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**INSIDE
THIS GUIDE**

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Learn about a multi-state
Networked Improvement
Community of school and district
leaders working together to bring
equity and opportunity to impact
student achievement.

Empowering Educators to Excel

A research brief examining results from a U.S. Department
of Education-funded TSL grant project.

Contributing Research Conducted by:

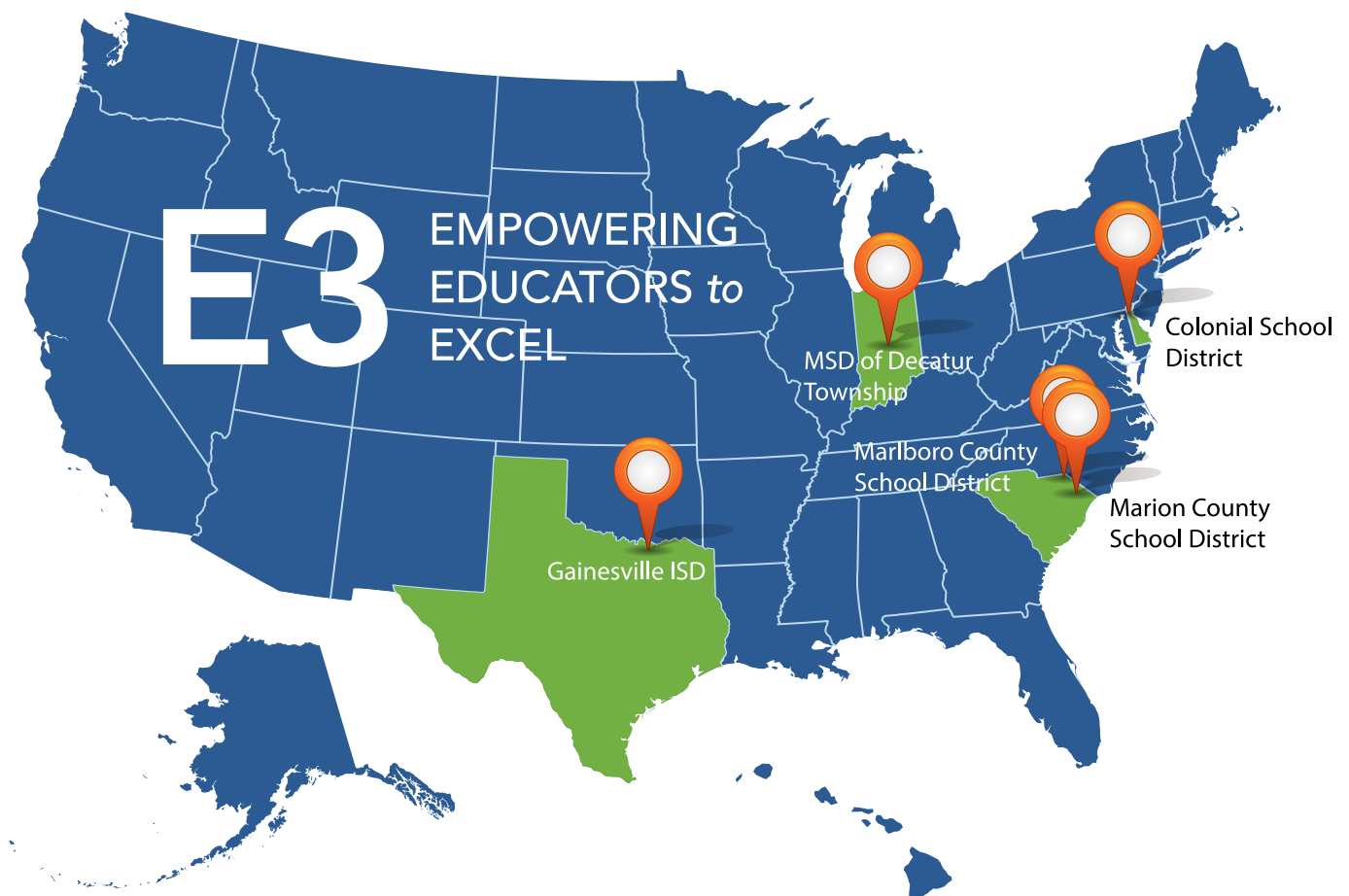
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STUDY OVERVIEW

In 2017, Insight Education Group was awarded a Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with five districts: Colonial School District (DE), Gainesville ISD (TX), Marion County School District (SC), Marlboro County School District (SC), and MSD of Decatur Township (IN). The Empowering Educators to Excel (E3) project brings much-needed support and growth opportunities to teachers and school leaders in 47 relatively small and/or rural schools across four states. In the 2019-20 school year, E3 directly impacted 117 school leaders, 211 teacher leaders, 1,742 teachers, and 28,251 students. Across all E3 schools, 82% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 72% are students of color.

During the first two and a half years of the grant, significant progress has been made in a short time. This brief provides a snapshot of the promising results to date, as well as the comprehensive interventions that have been put in place to achieve these outcomes.

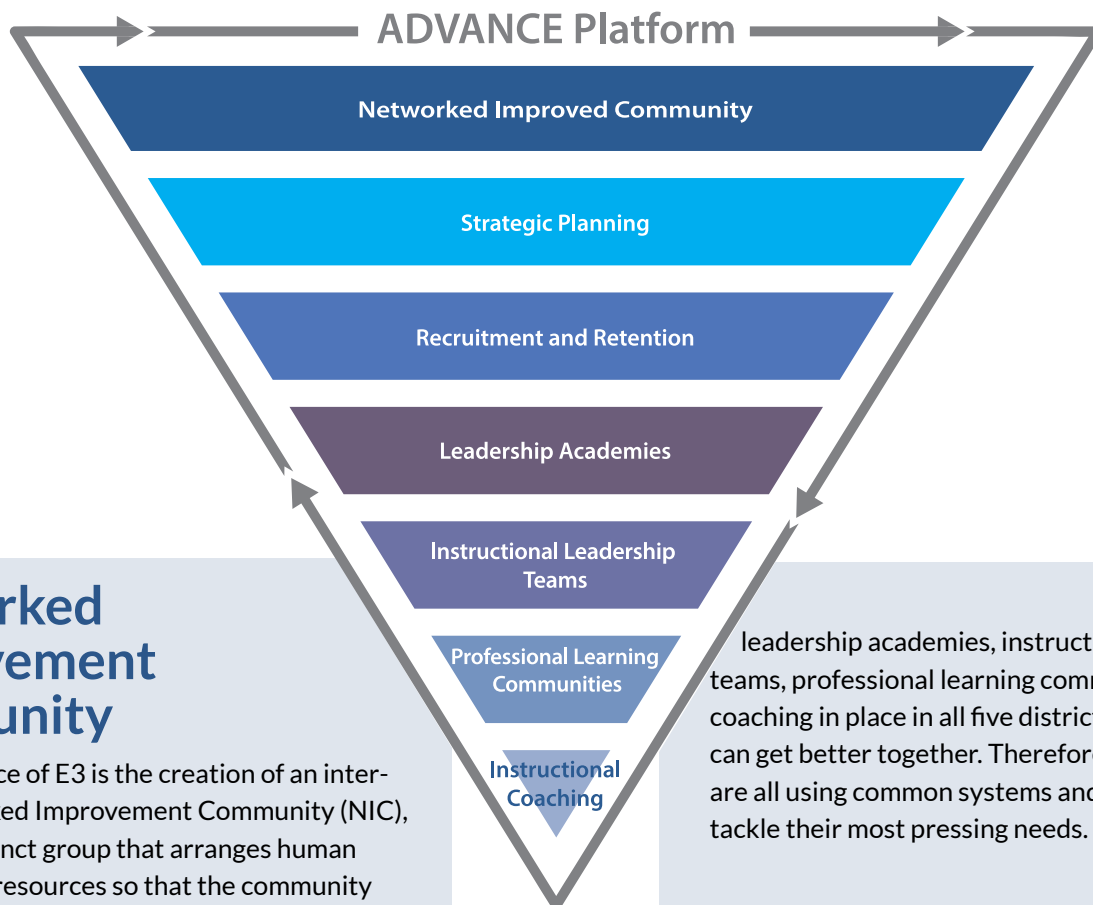
The Empowering Educators to Excel (E3) project brings much-needed support and growth opportunities to teachers and school leaders in 47 relatively small and/or rural schools across four states.



Interventions

In order to have the intended effects on teacher practice and student achievement, E3 is a comprehensive effort to change the status quo in participating districts. The following provides a summary of the most notable system-changes that have occurred as a result of this project—the 7 Levers of TRACTION for School Improvement. The figure below illustrates the macro-micro approach to impacting every educator in every building through a vertically-aligned networked improvement community.

The 7 Levers of TRACTION for School Improvement



Networked Improvement Community

The centerpiece of E3 is the creation of an inter-state Networked Improvement Community (NIC), which is a distinct group that arranges human and technical resources so that the community is capable of getting better at getting better (Engelbart, 2003). As part of a NIC, teachers and leaders have access to a broader network of peers to provide more external, content-based feedback, allowing educators to learn, share, and hone best practices and skills in successful teaching and learning. Therefore, best practices are not isolated to individual schools or classrooms, and students benefit from the high-quality resources and approaches shared across states.

Connected virtually via the ADVANCE platform (ADVANCEfeedback® and ADVANCELIVE), the NIC provides an opportunity for the smaller E3 districts to benefit from the professional learning and development similar to that of a large district. Importantly, E3 has put the same processes for strategic planning, recruitment and retention,

leadership academies, instructional leadership teams, professional learning communities, and coaching in place in all five districts so that they can get better together. Therefore, these districts are all using common systems and language to tackle their most pressing needs.

Strategic Planning

In order to create a NIC that is focused on the same goals and long-term, systems-based thinking, Insight worked with each district to create or update their strategic plans with foci aligned to the goals of the E3 grant, including increasing student results, retaining effective teachers, and focusing on equity. As part of the strategic planning process, each district followed a specific framework that creates an actionable plan for implementation, as well as allows for progress monitoring of all systems throughout the process. A key goal of these high-quality strategic plans is to integrate and institutionalize E3 tools and resources into the ongoing district priorities and work to ensure lasting success and program sustainability.





Recruitment and Retention

E3 is reshaping the way that participating districts are thinking about recruiting and retaining their effective teachers. Insight is focused on supporting districts in building year-long, multi-stakeholder and equity-driven recruitment systems to attract and retain effective teachers to their high-need schools. With the goal of increasing the number of applications of high-quality teaching candidates that align with student needs, the E3 districts have now put in place the essential elements for building 21st century recruitment and retention systems.

Leadership Academies

The E3 Leadership Academies are designed to support the professional development of building leaders—principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders/aspiring leaders. The Academy approach combines monthly training with specific follow-up to ensure transfer and accountability. Additionally, attendees have the opportunity to select a problem of practice that is specific to their own role/school, ensuring that the new learning is practical and relevant to impacting teacher practice and student achievement at their school. All five districts also offer an Aspiring Leaders Academy for teachers who seek a leadership role.

Instructional Leadership Teams

E3 utilizes the TRACTION for School Improvement (TSI) model for Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs). TSI is an asset-based school improvement model based on research in implementation science, specifically designed for high needs schools, that cultivates focus, discipline, and accountability among leadership teams to successfully execute their short- and long-term goals for the school. TSI has provided a common approach with the necessary level of local flexibility across all E3 schools. Through the “5-Star Meeting” structure, the TSI model ensures that key building stakeholders are meeting weekly to discuss progress made on their identified challenge and analyze the impact of decisions made, as well as provides a mechanism for both individual and group accountability.

Professional Learning Communities

All E3 districts use the Supporting Teacher Effectiveness Project (STEP) model for their school-level professional development. The STEP framework provides a data-driven professional learning community (PLC) structure that guides educators in identifying the bright spots (assets) that can be leveraged and scaled toward greater improvement and replication. STEP is designed to be a paradigm shift. Rather than telling teachers how to improve instruction, STEP empowers teachers to authentically select and hone the tools and mindsets that allow them to improve their practice and positively impact student learning.

Instructional Coaching

A recent meta-analysis from researchers at Harvard and Brown University found that one-on-one coaching is the most impactful type of professional development to move student achievement (Kraft et al., 2016). Every level of educator in E3 schools receives on-going coaching and support. Building-level administrators and teacher leaders provide feedback to teachers and teachers provide feedback to one another. The building-level instructional coaching is grounded in the pedagogical skills aligned to each district's evaluation instrument. Additionally, principals receive executive coaching to reinforce content and skills acquired in the Leadership Academy and support continuous growth and development. Educators are using asynchronous and synchronous video technology to self-reflect, coach each other, and to get instructional coaching feedback.



Recruiting Teachers of Color: An Investment in Diversity

Research has consistently shown that students of color perform better academically when taught by teachers of color (Jones, 2018). We have started to track the racial and ethnic characteristics of new hires to assess progress toward a more diverse teaching staff. In addition, we will use these data to indicate the success of recently adopted HR methods to attract and hire more diverse teachers.

The E3 districts have made significant progress in a very short time. For example, Gainesville tripled its percentage and Colonial doubled its percentage of newly hired teachers of color. In Marion and Marlboro, around 50% of new hires are teachers of color.

These new hires contribute to a teacher demographic continually evolving to better reflect the demographic of the students they serve. Both Marlboro and Marion have teaching staff at or near 50% teachers of color. Just three years ago, Marlboro's teachers were 73% White and Marion's teachers were 57% White. While none of the E3 districts has a percentage of teachers of color equal to its percentage of students of color, these districts are quickly closing the gap and will continue to do so during the remainder of the grant.

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Addressing the Achievement Gap: Student Performance by Sub-Group

We believe it is important to carefully assess sub-group impact, since E3's planned interventions—especially targeted recruiting and retention of effective educators of color—are likely to have disproportionate impact on the performance of students of color.

We examined how Black students performed relative to statewide averages for proficiency in Language Arts and Math. We then examined the performance of White students relative to the state average. In 2019, across grades 3-8, Black students outperformed the White students relative to the peer-to-peer analyses. In other words, at each tested grade level, Black students showed better results compared to the state averages of other Black students than the White students in all districts compared to the state average of other White students.

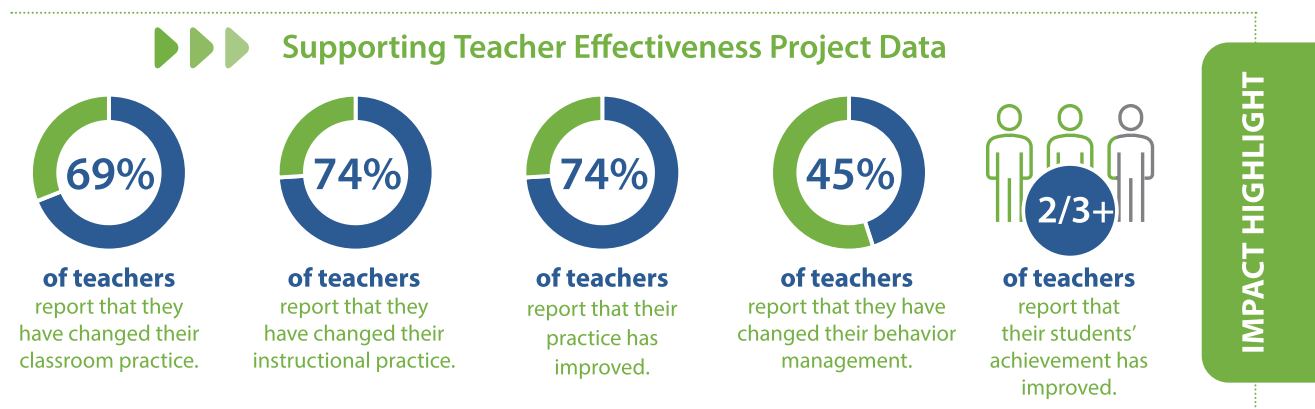
Due to E3's robust recruitment and retention strategies, combined with a relentless focus on equity, we expect to see that all districts will build on this initial success and meaningfully reduce this gap by 2022.

**Note that this data is not available for MSD Decatur as the state of Indiana does not release sub-group performance on its standardized test.*



Changing Professional Development: The STEP Model

The University of Connecticut is conducting an external evaluation on the implementation and effectiveness of the Supporting Teacher Effectiveness Project (STEP) in the E3 project. In spring 2019, the research team administered a survey to the teachers in 32 schools across the five E3 districts with the following results:



As the second phase in this study, in spring 2020 researchers visited eight schools to better understand which mechanisms of STEP are most effective in creating impact. Interviews, observations, focus groups, and documents were analyzed to find trends. Overall, researchers found many positive impacts on school and classroom culture, teacher practices, and student outcomes, including: a shift in professional culture from teachers blaming external factors for students' underperformance to a focus on internal accountability; an increased openness to collaboration and sharing of practices; the use of purposeful data analysis of student work; and an increased sense of teacher ownership.



THE RESULTS

The multipronged design of E3—that includes district- and school-level strategies as well as focused, aligned support for teachers and leaders with the opportunity for districts to share lessons learned across the network—is having a notable impact. The following outcomes are from two external evaluations of the project.

Seeing and Addressing the Disconnect Between Teacher Evaluation and Student Performance

There should be a clear and obvious connection between teacher effectiveness and student performance. Even so, there has been a decades-long disconnect between these two, despite continued attempts to raise awareness (*TNTP, Widget Effect) and strengthen teacher evaluation standards. This disconnect was clearly present to a greater or lesser extent in all of the E3 districts before the start of this grant. Our E3 baseline evaluation report illustrated for district leaders that there was no apparent connection between a given teacher's evaluation score and the academic performance of the students taught by that teacher.

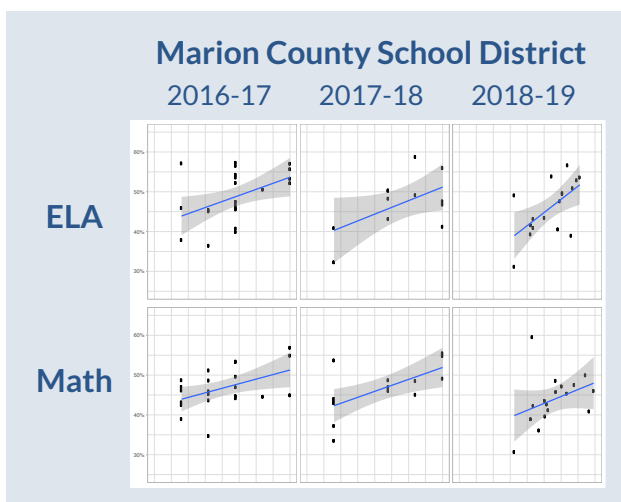
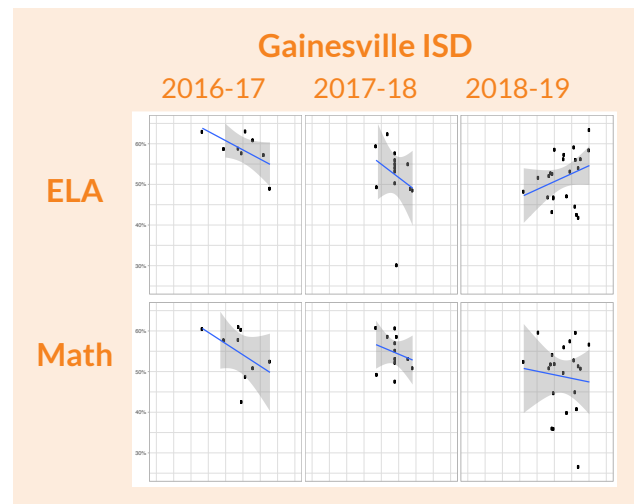
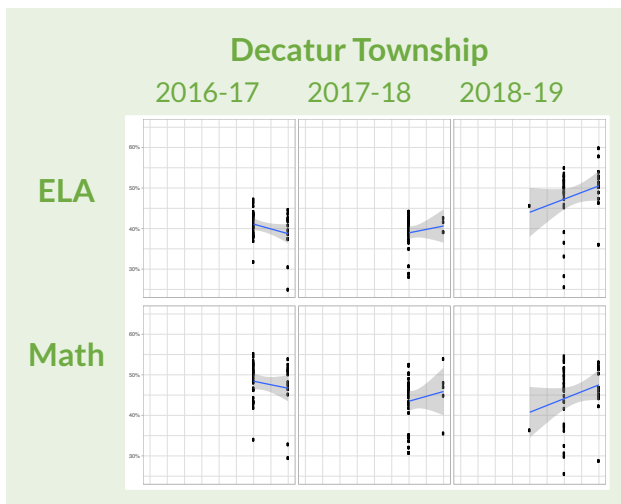
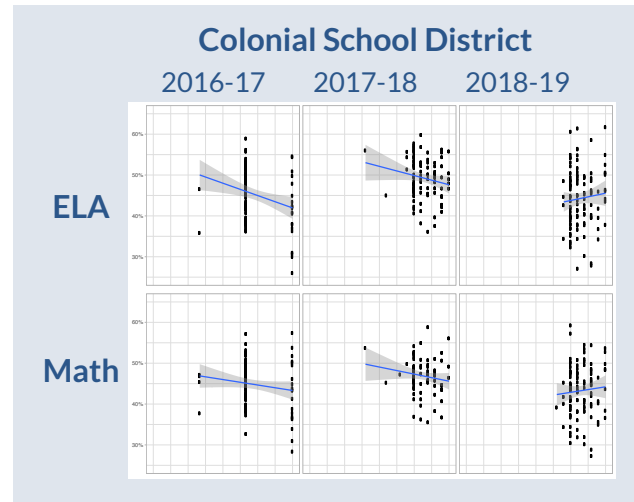
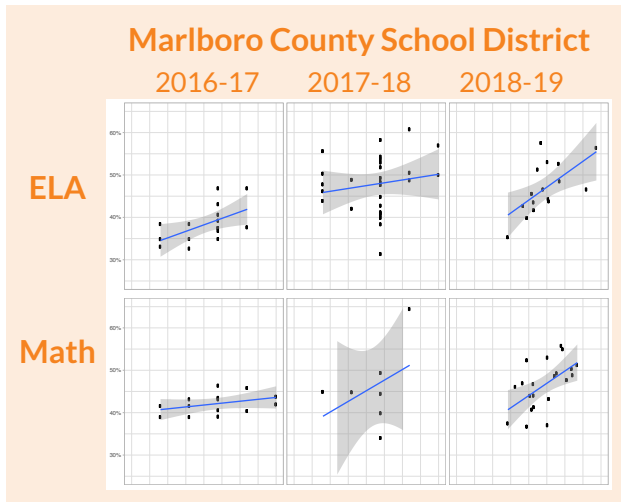
As principals and coaches have begun to focus on what matters most to improve teaching and learning through the E3 levers, we have seen a notable shift in the correlation between teacher effectiveness ratings and student performance. It is promising to see that the work of E3 has already led to stronger correlations between our two most important performance measures, as shown in the graphs on the next page.



*Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. (2009). *The widget effect: Our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness*. Washington, D.C.: The New Teacher Project.

Teacher Effectiveness Ratings and Student Performance

A comparison of correlations by subject and district, over time.



Interpreting this graphic:

As observation scores increase along the vertical (Y) axis, one should reasonably expect the student data to also increase proportionately across the horizontal (X) axis. This correlation would create a 45° line sloping up from left to right. Prior to E3 implementation in 2017, several districts' lines were flat or even sloping down. This downward slope indicates an inverse correlation where those who scored higher on evaluations tended to show less gains on student achievement. In one year of implementing E3, those slopes were changed into positive slopes and districts with slight positive slopes became even stronger.





Insight Education Group is an international educational consulting organization that partners with education leaders to develop the strategy and confidence to lead bold and equitable change—and provides the wrap-around and embedded supports to make change happen.

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