

STRAIGHT FUND

Technical Report for Fiscal Year 2014 and Fiscal Year 2015 Grantees



Prepared by
C H Smith & Associates, LLC



This document was prepared by
C H Smith & Associates, LLC
Cincinnati, OH
May 23, 2016

STRAIGHT A FUND

Technical Report for Fiscal Year 2014 and Fiscal Year 2015 Grantees

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

Overview of Evaluation Process	4
Research Question 1: Progress Toward Stated Goals	5
Research Question 2: Influence on Sustainability and Culture	17
Research Question 3: Promises and Realities of Replication	20
Preliminary Conclusions	21

This technical report is a complement to the annual report for 2015 and expounds upon the themes in the report produced by the Ohio Department of Education with more detailed data including state report card information that has been released since the production of the 2015 annual report.

OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION PROCESS

The Ohio Department of Education engaged C H Smith & Associates in July 2014 to evaluate the Straight A Fund Program's FY 2014 portfolio of projects over a period of three years and subsequently contracted with the research team in May 2015 to review the FY2015 grantee cohort in a similar multi-year evaluation. The team consists of Calista H. Smith as lead investigator, Helen Habbert, Charles Hauser, Carlos Mora and resources from Edunomics in the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University. Through the analysis of project data and artifacts, grantee reports, case studies, interviews, surveys and focus groups, the research team provides an evaluation of the grant portfolio based on the following three research questions:

1. Do the projects meet the stated funding goals: improved student achievement, reduction in costs, greater share of resources in the classroom, or shared services among districts?

The evaluation will look at these goals collectively for the portfolio considering grantees' intentions for their projects. Among the FY2014 grantees, all 24 grants selected student achievement as a goal, 13 projects selected cost savings, and 15 chose greater share of resources in the classroom. Shared services was not a specific goal selection option for FY2014 grantees. In FY2015, 34 grants selected student achievement, 28 selected cost savings, 21 chose more resources in the classroom, and 20 were sharing services. In the FY2015 evaluation, a preference was given to projects that had a goal of cost savings.

2. What is the influence on districts/schools of a substantive innovation grant when paired with a requirement to sustain the project through reduction/reallocation of other resources?

The Straight A Fund requires all projects to spend grant money in the first year of the grant and to keep the project operational for at least five years with existing resources. The evaluation design looks not only at fiscal sustainability but also project sustainability, particularly leadership and culture of change, in answering this research question.

3. Do the funded projects present the promise or reality of replication in order to more widely impact education across the state?

The intention of the fund is to find replicable innovations and to explore how successful projects may be scaled internally and externally. Straight A is also interested in how a culture of education innovation in Ohio is fostered to boost achievement of students and to generate fiscal efficiencies.

The C H Smith & Associates research team has organized its evaluation into key metrics with special attention to process, outcomes, and change adoption metrics that will answer the research question through various data sources. Our framework considers the role and ownership of teachers/implementers, engagement and outcomes of students, tools and resources, and project leadership. The evaluation will also answer the following practical questions:

- How was the Straight A Fund implemented (in terms of projects' characteristics, organizational and site dynamics)?
- What improvements could be made in state's support, implementation, or guidance?

Preliminary findings identified at data collection milestones are being provided in this annual technical report with a formal formative report to be delivered summer 2016, a final report on FY14 grantees in spring 2017 and a final report on FY15 grantees in spring 2018.

The data collected for this year will not be summative but are early indicators of progress to be reviewed and analyzed for an additional year for FY14 grantees and two more years for FY15 grantees.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: PROGRESS TOWARD STATED GOALS

This evaluation reviews progress toward the four Fund goals based on the following main sources: a) the self-reports of grantees, particularly the information provided in the ODE compliance survey, b) analysis from project-specific reports conducted by third party evaluators, c) CHS&A observations and interviews in case study sites, d) CHS&A survey analysis and e) Ohio's report card student performance and fiscal data. The variety of data in these sources shows the outcomes from different angles.

More of this analysis is focused on the results of FY2014 grantees because they have completed the grant implementation period and are in the first year of sustaining the project without new grant dollars. For some FY14 grantees, this is also the first academic calendar year in which they have fully implemented the intervention. A few FY2015 grantee were able to report results and preliminary outcomes based on the nature and timeline of their projects. As is the nature of change and innovation, these projects will take years to fully unfold. While data for this year are important in identifying progress and trends, the expectations of the Straight A Fund is that at least three years of data would be important to review to understand the impact of the initiatives.

The Straight A Fund was designed on the principles of innovation from the field and empowerment of grantees. In this spirit, each grant has its project-specific evaluation plan and timeline for providing data. Grantees could also decide if their evaluations were conducted internally or by a third-party evaluator. While the CHS&A team provides technical assistance to grantees to aid evaluation measurement when requested, the statewide research team did not require specific evaluation design or metrics of grantees. In addition, our approach to the evaluation is to review the performance of the portfolio while pointing to specific examples of results. The independent site-specific evaluations are to determine the efficacy of individual projects.

Below is a summary of self-reported outputs and outcomes produced by sites as an overview of progress. In addition, a progress chart for every FY14 and FY15 grantee is included in Appendix A based on their self-reports and project-specific evaluations.

TABLE 1: STRAIGHT A FUND GRANTEEES SHOW OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES FOR THE GRANT INVESTMENT
SOURCE: FALL 2015 SELF REPORTS

SELF-REPORTED OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES (reported as of October 2015)	COUNT
Number of students directly served (2015)	193,894
Number of high school students earning college credit (to date)	5,708
Number of college credits earned (to date)	24,665
Number of students in blended learning courses (2015)	43,823
Number of blended learning courses (to date)	1,008
Number of new or revamped courses developed (to date)	1,086
Number of new curricula (to date)	1,030
Number of new assessments (to date)	12,781
Number of teachers trained (to date)	13,412
Number of teachers earning graduate credit (to date)	1,881
Number of teachers earning additional credentials (to date)	710
Number of contacts or presentations related to potential replication of projects (to date)	564

More detailed analysis from state report card data and qualitative sources are included in the next sections addressing each of the four Fund goals.

GOAL 1: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In considering the portfolios impact on student achievement, the research team considers a) **measured achievement** in the form of assessment of competencies and mastery of skills; credentialing in the form of college credit or industry certifications; and attendance or graduation rates and b) the **preliminary conditions for achievement** including improved curriculum and assessment and the educational delivery infrastructure (i.e. technology, facilities, information systems impacting instruction, etc.). A discussion of the conditions for achievement has been included in this analysis of meeting the student achievement goal because some grantees selected increased student achievement as a goal focused on strengthening a condition of student achievement before direct intervention with students.

Measured Achievement

While each project had the freedom to choose their own metrics, the research team found some clustering of themes for measured achievement in the following areas:

- College and career readiness
- Reading and Literacy, particularly K-8
- STEM proficiency

The research team thought it would be most helpful to look at select metrics on state tests or state-approved assessments to best understand the portfolio. Grantees may have also captured additional process or outcome metrics that will more robustly speak to the value created by their projects.

College and Career Readiness

One of the more common metrics among projects, 8 of 24 FY14 projects and 9 of 36 FY15 projects, focused on college and career readiness is dual enrollment credit. Dual enrollment is when high school students are dually enrolled in courses receiving high school and college credit. Ohio’s College Credit Plus initiative has spurred growth in dual enrollment statewide, but the Straight A Fund has enabled more high schools, particularly rural schools, to take advantage of the program by funding credentialing of high school teachers to teach college-level coursework and providing technology for dual enrollment courses to be delivered in blended or online learning. Projects that focused on training teachers or providing technology to offer dual enrollment credit reported that 5,708 students have earned 24,665 college credit hours in FY14 and FY15 projects as of Fall 2015 self-reports.

CHART A: FY14 GRANTEES HELP MORE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EARN COLLEGE CREDIT
SOURCE: FALL 2015 SELF REPORTS

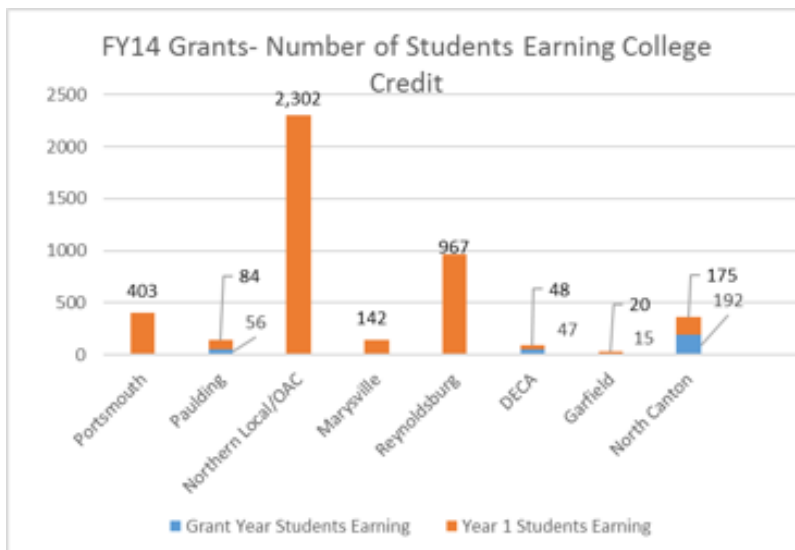
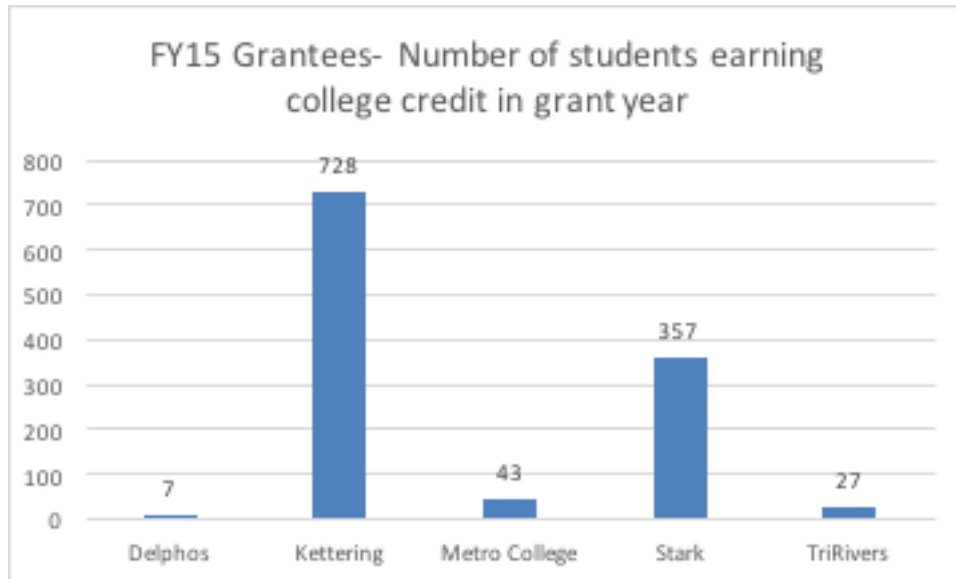


CHART B: FY15 GRANTEES HELP MORE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EARN COLLEGE CREDIT
SOURCE: FALL 2015 SELF REPORTS



With next year’s state report card, the research team will be able to complement the self-reported data with college and career readiness outcomes, including percentage of students graduating, receiving dual enrollment credit, earning industry credentials and meeting ACT remediation-free scores, for the high school graduating class of 2015.

Reading and Literacy

Among the FY2014 sites, five projects focused on direct reading interventions and reported student reading or literacy performance on state tests or assessments on ODE’s vendor approved list, some of which they capture at multiple points in time and some which are a single point assessment. In Fall 2015, four of those sites reported positive progress on their measures and one site saw a dip in their indicator for the grant year.

TABLE 2: MOST FY14 GRANTS REPORTING LITERACY DATA FROM APPROVED ASSESSMENTS SEEING PROGRESS
SOURCE: FALL 2015 SELF REPORTS

PROJECT	MEASUREMENT	PROGRESS?	COMMENTS
Beavercreek e-Spark	NWEA Map	Yes	Faster achievement growth; exceeding targets in subjects using technology, including Reading
Painesville Early Literacy	AimsWeb, MAP, KRA	Yes	Increased % of students on track for K same cohort in self reports (72%) and in state report card (74%).
Cincinnati FUTURE CLASS	DIBLE Oral reading fluency (need assessment)	Yes, in lead district	Positive growth with average of all grades for Cincinnati; 4,7, and 9th challenged; Princeton district not reported
East Holmes	State value added SLO objects	Yes	8 of 10 classes increased literacy value-added; One school jumped 54% to 97% met SLO literacy goals
Fayette	OAA scores	Not yet	Baseline: 87% Grant Year: 86.6% Year 1: unavailable

The project-specific self-reported data above provides greater detail, but the research team also looked at state report card data at a macro-level for FY2014 grantees. It tests a hypothesis that change is not isolated and can have an impact on a school or district at large. It also considers where the portfolio may be in its stage of change for an education innovation.

The State of Ohio reports student achievement data in the following disciplines: Mathematics, Reading, Science, Social Studies, and Writing. The data list the percent of students who attained a proficiency level in the achievement test for each subject matter tested at that grade level for each school.

For this analysis, the researcher downloaded copies of the data base and added an identifier to all schools that participated in the Straight A program during FY 2014, regardless of the focus of their specific intervention. The data are presented below for school years 2013-14 and 2014-15. In Table 3 below, the reading average in 2014, the average in 2015, and the corresponding gain/loss are compared for all schools not in any Straight A and for all schools that participate in at least one Straight A program.

TABLE 3: STRAIGHT A SITES NOT YET SEEING TEST SCORE ADVANTAGES OVER NON-STRAIGHT A SITES AS MAY BE ANTICIPATED WITH FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTING CHANGE
SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TEST GRADE	PARTICIPATION	READING 2014	READING 2015	GAIN/LOSS
3rd Grade	State	80.65%	78.14%	-2.51%
3rd Grade	Straight A	83.51%	80.47%	-3.04%
4th Grade	State	83.39%	68.99%	-14.40%
4th Grade	Straight A	83.13%	66.37%	-16.76%
5th Grade	State	67.59%	64.92%	-2.67%
5th Grade	Straight A	67.76%	65.65%	-2.11%
6th Grade	State	80.62%	64.97%	-15.65%
6th Grade	Straight A	81.73%	66.55%	-15.19%
7th Grade	State	79.86%	63.72%	-16.15%
7th Grade	Straight A	77.95%	60.67%	-17.28%
8th Grade	State	83.78%	63.84%	-19.95%
8th Grade	Straight A	83.48%	63.64%	-19.85%
10th Grade	State	88.85%	86.66%	-2.18%
10th Grade	Straight A	88.48%	85.91%	-2.57%
11th Grade	State	94.11%	93.01%	-1.10%
11th Grade	Straight A	93.35%	92.97%	-0.38%
12th Grade	State	95.63%	95.35%	-0.28%
12th Grade	Straight A	95.86%	94.77%	-1.09%

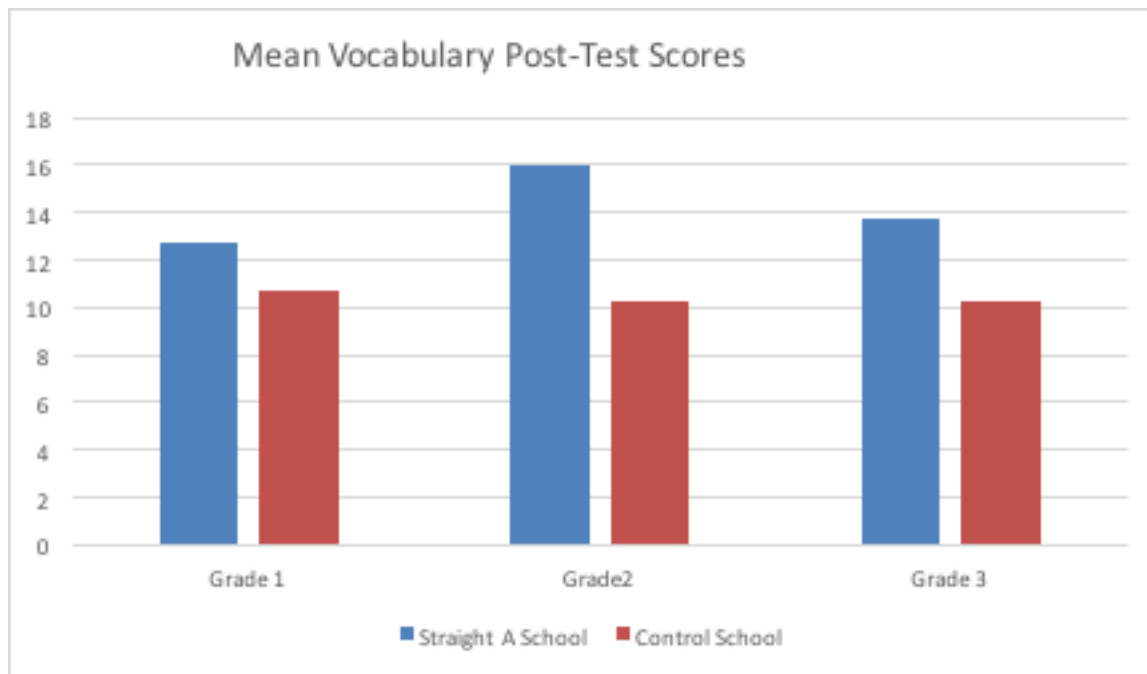
Straight A schools performed at about the same level as non-Straight A sites. This may not be atypical considering the research on the stages of change including variations of the Kubler-Ross change curve which suggests that dips in productivity are to be expected with initial implementation of change.

For both Straight A and non-Straight A buildings, there is a noticeable decrease of reading scores between 2014 and 2015 in grades 6-8, corresponding to the middle school years. This may be attributed to a variety of factors including the change in the state reading assessment process, factors regarding the development of pre-teens, or the middle school experience.

The decline in early reading scores, particularly in 3rd grade reading, is a bit more surprising as there are some early literacy Straight A projects and the state is still using the Ohio Achievement Assessment. In future analysis when FY2015 grantees will be included, enough sites may have data available to do cluster analyses of reading scores for only schools that are doing a literacy intervention. Among FY15 grants, 15 projects are capturing reading or literacy metrics. However, most are not yet ready to report outcomes since they are still in the grant implementation year.

Yet, one noteworthy example of progress, particularly with data from a third party evaluator in a quasi-experimental design, is the DigiLit project in the Cleveland Heights- University Heights district. In the Cleveland Heights- University Heights DigiLit program, results showing differences between Gearity Elementary, the school piloting the DigiLit initiative, and the control school not yet using DigiLit have been published in a document titled “First Steps to Language Arts Online: The DigiLit Project” by Dr. Kathleen Roskos, September 2015. For example, students in grade 1-3 obtained a higher mean score in the vocabulary post-test that was statistically significant. In a variety of metrics, second and fourth grade students are seeing advantages compared to the control school while data in other grades have mixed results. There is promising work, but it is still too early to make summative conclusions about the benefit of the entire DigiLit program from this data point.

CHART C: DIGILIT STEM VOCABULARY POST TEST IMPROVEMENTS VERSUS CONTROL SCHOOL IS A PRELIMINARY SIGN OF PROGRESS.
SOURCE: ROSKOS, K. “FIRST STEPS TO LANGUAGE ARTS ONLINE: THE DIGILIT PROJECT” 2015



STEM proficiency

Eight (8) FY14 projects had a focus on a STEM area including health science and three (3) had reported at least partial student performance measures from state-approved assessments as of Fall 2015. The SOIL project with lead applicant Kelley’s Island and the Springfield-Clark Career Technical Sustainable Peer-to-Peer Curriculum project had not yet shared student performance data for the second year. The ECOT Personalized Roadmap for Math posted 88% passage rates for courses but did not report on state-approved assessments, and Trumbull’s Health project reported modest increases in GPA and 100% of standard learning objectives being met. Milford’s project reported 83% of teachers in Cincinnati Public reporting content mastery and only 33% in Milford in the first year. Based on the self-reported data, outcomes to date in science and math as a portfolio are mixed.

TABLE 4: FY14 GRANTS REPORT MIXED PROGRESS IN STEM AREAS

SOURCE: FALL 2015 SELF REPORTS

PROJECT	MEASUREMENT	GROWTH?	COMMENTS
Beavercreek e-Spark	NWEA Map	Yes	Faster achievement growth; exceeding targets in subjects using technology, including math
Carrollton	OAA	Not available for participants	4 school wide scores improved, 4 stayed same, 2 declined; Planning to compare POWER to non-POWER students
Fayette	OAA scores	Not yet	Baseline: 87% Grant Year: 86.6% Year 1: unavailable

So few grants had a measurable math intervention at similar grade levels among FY2014 grantees, but the evaluation team looked at math test scores in part as a benchmark and again to consider any macro-level impacts of the Straight A Fund. Again, this is to see if the portfolio demonstrates a “rise tide lifts all boats” outcome and to monitor progress in the stages of change which tend to see no growth or declines in effectiveness at first before results manifest in subsequent years.

State math scores corresponding to years 2014 and 2015 were computed for all FY2014 Straight A and non-Straight A sites. There was a noticeable regress in mathematics scores for many schools in the State of Ohio. Again, there was not only a change in vendor for the 2015 assessments but the PARCC exam had multiple state assessment periods in the 2014-2015 school year. There was a marginal beneficial effect on grades 3 and 4 of Straight A sites compared with the rest of the grades. But for the most part, Straight A did not produce noticeable effects improving students’ mathematics scores.

TABLE 5: STRAIGHT A SITES SEE MARGINAL COMPARATIVE BENEFIT IN 3RD AND 4TH GRADE, BUT NOT YET SEEING TEST SCORE ADVANTAGES IN LATER GRADES OVER NON-STRAIGHT A SITES AS THEY ARE STILL IN FIRST YEAR OF FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE

SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TEST GRADE	PARTICIPATION	MATH 2014	MATH 2015	GAIN/LOSS
3rd Grade	State	77.61%	64.35%	-13.26%
3rd Grade	Straight A	77.37%	66.14%	-11.23%
4th Grade	State	75.45%	61.25%	-14.21%
4th Grade	Straight A	71.46%	59.28%	-12.18%
5th Grade	State	63.02%	60.55%	-2.47%
5th Grade	Straight A	62.83%	60.25%	-2.58%
6th Grade	State	71.65%	59.90%	-11.75%
6th Grade	Straight A	71.90%	59.33%	-12.57%
7th Grade	State	67.85%	60.22%	-7.64%
7th Grade	Straight A	66.08%	55.88%	-10.20%
8th Grade	State	75.74%	50.03%	-25.71%
8th Grade	Straight A	74.59%	46.35%	-28.23%

TEST GRADE	PARTICIPATION	MATH 2014	MATH 2015	GAIN/LOSS
10th Grade	State	82.26%	82.93%	0.67%
10th Grade	Straight A	80.36%	82.05%	1.68%
11th Grade	State	91.10%	90.06%	-1.04%
11th Grade	Straight A	90.13%	89.45%	-0.69%
12th Grade	State	93.81%	93.51%	-0.29%
12th Grade	Straight A	93.51%	92.80%	-0.70%

Again, FY15 grantees are not as far along in their projects and have more limited reporting. In next year’s report, we anticipate 19 projects providing initial data related to STEM outcomes.

Value-Added Scores

In addition to the data on achievement test scores, the research team looked at value-added scores. The State of Ohio reports value-added scores at the building level. In the school year 2013-14 there were 3,444 school buildings in the database of value-added scores available at the Ohio Schools Report Card Web portal¹ maintained by the Ohio Department of Education. The database contained actual value-added information for 2,539 school buildings.

In the school year 2014-15 there were 3,415 school buildings in the database of value-added scores. The database contained actual value-added information for 2,520 school buildings. Standard statistical information for the distributions of value-added scores corresponding to the school years 2013-14 and 2014-15 is provided below.

As can be seen in Table 6, the mean of value-added scores for all 2,539 schools with value-added information was almost 1 full point, whereas the corresponding mean for the following school year was slightly negative, which indicates a regress. The distributions have potential outliers, as indicated by the large values of minimum and maximum scores, which lie about 5 standard deviations above and below their respective means. In this analysis, we did not control for potential outliers.

Straight-A awards innovation grants to either a single site (building or district) or to a consortium of school districts or independent schools. During site visitations, CHS&A research analysts have been able to observe lack of uniformity in the performance of consortium members. That is, some consortium members perform very well while some others do not. Therefore, an analysis of value added scores for lead districts or single district grants versus non-lead districts in Straight A was performed.

TABLE 6: MEANS OF VALUE-ADDED SCORES FOR OHIO SCHOOLS SCHOOL YEARS 2013-14 AND 2014-15, SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL YEAR	N	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
2013-14	2539	-24.18	22.10	0.98	4.56
2014-15	2520	-31.21	26.21	-0.11	5.73

TABLE 7: MEANS OF VALUE-ADDED SCORES FOR CONSORTIA LEAD DISTRICTS AND SINGLE DISTRICT GRANTS ARE BETTER THAN NON-LEAD CONSORTIA MEMBERS. SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL YEAR	LEAD			CONSORTIA		
	MEAN	N	STD. DEVIATION	MEAN	N	STD. DEVIATION
2013-14	0.06	105	5.10	0.37	83	5.52
2014-15	0.34	103	4.64	-0.44	83	6.47

¹See <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

In fiscal year 2014 there were 25 applicants that received Straight-A funds. Viewed at the building level, there were 127 individual schools that received funds directly or as the lead member of consortia and 154 individual schools that received funds as members of consortia that were not members of the lead district. Not all of those buildings had value-added scores reported in the ODE databases. In the school year 2013-14, 105 individual schools that were members of lead Straight-A school districts had reported value-added scores while 83 individual school's members of consortia districts that were not leading the Straight-A initiative also had reported value-added scores. The corresponding numbers of individual schools in the 2014-15 school year were 103 and 83.

Results indicate that while schools in lead districts improved their value-added scores, the opposite happened in consortia schools that were not members of the lead district. The data suggest that in the base year 2013-14 schools in the lead districts had value-added scores relatively lower than consortia schools (0.06 versus 0.37) but a year later, the lead schools had significantly improved their value-added scores (a five-fold gain of 0.34) while consortia schools had a significantly lower value added score of -0.44. The research team did not investigate the reasons for the decline in value-added scores in the consortia schools.

Schools participating in a Straight A intervention as a part of the lead district had better value added scores than the schools of non-lead consortia members. This difference may be attributed to a variety of factors including elements unrelated to the execution of the Straight A Fund or the implementation of the grant. Some key factors to consider include the wide variety of interventions, the degree to which an intervention affected all of the grades and classrooms scored, unavailability of value added scores for grades 9-12. However, these data are to be kept in mind when considered with other evidence regarding the design, coordination, and implementation within consortia.

Conditions for Achievement

The academic results are key in understanding increased student achievement. The conditions of achievement can also be an area in which to seek better understanding. All FY2014 grants selected increased student achievement as a goal. Some of the projects focused their primary metrics on measuring the improved conditions that are anticipated to impact achievement in the long run versus the short term. The following section provides analysis regarding the cluster of interventions focused on curriculum, assessment and, education infrastructure.

Curriculum and Assessment

Grantees self-reported 1,030 new curricula and 12,781 new assessments as a part of their Straight A Fund projects. Many of those items were quickly deployed in the classroom, and two FY14 projects had the development of tools as the primary intervention. The FY14 projects led by Otsego and Oregon City were primarily focused on development of curriculum materials and assessments respectively for the grant implementation. They are just beginning to deploy the tools in the classroom in the current year. Otsego plans to report results on the state exams for high school math, English, and science in future years. Oregon City's evaluation plan focuses on determining the strength of the alignment of the assessment to state standards.

Education Infrastructure

Many districts took the opportunity of the grant to leap years forward in advancing their education delivery platforms and resources. Construction or renovation of 725 classrooms or learning spaces occurred among FY14 grantees. James A Garfield, North Canton, and Marysville had major facilities efforts, deploying 55% of grant dollars for fixed assets. These sites also reported academic outcomes with college credits earned based on the design of their projects.

South Central's Strategic Human Capital System and Meta Solution's (formerly TRECA) Optimizing Medicaid projects deployed operational initiatives that they expected to impact student achievement but maybe difficult to correlate with subject matter achievement outcomes to date. Last year, South Central school district credited its new human resource system deployment with helping the district identify 15 qualified applicants for its open speech language pathologist positions while neighboring district did not have any such candidates. It successfully filled the position this year. The Optimizing Medicaid project has facilitated communication among professionals serving students with special needs to better address student needs and has had some meaningful financial results.

Two FY15 grantees, Noble Local and Rittman had operational efficiency projects in fiscal offices and transportation but did not select increased student achievement as a goal. Their results will be reflected in the discussion of cost reduction and shared services in future years.

Knowing that the projects that are focused on improving a preliminary condition to increasing achievement will have a longer time before demonstrating student outcomes, the Straight A Fund will need to make a strategic decision to determine if these grants should be consider for the student achievement goal or if it is best to focus on their operational or fiscal outcomes to have them reflect results within the three-year evaluation window.

GOAL 2: COST SAVINGS

FY14 grantees have completed the expenditure of the \$88.7 million awarded and are to sustain the work, \$1 for \$1. FY14 grantees also reported:

- Roughly \$3.9 million this year alone in cost savings (\$2.3 million allocated back into project costs and a \$1.6 million above and beyond project expenses). This is particularly noteworthy since not all projects in FY14 expected cost savings when they applied for the Straight A grant. Grantees provided evidence of cost savings, but methodologies in categorizing savings from period to period and how to recognize amortization of major assets that did not have to be acquired differed. As the Straight A Fund continues to work with grantees on reporting, the savings results may be refined.
- Savings of \$.05 per \$1 granted for this year. In data cited in the 2014 Annual Report, sites projected an overall \$0.19 cost savings per \$1 granted over five years and the \$.05 savings this year per \$1 granted puts them on pace toward planned savings projections. While the ratio alone is modest, it is significant considering how all of the FY14 grants had increased student achievement as a goal. The dollars invested are expected to show value for student success.

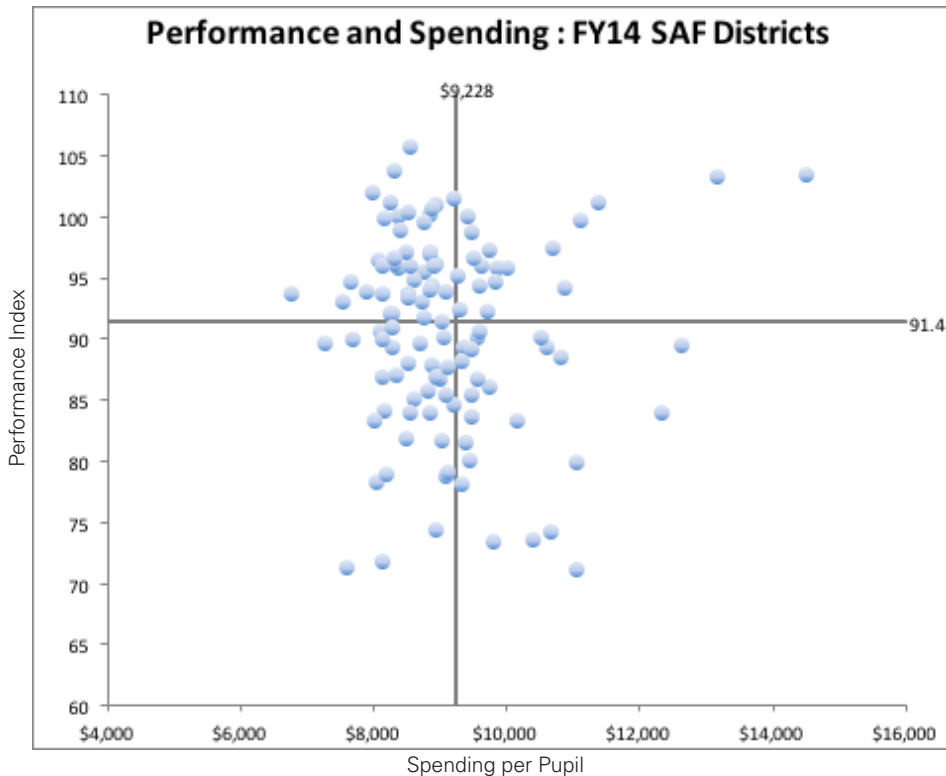
While not an explicit element of this goal, some projects are seeing increases in revenue or other fiscal efficiencies. The Optimizing Medicaid in Ohio Schools project led by META Solutions helped districts claim funds available through Medicaid for the cost of clinical services provided to low-income student with special needs. This \$219,000 grant was able to bill \$289,157 to Medicaid in the first year. These Medicaid dollars offset the education dollars that can now be deployed to more direct educational purposes.

Cost savings will be tracked for over five years. For the FY15 grant cycle, preference was given to projects that anticipated cost savings which should expand the depth of information in this area. Next year, FY15 grantees will have completed all project spending and have a better sense of what dollars they are actually saving year after year.

² For an explanation of the performance index calculation, please visit <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/Report-Card-Resources/Achievement-Measure/Technical-Documentation-PI-Score.pdf.aspx>

The interplay between costs and student achievement is also an interesting approach to the analysis of these first two goals. The Ohio Department of Education produces a performance index² based on academic indicators and plots that against expenditures per equivalent pupil. This analysis is also reproduced here with just the FY14 grantee participating districts. The graph below is included with a legend in Appendix B:

CHART D: SPENDING AND PERFORMANCE INDEX FOR STRAIGHT A DISTRICTS SHOW MORE DISTRICTS IN THE QUADRANT OF ABOVE AVERAGE PERFORMANCE AND BELOW AVERAGE SPENDING.
SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



The most populated quadrant with 33 involved districts is the top, left quadrant which indicates a performance index above the state average and spending per pupil below the state average, which is the most ideal position for districts. Twenty-six (26) districts were below the state spending average (favorable result) but also below the state performance index average (unfavorable result). Twenty-two (22) districts were below the state average for the performance index and above the average spending per pupil (both unfavorable). Only 18 were high performing academically (favorable) but also above the state average in spending per pupil (unfavorable).

GOAL 3: GREATER SHARE OF RESOURCES TO CLASSROOM

For the purposes of the evaluation, the research team is measuring the portfolio's progress on the "greater share of resources to the classroom" goal by the percentage of district expenditures per equivalent pupil classified as classroom related expenses as categorized by the Ohio Department of Education. This includes expenditure categories for Instruction, Pupil Support Services, and Instructional Staff Support Services. This choice by the research team intends to capture a measure that is consistent, but is also limited in that it does not account for greater allocations that may be happening at the school level but may be off-set by the district's overall expenditure patterns. However, doing school level analysis may be less productive depending on how grants categorized expenditures such as technology platforms and professional development sessions offered to multiple schools in the district.

FY14 grantees reported a greater percentage of classroom related expenses than the state average both before and after the grant. As a portfolio, the percentage remained consistently around 67%.

Among the FY14 grantees that selected greater share of resources in the classroom as a goal, projects range from upgrading technology in schools and classrooms to developing new assessments to optimizing Medicaid billing for special needs students. In their applications, the interpretation of “greater share of resources in the classroom” is more varied than the Straight A Fund sees in future years when more clarification around the Fund’s intention for the goal are explained in the application question. In fact, the hard assets acquired for use in the classroom may be technically categorized as a non-classroom expense. Keeping these interpretations in mind, the subset of FY14 grantees that selected greater share of resources in the classroom saw a little more than one percentage point increase in the portion of expenditures invested in the classroom before the grant in FY13 and after the grant in FY14.

TABLE 8: CLASSROOM RELATED INSTRUCTION AS PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURES IS SLIGHTLY HIGHER FOR GRANTS SELECTING “GREATER SHARE OF RESOURCES IN THE CLASSROOM.”
SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPORT CARDS

	FY13	FY14	FY15
STATE AVERAGE for percentage of expenditures in the classroom	64.7%	60.6%	63.1%
FY14 TOTAL COHORT AVERAGE for percentage of expenditures in the classroom	67.1%	67.3%	67.4%
FY14 “GREATER SHARE OF RESOURCES IN CLASSROOM” GRANTEE AVERAGE for percentage of expenditures	66.7%	68.5%	68.0%

This subset of districts also saw absolute dollar amounts related to classroom expenditures greater than the state average before and after the grant. However, there was also an absolute growth in total operating expenditure per equivalent pupil that was slightly lower than state average before the grant but much higher than the state average of operating expenditures per equivalent pupil (EPEP) after the grant.

TABLE 9: GRANTS SELECTING GREATER SHARE OF RESOURCES AS A GOAL INCREASED DOLLARS TO CLASSROOM FROM BEFORE TO AFTER THE GRANT BUT ALSO INCREASED OVERALL EXPENDITURES PER PUPIL.
SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPORT CARDS

	FY2013 Classroom EPEP	FY2015 Classroom EPEP	Classroom Instruction variance	FY13 Total EPEP	FY15 Total EPEP	Total EPEP Variance
STATE AVERAGE	\$5,638.03	\$5,660.57	\$22.54	\$8,718.97	\$8,971.82	\$252.85
FY14 “GREATER SHARE” GRANTEE	\$5,806.34	\$6,414.36	\$608.02	\$8,710.18	\$9,437.38	\$727.20

Most grantees did not have a subset of financial measures related to greater share of resources in the classroom in their self-reports. In self-reports, grantees reported acquiring instructional materials for students, technology for the classroom, and renovations for the classroom in ways that show that more resources are being deployed in the classroom. One of the biggest impacts of the Straight A Fund allocations for many grants related to resources in the classroom has been a great increase in the purchase of computing technology for student use in the classroom. The addition of technology brings with it a significant increase in speed of access to content, quantity of educational tools, applications and communication capability. It would be hard to argue that a student without classroom technology has access to the same resources as a student with access to classroom technology. However, it is unclear if those costs would be categorized at the district level as classroom

expenditures. As the evaluation process moves forward, it will look to capture a calculation of the number of students with computing technology access today compared to before the program started and a sense of what's possible with the resource as opposed to what was done before. However, if the intention of the Straight A Fund with the "greater share of resources in the classroom" goal was to increase share of resources traditionally classified as classroom expenditures in relation to non-classroom expenses, the results do not currently pan out for FY14 grantees.

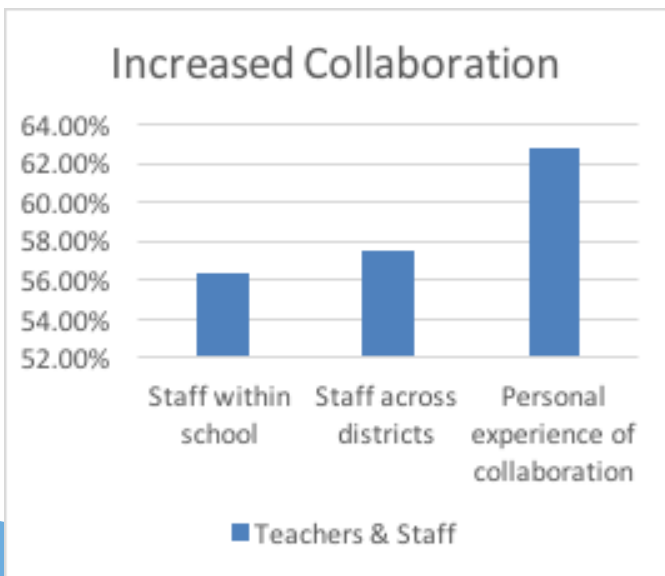
The Fund should also consider if having "greater share of resources to the classroom" is an appropriate goal. Grantees in all years selected another goal, either "student achievement" or "reduction in spending," along with "greater share of resources in the classroom." It may provide more precise insights to focus on the grants' results related to student achievement and cost savings.

GOAL 4: SHARED SERVICES

Shared services was not an explicit goal for FY14 grantees, but was added as a goal opportunity for FY15 grantees. Regardless of the grant year, grantees are expressing a significant increase in collaboration with other school districts, teachers and community organizations thus sharing resources, knowledge, professional development and implementation support. Purchasing these services from vendors exclusively would likely be cost prohibitive. According to the 2016 Teacher and Administrative surveys this sharing of knowledge and partnering with various stakeholder group outside the school district walls has been one the most important benefits of the Straight A Fund investments to their participating districts. In the words of the individual grant recipients when asked, "What was the biggest benefit of your project?":

- "The biggest benefit has been the incredible level of collaboration between stakeholders: parents, county ESC, district, building, and teacher teams."
- "The power of the collaboration has allowed similar district to share one voice regarding needs and provided the necessary resources to meet basic infrastructure, equipment and college course work for teachers."
- "Collaboration and sharing of best practices among the districts...this is what the current and future of the project rests upon and is what allowed for the creation of digital curriculum."
- "Working with teachers in other schools."
- "Collaboration with industry partners."

CHART E: COLLABORATION INCREASED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF.
SOURCE: C H SMITH & ASSOCIATES ONLINE SURVEY OF TEACHERS AND STAFF IN FY14 PROJECTS



Participants in the External Consultants Focus Group conducted in Fall 2015 reported that the projects led to a programmatic shift that facilitated the cohesive sharing of resources. More specifically, for one project, the grant allowed for the alignment of bell schedules between districts so that schools could share teachers and classroom resources in a more efficient and productive manner. One site reported that they added a student experience survey that was connected to teacher professional development.

Twenty projects selected shared services as a goal in FY15. Some significant efficiencies are already being noted for one FY15 grantee. According to an October 2015 report from the Auditor of State's Ohio Performance Team (OPT), the addition of Southeast Local schools to a partnership with Rittman Exempted Village, Orrville City, and Green Local school district that consolidates fiscal offices has yielded positive operational outcomes. The initiative reduced 1.1 FTE in operational staff, reducing annual payroll by \$50,560 with a one-time grant of \$187,790. In addition, the project was able to balance the workload among fiscal functions reducing the checks per FTE by 14.5% and purchase orders per FTE by 20.9% and increasing productivity per FTE with the workload for pays per year per FTE increasing by 22.4% and payrolls per FTE by 23.2%.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: INFLUENCE ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CULTURE

The evaluation is considering the impact of the Straight A Fund design on both fiscal and programmatic sustainability. An important complement to sustainability practices is the culture and nature of change which is included in this analysis.

Fiscal Sustainability

Fiscally, the tenets of the Straight A Fund on sustainability have taken root with grantees who are expected to maintain the work of the funded project for at least five years although all grant funds had to be expended in the first 12- 18 months. FY14 grantees report that 49% of costs this project year, considering that grants funds were previously expended, are covered by reallocation of resources and 51% are covered by the savings that were generated by the project.

Treasurers in an April 2016 focus group re-affirmed that their definitions of sustainability matched the definition of the Straight A Fund. However, non-fiscal participants in Fall 2015 focus groups shared that the expedited expenditure timeline was one of the most significant challenges for grant teams. The timeline may have rushed decision-making and at least one project reported that key stakeholders began to disengage after the money was expended. In addition, some grants have experienced greater challenges in getting data from partners and/or keeping leadership involved in the project after the grant spending is over. This issue appears to be most pronounced in initiatives that were primarily driven by an external, non-district partner with which there was not a history of managing the grant's consortia of districts and projects where a change in senior leadership or sponsorship occurred and the project was not rooted in a larger strategic plan and multi-level ownership.

One focus group participant suggested requiring most of the money to be expended in the first year but reserving a small amount of the grant to distribute to each grantee after they comply with reporting requirements over the remaining four years.

External Forces on Fiscal Sustainability

The research team also considers the fiscal sustainability of Straight A projects in context of the fiscal sustainability of districts overall. According to the work of Dr. Marguerite Roza of Edunomics, monitoring personnel costs, particularly benefits, provides a greater context for sustainability. There could be a case where the project has been designed to be fiscally sustainable over five years but external budget forces, such as benefit costs, could challenge the ability to continue to fund the project as desired in future. The research team will trend this data overtime for participating districts as a reference and to monitor unusual developments that may relate to changes reported in project fiscal sustainability.

The state average percentage of operating expenditures for salary and benefits together is 75% and 22% for benefits alone. This is roughly the same average as the districts in the cohort. Below is a list of districts that were more than one standard deviation above the average which would be 80.3% of expenditures are for salary and benefits. These would be districts to continue to monitor to see how they are able to sustain projects with the fiscal pressure of personnel costs:

TABLE 10: STRAIGHT A DISTRICTS WHO MAY BE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO EXTERNAL COST PRESSURES ON SUSTAINABILITY BASED ON PERSONNEL COSTS AS PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURES.

SOURCE: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

IRN	Straight A lead and consortia districts with above average salary and benefit expenditures	Salaries as % of Expenditures	Benefits as % of Expenditures	Total Salaries & Benefits as % of Expenditures
44503	North Canton City	61.7%	25.5%	87.3%
47019	Hilliard City	62.5%	23.0%	85.5%
44933	Upper Arlington City	63.8%	21.0%	84.8%
46763	Olentangy Local	60.4%	24.2%	84.6%
45476	Marysville Exempted Village	61.4%	22.8%	84.3%
44073	Grandview Heights City	62.9%	21.0%	83.9%
46995	New Albany-Plain Local	61.8%	22.0%	83.8%
48207	Anthony Wayne Local	60.0%	22.5%	82.5%
45609	Rossford Exempted Village	59.1%	23.0%	82.1%
47241	Beavercreek City	58.3%	23.4%	81.7%
46813	Perkins Local	60.9%	20.8%	81.7%
46813	Perkins Local	60.9%	20.8%	81.7%
43588	Bellefontaine City	58.5%	22.6%	81.1%
47688	East Holmes Local	58.0%	22.9%	80.9%
46961	Gahanna-Jefferson City	62.6%	18.3%	80.8%
50518	Wolf Creek Local	52.8%	27.5%	80.3%
45583	Perrysburg Exempted Village	59.6%	20.7%	80.3%
STATE AVERAGE		53.5%	21.6%	75.1%

Programmatic Sustainability

With data to date, all of the FY2014 projects are continuing the work. While there may be varying degrees of continued implementation within in a project, particularly school to school or site to site, we have identified three characteristics most common in sites that have the strongest continued implementation. When reviewing data from focus groups, case studies (See Appendix D), surveys, and self-reports for both FY2014 and FY2015 grant cohorts, the following characteristics were recurring themes among projects that showed great promise of continuing the innovation:

- The grant intervention’s connection to district, school, and regional strategy
- Distributed ownership of the project among district leadership, building principals, teachers or operational staff, and students.
- Leverage of existing, proven instructional and process tools

Projects tied to larger school, district, or regional plans have a variety of anchors to keep the project in place. Prime examples of this include Canton's Brighter Tomorrow initiative and the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative. Stakeholders tend to look for ways to modify or evolve the project instead of having significant disengagement or abandonment by individual stakeholders. Projects that appear to be more isolated are more challenged in taking permanent root and tend to be active with only the most engaged teachers or operational staff. The connection to the bigger picture facilitates acceptance by stakeholders and provides coherence and unity of purpose.

In addition to unity of purpose, strong projects empower all stakeholders aligned with the purpose. When district administrators, principals, and teachers/operational staff felt ownership of a project, there is more robust implementation and more signs of success. Because the Straight A Fund by design allows the idea and focus of the project to come from the field, there is fertile ground to grow the seeds of empowerment in the planning phase to the implementation phase. What is most crucial in the implementation phase is that this empowerment and engagement is felt at all levels. This distributed leadership has also weathered changes in key staffing in projects, such as a change in building leadership that happened early at Cleveland Heights- University Heights DigiLit, so that the work continues.

District administration visibility and sponsorship is often important in sustaining the work of initiatives, such as the Beaver Creek e-Spark initiative or Tri-Rivers RAMTEC. Administrators have a variety of resource levers and can often facilitate connection to other districts or resources to sustain the program. From the 2015 administrator and teachers survey, we found that 48.7% of respondents reported active or very active leadership support while 6.2% reported limited sponsor involvement. In 2016, we found 43% of respondents reported active or very active leadership involvement while 10% teachers and 4% administrators reported limited sponsor involvement. Teachers are least likely to report active and visible leadership involvement.

Interestingly, in one of the focus groups conducted in Fall 2015, some administrators and coordinators shared that they believed principals were less crucial for their projects, which may have been the case for the nature of their interventions and unit level of implementation (building level, self-selected classrooms, etc.). However, based on observations in case studies and reports from teacher focus groups, the support of building leadership is critical to successful implementation. The building leadership facilitates the resources and time to implement and serve as intellectual leaders to set the tone for the building.

Distributed ownership also includes how teachers are empowered to implement and make adjustments with the intervention. Many of the most successful projects have an element of lead teachers, early adopters, or peer coaching. Some examples include technologists in residence at each Cincinnati public school involved in Future CLASS or Project Lead the Way teacher/trainers in Carrollton's POWER project. In open responses to surveys and case study visits, teachers reported that through professional development, coaching, and collaboration among peers they were able to overcome trepidation and difficulties implementing change, particularly in using new technology.

This does not mean that everyone is absolutely on board with the intervention. In the second year of implementation, evolving dynamics are appearing in site visits and in survey data. In site visits, there are reports of winning over early resisters who are now more fully implementing the project. On the other hand, researchers are also seeing in some site visits and in survey data that there is some increasing resistance as some grants are expanding beyond the piloting teachers to a broader pool of implementers. In a few grants, specific comments about new barriers found with a deeper implementation have increased frustration with the project but with a sense of ownership, teachers are willing to express their concerns while implementing instead of fully abandoning the initiative.

Ownership and engagement of students, at all grade levels, is one of the most touted dynamics by grant participants such as the announcements done by Gearity elementary school. With at least 39 projects having some form of 1:1 computing, project-based learning, or blended learning, students are taking a more active role in directing their own learning and succeeding in school. Personalization in many Straight A projects allow students to work at their own pace moving through lessons based on their mastery and not the pace of the entire class. In response to a survey question asking FY14 grant teachers and staff members what surprised them the most, one teacher stated “The ownership the kids have taken over the lab space we have created ...” In addition, case study observations and other survey responses found that the student engagement in learning is also impacting and encouraging further teacher engagement. As shared by a teacher in one project, “The curriculum empowers the students to be connected and interested. Their drive, in turn, drives me to be better every day.”

To the third characteristic, projects that seem well on their way to sustainability also tend to capitalize on both proven core program resources and improvement processes, such as the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative and the Arts and College Preparatory Data Matters projects. While the Straight A Fund is based on innovation, the innovation is typically not of “whole cloth” but creatively weaving together best practices, existing resources and proven strategies to implement in a new context. The projects that are creating brand new technologies, assessments, curricula, or resources may still be very promising, but have a longer implementation horizon. These innovations also must prove the efficacy of the intervention and the implementation. Projects that are building on existing work or technologies that have been well vetted and prove effective then focus their attention on the appropriate execution or scaling up of the program. If those programs then use solid project management and process improvement tools such as the Ohio Improvement Process, they appear to have less vulnerabilities in their implementation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: PROMISES AND REALITIES OF REPLICATION

While many projects are still monitoring and measuring their successes and lessons learned, replication and exploration of replication opportunities are occurring. Projects reported more than 500 interactions about the potential to replicate their project. This included requested visits by other schools, presentations at conferences, and more.

According to the 2015 teacher and staff survey of FY14 grantees, 44.0% of respondents report interest among fellow staff and stakeholders in duplicating the change of the project in their environments and 50.9% of respondents report other student interest in participating in future similar opportunities. In the 2016 survey we find similar percentages with 42% reporting interest from fellow staff and 49% reporting interest from other students.

Most of the FY14 grantee case study sites reported some level of internal expansion (both planned and spontaneous) as teachers observe and copy some of the classroom changes being made, whether by informal observation and peer interaction or by participation in new professional development programs.

Some project coordinators have been surprised to discover a “spillover effect” resulting from professional development programs. In November 2015 focus groups, teachers working on case based learning projects reported traveling to conferences across the country to share best practices on case based learning. Teachers also reported that they have started to integrate elements of grant funded projects into existing curriculum.

Another component of replication is the impact that it has on relationship building and networking among teachers and other stakeholder groups. As these groups are talking about their respective programs and sharing ways to integrate pieces of the program, teacher groups are collaborating in new and innovative ways. In the Cincinnati Future CLASS project focused on improving education for English language learners, classroom observations have documented that a control group of teachers, without TESOL training, are showing

improvements in classroom techniques and student outcomes just by working with colleagues who have completed TESOL courses.

Participants in Fall 2015 focus groups also discussed the hopes and challenges associated with sustainability and replication of the projects. While all respondents believed that the projects were worthy of replication, the general consensus among the focus group participants was that the projects could not be replicated without the infusion of supplemental funding to support the initiatives. Some replication is being supported by FY2016 Straight A grants that were announced after the focus groups were conducted.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

C H Smith & Associates asserts that the Straight A Fund as a portfolio is meeting reasonable progress toward increasing student achievement, reducing spending, and sharing services. More definitive impact can be determined as time passes. Some of the most salient evidence that Straight A Fund is meeting its goals include the following:

- Technology is being successfully integrated into the learning process in ways that appear to be leading to improved student achievement, particularly when teachers are engaged in the process and given the appropriate professional supports.
- Increases in the awarding of college credit are promising. This should be compared with other districts when the high school graduation class of 2015 is captured in statewide data next year.
- Students are more engaged in learning, with demonstrated or anticipated improvements in student achievement.
- Value added scores in participating schools of lead districts improved from previous year.
- FY2014 projects report sustaining programs by savings they achieved or reallocated resources to the intervention.
- \$3.9 million dollars was reported in spending reductions among FY14 grantees for the current year.

This is not without challenges. The notable challenges to meeting the stated goals include:

- Ability to demonstrate collective impact in statewide test scores. Schools that received Straight A funds in FY 2014 performed about the same as schools who did not receive such funding. Although according to the typical pattern of change found in research, positive differences may appear over time. As of yet, the portfolio does not demonstrate a “rising tide lifts all boats” outcome for statewide assessment as we are not seeing schoolwide differences in impact of Straight A sites compared to non-Straight A sites. This does not discount the differences in outcomes for specific students who may be participating in the interventions.
- Varying results within consortia. According to preliminary analysis of value-added scores, which are only available for K-8 grades, lead districts have better outcomes than non-lead participating districts. From a qualitative perspective, consistent implementation across a consortium depends on successful project coordination and strong engagement of the coalition members.
- Unclear definitions and expectations around “a greater share of resources to the classroom.” If this is measured by percentage of district resources spent on classroom instruction, projects are not meeting this goal. As evidenced by the quantity of resources that are aiding instruction including technology and advanced equipment, the portfolio may be meeting its intention for greater share of resources in the classroom.

The Straight A Fund is making a meaningful impact on the culture of sustainability and innovation in Ohio education according to these common themes:

- The Straight A Fund's flexibility in allowing projects to choose the intervention may be creating a greater sense of ownership from grantees knowing that they had a great deal of discretion in selecting the project.
- Collaboration is facilitated through the Straight A Fund and is generating and leveraging a greater number of resources. This includes collaboration within schools, among schools in a single district, and across districts.
- The concentration of dollars available in the Straight A Fund allow for more scalability of many focused innovations. If the same amount of funds is distributed evenly among districts as a part of foundation funding, most districts would not be able to obtain enough financing to try an innovation at the scale at which many districts or consortia of districts are implementing.

The Fund's fiscal requirement to have all money spent upfront while sustaining work for five years is having both a positive impact and unintended consequences. Many projects have better planned fiscal and programmatic sustainability to make sure that they could keep the project going after the grant funds. However, the upfront dispersal limits initial planning efforts, especially in terms of researching technical issues and purchases, as well as the incentive (or potential recourse) for projects to continue engaging key stakeholders and participating in the reporting process.

The research team looks forward to further analysis when additional data become available in future years. The evaluators are also composing formative recommendations for the Straight A Fund based on information to date to report in June 2016.