

BRIGHT SPOTS

Quality Teaching



Children's Literacy Initiative, Philadelphia, PA

Extreme Makeover: Classroom Edition could be the new theme of Chicago's Lázaro Cárdenas Elementary School. Unlike the show, however, no cameras are rolling when the school's principal and five third-grade teachers enthusiastically organize and rearrange classrooms during the summer of 2011 to support more effective teaching techniques in reading and writing.

Their efforts were inspired by literacy breakthroughs among third-graders at Cárdenas Elementary, sparked by Children's Literacy Initiative's first year of work funded through the federal Investing in Innovation (i3) program at the school. "Our teachers' successes have snowballed into a building-wide norm that everyone buys into," says Jeremy Feiwell, Ed.D., principal of Cárdenas, a 98-percent Hispanic, low-income school in Chicago where makeovers are planned for all 30 classrooms. "We're setting higher standards for what kids can achieve and using classrooms as a teaching tool." That's good news for Cárdenas' 630 students in pre-K through third-grade.

Early reading = lifelong success

Cárdenas Elementary is among 39 public schools in Philadelphia, Chicago, and Camden and Newark, N.J., where the Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI) is expanding its program, *Modeling Exemplary Literacy Instruction*. Funded by a \$21.7-million i3 validation grant plus a required \$4.3-million private-sector match, CLI, a 23-year-old organization, will train 460 teachers, who collectively will teach 45,600 children, kindergarten through third-grade students during the five-year grant and thousands more in years to come. The outcome of their efforts will provide useful evidence about the impact of the organization's work to improve reading achievement for children at high-poverty schools.

"We demystify great teaching practices so they are easy to teach, observe and replicate," says Kelly Hunter, Ed.D., CLI's acting executive director. "To change

WHO THEY ARE

By 2015, CLI will reach:

- 1.045 million students cumulatively.
- 75,600 students annually.
- 175 high-poverty urban schools.
- 1,960 teachers annually.

\$186 average annual cost per student during 3-year training.

\$5,000 average annual cost per school after 3-year intensive training.

\$586 estimated cost-per-impact per additional student meeting literacy benchmark.

Source: *Center for High Impact*

Philanthropy

CONTACT

Children's Literacy Initiative

Philadelphia, PA 19103

(215) 561-4676

Kelly Hunter, Ed.D., Acting Executive Director

khunter@childrensliteracyinitiative.org

teaching habits, you need somebody there by your side over several years to build on your specific strengths and improve your skills and classroom setting.”

CLI trains teachers in replicable instructional strategies that make children feel intellectually safe, curious and eager to learn how to read. “What matters most is how you talk to kids, how you listen to them and get them to talk, and how you create an environment that inspires trust, sharing and learning,” says CLI Founder Linda Katz. “But we also need to bring teachers to a high level of proficiency in how to instruct reading and writing, how to organize their time and space, and more generally how to create rigor in their lessons.”

Model classroom teachers receive expert CLI training and one-on-one coaching in effective teaching practices, typically for three years. In collaborative teams with principals, school-based coaches and reading specialists, model teachers become in-house experts who train colleagues. CLI also works with teachers to transform classrooms to inspire learning — outfitting classrooms with rugs, comfortable seating, easy access to books, vocabulary and student writing on display, writing and listening centers, and a home lending library.

Because CLI cultivates expert teachers within each school who mentor colleagues, the Center for High Impact Philanthropy cites CLI’s approach for its cost-effective impact on early literacy instruction.

What works

Funding from the i3 program supports a randomized control trial conducted by American Institutes for Research to compare outcomes for 39 CLI-trained schools with those of 39 peer schools. While CLI has already demonstrated outcomes in increased third-grade reading proficiency, the organization is eager for this additional validation to help it reach still more teachers and with them, more children. “When schools spend money on reading interventions, they need to make decisions based on evidence,” says Hunter. “We want them to understand that this investment will make a real difference in kids’ lives.”

“We know that not reading on grade level in third-grade is the single biggest predictor of dropping out of high school,” says Katz. “And our economy does not accommodate people without high school diplomas. It is the beginning of the glide path toward poverty.”

CLI is also using i3 funds as a catalyst to help it begin to develop technology infrastructure for online training and video conferencing. Eventually, this will help CLI expand its impact by supplementing face-to-face interactions with schools and teachers. “We’re not looking for CLI to be in every single classroom across the nation,” says Hunter. “But we are hoping the lessons we have learned can be shared and replicated by others.”

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

Among black non-English Language Learners:

- 62% in CLI 1st-grade classrooms achieved proficiency. *
- 48% in comparison schools achieved proficiency. *

Among 1st-graders:

- 58% of CLI model classroom 1st-graders achieved proficiency. *
- 46% of 1st-graders at comparison schools achieved proficiency. *

* Source: OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, 2009 DIBELS data for Philadelphia students

Among 3rd-graders at Gotwals Elementary in Norristown, PA, (a high-poverty school) on PSSA reading tests, 69.8% scored proficient (58.7%) and advanced (11.1%) in 2007–2008, their third year with CLI-trained teachers, compared to 20% proficient (0% advanced) in 2004–2005.

HIGHLIGHTS

CLI:

- Coaches teachers in techniques proven to help children learn to read and write.
- Establishes model classroom teachers as mentors to peers.
- Demystifies instruction so it is observable, measurable, replicable and scalable.
- Builds internal school capacity with minimal continued costs.
- Helps teachers modify classrooms to inspire reading.