



SPECIAL BULLETIN

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Teach For America Case Study

The goal of this study was to determine the impact of TFA teachers on student growth in reading and mathematics as compared with that of similar experience teachers in non-TFA classrooms.

TEACH FOR AMERICA (TFA) is a nonprofit organization committed to placing top college graduates into local teaching forces of beginning teachers currently serving in urban and rural school districts across the country. As part of their commitment to work as TFA corps members, these teachers agree to two years in public schools, and in the process it is hoped that they evolve into instructional leaders who seek to expand educational opportunities for all.

Teach for America – Jacksonville has corps members placed in 23 Duval County schools. In March 2011, *TFA – Jacksonville* requested an external analysis be done of current performance by corps members. *The Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership* was asked to provide this data to inform TFA work in several ways:

- To provide TFA teachers, staff members, and stakeholder groups with relevant information about the progress made to date by corps members
- To make information available about student data and relative utility in offering teachers and TFA staff members with data for decision making about student performance
- To make recommendations for analysis that will equip TFA and the Duval County School Board with relevant information about the effectiveness of TFA corps members

Data from all levels was reviewed with the goal of answering the following question: *How does the student performance of students in TFA classrooms compare with that of similar experience level teachers in non-TFA classrooms?*

While student achievement in all areas is important, the most commonly cited indicators of student proficiency are those found on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (FCAT) in grades 3-10 in reading and mathematics. These state-mandated accountability measures were used for most of the analyses conducted for this report. In addition, we included a recently developed assessment of reading in the primary grades called FAIR (*Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading*) to include data for TFA corps members assigned to primary grade levels. In all, we were able to include 109 corps members. After clarifying questions of TFA staff members and discussing reasonable comparison groups that might be used to answer questions about efficacy, we arrived at several groups which would serve as the source of contrasts made in the analysis of student achievement gains:

- Students in TFA Classrooms
- Students in Non-TFA Classrooms
- Students in Novice (Non-TFA) Classrooms
- Students in Title 1 Schools
- Students in Turnaround Schools
- Students in Duval County (Sample)

Student achievement gains available for students in Grade 2 (FAIR), grades 4-8 (FCAT) in reading, and grades 3-10 (FCAT) in mathematics were

used to carry out statistical analyses on differences that were found among the gains made by grade level and by named comparison groups of teachers. Local percentile ranks were assigned to all students in Grade 2 for whom FAIR *Probability of Reading Success* (PRS) scores were available (n = 8700) and for all students at grades 4-10 in reading and mathematics for whom previous year and current year data created viable “gain scores” (about 60,000 in reading and





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“Genius without education is like silver in the mine.”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

76,000 in mathematics). Local percentile ranks were calculated by standardizing gain scores and ranking them within grade levels. Allowing for the uniqueness of grade level patterns of test content and difficulty, the rank ordering of gains within grade level would give us a good representation of what “typical” growth looks like currently in our schools.

Based on the percentile ranking process in reading and mathematics, gains produced for all students were then sorted into four quartile groupings. Using the placement of student gains within local percentile ranks and quartiles, we can determine whether students made growth placing them in the 1st through the 4th quartile of gains seen in Duval County. This process allowed us to use commonly available measures (FAIR and FCAT) in reading and mathematics to qualify the relative size of gains made by students of teachers within various comparison groups. The average performance in Duval County was determined by local percentiles calculated with all students, so variations would occur randomly across all. Based on these sources of information, we were able to make distinctions in two ways:

1. Average gains of students made in classrooms of TFA teachers
2. Proportions of student gains falling in the top (3rd & 4th) local quartiles of performance

Reviewing student gains, it’s clear that TFA corps members are having a positive impact on student achievement in Duval County. These findings mirror national studies which demonstrated that student achievement under corps members was equal or greater than that of other new teacher groups. The goal of ensuring that effective teachers are placed in every classroom is critical. Duval County principals expressed high levels of satisfaction on a recent survey. There is concern about the commitment and *staying power* of corps members in Duval County. Efforts are ongoing to enhance the TFA corps members commitment to Jacksonville.

READING GAINS IN LOCAL 3RD & 4TH QUARTILES	Number/percent of students top quartile gains					Duval County Sample
	TFA Teachers	Novice T1 Teachers	Novice Teachers	TA Schools	Title 1 Schools	
Grade 2 Count & % w/in grade	57 75.3%	174 55.8%	278 52.6%	201 55.2%	293 54.7%	1925 50.0%
Grade 4 Count & % w/in grade	103 54.2%	157 32.5%	300 41.1%	250 40.6%	406 42.4%	1077 50.0%
Grade 5 Count & % w/in grade	40 40.8%	159 40.0%	301 47.0%	212 41.3%	347 44.1%	1012 50.0%
Grade 6 Count & % w/in grade	124 44.8%	158 30.3%	263 38.1%	95 22.0%	322 40.6%	700 50.0%
Grade 7 Count & % w/in grade	81 52.3%	116 33.1%	242 41.1%	75 26.1%	292 45.4%	612 50.0%
Grade 8 Count & % w/in grade	99 44.4%	141 31.2%	220 38.6%	106 28.3%	324 43.1%	651 50.0%

Figure 1: Reading Comparisons by Teacher and School Groups.

Summary Statements: Percent of students in TFA classrooms making gains which were above average locally (Q3 & Q4):

- Were significantly higher at Grade 2 (75.3%) than other comparison groups and the district as a whole (+).
- Were also significantly higher than comparison groups at grade 4, 6, 7, and 8 (+).
- Were not significantly different at Grade 5.
- Improvement most needed at grades 5, 6, and 8.

MATH GAINS IN LOCAL 3RD & 4TH QUARTILES	Number/percent of students top quartile gains					Duval County Sample
	TFA Teachers	Novice T1 Teachers	Novice Teachers	TA Schools	Title 1 Schools	
Grade 4 Count & % w/in grade	57 52.3%	174 56.3%	278 52.2%	201 58.0%	293 56.2%	589 50.0%
Grade 5 Count & % w/in grade	57 45.2%	109 44.7%	181 48.2%	159 45.3%	246 47.9%	552 50.0%
Grade 6 Count & % w/in grade	91 66.9%	147 57.6%	219 57.3%	178 61.2%	332 55.2%	537 50.0%
Grade 7 Count & % w/in grade	42 70.0%	165 59.9%	249 56.1%	140 59.6%	298 56.2%	514 50.0%
Grade 8 Count & % w/in grade	92 64.4%	164 55.8%	202 54.2%	170 54.8%	326 54.7%	553 50.0%
Grade 9 Count & % w/in grade	39 69.6%	126 60.9%	212 53.0%	279 56.0%	258 56.3%	445 50.0%
Grade 10 Count & % w/in grade	74 56.4%	135 54.8%	190 49.5%	285 52.1%	266 53.0%	446 50.0%

Figure 2: Math Comparisons by Teacher and School Groups.

Summary Statements: Percent of students in TFA classrooms making gains which were above average locally (Q3 & Q4):

- Were significantly higher at grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 than other comparison groups (+).
- Were not significantly different at grades 4, 5, and 10.
- Improvement most needed at Grade 5.

COLOR KEY:

Green = statistically significant results in a positive direction (+) **Yellow** = no significant difference (=)
Blue = Duval County Sample **Gray** = Indicates the teacher comparison group used in statistical analysis

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