do differently?"… It wasn't something that was on the agenda. It just sort of came out.*

A few teachers explained that this sort of open discussion did not normally happen across grade levels and that even grade-level meetings primarily concerned planning, not group problem solving. At another school, the Teacher Fellows facilitator described how the Teacher Fellows program taught them how to talk to each other and structure their meetings to facilitate

communication. Another teacher talked about the benefit of sharing their practice:

I was the facilitator of teacher fellows. ... That first class was an eye-opener for me. Their process of saying, "I have an issue in my room, how do I solve it?" Maybe there is a fellow teacher I confide in, but usually I'm hesitant to. But the process of opening up to other teachers affected our school positively.

Teachers also reported that the opportunity to present their work and learn from fellow teachers fostered a feeling of being a part of a larger community that is working hard to improve student learning. As one teacher said,

I learned a lot from teachers who were there. It is so nice when you learn from people who are in the same boat as you. When administrators tell you what to do and hand you a paper, I get the feeling that they don't totally understand. But when you hear from teachers and they provide some help, it makes a difference. ... It was exciting to see that other teachers are researching as well, and searching to find new [strategies]. *It was encouraging to see others facing the same things I am, and they have solutions instead of complaining.*

Yet a few participants did not believe the Teacher Fellows enhanced collaboration or could reach all teachers. One teacher, who sought greater collaboration with his colleagues as part of the program, did not feel the program helped. Another teacher expressed the opinion that there would always be teachers who "will shut doors and teach" and that the program would generally attract extroverts.

Instructional Outcomes

About half the teachers reported that they planned to continue to use the new strategies they examined during their inquiry projects with their students next year. For example, one teacher, tried a strategy involving manipulatives to help students who had difficulty distinguishing between letters and numbers; she found it effective for helping students learn their letters and sight words and said she would use it again. Another teacher, new to the elementary school level, found the Teacher Fellows program very useful in helping him discover ways to modify his ninth-grade music curriculum for elementary grades. He simplified the curriculum, made it more repetitious and fun, and reduced the difficulty of the vocabulary and found younger students able to learn the material. He plans to use this approach next year to simplify his 10th- grade curriculum as well.

In addition to instruction changing because of their own inquiry projects, several teachers reported planned or implemented instructional strategies from watching other teachers' presentations at the Learning Showcase. Teachers gave many examples of how ideas from the showcase informed their practice:

It was awesome. I learned so much. I attended a session on Four Square writing in preschool. They showed us the method. I loved [this method] *because toward the end of the year* [the teacher] *could take that topic sentence and picture and write the idea on the board for the whole class. I already obtained the template and plan to do it next year, and I already* [shared it] *with my paraprofessional.*

So many of the things I heard [about] *I am already implementing. I jotted little notes. I tried to get a little from each person. I have already tried things, like*

having parents come to class, and [am trying] *to have parents come in and do things with kids.*

Going out to see other people was enlightening. I saw another group that had done a play as a reward system for students; students who had good grades and behavior could participate in the play. We could do that here.

There was one I really liked by teacher fellows from another school—an ESOL strategy for taking notes for math [that involved] *a highlight, reread, and decode strategy. I think it is a useful tool when doing math. I'm going to use the strategy. She even gave us a template for the students to write what the problem said and what it means.*

Part of the [science] *presentation talked about authentic assessments—that is something she discussed that I can bring in.*

There was one that I attended that had to do with music. It explored having soft music playing in the background, which is supposed to help concentration, taking tests, behavior. So it is something worth exploring. ... I might try the music in the future.

Another presentation dealt with plants. I was able to come back and use that same strategy to show kids how this is the flower, stem, root, to give them an idea of what it is. ... Another presentation dealt with reading in kindergarten. That was interesting because it demonstrated strategies, practical things that I could come into the classroom and do. I took note of things that I might be able to implement at the beginning of the school year.

Principals also confirmed that teachers returned from the showcase with many new ideas and a strong desire to try many of the new strategies they learned about in their school. For example, one principal explained

The teachers were very thrilled with showcase. Even though it was on a Saturday, they really liked it and said they got great ideas. They kept coming to me saying I saw this idea and we should implement this schoolwide.

Finally, a handful of teachers mentioned attitude changes in themselves as a result of participation in the Teacher Fellows program. One teacher said she was more excited about teaching and trying the new strategy with her students—an attitude she felt would affect her students' excitement as well.

Student Outcomes

Interviews with teachers in the Teacher Fellows program suggested that the changes in practice they implemented through their inquiries may already be having some positive effects on students. Specifically, over half the teachers reported that the strategies they implemented as part of their inquiry resulted in academic and behavioral or attitudinal improvement for their students. For example, one teacher examining the effect of using story aids, such as puppets or other props, on increasing student retention of story elements described her findings:

Without story aids, students did not have not as much retention of the story as with the story aids. I have ELL [English language learner] *students. They learn language*

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throughout the year, and I also have language-impaired students throughout year. … I had them put down puppets and let them act out the story. They remembered the story when they could play with it; the language came out. It was significant in our findings as a vehicle for children with language impairment and ELL to be successful.

This teacher plans to use props with all the stories she teaches next year.

Another teacher who paired fourth-grade reading tutors with her first-graders to improve their reading fluency as her inquiry found that the program increased student engagement, the amount of reading done at home, and homework completion—which she attributed to their increased reading fluency. One teacher found that her students tended not to use a strategy she introduced to them; her findings made her think about possible changes to make in the context of another inquiry.

Program Strengths

By and large, teachers spoke positively of their experience in the Teacher Fellows program, and a number expressed excitement at participating again next year. Specifically, aspects of the program that seemed to contribute to teachers' positive experience were layers of support embedded in the program, the clearly structured process and materials for leading teachers through the inquiry process, and the nurturing culture of the program.

High-Quality Training and Facilitation

The UF faculty members who developed the programs for FMTI value teacher knowledge and supporting teachers in leading and facilitating the building of knowledge among their peers. The Teacher Fellows program is structured so that Teacher Fellows facilitators receive training in facilitation and support from UF staff, and the teacher fellows receive support from the facilitators and their peers. This structure creates an environment where everyone has resources to draw on as they work together on their inquiry. For example, a Teacher Fellow facilitator who initially did not feel prepared to facilitate described how the professors-in-residence supported her in their role:

> *I was a little nervous about facilitating at first but felt well supported. …* [Our professor-in-residence] *has been great with the whole process, responsive to my questions, very quick in responding.*

One Teacher Fellow facilitator described her role in creating the supportive environment:

> *As facilitators, we develop an agenda, like the UF style. We are not teachers to boss people around. We are facilitating, sharing knowledge.*

In turn, a few of the teacher fellows cited the support of the Teacher Fellows facilitator, as well as the collaborative structure of the program, as helpful for finishing their inquiries. As a few teachers shared,

> *At first I wasn't sure what I was supposed to be accomplishing with the inquiry. I spoke to* [the Teacher Fellows facilitator] *and we talked in meetings that we had here. They were helpful.*

> *One reason* [completing participation was not a challenge] *is because of the teachers I was doing inquiry with; we were able to come together and brainstorm ideas. If we were*

not able to understand something clearly, we could go to the facilitators, and they were able to help us. They could direct us to links to help us understand what we were doing.

We all worked together so I didn't feel my workload was too enormous. We would help videotape each other and notice things. We used the video tool a lot. We found it was a helpful tool to bring the videos to the PLCs and discuss strategies.

Clearly Structured Process and Materials

In addition, teachers talked about the program being well organized and easy to follow, which helped make the task of facilitating and engaging in inquiry easier. A few Teacher Fellow facilitators interviewed described their training, preparation, and materials that helped them to lead their school's group of teacher fellows:

We got the training and support for us, guiding us through process and paper. … Everything you do is given to you. It's not lecture—a lot of grouping and presenting and breaking down the reading materials.

[I didn't feel prepared to facilitate] *when I was told to do it because there was so much I was doing.* [But] *once you're mentally organized, it's laid out and* [you just] *follow it.* [The teacher fellows] *all presented and did what they're supposed to do.*

A teacher fellow described how being walked through the inquiry process helped her take ownership of her work:

Each [meeting] *was something different. Their overall goal is to teach us how to put together a meaningful inquiry. My first idea, the facilitator tore it to shreds. We were talking about doing inquiry, what is a good inquiry, what are guidelines. It needs to be testworthy, something you can collect data on, how long will you collect data, what are implications of that, how to put it in writing, how to talk with colleagues. For me it was important using their guidance to stay structured. If you are testing more than one thing, it's not specific enough. They walked us through the inquiry process and importance of inquiry. That helped me take ownership of that.*

In addition, the Teacher Fellows program provided support, templates, and feedback that made preparing a showcase presentation much easier for teachers. As one teacher explained,

There were no challenges. I was given a lot of good examples, including sample PowerPoint presentations and handouts. Before the showcase, I brought my presentation to my Teacher Fellows group, and they gave me suggestions about what to change.

Another teacher described how teachers who did not participate in the Teacher Fellows program but who went to the showcase were impressed when they saw how much help the teachers received, and now they were thinking about joining the Teacher Fellows program next year.

Culture and Values of the Program

The culture and values of the program made the meetings and showcase a welcoming and comfortable environment in which to present and share wonderings and results. One Teacher Fellows facilitator described an initial resistance to the structured sharing required of teachers, but she also talked about how the program had taught them to communicate in a supportive way.

Not everyone is willing to take on something new like this. Some people find it threatening. You expect them to do things a specific way, but it's so we can all share with each other. ... We kept telling them we were all learning, there's not a right way or wrong way.

This nurturing environment helped people who had been nervous about presenting at the showcase feel safe. Teachers explained how the environment of the showcase helped them relax and made it a good experience:

I was more fearful with my peers than at the showcase because they know me here and I felt bad messing up. I saw people were laid back and just there to share and get new ideas.

Yes, it went really well, I liked it. I had never done a presentation using PowerPoint. It was a nice environment. I got to see colleagues from the past.

Teachers also felt a great sense of accomplishment in overcoming their fear of delivering a presentation to an audience of teachers and administrators.

Again, that was a wonderful experience. When I got there I was a little nervous to see so many teachers. My concern was would this be an inquiry that other teachers would learn from. Once I was able to sit down and watch other presentations, I got a little relaxed. When it came to my time, I think we conveyed what our wondering was and how we accomplished that.

At first I was really nervous. There were 15–18 people. I presented with the second grade and Spanish teachers about doing morning meetings; I spoke about the special education aspect. I think it went really well. [Through this experience] *I felt more secure about presenting.*

Program Challenges

Comments about the Teacher Fellows program trended to the positive, but a few interviewees mentioned some challenges to running and participating in the program and provided suggestions for improvement.

Time Commitment

Staff at two schools mentioned the time commitment required for the Teacher Fellows program as a barrier. According to one teacher,

The two hours [a month]*, it's a lot to ask of teachers. Teachers are very into their time. They want to get out and do their thing at home. I have in-laws who can watch my kids. It's very hard for everyone to do it. Maybe if it was an hour two times a month they'd be more accepting. I don't know. A lot of teachers have their kids in activities after school.*

Difficult Projects

A couple of teachers mentioned difficulty with implementing the inquiries themselves. One had to do with the nature of the inquiry she chose, which involved creating a professional learning community of teachers from several schools not involved with the Teaching Fellows program. The other teacher mentioned that the process of setting up her classroom for the inquiry was the only challenge.

[My inquiry was a challenge] *because I was dealing with other teachers rather than having my classroom accessible to me all the time. I was depending on these adults to make sure they got to the meetings and took their reflections seriously. And they had to be willing to suspend judgment and come in and be open to the experience.*

The only challenge was implementing the procedures needed and getting kids ready and getting them in place to implement.

Lack of an Opportunity to Share Projects With School Colleagues

Sharing findings beyond the Teacher Fellows group was limited. However, teachers at some schools did have an opportunity to share and fine-tune their presentations:

Prior to … the showcase, we met in the computer lab and presented to our staff. They could critique our presentations, and it gave us an example of the types of questions people would ask.

However, for the most part, teachers did not report sharing inquires broadly with colleagues throughout the school but rather only with the teacher fellows:

We haven't [shared] *this year. I'm not sure if we will. They do give us chance to do professional development. If they do, I might do my inquiry.*

We did have an opportunity to share but not schoolwide, just amongst ourselves with the teacher fellows. We have not had a chance to do it schoolwide.

Those who went to showcase all agreed we will share our presentations from the showcase with one another before we go to next year's presentation. We would have grown a lot more if we had done that beforehand.

The lack of sharing schoolwide seemed to be due to timing because the inquires ended late in the school year. As one teacher said,

We haven't shared our presentation with other teachers in the school outside of teacher fellows. The showcase was so close to the end of the year, so that may have interfered with teachers being able to share their presentations with teachers at a faculty meeting.

However, many teachers mentioned plans or desires to share their inquiries with the rest of their colleagues at their schools in the coming school year. They also hoped it would encourage more teachers to participate in the Teacher Fellows program in future years. Many teachers expressed plans and desires for sharing inquiries at faculty meetings and professional development days:

It will probably be similar to the showcase, when we have professional development days. We'll have teachers rotate on a schedule and see each other.

We will present our inquiries to staff at one of our professional development days.

We will try to do one [a presentation] *here in house and share with other teachers who are not in the program.*

If I can present my project in October at a faculty meeting it may help us recruit more teachers for next year.

A couple of principals mentioned setting aside time in the next school year to allow for sharing of the inquiry projects more broadly. As one said,

I want to see [all the inquires done by teachers at my school]. *Others are asking and want to share them again. I don't foresee it will happen now but when school starts again. We haven't quite figured out how we will share them. Probably similar to the showcase, when we have professional development days.*

Showcase Scheduling and Logistics

A few minor challenges were specific to the Learning Showcase. The ones mentioned tended to concern the scheduling of presentations and glitches in technology.

The showcase was from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 on a Saturday. There were 275 presentations in total divided among four time slots during the day. During each of the time slots, there were 35–37 concurrent sessions, which included two presentations each. Therefore, most Showcase attendees listened to seven or eight presentations in addition to presentations made by speakers at the opening and closing sessions. A handful of teachers mentioned that the day felt long and the number of presentations was more than they could process in one day. Also, some teachers mentioned that the day started with keynote speakers who they thought were great but whose speeches went longer than they expected. As one principal said, "The day was too long. People felt oversaturated with information." Those staff who felt the day was too packed suggested breaking up the showcase over two days, instead.

Several teachers mentioned that choosing which presentations to attend was difficult because there were just four time slots, each with concurrent presentations, and usually they were making their own presentations in one of the four time slots. As one teacher described, "There were so many [concurrent presentations] that you couldn't get the full spectrum. You couldn't embrace it because you only get to go to three." The teachers felt the need to attend their colleagues' presentations to show support, but often they wanted to attend other presentations that were of greater relevance to their own practice.

One teacher mentioned that the transition time between presentations was too short. He wished that more than five minutes was allotted between presentations to allow for more discussions after the presentations.

A few teachers were disappointed by the small audiences at their presentations. Some thought it was the time of day. As one teacher said, "We were [during the] last session of the day, so there was not a large turnout." Others teachers thought the small audience was due to the location of their sessions. As one reported, "I was upset because not a lot of people came into my session. We were in one of those rooms where not a lot of people came to it. There were maybe five of us."

Finally, in a couple of cases teachers reported having minor difficulties with the technology at the showcase.

> *What stressed me out was that the computer wouldn't read our PowerPoint. The first presenters had to download theirs on an iPhone and put it on the smart board. We had handouts, but we had practiced on PowerPoint.*

> *There were some technology difficulties, with the facility not having the correct Microsoft system. There was a 10-minute delay in our presentation.*

However, most teachers felt the challenges they encountered were minor and that the strengths and supports of the programs were much more salient.

Summary and Recommendations

All but one FMTI school successfully launched a Teacher Fellows program, and on average a quarter of a school's faculty participated. Participants showed active and consistent engagement throughout the year and at the Learning Showcase. Teachers reported benefits to participating, including closer collaborative relationships with their peers and improved instructional strategies, which they report improved student outcomes. The strengths of the program include the high-quality training and facilitation, a clearly structured process and materials, and a programmatic culture that made teachers feel comfortable in sharing their practice and trying new classroom approaches.

For the most part, teachers and principals did not mention areas for improvement in the Teacher Fellows program. However, a few good practices might be worth promoting more widely and some issues might suggest changes to consider. Specifically, FMTI may want to consider building in to the program opportunities for teacher fellows to share their presentations at their own schools before the Learning Showcase. To help them get the most out of the Learning Showcase, teachers from a school might attend as a team and decide which presentations each would attend so that they can later share the information with each other. If possible, having the showcase earlier in May could enable teachers to try out new ideas in the current school year, and having it over two days may enable more teachers and principals to participate, attend more sessions, and not feel so overwhelmed.

4. PRINCIPAL FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Principal Fellows program was designed to support principals in adopting a facilitative leadership approach and to enhance their ability to effect change within their schools. The Principal Fellows program has several components.

- The Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC), which holds meetings of the principals across the 20 treatment schools facilitated by UF faculty
- The statewide Principal Leadership Institutes, which afford the opportunity for principals to collaborate and share leadership practices with principals from UF's network of partner schools across Florida
- A yearlong inquiry project and opportunity for principals to present their work at the Learning Showcase.

The FMTI also provides other school supports that help principals share leadership and engage in data-driven decision making. One such support is the administration and analysis of two schoolwide surveys—the School Culture Survey and the Instructional Practice Inventory—that enable data-driven decision making. Another is the Summer Leadership Institute, where school leadership teams interpret the data from the two surveys and create school-specific action plans.

This section describes the implementation of the Principal Fellows activities, other school supports, and their benefits and challenges as perceived by participants and UF staff.

Principal Fellow Meetings

In 2011–12, the PPLC, comprising all 20 principals in the treatment schools, met five times during the school year. Almost two-thirds of the principals attended all the PPLC meetings (Exhibit 7). However, a quarter of principals attended only one or no meetings. Although all five interviewed principals said they participated in the meetings, several had to miss some meetings because of emergencies at their schools or meetings with their regional superintendents. Further, they expressed concern about the number and timing of meetings. In particular, meeting after school was difficult because once they were at their schools, it was often difficult to leave because of issues that arose that day. They also requested more content and resources through the program, such as a book study on appreciative leadership. Still, all the principals interviewed participated in enough meetings that they were able to conduct their inquiry projects, and 70% of them shared their projects at the Learning Showcase.

Exhibit 7. Attendance at Principal Fellows Meetings
(*n* = 20)
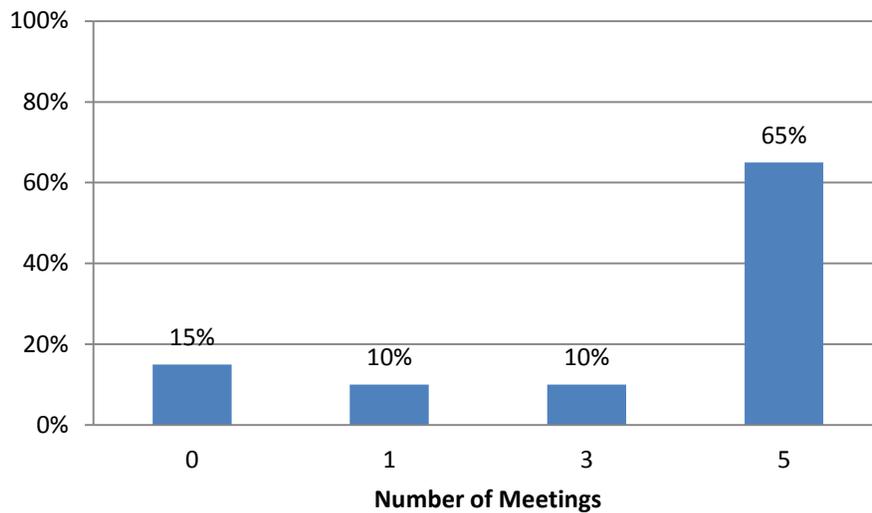
Principals reported benefits to attending the local PPLC meetings. All interviewed principals said that having discussions with other principals helped them see things from a new perspective. Most principals also enjoyed networking, sharing challenges and practices, and receiving ideas from their peers. As one principal described, "We talk about a lot of issues. How do you do this? Handle that? You can see things in a different perspective."

Some principals found the meetings more useful and engaging than other district principal meetings because of their focus on active learning. A principal summarized the difference between PPLC meetings and district meetings as follows:

> *Those* [PPLC] *meetings in the program are smaller than district principal meeting, more comfy. We can talk and give feedback and learn what's going on at their schools with their projects. I don't like meetings, but I like this better. … In contrast, the regular principal meetings, it's just throwing information at you.*

One principal, in contrast, found going to the meetings to be a challenge on top of her other work and not as rewarding as the other principals did. However, she did acknowledge that she learned things at the meetings that she found helpful, such as how to lead an inquiry in the school and how to restructure faculty meetings to share and gather information in different ways.

Statewide Principal Leadership Institutes

Statewide Principal Leadership institutes are an opportunity for principals to get away from their daily work to focus on learning and sharing practices with principals from other schools and districts. Most of the principals attended both statewide Principal Institutes, and all but two attended at least one (Exhibit 8). Principals felt they benefited from both Principal Institutes but more from the second one.

Exhibit 8. Attendance at Principal Institutes
(*n* = 20)

Number of Principal Institutes Attended	Percentage of Principals
0	10
1	20
2	70

The first institute was held in Naples, Florida, in November 2011. The goal was to teach the principals how to lead an inquiry on leadership and instructional practices and to inspire them to identify meaningful topics for their projects. Although intended to convene principals from across Florida districts, the first institute was not statewide because the principals from the other partner districts were not able to get release time. FMTI staff, however, wanted to get principals away from their daily work to enable them to focus on the institute. The institute was held in Naples so UF faculty could share the work the Lastinger Center had done with a children's foundation to help principals understand the impact of inquiry. This was a strategic community-wide inquiry project that identified a pediatric dental crisis and resulted in the development of a pediatric dental center. Dr. Nancy Dana, an inquiry expert from UF, presented on the inquiry process and helped the principals get started with their individual inquiry projects. Interviewed principals said that the institute helped them develop some initial ideas for their inquiry, but the relevance of learning about and visiting the dental center was unclear to them.

The second institute was held in Jacksonville Florida, in May 2012. The focus was on cognitive strategies to promote student learning. It included principals from other districts across the state, which all the participants appreciated. Dr. Marcia Tate presented on 20 instructional strategies to promote student learning (i.e., "that engage the brain"). Her presentations, book, and other materials on cognitive learning strategies resonated with the principals and were highly regarded. Principals described this part of the institute as "awesome," "great," and "mesmerizing." In fact, the principals were so motivated by Dr. Tate's work and presentation that they joined together to request that the district hire her to conduct professional development sessions for all district principals and for many of their teachers. Further, many of the principals planned to start or were already using her strategies and ideas in their schools. The enthusiasm for this institute was expressed well by one of the principals:

> *The one in Jacksonville was best conference I've ever been to in my 25 years as an educator. Marcia Tate was fantastic. We were all just moved by her. I didn't look at my watch one time. We talked about brain research and education and how it relates to the brain and how kids learn. It was amazing, so much so that we're bringing her to Miami two times so teachers can see her. … I presented to my faculty when I returned 20 strategies on how to effectively engage children. I did some of those strategies with my staff. … Next year all of my teachers will be teaching all 20 strategies of brain engagement.*

Principals reported that getting outside the M-DCPS district and their buildings helped them develop a deeper sense of camaraderie with each other and made them more open to thinking

about new strategies. Seeing the strategies at work in similar schools showed the principals that the adoption of these strategies was possible:

> *We were able to go and visit some of the schools, and I enjoyed that as well. They shared tools that they have. I was taking notes. A lot of things I want to implement. One of the schools I was visiting was implementing the brain-cognitive strategies that the speaker was talking about. A lot of things I want to open my school year with.*

Inquiry Projects

As part of the PPLC, principals were expected to engage in an inquiry project. Most (85%) of the principals did so, and 70% presented their inquiry findings at the Learning Showcase (Exhibit 9). Inquiry projects gave the principals a chance to look at a specific issue affecting their school with a different perspective and greater focus. Topics for the inquiries included principal walk-throughs, strategies for teaching writing, math interventions, and strategies for strengthening students' approaches to learning (Habits of the Mind).

Exhibit 9. Principals' Completion of Inquiry Projects (n = 20)

Element	Percentage of Principals
Wrote inquiry abstract	85
Presented inquiry at Learning Showcase	70
Attended Learning Showcase	75

Principals reported that the inquiry projects have changed their practices and funding decisions about specific interventions. For example, a group of four principals did an inquiry on principal walk-throughs and how to use them better to enhance student achievement. In the past, principals would observe a single teacher and look for practices needing improvement and then give individual feedback to just that teacher. They believed that approach was not effective. As part of the inquiry, the principals developed a tool that focused their attention on particular aspects of teaching. Principals then discussed with their leadership teams common issues they identified across teachers without singling out any individuals. They also talked privately with some teachers about specific issues. This approach allowed for leadership and faculty discussions about expectations and how to address these issues with more systematic professional development and support for teachers. All the principals liked the new approach. One said,

> *I ended up changing the way I do walk-throughs. I never did it that way before, but I do it now. They* [teachers] *have a better understanding of what I expect; teachers and I talk. Now all the assistant principals and I do* [walk-throughs] *this way.*

Inquiry projects also helped principals determine whether their investments in interventions were making a difference for students. A principal shared her experience:

I had $29,000 [from Title 1] and decided to use it for interventions—tutoring during the day and after school. Question: Is it worth it? So we took baseline data, periodic data, and final data. It showed 1-on-1, push-in and pull-out models, small groups, and afterschool programs all improved scores for the kids [receiving them]. I was happy. It justified the expenditures so I got money again this year for these interventions.

Principals also liked teaming with other principals in their regions to work on the inquiry projects. As one principal shared, "For the Learning Showcase, I hooked up with colleagues in my region who I met as principal fellows. We decided let's do the presentation together. I learned from her and she learned from me. We both walked away with some take-away."

Even though principals found inquiry projects interesting, they found them to be a lot of work and were not sure whether they were worth the time. As one principal noted, "[Doing an inquiry project] is interesting. It gives us an opportunity to look at things differently. I don't know how productive it's been. It's a little cumbersome because it's after hours and we have a million things to do." Some principals suggested that principal inquiry projects be voluntary.

Other School Supports

FMTI offers other schoolwide supports, including two schoolwide surveys and a Summer Leadership Institute. Although not directed just at the principals, these supports strengthen school leadership, encourage principals to adopt a more distributed leadership model, and provide data to enable principals to make data-driven decisions.

School Surveys

FMTI aims to support more shared and effective school leadership through the administration and analysis of formative assessments to support data-driven decision making. The two surveys the FMTI conducts are the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) and School Culture Survey. The IPI is an observational assessment of instructional practices that measures the level of student engagement in learning. The School Culture Survey measures six factors of school culture—collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership—and an efficacy factor.

Whereas all schools participated in at least one of the data collection efforts, three of the 20 schools did not conduct the IPI, and two did not administer the School Culture Survey. Those schools that did participate in the IPI received their first round of data in December 2011 or January 2012. The findings from the IPI informed later FMTI programming. Specifically, consulting with Marcia Tate on instructional strategies to better engage students in learning was a new component added in response to the IPI findings. Further, a new goal was to make the course Ready Schools 303 an opportunity to develop student engagement coaches to support this work.

Before the 2012 Summer Leadership Institute, however, interviewed principals were not sure whether the IPI and School Culture survey had been administered or whether and when their data would be shared with them. Some principals had received the data but could talk about the data only in general terms because they had delegated review and decisions about areas for targeted improvement to other staff. Only one principal mentioned using the data to improve school climate or instruction. That same principal mentioned the difficulty in attending to these data

while also trying to address many other issues (e.g., instruction, parents, the building, staff, and budget).

Spring survey results were to be presented to the schools at the 2012 Summer Leadership Institute (which was held after data collection for this report). At that institute, leadership teams were to have the opportunity to analyze IPI data in relationship to student achievement data. However, before the summer institute, most principals appeared not to be very involved in using data from the two surveys.

Summer Leadership Institutes

Another way the FMTI supports more effective school leadership is through an annual multiday Summer Leadership Institute that generates school-specific action plans for the upcoming school year. Each school sends a leadership team, typically composed of the principal, assistant principal, teacher leader (who may be a teacher in the master's degree program), and school-community liaison (in schools where such a position exists). These teams examine a variety of data on school culture, instructional practices, and student achievement to develop school improvement plans that they take back to their full faculties. Participants also use the summer institutes as a forum to learn about the practices and experiences of other schools in addressing such topics as using student data, protocols for PLC meetings, discipline, and improving school culture.

Although most schools sent representatives to the Summer Leadership Institute, most principals did not attend and less than half the schools sent an assistant principal (Exhibit 10). Almost all the schools had teacher leaders present, and more than a third included a teacher in the FMTI master's program. Also, all the schools present at the institute submitted a school action plan.

Exhibit 10. Participation at Summer Leadership Institute (*n* = 20 schools)

	2011		2012	
Type of Attendee	*N*	%	*N*	%
Principal	8	40	8	40
Assistant principal	6	30	9	45
Teacher leader or community involvement specialist	18	90	17	85
FMTI master's program student	7	35	7	35
No representatives	1	5	3	15
Submitted school action plan	19	95	17	85

Many of the principals interviewed did not participate in the 2011 Summer Leadership Institute and did not have much information at the time of the interview about the institute taking place in summer 2012. Some principals had not attended in 2011 because the institute was in July and they had just started at their school in August. Other principals missed the institute because they were busy working on their budgets.

A couple of principals who did attend the 2011 summer institute found it a useful for making school plans.

Yes, it was useful. ... We came back with an action plan to improve the school—all that got implemented.

I found the program to be very useful in terms of we were able to do something specific to our building. We could put together an action plan and come back and we were able to use that and tie it into the school improvement plan. It was meaningful work with sharing and hearing back from different schools about what they were doing.

In contrast, the principals who missed one or both days of the institute did not see the value of it.

My staff was there and they seemed to get something out of it. It was OK, nothing great. I was there for one day; I can't remember what it was about.

Teachers who attended the Summer Leadership Institute valued being able to talk about common challenges across schools and to look at various type of data. They also noted the importance of having principals at these institutes for creating a shared understanding of challenges and strategies.

We learned a lot from talking with teachers at other schools and that I'm not alone. The struggles we're having getting through to parents and motivating students are going on at every school. That's the summary of what we learned. I did learn different strategies. We went through scenarios and strategies.

Yes. I found it interesting to see all kinds of things about data being brought to the table, activities for us to bring back to our school.

Every principal at every school should've been there and administrators from downtown to hear the voice of the teachers. They don't see the struggles we go through. They say this is what we want implemented and done ... they don't know the struggles. My principal knows, but some principals don't have a clue based on my conversations with some of the teachers there.

Summary and Recommendations

The Principal Fellows program included both local meetings and two statewide institutes. Principals appreciated the opportunity to discuss leadership with other principals and be exposed to new ideas that were working in schools similar to their own. Through their inquiries for the Learning Showcase, principals reported that they changed their own practices and funding decisions about specific interventions.

Participation in the Principal Fellows program was inconsistent, largely because of the unpredictability of a principal's job and unexpected issues that arise. To encourage principals to make the program a priority, FMTI might want to redouble efforts to ensure principals understand program expectations and create programming that principals see as directly applicable to their jobs. Principals do not have the time or interest to attend any event for which they cannot see the immediate benefit.

Given the principals' feedback, FMTI has already planned changes for the program. Specifically, the program will have fewer but longer principal meetings next year. Rather than holding five 2-hour meetings, FMTI will have four quarterly meetings from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. The focus of those meetings also will change from inquiry projects to a learning community that uses the UF

Lastinger Center protocols to share dilemmas and ideas for how to solve them. This structure will give principals more of an opportunity to network. Finally, principals will serve as co-facilitators of the meeting discussions next year.

In addition to the already planned changes, to further strengthen the program, the applicability of the two schoolwide surveys needs to be made more explicit. Many principals were unsure of whether the surveys had been completed, and consequently they did not know the results. Perhaps the professors-in-residence can meet individually to review the data output, or at a minimum the data could be presented in a way that is visually stimulating and easy to interpret.

5. KEY FACTORS AFFECTING FMTI IMPLEMENATION

M-DCPS is the fourth largest school district in the country, comprising 392 schools, 345,000 students, and 40,000 employees. Launching and implementing a complex initiative such as the FMTI districtwide is a major undertaking and could be susceptible to many challenges often faced by districts of this size. Successful implementation of FMTI depends on effectively coordinating activities across multiple organizations and departments, obtaining stakeholder buy-in at various levels, developing and delivering high-quality programming on a large scale, and being flexible to adapt to unexpected developments. Discussed here are the factors that supported and challenged implementation of FMTI in its first year to inform other similarly complex and comprehensive early childhood professional development initiatives being conducted in large urban districts.

Supports

As described in Chapters 2 through 4, FMTI staff have successfully developed and implemented all the program components. All proposed activities have taken place, and the participants have provided very positive feedback on both the implementation and perceived impacts. The success of the initiative thus far has been in large part due to building on existing good collaborative relationships across FMTI partners, good reputations with schools and district administrators, and existing well-designed programs that could be adapted for an early childhood emphasis. Other supports had to do with the strong and diverse talents of the FMTI team in content, skills, and perspectives.

History of Partner Collaboration

Coordination and collaboration across partners was supported by a history of strong, positive teamwork over a number of years on Ready Schools Miami, which also included the job-embedded master's degree program, the Teacher Fellows program, and the Principal Fellows program. All the interviewed FMTI partners mentioned the shared history, mutual respect, established trust, and good communication as contributing to good cross-organization collaboration.

Because of the credibility UF had established through the years with the district through Ready Schools and other projects, it and the district had a much easier time developing a memorandum of understanding with the teachers union that enabled teachers to participate in all the FMTI programs. Teachers also mentioned the credibility of UF as a reason for wanting to participate in FMTI programs. A few principals who had been involved in Ready Schools were particularly excited to be involved in FTMI because of their Ready Schools experience.

> *I was part of the Ready Schools, so I jumped on this. It was a great PD opportunity for our teachers. I saw how much Ready Schools impacted and informed my teachers.*

> *I had been part of Ready Schools when I was at another school. Because this school hadn't been involved, I was very anxious we'd be a part and I hoped we'd be a treatment school.*

In addition, the FMTI was supported by funders—The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation—that have invested in Ready Schools Miami for years and see

the FMTI as an opportunity to refine and expand a successful model for improving schools and student achievement.

Districtwide Support

The FMTI has received support from multiple departments in the M-DCPS district (e.g., Early Childhood Programs, Title 1 Administration, School Operations, Office of the Superintendent of Schools), the regional superintendents, the teachers union, and the school board. Support from the numerous district entities was gained through years of building good relationships, understanding the district culture, and knowing the important processes to follow when communicating about the initiative. UF staff's knowledge about the organizational norms and district processes, gleaned from its prior work, has made collaboration much easier. As one UF faculty member said,

> *Knowing the organizational norms and values has helped. This district is extremely large, they are committed to certain organizational processes because it's the only way they can keep things ordered. Knowing how those processes work is key to success. I've had to learn by trial and error and by being guided on how the decision-making process works.*

FMTI staff suggested that anyone starting a large urban school reform effort learn the expected processes for communication and how to work within them because it generates more support for collaborative work.

Support from the teachers union also was carefully sought and, although it took time, was considered a critically important accomplishment. The district and UF prepared a memorandum of understanding collaboratively with the union that listed the benefits and expectations of the initiative for teachers. Having this agreement enabled FMTI staff to ask teachers to participate in important FMTI activities that were not part of their regular teaching responsibilities.

Finally, support and commitment for FMTI have been expressed at the highest levels of the district. The school board unanimously approved the FMTI project with no questions, and the superintendent publically expressed his support to all the principals and teachers at the Learning Showcase.

Diversity and Talent of Team

The FMTI partners attributed some of their success to having a team that is diverse in years of experience and areas of expertise. The team includes staff working in different departments in the UF's College of Education (i.e., the School of Special Education, School of Psychology & Early Childhood Studies, and the School of Teaching & Learning) as well as staff based in Gainesville and in Miami. Further, two of the professors-in residence are considered "cross-overs," people who have worked both in the district as teachers as well as researchers at UF. Their experience working in the school system has proved to be helpful in developing the Teacher Fellows program and courses for the graduate program.

Another important factor in FMTI's success has been good project management and leadership. To support effective coordination, the project has an overall leader and coordinator, Dr. Phil Poekert, who works closely with the project director at the district, Dr. Marisel Elias-Miranda, Administrative Director, Office of Early Childhood Programs. In addition, a professor at UF, Dr. Stephanie Smith, helps coordinate the master's program, and a project coordinator at the district,

Pilar Baldwin, helps coordinate their efforts. The full FTMI team meets monthly by phone and twice a year in person. The district and UF teams meet monthly to discuss project implementation logistics.

FMTI partners believed that the initiative leaders kept the project organized and on schedule. They also noted that all team members were good at communicating with each other and solving problems together. Further, they felt that the central leadership's positive management style, effective facilitation, and interpersonal skills were key in supporting collaborative decision making and coordination across departments and organizations. As one UF faculty member noted, "So much of this is relationships. I have made an effort to get to know people in different offices, so when I give a call, it's a positive thing for them, that I'm not just nagging." One of the UF faculty recalled that after a meeting she frequently received a call from the initiative coordinator who was checking in to see if they were on the same page.

Built on Existing Programs

One of the unique strengths of the FMTI is that many of its programs were already developed and well tested through Ready Schools Miami. These included the job-embedded master's program, the Teacher Fellows program, the Principal Fellows program, the Learning Showcase, the Summer Leadership Institute, and the school surveys. Building on program strengths, the FMTI became an opportunity to refocus and refine. Specifically, the master's degree program was revamped to include an early childhood specialization. Also, the role of the professors-in-residence was enhanced, and the online course environment was improved to support better collaboration among students and faculty. The Teacher Fellows program did not change because the materials and activities had already been refined during the three years' implementation of Ready Schools and were working well. Finally, the Learning Showcase, which was the fourth showcase for the district, was enhanced by the learning and feedback from past showcases, which helped greatly in planning a showcase that increased by 50% in size with the addition of FMTI.

Challenges

Challenges encountered mostly affected the FMTI's ability to recruit schools to participate in the initiative and recruit teachers for the job-embedded master's program. No significant challenges were encountered in the development or implementation of program activities. The original goal was to recruit 50 Title 1 schools in M-DCPS for participation as a treatment or control school. To be eligible to participate, a school needed to be a Title 1 school, have a preschool program, have preschool through grade 3 teachers who were interested in applying to the master's program, and not have already been a Ready Schools partner school. Because of delays in hiring and strict communication protocols, however, school recruitment was a challenge. Similarly, recruitment of teachers for the master's program was impeded by late recruitment of the schools, principals' lack of understanding of the program, and UF admission requirements for GRE scores and college GPAs.

In the end, 43 schools applied to be a part of the FMTI, but a few had to be eliminated because they did not meet entry criteria. The school recruitment process took over half a year, from May 2011 through January 2012. Only at that point could schools be randomly assigned to the treatment or control condition, which took another few weeks. It was February before the

treatment schools were identified. The challenges to school and teacher recruitment are discussed below.

Delays in Hiring

Because of budget cuts, the district had a hiring freeze that delayed the hiring of a district project coordinator. Even though the position was to be funded by the i3 grant, all hiring was on hold. Thus, the project had no coordinator at the same time the district was trying to recruit schools. Without anyone in this critical position, district communications were difficult to handle. No person was designated to make personal phone calls or follow up with certain schools, and the UF staff were not allowed to make these contacts.

UF also experienced a delay in hiring the clinical professor for the master's program, in part due to a hiring freeze. In addition, there were complications in coordinating across two departments (e.g., having to decide in which department the new hire would reside). It took six months just to get the position posted.

Strict Communication Protocols

Because of district communication protocols, communication about FMTI needed to go through regional superintendents and through the district. FMTI staff could not communicate directly to schools about the program. Further, communications to schools were included in weekly briefings, a structure established to streamline the unmanageable amount of e-mails principals had been receiving daily. Given these constraints, getting the proper message out about what the FMTI was offering was challenging, and principals were not paying attention to the communications in the weekly briefings because they did not stand out from other numerous topics being covered. There are still principals who tell UF staff they never heard about the opportunity to become a FMTI school. Also, there was and continues to be confusion among principals about why the program is aimed at preschool through grade 3 teachers.

With the less-than-clear communications, some confusion was evident among principals about who could apply to the master's degree program. Again, however, clarifications had to be made by senior district staff rather than UF staff.

Finally, keeping the regional superintendents informed about FMTI continues to be problematical because of changes in the district structure and organization under regional superintendents. For example, when the project began there were five regions, then there were four, and now there are three regions. Keeping track of which schools are under which regional superintendents and who the proper person is to coordinate with has been a continual process for UF staff.

Strict Graduate School Enrollment Requirements

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the greatest challenges to recruiting for the graduate program is the need for teachers to have a minimum score on the GRE and a 3.0 GPA during their undergraduate degree. The requirement is necessary for the university to maintain a high standing as a graduate program. However, fear and difficulty with doing well on the GRE have been impediments for preschool and kindergarten teachers, who are important targets of this initiative.

Competing Priorities of Principals and their Schools

Not surprisingly, principal buy-in and support have a considerable influence on the success of FMTI at each school. Principals need to communicate the opportunities to teachers. If teachers feel that the principal does not support their involvement in FMTI or is more interested in their participating in other activities, they have much less incentive to pursue FMTI activities. As one district leader said,

> *The principal has a really big role in making it happen. It will only fully work if you have a principal who is really enthusiastic and on board, sees the benefit of the master's program and professional learning communities, and is open to suggestions of change and willing to empower the teachers and staff. In contrast, if you have a principal entrenched in ways and who likes to run school, the program will not be as successful.*

However, not all principals were on board with FMTI. Lack of principal support was particularly an issue in transformation schools, persistently low-achieving schools identified to receive extra support and interventions. These schools are overwhelmed with many new activities and requirements besides FMTI. In some cases, regional superintendents had encouraged these schools to participate in FMTI, but the addition of FMTI on top of other transformation activities proved to be too much. Two of the FMTI treatment schools were transformation schools, and participation has been an issue in both of them.

Summary and Recommendations

The successful implementation of the FMTI can be attributed to the strong history of partner collaboration, support from many district entities (e.g., central administration, regional superintendents, teachers' union, and school board), the diversity and talent of the team, and the strength of the programs the FMTI was built on. To address challenges, FMTI is already making inroads. Specifically, to improve communication, FMTI staff will be creating a monthly newsletter giving the dates and explanations of all upcoming initiative activities and sharing successful practices across schools. Through this forum and others, FMTI still needs to make a stronger case for a focus on pre-K and kindergarten, in particular, to increase the buy-in of principals for a focus on the early grades and to attract more teachers at that level. Further, FMTI should consider the entire school context in selecting schools for participation and may want to consider not working with transformation schools or working only with those schools that make the FMTI their primary means of school improvement.

6. BASELINE DATA

This chapter presents the baseline data from the teacher survey and Classroom Assessment Scoring System observations. In summer 2011, we collected baseline survey data from 1,585 preschool through sixth-grade teachers at the 20 FMTI and 20 control schools. The survey captured teachers' self-reports of instructional practices and school culture. No substantively significant differences were found between the responses of teachers in the treatment and control conditions, but some systematic variation was detected by grade level, which we present.

In fall 2011, trained assessors observed 34 teachers in the master's degree program and 34 matched comparison teachers using the CLASS. The observers rated the teachers on dimensions of emotional support, instructional support, and classroom organization. Findings from the survey and CLASS observations are described below.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 1,551 teachers completed at least some portion of the baseline survey. The majority of teachers were experienced educators: 57% had at least 10 years of experience, and an additional 32% had been teaching for 6–10 years (Exhibit 11). The highest degree earned for a majority (71%) of the teachers was a bachelor's degree. The majority of teachers were of minority race/ethnicity. Forty-nine percent identified as Hispanic, 23% were African American/Black, 18% were White, and 10% identified as members of an "other" race/ethnicity.

The teachers in the master's degree program reflected the larger sample of surveyed teachers on the demographic characteristics except that a larger proportion of the master's program teachers were White (44%) and fewer were African American/Black (3%).

Exhibit 11. Teacher Characteristics, Overall and for Master's Program Teachers

|	All teachers (*n* = 1,551)	Master's teachers (*n* = 34)
Years teaching	%	%
1–2 years	2	3
3–5 years	9	9
6–10 years	32	41
10+ years	57	47
Ethnicity		
African American/Black	23	3
Hispanic	49	47
White, non-Hispanic	18	44
Other	10	6
Highest degree		
Bachelor's -	71	82
Master's -	22	18
Education specialist -	6	0
Doctorate -	1	0

Teacher Survey Findings

Items on the teacher survey were chosen to represent certain conceptual areas and then analyzed using exploratory factor analysis to empirically reveal a data structure. Thirteen factors resulted, each with a Cronbach's alpha ≥ .70. For each of the factors, the response distribution for the subset of 34 master's program teachers was generally very similar to that of the larger sample, so results from the subset are not discussed separately.

Teachers' Self-Report of Instructional Practices

Learner-centered instruction. This factor consisted of three items, rated on a scale of 1 (*never)* to 5 (*almost every day),* that captured how frequently teachers allowed certain elements of classroom practice to be student driven. An example is how often within the last year teachers asked students to make choices about their own activities. The mean for the factor was 3.96, with 46% of teachers reporting a factor score of at least 4 (*once or twice a week*) (Exhibit 12). Tests for statistically significant differences based on grade level revealed that teachers of younger children (pre-K and kindergarten) used learner-centered instruction more frequently than teachers of older children (first- through third-graders and fourth- through sixth-graders).

Exhibit 12. Use of Learner-Centered Instruction, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,527)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
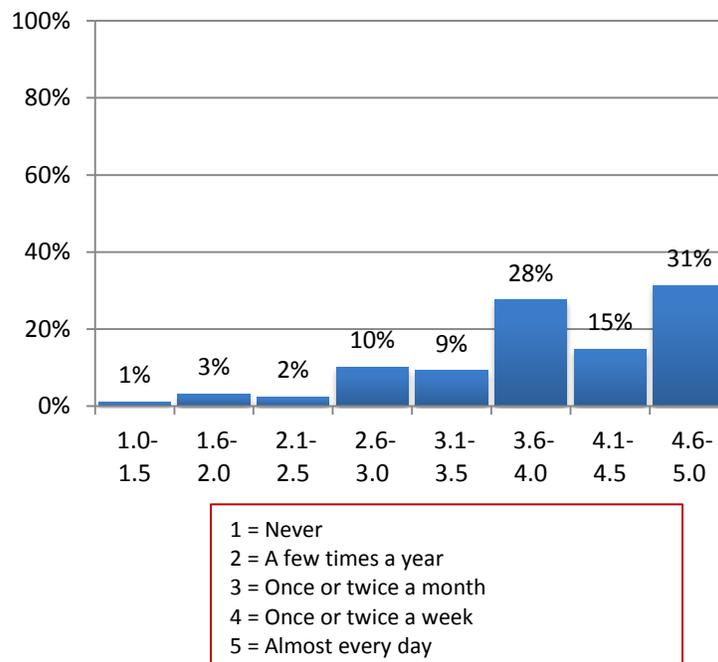
Use of data to inform practice. This factor similarly consisted of three items on the same 1 to 5 scale. It assessed the frequency with which teachers used student assessment data to individualize instruction for each student, inform lesson planning, and evaluate the overall effectiveness of his or her instructional practice. The mean for this factor was 4.23, with 59% of teachers reporting they used student assessment data at least once or twice a week (factor score of 4 or higher) (Exhibit 13). No differences were seen by grade level on this factor.

Exhibit 13. Use of Data to Inform Practice, for All Teachers (n = 1,528)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
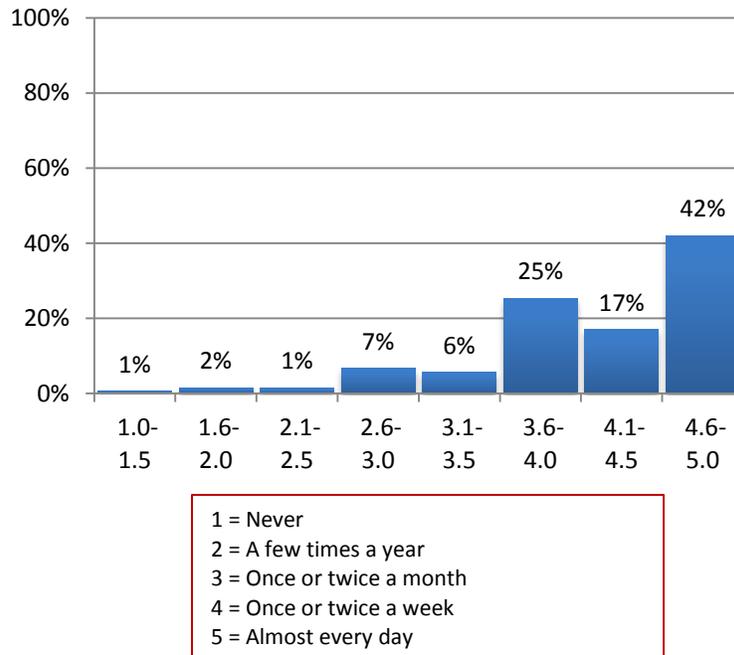
Developmentally appropriate practices. Five items, also on a 1 to 5 scale, assessing how often the teacher used practices considered to be developmentally appropriate for children contributed to this factor. Practices inquired about included asking students to use manipulatives or real objects such as plants and animals as part of their learning experience, engage in inquiry through experiments or projects, and incorporate music, art, or drama into their learning. The mean factor score was 3.87, with 38% of teachers rating themselves a 3 (*once or twice a month)* and 44% rating a 4 (*once or twice a week)* or 5 (*almost every day)* (Exhibit 14). Teachers of the youngest students (pre-K and kindergarten) reported using these types of practices significantly more than teachers of older students (grades 1–3), who in turn used these practices more than teachers of the oldest students (grades 4-6). Possibly these types of multimodal learning practices more easily align with curricular aims in the lower grades or are more easily implemented with younger children. However, FMTI schools may be able to target increased implementation of these types of practices with older children as a means to improve achievement.

Exhibit 14. Use of Developmentally Appropriate Practices, for All Teachers
(*n* = 1,526)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
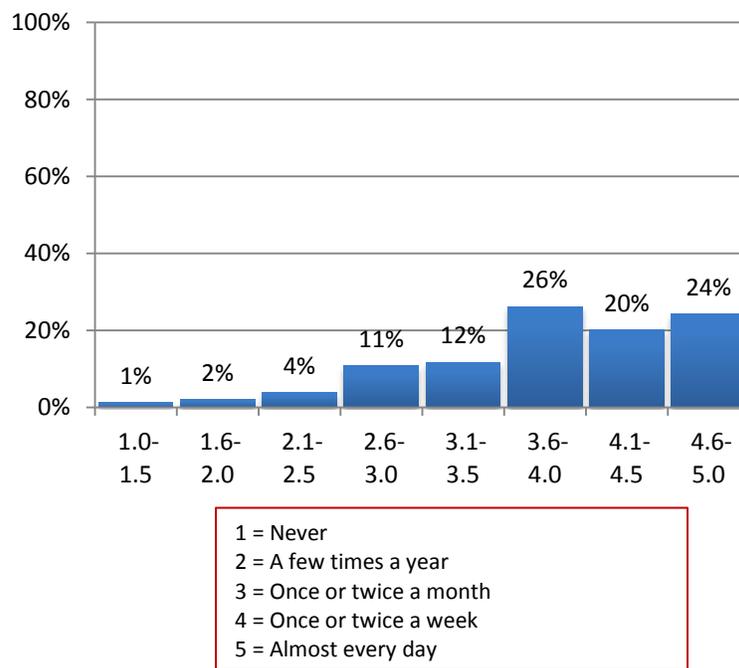
Emphasis on higher order thinking skills. This factor consisted of seven items, rated again on a 1 to 5 scale, that measured how often teachers gave students opportunities to use higher order thinking skills such as problem solving, generating hypotheses, and applying classroom concepts to real-life situations. Scores on this factor were very high, with a mean of 4.39. Seventy-six percent of teachers responded that they used these types of practices at least once or twice a week (factor score of 4 or higher) (Exhibit 15). Almost all teachers (94%) reported they used these practices at least once or twice a month (factor score of 3 or higher). No differences by grade level were seen for this factor.

Exhibit 15. Emphasis on Higher Order Thinking Skills, for All Teachers (n = 1,528)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
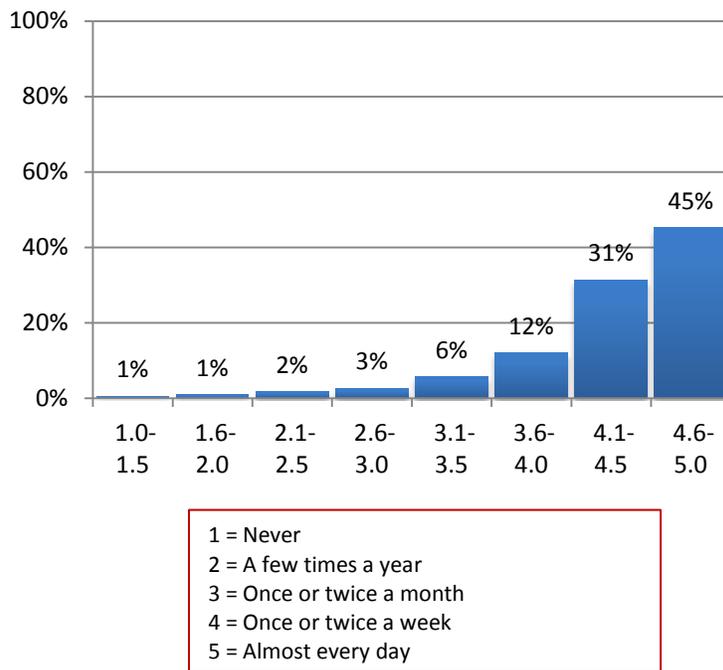
Differentiated instruction. Four items assessing how frequently teachers differentiated instruction on the basis of varying student learning styles and individual student needs constituted this factor. These items were rated on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost every day*). Use of differentiated instruction was frequent and common among teachers; the mean factor score was 4.45, with 75% of teachers responding they used these types of practices at least once or twice a week (factor score of 4 or higher) (Exhibit 16). Almost all teachers (97%) reported they used these practices at least once or twice a month (factor score of 3 or higher). No differences by grade level were seen for this factor.

Exhibit 16. Use of Differentiated Instruction, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,529)
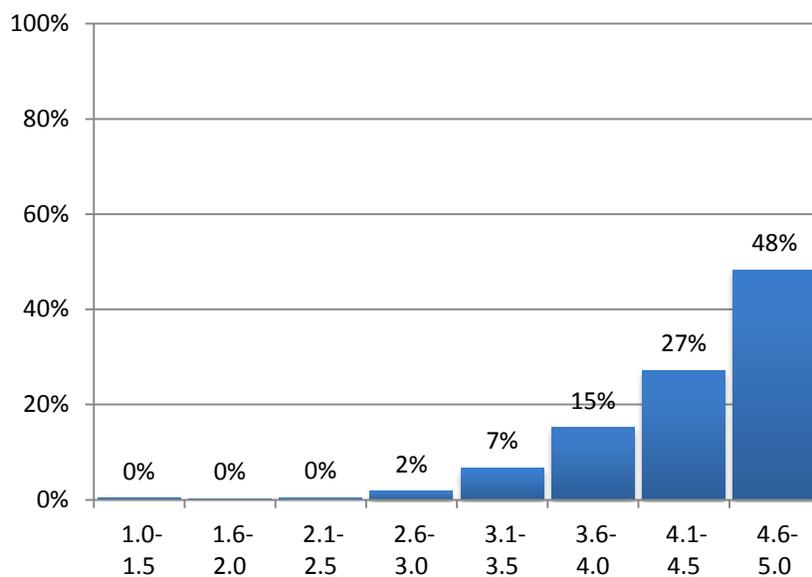
1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day

Culturally responsive instruction. This factor consisted of four items that assessed the frequency with which teachers used practices that were considered culturally responsive, such as adapting lessons to reflect the cultural background of the students, providing students with opportunities to explore diversity in heritage, and using activities that build on students' home and family experiences. On a scale of 1 to 5, the mean for this factor was 3.81, with 43% of teachers responding that they used these practices at least once or twice a week (factor score of 4 or higher) and 75% of teachers responding they used them at least once or twice a month (factor score of 3 or higher) (Exhibit 17). Teachers of younger children (pre-K and kindergarten) used culturally responsive instruction significantly more often than teachers of older children (first- through third-graders and fourth- through sixth-graders). This is another area where FMTI schools can aim to help teachers improve their practices, especially in the higher grades.

Exhibit 17. Use of Culturally Responsive Instruction, for All Teachers (n = 1,521)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
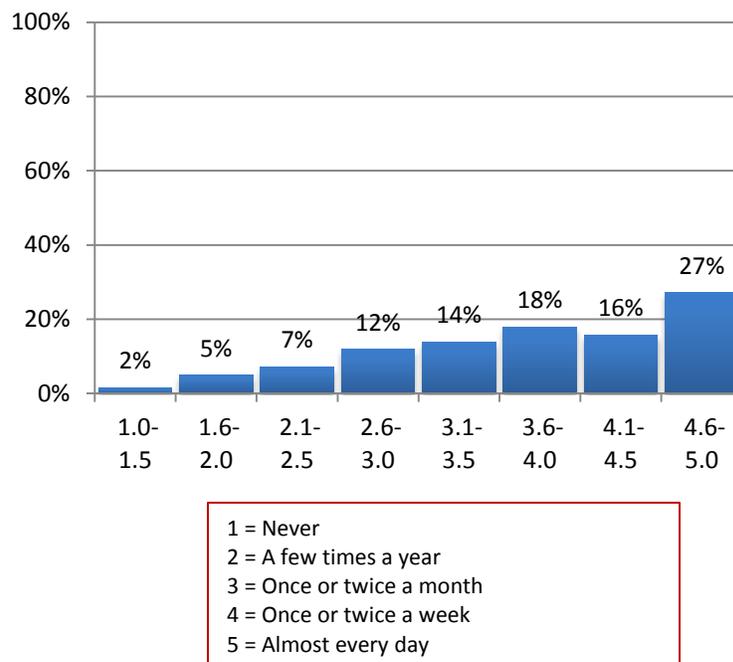
General instructional knowledge. Three items assessing the amount of knowledge teachers had about general instructional strategies constituted this factor. The items were rated on a scale of 1 (*no knowledge*) to 4 (*extensive knowledge*), and examples of strategies inquired about included creating a positive learning environment and using ongoing student assessment to plan curriculum. Overall, teachers rated themselves as having high general instructional knowledge; the mean factor score was 3.49, with 68% reporting they had moderate or extensive knowledge (factor score of 3 or higher) (Exhibit 18). The ratings of pre-K and kindergarten teachers were significantly higher than the ratings of grade 1–3 teachers. However, there was no difference between the self-reported instructional knowledge of pre-K/kindergarten teachers and fourth- through sixth-grade teachers. FMTI schools may want to target increasing the general instructional knowledge of teachers of grades 1–3.

Exhibit 18. General Instructional Knowledge, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,526)

1 = No knowledge
2 = Minimal knowledge
3 = Moderate knowledge
4 = Extensive knowledge
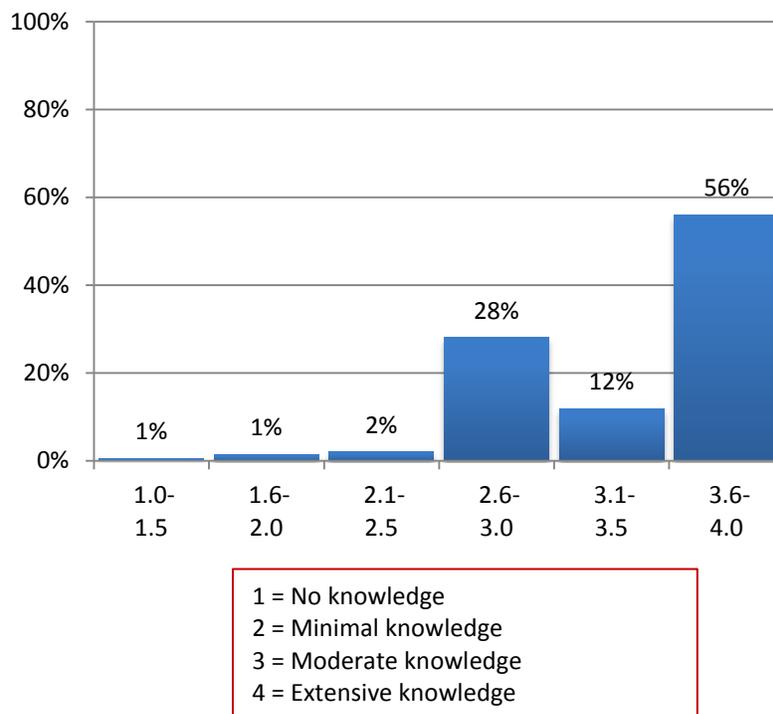
Early childhood teaching knowledge. This factor consisted of four items assessing teachers' knowledge of best practices in teaching young children. The items again were rated on a scale of 1 (*no knowledge*) to 4 (*extensive knowledge*), and examples of knowledge assessed included that of child development from ages 0 to 5, Florida state standards for the learning and development of 4-year-olds, and strategies for promoting family engagement. The mean for this factor was 2.78, with only 28% of teachers reporting at least moderate knowledge (factor score of 3 or higher) (Exhibit 19). This indicates room for improvement in this domain. At the same time, the mean can be considered somewhat artificially depressed because of the inclusion of responses from teachers of older children. Not surprisingly, teachers of the youngest students (pre-K and kindergarten) reported more early childhood teaching knowledge than teachers of older students (first–third grade), who in turn reported more knowledge than teachers of the oldest students (fourth–sixth grade). The mean differences between groups were quite large.

Exhibit 19. Early Childhood Teaching Knowledge, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,526)

1 = No knowledge
2 = Minimal knowledge
3 = Moderate knowledge
4 = Extensive knowledge
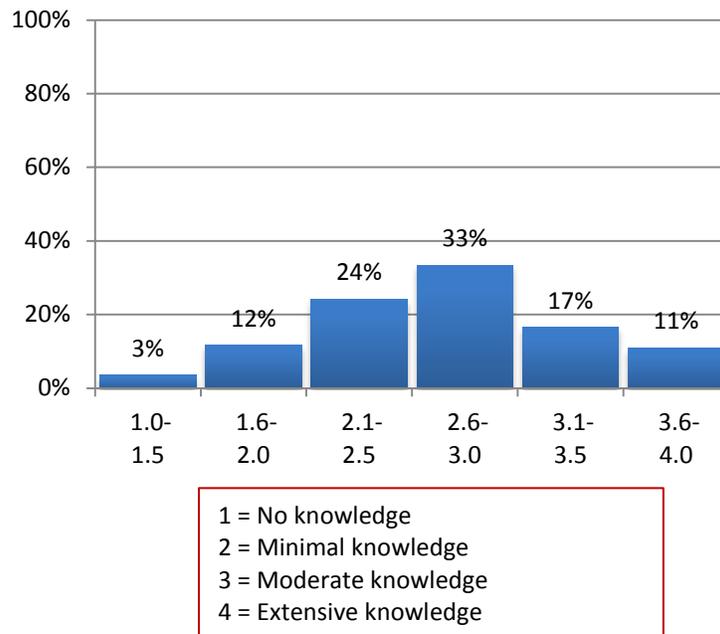
### Teachers' Perceptions of School Culture

Frequency of collaboration on instruction. Six items, rated on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost every day*), that captured how frequently teachers worked with each other on instruction constituted this factor. Example items included discussing what they learned at a workshop or conference, sharing research on effective teaching methods, and developing materials for particular classes. The frequency of collaboration was relatively low; the mean for this factor was 3.28, with 41% of teachers reporting they collaborate less than once or twice a month (factor score lower than 3), and only 16% collaborating once or twice a week or more (factor score of 4 or higher) (Exhibit 20). Teachers of older children (first- through third-graders and fourth- through sixth-graders) reported significantly more collaboration on instruction than teachers of younger children (pre-K and kindergarten). FMTI schools that actively encourage collaboration among teachers, especially in the lower grades, have potential to see gains in this area.

Exhibit 20. Frequency of Collaboration on Instruction, for All Teachers
(*n* = 1,527)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once or twice a month
4 = Once or twice a week
5 = Almost every day
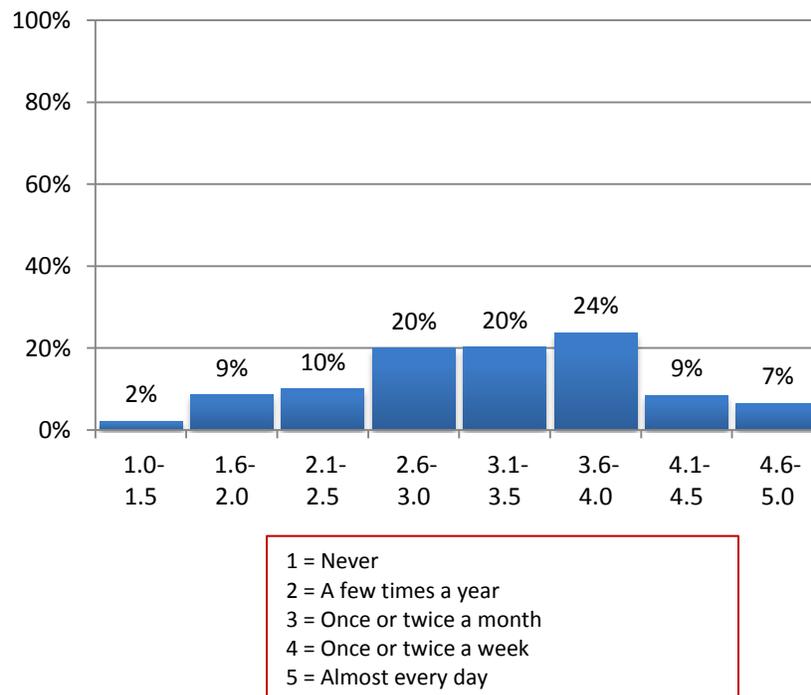
Collegial relationships among teachers. This factor was composed of five items that captured teachers' assessment of the level of collegiality among faculty at their school. The items were rated on a scale of 1 *(strong disagree)* to 4 *(strongly agree)*, and examples included teachers feeling supported by colleagues to try new ideas, trusting each other, and being open to advice and feedback from their peers. The mean factor score was 3.21, with approximately 46% of teachers rating that they either agree or strongly agree (factor score of 3 or higher), and the other 53% rating that they either disagree or strongly disagree (factor score lower than 3), although very few scores (9%) fell below 2.5 (Exhibit 21). This indicates that although many teachers found their school climate to be generally collegial, a considerable number saw collegiality in some situations but not others. There were no significant differences in teacher response by grade level. By purposely fostering collegial relationships among teachers, FMTI schools may be able to improve teaching quality, and by way of this, student achievement.

Exhibit 21. Collegial Relationships Among Teachers, for All Teachers (n = 1,524)

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Agree
4 = Strongly agree
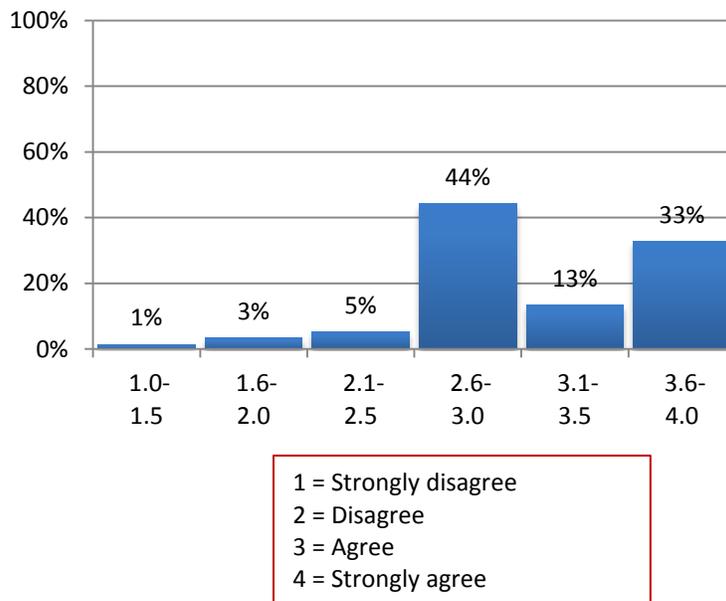
Effective principal leadership. This factor consisted of six items that teachers rated on a scale of 1 *(strong disagree)* to 4 *(strongly agree)*, indicating their level of agreement with statements describing their principal's quality of leadership. Example items included the principal actively monitoring teaching quality, ensuring teachers have dedicated time for collaboration, and supporting successful student transitions from one grade level to the next. The mean for this factor was 3.45, with 68% of teachers indicating they either agree or strongly agree (factor score of 3 or higher) that their principal demonstrated strong leadership within the last year (Exhibit 22). Very few factor scores (6%) fell below 2.5. There were no significant differences in teacher response by grade level for this factor.

Exhibit 22. Principal Leadership, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,523)

| 1 = Strongly disagree |
| 2 = Disagree |
| 3 = Agree |
| 4 = Strongly agree |
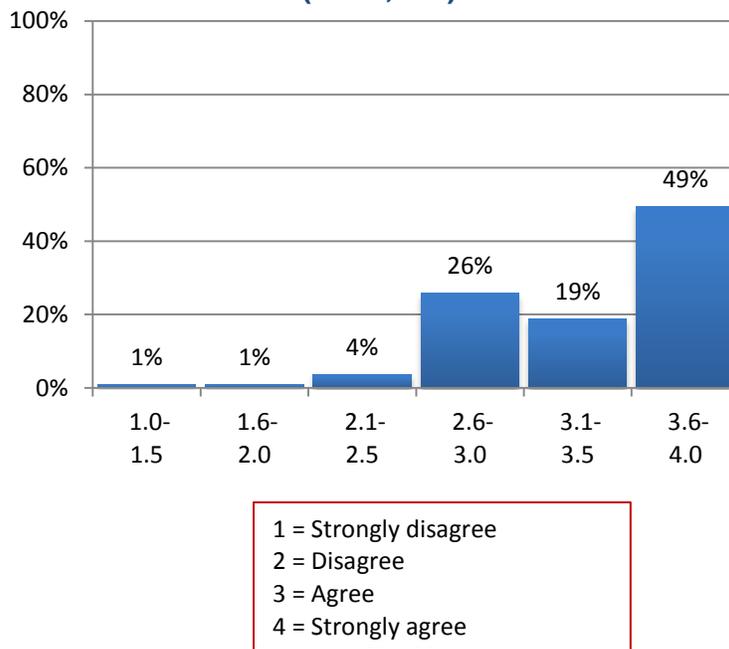
Teacher leadership. Six items describing teachers' own level of leadership at their schools constituted this factor. They rated themselves using a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*once a week or more*) on how frequently they had demonstrated leadership within the last year, in ways such as developing curriculum that could be used by others; participating in peer observation, coaching, or modeling; and facilitating teacher meetings. The frequency of teacher leadership was low. The mean factor score was 2.02, with 65% of teachers indicating they acted as leaders less than a few times a year (factor score lower than 2) (Exhibit 23). Teachers of fourth- through sixth-grade students rated themselves higher on leadership than teachers of first- through third-grade students. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers did not differ from fourth- through sixth-grade teachers in their leadership ratings. This is a domain where, relative to other domains, baseline ratings are especially low, and FMTI schools may benefit from increasing teacher leadership. Schools may chose to focus on teachers of grades 1–3 in particular.

Exhibit 23. Teacher Leadership, for All Teachers
(*n* = 1,527)

1 = Never
2 = A few times a year
3 = Once a month
4 = 2 or 3 times a month
5 = Once a week or more
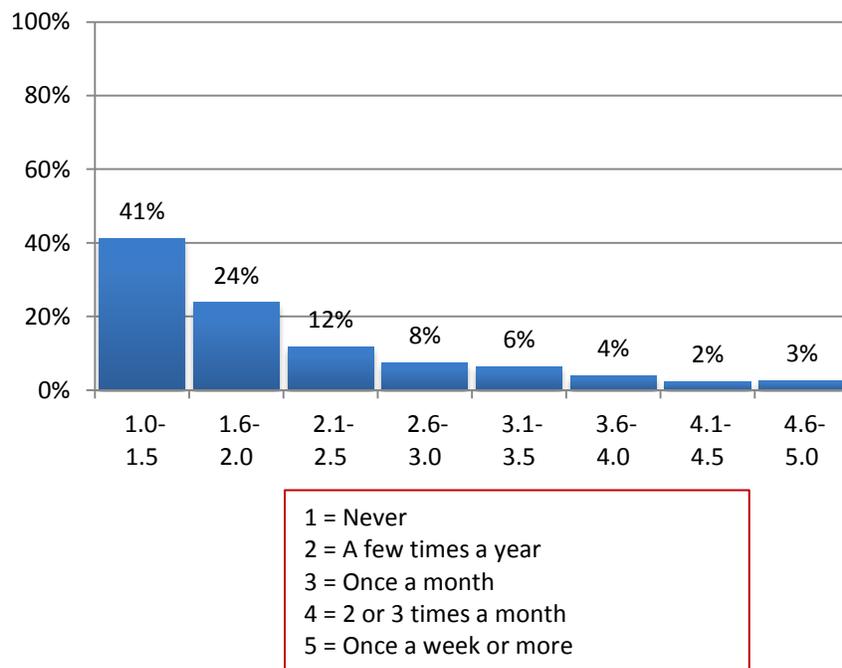
Family partnerships. This factor consisted of five items that described various ways in which teachers could reach out to their students' families to build stronger relationships. Teachers indicated the percentage of their students' families they contacted using a particular method on a scale of 1 (*0%*) to 6 (*100%*), with the intermediary numbers representing quartiles (e.g., 2 = 1–25%; 4 = 51–75%). Example methods of contact included calling or sending a personal note/e-mail to discuss a concern or positive news and sending home activities for parents to do with their children. The mean score for this factor was 3.93, with 64% of teachers making these types of efforts with a large portion (25–75%) of their students' families (factor score higher than 3 but lower than 5) (Exhibit 24). Fourteen percent reported making these efforts with 76% or more of their families (factor score of 5 or higher), whereas 22% reported building partnerships with less than 25% of their families (factor score of 3 or lower). Teachers of the youngest students (pre-K and kindergarten) reported working with a greater percentage of families than teachers of older students (grades 1–3), who in turn worked with more families than teachers of the oldest students (grades 4–6). This pattern is common in the family-school partnership literature, and FMTI schools may choose to encourage partnership-building among teachers of older students.

Exhibit 24. Building Family Partnerships, for All Teachers (*n* = 1,523)
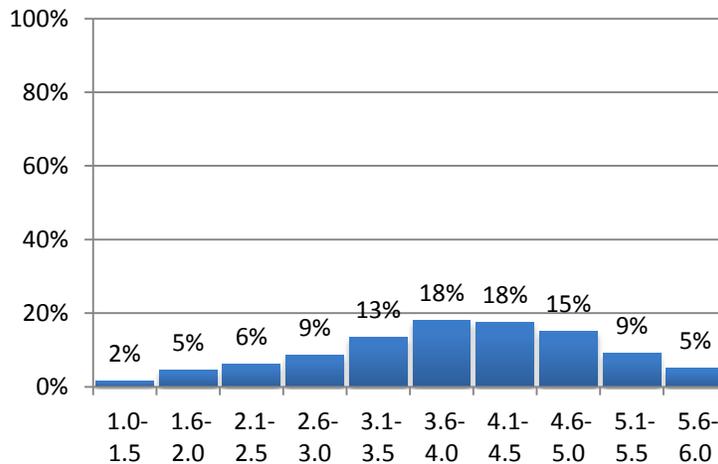
1 = 0% of families
2 = 1-25% of families
3 = 26-50% of families
4 = 51-75% of families
5 = 76-99% of families
6 = 100% of families

CLASS Observation Findings

The classrooms of the 34 master's degree teachers and their 34 matched comparison teachers were observed and rated using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System. The CLASS has been extensively validated and can be used reliability in both research and evaluation studies, and as a tool for guiding professional development. The measure gives scores on three domains of classroom quality that have been linked to student learning and achievement: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Each domain is composed of multiple dimensions, which are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with a score of 1 to 2 considered as low, 3 to 5 as middle, and 6 to 7 as high.

Emotional Support

Emotional support includes measures of positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives. The mean emotional support domain score for master's program teachers was 5.1, whereas the mean score for comparison teachers was slightly higher at 5.4 (Exhibit 25). This difference is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, indicating we may need to make adjustments for baseline nonequivalency in the future. Tests for differences in emotional support by grade level revealed some baseline nonequivalency by grade as well. This may be due in part to the small sample size.

Classroom Organization

Classroom organization includes measures of behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats. The mean classroom organization domain score for master's degree program teachers was 5.3, whereas the mean score for comparison teachers was 5.5 (Exhibit 25). This difference was not statistically significant. There were also no differences in classroom organization scores by grade.

Instructional Support

Instructional support includes measures of concept development, language modeling, and quality of feedback. The mean instructional support domain score for master's degree program teachers was 2.5, whereas the mean score for comparison teachers was higher at 3.4 (Exhibit 25). It is typical for scores on instructional support to be the lowest among the three CLASS dimensions. This difference is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, again indicating we may need to make adjustments for baseline nonequivalency in the future. Tests for differences in instructional support by grade level revealed some baseline nonequivalency by grade as well.

**Exhibit 25. Mean CLASS Scores,
for Master's Teachers and Matched Comparisons
(*n* = 68)**
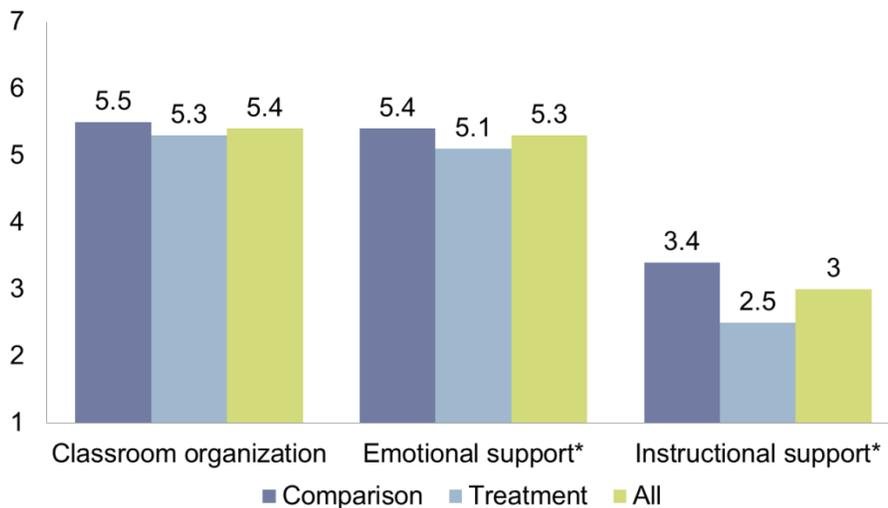
*Difference between groups significant at *p* < .05.*

Summary and Recommendations

The baseline data provide insight into teacher practices and school culture that are already strong and those that are weaker and could benefit from additional attention as part of FMTI. Teachers of older children (first- through third-graders and fourth- through sixth-graders) scored lower than pre-K and kindergarten teachers on a number of factors, including learner-centered instruction, developmentally appropriate practices, culturally responsive instruction, early childhood teaching knowledge, and family partnerships. Teachers of first- through third-graders also were low on measures of general instructional knowledge and teacher leadership. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers scored lowest on measures of collaboration on instruction. Further, there is room for improvement at all grades on building collegial relationships among teachers. With regard to instructional practices measured by the CLASS, instructional support (i.e., concept development, language modeling, and quality of feedback) received the lowest scores across teachers and is the area that most teachers need to develop.

7. CONCLUSION

FMTI has made significant progress in creating a coordinated initiative to improve early childhood teaching and learning. With its multiple job-embedded professional development programs and supports for schools, FMTI is enhancing teachers' skills, school leadership, and the professional culture in schools. These strategies form a coherent and comprehensive program for improving the academic achievement of high-need children in preschool through third grade.

After a successful first year of implementation, the second year is under way. Cohort 2 teachers in the master's degree program have begun their courses, and Cohort 1 teachers are continuing their course of study. Teachers are being recruited to participate in the 2012–13 Teacher Fellows program, and principals have developed a calendar for upcoming Principal Fellow meetings. While program components are mostly remaining intact, the FMTI partners are working to further strengthen all these programs based on their experiences the first year of implementation and the formative evaluation findings.

As the initiative continues to unfold, the evaluation of FMTI is continuing to collect both formative and baseline data for the summative evaluation. The evaluation team will gather more formative evaluation data through interviews with principals, teachers in the master's degree program, facilitators and participants in the Teacher Fellows program, and FMTI faculty and staff. We also are collecting baseline CLASS data for teachers in Cohort 2 of the master's degree program. These results will be presented in September 2013.

The final evaluation report, to be prepared in September 2015, will present findings about the impact of the FMTI on student's reading and math achievement. Impacts will be measured for students schoolwide and for students of teachers in the master's program. The evaluation also will report on changes in instructional quality as measured by CLASS for those teachers in the master's program and a matched comparison group. Finally, the evaluation will measure school culture through a follow-up teacher survey. Although the impact of the FMTI will not be known for a few years, data collected during the first year show that, at least in terms of implementation, the FMTI is on the right track.