

# Evaluation of the Florida Master Teacher Initiative Second Formative Report

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## Executive Summary

The Florida Master Teacher Initiative (FMTI) partners have developed and implemented for 2 years 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 if activities are sustained beyond the grant. Teachers and principals also shared many examples of how these programs are starting to affect them, their instruction, and their students. Presented here are a summary of the many accomplishments, early outcomes, and supports and challenges for implementation.

### 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.** In establishing the Early Childhood Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (ECTLSI) graduate program, University of Florida (UF) faculty developed four new early childhood courses and adapted several other 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. In Year 2, UF faculty revised the new courses on the basis of feedback from teachers who took the course in Year 1.
- **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. They also built time into their courses to train teachers on the use of their online tools.
- **Recruitment and retention of graduate students.** A total of 56 teachers from 14 of the 20 FMTI schools were recruited and accepted into the master's degree program (37 in Cohort 1 and 19 in Cohort 2). By October 2013, 86% of the 56 teachers (30 in Cohort 1 and 18 in Cohort 2) were still enrolled in the ECTLSI program.

#### *Teacher Fellows Program*

- **Recruitment and participation.** In 2012-13, 18 of the 20 treatment schools ran Teacher Fellows programs and held the required six program sessions, meeting about once a month. On average, about 30% of teachers at each school participated in the Teacher Fellows program. The overall number of teacher fellows grew slightly from Year 1 to Year 2 of the program, from 220 to 242 teachers. Ninety-four percent of

teacher fellows attended all six sessions, 98% presented at the Learning Showcase, and 99% wrote and submitted a summary of their inquiry.

- **Learning Showcase.** A total of 245 staff members from FMTI schools delivered presentations at the showcase. They comprised more than a quarter of the 900 attendees at the showcase.

### ***Principal Fellows Program***

- **Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) meetings.** Three-quarters of the principals in the 20 treatment schools attended two or three of the four PPLC meetings in Year 2.
- **Statewide Principal Leadership Institute.** Most (75%) of the principals attended the one statewide principal institute held in 2012-13.
- **Principal inquiry projects.** Three (15%) of the principals did an optional inquiry project in Year 2.
- **Summer Leadership Institute.** Most schools sent representatives to the annual Summer Leadership Institutes: 19 of 20 schools in 2011, 17 of 20 schools in 2012, and 19 of 20 schools in 2013. Only 25% of schools (5 of 20) sent principals in 2013, in comparison with 40% of schools (8 of 20) in past years. The percentage of schools that sent assistant principals also declined, from 45% to 35%, between the summers of 2012 and 2013.

### ***Program Enhancements***

- **Assistant Principal Fellows Program.** In the 2012-13 school year, the FMTI team introduced an Assistant Principal Professional Learning Community (APPLC), a program similar to the Principal Fellows program but for assistant principals. The team has continued to hold APPLC meetings and added a statewide Assistant Principal Institute in 2013-14.
- **Transition to Kindergarten PLC and Post-Baccalaureate program.** In the 2013-14 school year, UF faculty launched a new post-baccalaureate program, a non-degree-bearing, four-course version of the ECTLSI program available to a wider range of teachers than those who qualify for the master's program. The FMTI team also launched the Transition to Kindergarten Professional Learning Communities to support inquiries about aligning standards, social-emotional development, and barriers to smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten.

## **Early Outcomes**

### ***Benefits for Teachers***

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

- **Increased knowledge of early childhood.** Several teachers credited the master's degree program with improving their knowledge of early childhood education, including their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices and the importance of early learning for later learning.
- **New classroom strategies for instruction.** 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. These strategies included new techniques for classroom management, differentiated instruction, backwards mapping, and assessment. Similarly, almost all teachers participating in the Teacher Fellows program reported learning new instructional and classroom management strategies from their inquiry projects and the Learning Showcase.
- **Increased reflection on practice.** The inquiry process used in the master's degree program and the Teacher Fellows program has made teachers more aware of multiple perspectives to the problems they face and of more options for solutions.
- **Increased cultural awareness and parent involvement.** Beyond concrete instructional strategies, many teachers credited courses in the master's degree program with improving their cultural awareness, helping them to think about the whole child, and motivating them to increase their efforts to engage parents.
- **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.
- **Increased leadership skills.** The majority of teachers enrolled in the master's degree program and teachers trained as Teacher Fellows facilitators reported growth in their leadership skills and increased confidence in taking on leadership roles. Principals also reported that the teachers participating in the master's degree program were emerging as leaders within their schools.

### ***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 were 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 and positive changes in their classroom climate.
- **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.
- **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 degree 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.
- **Ongoing open communication and clear roles.** Regularly scheduled and ad hoc meetings among FMTI team members support efficient collaborative decision making and open communication. There are also clear and purposeful allocations of roles among team members.
- **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. Knowing the district and how to navigate its systems enabled FMTI to get off the ground quickly and successfully and to keep the initiative on track.

### *Challenges for Implementation*

- **Competing commitments.** Given many competing demands, finding time to fully engage in FMTI activities was a challenge for participants. Attendance at Principal Fellows activities and the Summer Leadership Institutes were particularly affected by competing demands on principals’ time. Likewise, teacher recruitment to the master’s degree program was low, in part because of already full schedules. Teachers in the Teacher Fellows program also felt constrained by time. However, most participants found the time they spent on program activities highly worthwhile and doable.
- **UF graduate program requirements.** Enrollment in the master’s degree program was hindered by teachers’ reluctance to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and having 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. Ten teachers were given an opportunity to start courses and try to improve their GRE scores. As a result, six additional teachers were fully accepted in the master's program who otherwise would not have been able to participate.

- **School accountability pressures.** Ten of the 20 FMTI schools have been identified as needing improvement and have been subsumed by the Education Transformation Office (ETO). Teachers working in schools under oversight of the ETO reported challenges to implementing the new instructional practices learned in their courses. Some teachers reported that the school climate and some of the prescribed interventions under ETO were not conducive to the type of experimentation advocated by the ECTLSI program. In addition, there have been scheduling conflicts between ETO and FMTI professional development activities.
- **Understaffing.** The amount of work demanded of UF staff, especially professors-in-residence, to implement the many components and activities of FMTI has spread them too thin. In addition to teaching classes and mentoring principals, assistant principals, and teachers, they must attend to the logistics of all the program meetings. Without having enough staff members dedicated to the project full-time, finding the time and energy needed to implement each of the individual programs at the high quality expected is difficult.
- **Strict district communication protocols.** Because of district communication protocols, communication about FMTI needed to go through the district each time program staff wanted to share information about upcoming FMTI activities. FMTI staff could not communicate directly with schools about the program. Given these constraints, it was sometimes difficult for UF to convey timely information about offerings. Further, district protocols around scheduling professional development and access to the professional development portal made some aspects of the work difficult for UF staff.

FMTI partners have been successful with offering high-quality programs for principals and teachers. However, securing the desired levels of participation in the master's degree program and the Principal Fellows program has been a challenge. FMTI partners have responded to these challenges by incorporating new program enhancements and working on the scheduling of program activities to avoid conflicts with other district activities. Staff and school personnel alike have expressed a desire for the program to continue after its grant expires in 2015, but little attention has been paid to securing future funding.

Future evaluation reports will provide a description of program implementation across all years of the initiative 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 third-grade students in Miami-Dade County. 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.

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 (ECTLSI) 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, 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 school surveys and student assessment data to support data-driven decision making and development of school action plans at summer institutes.

The FMTI team also introduced program enhancements following Year 1. In the 2012-13 school year, the FMTI team introduced an Assistant Principal Professional Learning Community (APPLC), a program similar to the Principal Fellows program but for assistant principals. In the 2013-14 school year, UF faculty launched a new post-baccalaureate program, a non-degree-bearing, four-course version of the ECTLSI program available to a wider range of teachers than those who qualify for the master's program. Finally, the FMTI team also recently launched the Transition to Kindergarten Professional Learning Communities to support inquiries about aligning standards, social-emotional development, and barriers to smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten.

SRI International is conducting an independent evaluation of FMTI. The multifaceted evaluation will measure the impact of FMTI on students' reading and math achievement in grades K–6 by 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 by 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 Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations and survey measures. The CLASS will be used to track outcomes in three 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. Some fidelity data from this study for Years 1 and 2 are included in this report.

Finally, the evaluation includes a formative component to identify implementation challenges, suggest midcourse corrections, assess progress, and document program functioning to support replication.

This report presents findings from the formative evaluation following 2 years of implementation. A prior FMTI formative report was produced in 2012 and included formative feedback following the first year of implementation and baseline CLASS observation and teacher survey measures. A final comprehensive summative report will combine findings across years and present final implementation data, as well as teacher and student outcome results.

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

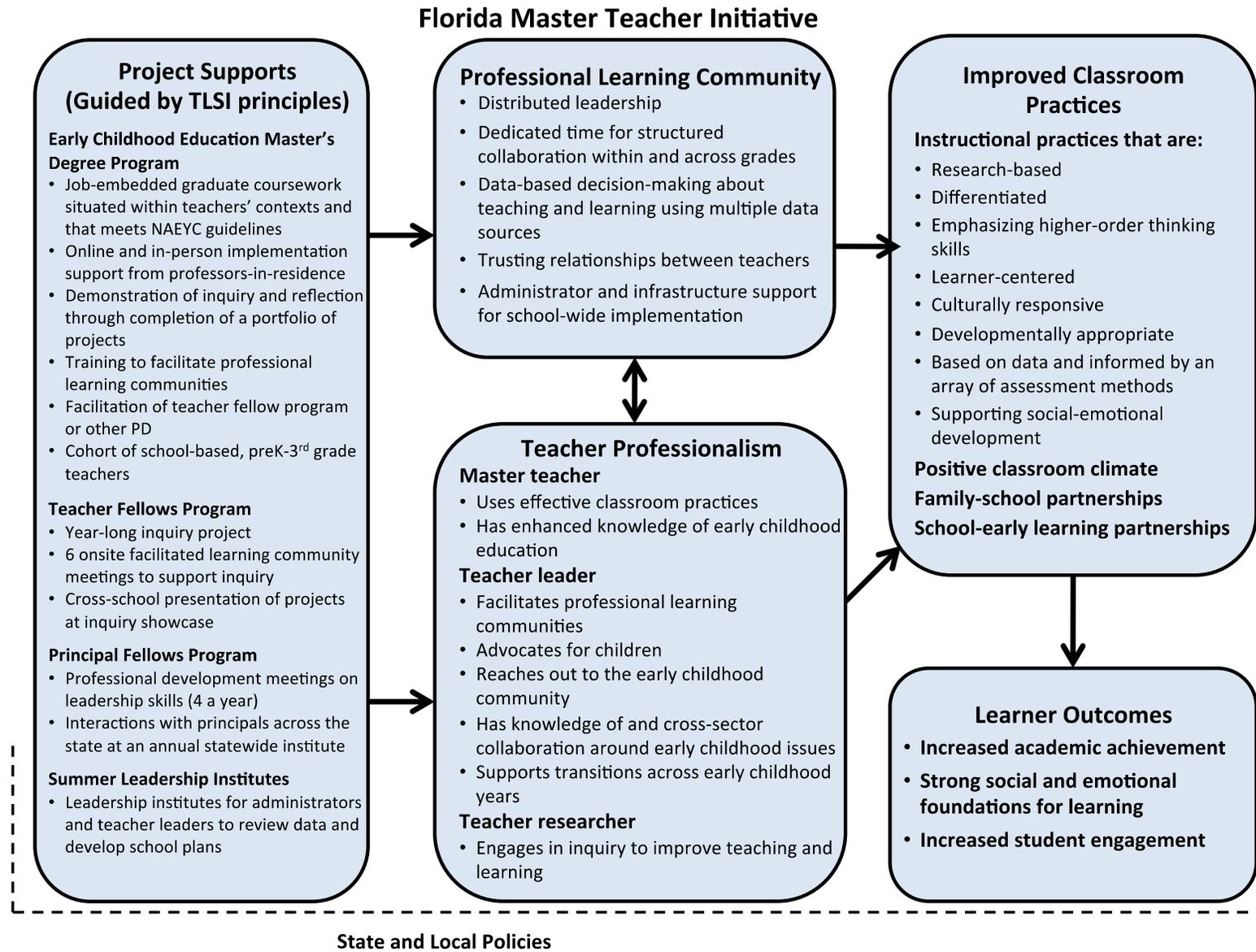
### **Logic Model for the Florida Master Teacher Initiative**

The logic model in Exhibit 1 shows how FMTI program components are expected to 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 professional learning communities among school staff and the professionalism and effectiveness of teachers. The job-embedded master's degree program aims to develop a cadre of teachers with deeper knowledge of the early learning foundations promoted by FMTI, as well as strong research and leadership skills at each school. This cadre is then able to facilitate a Teacher Fellows program that supports involvement of all teachers at a school in research projects (inquiries) to improve their practice and share in learning, as well as infuse their early learning knowledge and facilitation skills in other school-based professional development efforts. Principals also learn how to support the emerging teacher leaders and researchers through their own professional learning community. Finally, teachers and administrators come together in teams to develop school plans each summer to improve school climate, instruction, and student achievement.

The main program components, together with additional program activities, are meant to produce teachers who excel as (1) master teachers who use effective teaching practices, including those focused on early childhood, (2) teacher leaders in their schools and communities who promote instructional improvement and high-quality education from prekindergarten through third grade, and (3) teacher researchers who, through participation in a guided inquiry, research instructional topics that are relevant and important to improving their practice.

With improved skills in teaching, research, and leadership, 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 classroom climates, establish stronger partnerships with parents and the community, and 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



## **Research Focus and Data Sources**

This report presents findings from Year 2 of 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
- Program enhancements (post-baccalaureate program, Transition to Kindergarten PLCs, and Assistant Principal Fellows program)
- Systemic factors that support and hinder implementation.

Data sources for the formative evaluation included interviews with principals, teachers participating in the job-embedded graduate program and Teacher Fellows program, UF faculty, and district administrators; participation data; and program documentation.

### ***Interviews***

In fall 2013, teams of researchers visited 6 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 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 23 teachers, including 10 teachers enrolled in the master's degree program, and all the school principals. The master's degree program teachers were equally representative of teachers who started the program in 2011 (Cohort 1) and those who started in 2012 (Cohort 2). We also interviewed district staff managing the initiative and UF faculty, 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 programs (e.g., Principal Fellows, Summer Leadership Institute, and master's degree program), challenges to participation, perceived impacts and benefits of the program for 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, and plans for sustainability.

### ***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 Summer Leadership Institutes, information on course completion and academic progress for master's degree teachers, and participation in facilitation and coaching training offered by UF through the district.

### ***Program Documentation***

The formative evaluation also included a review of program documents, including "The Link," a periodic newsletter about FMTI published by UF and the Learning Showcase program.

## **Overview of the Report**

Chapters 2 through 5 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, the Principal Fellows program and other schoolwide supports, and program enhancements. In each chapter, we provide information about participation, participants’ assessments of the programs’ strengths and weaknesses, and perceived outcomes effected by the programs. Chapter 6 discusses key factors that were supports and challenges in implementing such a complex and large-scale initiative. Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of findings and next steps for the evaluation.

## 2. Master's Degree Program

At the heart 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 preK–3) working in high-need communities. The FMTI graduate program is an enhancement of UF's Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program with an emphasis on early childhood (EC), so it is called the ECTLSI 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 3-day institute focused on developing participants' facilitation and leadership skills. The ECTLSI program is serving two cohorts of teachers: Cohort 1 began the program in the summer of 2011, and Cohort 2 began the program in the summer of 2012. Both cohorts are following the same sequence of courses and engaging in similar leadership and research opportunities.

The goal of the ECTLSI program is to improve teacher professionalism along three dimensions: instructional practice, leadership, and the ability to engage in inquiry to improve teaching and learning. By facilitating improvement in these three domains, the program aims to help participants achieve the three pillars of "master teacher," "teacher leader," and "teacher researcher." In the final semester of the program, teachers are expected to document their progress toward these goals by assembling a portfolio of their work, including artifacts for each of the three pillars.

### Course Development and Adaptation

The master's degree program is a joint venture of two schools within UF: the School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies and the School of Teaching and Learning. The program was adapted from the existing TLSI program to include an early childhood focus. This adaptation involved 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, UF faculty redesigned existing TLSI 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.

The course designers also built in mechanisms for improvement. After each course, students are asked to provide feedback that is analyzed by the teaching professor and the course designer. Moreover, UF faculty hired graduate students to interview master's degree teachers from Cohort 1 to learn about their perspectives on which features of the program had the largest impact on their practice and which features of the program could be improved. Where relevant, changes were made to courses before they were offered to Cohort 2.

For the most part, both the professors and designers of the ECTLSI courses believe that they went well the first time around. In particular, the original TLSI courses required few adjustments after their initial adaptation to emphasize early learning content. UF faculty explained that these courses had already gone through several cycles of formative feedback and revision and were consequently already functioning smoothly. The newly developed early learning courses also were largely successful, although they required some more substantial revisions than the original TLSI sequence. For example, in their feedback for the Developmentally Appropriate Practice course students expressed concern that the course was overly focused on very early childhood (birth through preK), whereas many of them teach kindergarten through third grade. In response, the course designers reduced some of the early childhood readings and introduced additional videos of primary-grade children. Of all of the courses, Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education was the least well received by Cohort 1 students. For Cohort 2, UF staff heavily reorganized the assessment course and used a different professor, who was more experienced with the ECTLSI students, to teach it. By all accounts, the course appears to be going more smoothly for Cohort 2.

Through experimentation while teaching Cohort 1, UF faculty also refined the blended model for delivering instruction. An unsuccessful experiment with online-only delivery for one course confirmed the need for all professors to include at least some face-to-face instruction. UF staff also learned the necessity of allowing adequate time for students to become familiar with new online technologies before requiring their use in class. For example, program staff added “voice thread” to the online platform midway through the program, which allows a discussion thread using recorded video messages and presentations. This addition was meant to enable more compelling conversations and sharing than a purely written dialogue; however, teachers struggled with learning the new technology while learning new content at the same time. Once teachers became comfortable with the voice thread feature it ceased to become a barrier. For UF staff, this experience highlighted the importance of respecting the learning curve associated with introducing new technology for teachers who already have a lot on their plates.

The final category of revisions UF staff applied to the ECTLSI courses grew out of an increased understanding of participants’ roles as full-time teachers and graduate students working under the constraints of the public school calendar. As one faculty member explained,

*As we see how students respond to coursework, and when they really start to grow with coursework and assignments, things that feel too theoretical have been pared down. I’ve watched that happen. So I’ve seen things like the amount of scholarly reading has been reduced, and the amount of conversation and connection to practice has increased.*

Likewise, other professors described an increased awareness among UF faculty that ECTLSI participants could not be considered “traditional” students in many ways and that the goals of the program “are to strengthen teachers’ knowledge and practice; we aren’t preparing them to be researchers at an R-1 university.” After teaching Cohort 1, professors also realized that some of the due dates for their assignments coincided with particularly stressful times during the public school calendar, such as during the high-stakes state testing period. In response, UF professors shifted due dates for Cohort 2 to be more accommodating of their responsibilities as teachers.

## Recruitment of Graduate Students

In contrast to the successful process for course development and adaptation, the recruitment of graduate students has continued to be a challenge throughout the life of the FMTI initiative. 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, producing a video that promoted the ECTLSI program through student testimonials, 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 contextualize the disappointing participation statistics and inform future recruitment efforts for FMTI or for similar initiatives. As discussed in detail in the 2012 FMTI formative report, the most frequently cited reasons that Cohort 1 teachers applied for the grant include the fact that the program would be free to participants, the good reputation of UF, the ease of completing the program online, its immediate applicability to their instructional practice, and a personal drive to become a better teacher. Cohort 2 teachers cited many of these same factors when explaining their decisions to apply. For example, as one Cohort 2 teacher explained,

*I wanted to enhance my practice. ... I wanted to be a better teacher...not just a better educator. I wanted to be a better leader. I knew this program—researcher, leader, and master teacher. I just wanted to improve on my craft. I've been teaching 16 years. I don't want to say I was in a rut, but I wanted to take it to a different level.*

Cohort 2 teachers, while echoing many of the same reasons for applying to the ECTLSI program, were additionally able to shed some light onto why they applied the second year the grant was offered, but not the first. For example, one teacher explained that the program was not advertised as much for Cohort 1 as it was the year she joined. When recruitment was under way for Cohort 1, she was teaching fourth grade, making her ineligible for the program; however, because of the more intensive advertising the following year, she asked her school administration if they would move her to third grade if she applied for the program, which they did. This example both underlines the importance of aggressive advertising and provides some validation for UF staff's concern that their recruitment strategies did not effectively target early childhood teachers. Historically, the TLSI program, on which the ECTLSI program was designed, tended to attract teachers from the upper elementary grades 3–5.

Several other Cohort 2 teachers cited their exposure to the program during its first year of implementation—either through participation in the Teacher Fellows program or simply through hearing about the positive experiences of Cohort 1 teachers—as a motivator for applying for the second round. For example, one teacher said,

*At first I wasn't sure, I was getting married and I was on the fence. You know it's a lot to take in. But [the first cohort] had so many positive things to say about it, they were so energetic and motivated that I was like "I want to be that, I want to extend my thinking in terms of education." ...*

*They were honestly the ones that were like “Do it, because it changes your life.”*

Similarly, a principal from one of the participating schools described the process as

*An evolution. Those high flyers that we have took to it really well, and [the other teachers] see the things they’ve brought to our school and the empowerment and camaraderie they’ve had, and they see how wonderful the UF people have been, and then people gravitate towards that that want to be a part of something like that.*

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. For both cohorts, 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 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 FMTI cannot waive the GRE or GPA requirements altogether, it does assist candidates in overcoming these barriers. For example, 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 who had borderline scores but 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. Plan C candidates are allowed to take the first course as non-degree-seeking students 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. Ten teachers took advantage of the Plan C opportunity (two in Cohort 1 and eight in Cohort 2); as of October 1, 2013, six of those teachers had been fully accepted into the ECTLSI program.

Aside from the GRE requirement, some teachers did not apply because they already had a master’s degree. Although the FMTI program does offer a “specialist” degree for participants who already have a master’s, many teachers cited the combination of already having a master’s along with having a lot on their plate due to work and personal obligations as their explanation for not applying. A principal at one of the schools with no master’s students explained that her “biggest challenges were that 50% already have a master’s, and the other 50% did not want to take the GRE. They were afraid or discouraged through the process.”

UF faculty were especially disappointed that they were not able to meet their recruitment goal for Cohort 2, given that they had both more time and more experience to improve on their efforts from the first round. Several UF staff members speculated that they may simply have overestimated the demand for their program from any given school, saying that they had “gone back to the well too many times.” By contrast, one principal believed that if the program continued, his school would continue to field new applicants for the program as his older staff turned over and new teachers joined. From this perspective, the graduate degree model might not

have overestimated demand altogether, but rather overestimated the size of cohort that could be recruited in any given year.

Another issue with recruitment that UF faculty identified was the inability to establish a foothold in some schools. Although the schools applied to be part of FMTI, seven 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. Program staff speculated that recruitment might have been less challenging if they had made administrative commitment to the program the central criterion for selecting schools. One UF faculty member reflected:

*I think it's really important that you select schools that truly want to do what you want to do. I'm not sure if we did that right from the beginning. I think there was a lot of care about selecting schools from each region, and for political reasons, each school board member had a certain number of participating schools. It was very careful, but for me the more important thing is—do you [the principal] agree with the model conceptually and are you really going to push it and make it work?*

Similarly, a principal of one of the participating schools argued that the program might have gained better traction in schools if they had more effectively enlisted principals in their efforts:

*Principals need to be more involved in understanding what this really means so they can be your best ambassadors and your best support system.*

## **Retention of Graduate Students**

A total of 56 teachers from 14 of the 20 FMTI schools were recruited and accepted into the master's degree program (37 in Cohort 1 and 19 in Cohort 2). By October 2013, 86% of teachers who were admitted to the program (30 from Cohort 1 and 18 from Cohort 2) were still enrolled in the ECTLSI program. Two of the original Cohort 1 teachers who completed Year 1 put the program on hold for a year but rejoined the program to complete their Year 2 with Cohort 2 teachers.

## **Fidelity**

By the end of their program, master's degree teachers are expected to maintain a 3.0 GPA, complete scheduled classes, attend a facilitator training, engage in formal inquiry projects, and facilitate a Teacher Fellows group, other inquiry group, professional learning community, or other professional development activity. 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 the goals. Almost all teachers who remained in the program from either Cohort 1 or Cohort 2 maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher, completed their scheduled classes thus far, and completed at least one inquiry, and most participated in a facilitator training and led a Teacher Fellows or other professional development effort in their school (Exhibit 2). However, part of the fidelity model for FMTI also requires at least two teachers to participate in the ECTLSI at each school so

that each school would have a critical mass of teachers who could work together on coursework and school leadership and research efforts. Because only 10 of 20 schools had at least two teachers enrolled in the ECTLSI program by Year 2, there was low fidelity for the model overall.

### Exhibit 2. Teacher Progress in Master’s Degree Program

Element	Percentage of Master’s Degree Teachers		
	Cohort 1 Year 1	Cohort 1 Year 2	Cohort 2 Year 1
	<i>n</i> = 30	<i>n</i> = 27	<i>n</i> = 19
Maintained a 3.0 GPA	100	100	95
Completed scheduled classes	100	100	95
Completed an inquiry	93	100	100
Participated in facilitator training	83	93	74
Facilitated a Teacher Fellows or other professional development group in their school	77	93	53
Presented inquiry at the Learning Showcase	93	90	100

### Benefits and Outcomes

Measurable, standardized outcomes of the master’s degree program will not be available until September 2015. In the meantime, however, program participants and principals have reported on the effects they attribute to the program. In the following section we discuss the self-reported benefits and outcomes for teachers across each of the three pillars of the ECTLSI program: master teacher, teacher leader, and teacher researcher.

#### *Master Teacher*

A primary goal of the ECTLSI program is to help participants become “master teachers” by improving their instructional practice and increasing their knowledge of early childhood education.

**Improvement of instructional practice.** 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. These strategies included new techniques for classroom management, differentiated instruction, backwards mapping, and assessment. For example, several teachers described changes they made in their classrooms:

*I was a little bit biased, I think, when I was grading handwriting in kindergarten. ... So what I’ve done is I’ve started to create rubrics so that I am not biased. ... This is their score based on this criteria and then I also have proof for parents about why did my child get this score...it’s concrete. So I create a lot of rubrics now, and it’s working.*

*My instructional delivery has also changed. I’ve learned how to synthesize what I say; I’m more concise in my teaching; I’m able to target skills I*

*need to target and assess quickly if they're getting it and adjust instruction better.*

*The perfect example [of how my practice has changed] is being more open to creating small grouping, differentiated instruction. I was old school before with whole group instruction, but now I see that there is a need to work on really getting that down pat. ... We do see that we are able to target the students who are really in need, and we are adjusting the material according to their needs, and we do see growth. You don't see the big growth, but you do see those little improvements.*

One of the most frequently cited instructional strategies that teachers implemented because of what they learned from an ECTLSI course was incorporating morning meetings into their daily schedule. As one teacher explained, "We always have a little activity that has to do with the students' emotions, five minutes, so they can start on a good note.... They start talking about what they like, and afterwards they are more into whatever I have to tell them...because they are already excited. It carries over to their behavior." Another teacher described how the addition of morning meetings provides a "structure that kids can follow, builds a sense of community in the classroom, improves their oral language, and introduces new vocabulary."

Many teachers also reported shifting their instructional style to incorporate more opportunities for movement during the day, more cooperative learning, and less teacher talk. A third-grade teacher explained, "I've taken a step back from the teacher role and I've really stepped more into a facilitator role, letting them work hands-on and letting them explore their possibilities, letting them challenge their own thinking and each other's thinking." Similarly, a third-grade teacher from another school emphasized, "The most useful thing with the actual program has been my communication skills with students." In some cases, principals have taken notice of the same changes that teachers self-report. As one principal described, "I've seen instruction become geared more towards giving students an opportunity to talk to one another. The instruction is more facilitative as opposed to whole group lecture type."

Several teachers and principals also discussed how the ECTLSI program has helped teachers with the transition to the new Common Core State Standards. As a principal explained:

*I think it helps them to prepare for the new standards. By them going into the [ECTLSI] classes and participating in the PLCs, it gives them opportunities for discussing what they are thinking about the new initiatives, what they can do about it, what they are doing about it.*

Likewise, a teacher said,

*Being in the program has made the transition into teaching Common Core much easier, because a lot of the beliefs of the program are what we are expected to show as teachers now teaching to Common Core. It's been kind of like an aha moment...In taking the class Transforming the Curriculum, we are looking at the way students should be assessed, and formative assessment, rubrics...and all of those beliefs and ideas that they are teaching us is what we're being asked to do in class now as teachers. So it all ties together.*

**Impacts on students.** Teachers also reported that the changes they are making in their classroom strategies are positively affecting their students. One change teachers saw was an improvement in students' relationships and communication with one another. For example, one teacher said, "The relationship among [students] is a lot better. There are less conflicts in my classroom, people are more caring and understanding of each other. They understand working together and controlling airtime when they speak."

Several teachers also reported that the quality of their students' thinking and achievement has improved. As one teacher explained, "They can deeply think and analyze and draw conclusions and look for connections." Similarly, another teacher who has taught some of her students for two years in a row (i.e., looped with them) noticed "in terms of their higher-order thinking, those that were with me last year are way beyond those that came from other classes." Additionally, several teachers directly attribute improvements in their students' academic achievement to changes in their instructional practice due to the ECTLSI program. As one teacher described, "the skills are sinking in and little by little students are becoming more responsive and their test scores have improved." Another teacher referenced the fact that her third-grade class had the largest gains in her school.

**Increase in cultural awareness and parent involvement.** Beyond concrete instructional strategies, many teachers credited the Culturally Responsive and Children in Poverty courses with improving their cultural awareness, helping them to think about the whole child, and motivating them to increase their efforts to engage parents. As one teacher explained, "I am more conscious about the person, curriculum is important but who the student is matters too." Another teacher reported, "Right now we're in Children in Poverty; that's really helping. Not all of our students are living in poverty, but it gives us an idea why certain kids come in the way they do and ways we can encourage them."

In particular, many teachers reported experiencing a change in how they view parents. Several teachers explained that they had previously assumed that if parents weren't involved in their children's education it meant that they didn't care. Through the program, however, they learned that cultural and socioeconomic differences in the ways parents perceive teachers could also contribute to their level of involvement. As a couple of teachers explained,

*Before, I was a little more frightened and scared to talk to them. But now I am more aware that this is teamwork. If I don't reach out to them, some may not reach out to me based on their culture.*

*I have always kept a straight line between them and me. Now I see them more as partners. ... I present myself as someone who is concerned and interested in their child's well being, versus the enemy. ... I've learned to bring that mistrust down. My view of parental involvement has changed through everything I read and learned through the TLSI program. I have a more compassionate way of looking at parents in terms of what they can give and how much. ... For the first time I have parent volunteers coming into my classroom. Before, I wouldn't let parents come into my classroom. They help with grading, tutoring, filing. I don't feel watched or threatened.*

One strategy that a few teachers implemented to improve parental engagement was to either call home or set up in-person meetings early in the school year to welcome parents, establish norms,

and set an early precedent of not exclusively contacting parents when something was going wrong. One teacher developed two schoolwide parental involvement strategies: a family movie night and a school garden where parents could volunteer to help. The idea behind the movie night was to bring in parents “to enjoy the school from a different perspective...to have the teachers interact with parents in a nonthreatening way.” A few teachers acknowledged that they were not doing enough to involve parents in their classrooms but that the program had helped them understand the importance of doing so.

**Increased knowledge of early childhood.** Several teachers also credited the program with improving their knowledge of early childhood education. One teacher reported an increased understanding of “what’s more appropriate at certain ages and how to reach them more efficiently. What they should know and what we need to get them there.” Another teacher explained how the program helped her understand the importance of the early years to students’ later academic success:

*I definitely know more about the impact that early childhood has. It has actually made me want to become more of an advocate for early childhood. I think that sometimes because of standardized tests we’re kind of forgotten, or shoved under the rug, but we’re the base, we’re the foundation. If we have strong teachers in kindergarten and first and second [grades], there is going to be no problem when they get to third.*

A few teachers participating in the master’s degree program felt that they did not gain much new knowledge about early childhood education from the program. However, they spoke positively about the program and felt that it reinforced what they already knew or their general approach to early childhood education. For example, a teacher in the specialist degree program explained, “I have been taking trainings for years about developmentally appropriate practices.” Another teacher reported, “It reaffirmed a lot of the things that I already believed.”

In summary, all of the master’s program teachers reported improvements in instructional practices because of the ECTLSI program. One teacher emphasized, “these are definitely some of the most impactful courses that I have had...I am a national board certified teacher. The national board changed my teaching but I am finding this is having even more of an impact.” On a similarly positive note, one of the principals explained,

*I’ve seen tremendous growth. Not only in their whole environment in teaching and learning, but dealing with discipline, how to work with parents, sharing best practices, working in teams. ... I’ve watched them grow from teachers to blossoming master teachers, and that is exciting.*

### **Teacher Leader**

Another important goal of the ECTLSI program is to help participants develop into “teacher leaders.” The majority of teachers reported growth in their leadership skills and increased confidence in taking on leadership roles. Principals also reported that the teachers participating in the master’s program were emerging as leaders within their schools.

One teacher with a naturally shy disposition admitted that prior to the ECTLSI program she would not have even agreed to be interviewed by the evaluation staff because it would have

made her uncomfortable. She explained “I used to keep ideas to myself, but being part of the program has given me the courage to talk to other people about my ideas.” Several teachers explained how because of their experiences in the program they now felt comfortable speaking in front of politicians or at conferences. One teacher said, “I didn’t realize I was going to have to speak in public, they forced me into it, and they actually made me a little comfortable with it, which I didn’t think could ever happen. I had to speak to Governor Scott when he came here. And it worked out well, surprisingly enough.” Two other teachers also explained how the program transformed their view of themselves as leaders:

*The leadership component didn’t exist for me before the master’s program. I never saw myself as a teacher leader. ... They’ve convinced me that you need to make your voice heard outside of the classroom. ... It’s made me reevaluate my role in education. It’s been a big, big impact on me personally. It’s altered the way I view my future in education.*

*Seeing myself as more of a leader...you start focusing on what else am I able to do in a leadership position to help the school? I think I have the potential. I’ve obtained tools and gained skills through practice and interaction with others; I co-facilitated the program. A lot of things happened where I was put in those positions, whether I wanted to do it or not, and I’m like you know what, it’s okay, I think I can handle it. I’m able to see myself [do it] and gain more confidence.*

In addition to seeing themselves as leaders, some teachers perceived changes in the way that other teachers and administrators responded to them. For example, one teacher explained, “I definitely had a lot more communication and helping with the principal and administration. They come and ask me for advice since we’re so active in the school.” Similarly, a teacher from another school said,

*The administrators are seeing me more as a leader instead of just another teacher in the school. I have been assigned roles, like being coach for second and third grade. They see more of an emerging leader. ... I think that’s the same way teachers are seeing me, the way that they approach me.”*

Principals also reported witnessing teachers in the master’s program improve their leadership abilities. One principal explained, “If we could have more people like [the ECTLSI teachers]...then it’s like I have a school full of principals.” Two other principals described how teachers in the master’s program had taken on leadership roles in their schools:

*I’ve seen some leadership skills develop in some of them. I’m a huge fan of teacher leaders. I’ve seen teachers who would usually not take an active role in trying to start a PLC do that, solicit membership, write the letter to recruit others, come to see me.*

*They want to take on more of a leadership role, which we’ve definitely given them. They asked to be part of our opening school meeting. They facilitated our breakout sessions, worked on protocols, and the rules of*

*engagement. We've had them lead discussions, given them that opportunity, and they've done very, very well.*

In particular, principals reported expanding the use of teacher leaders in their buildings to support school plans and innovations identified through FMTI activities or to help rally teacher support for unpopular district initiatives. For example,

*The one change that we made was, when we do professional development, we have a group of people that are trained and have a wealth of knowledge on protocols and things that they can bring to the table to share with others. I can call on those people to help out with meetings, etc. I really like that I have people who are trained and [it] doesn't always have to be the administrators working with the teachers.*

*When you are in the district and they call you and say do this, you do it. [Teachers] don't understand that because they are not sitting in this seat. So I call on the UF teachers and say we need to work on this, so they go out and do the protocols. Due to class size reduction, I had to make unpopular decisions. They are saying let's do the protocols and unite. It's a very positive attitude, and I appreciate that support.*

Two principals also highlighted the increased role that teachers in the master's program have taken on in faculty meetings. One explained,

*I've changed the format of faculty meetings. I'm not lecturing as much... and I invite teachers to come and to share best practices. They are often willing because there are a multitude of great things that they are doing that they don't otherwise have time to share. So I've seen a lot of stepping up and taking a leadership role as a teacher leader.*

Another principal explained that he thought the grade-level meetings had become more meaningful "with the master's teachers that are in those meetings." As he said,

*Maybe they help guide the different protocols and procedures of how they disseminate information to each other. I haven't been in all the meetings, but it's understood now that those particular individuals are assisting the grade-level leaders in those meetings.*

In one school, two Cohort 1 teachers created a PLC for teachers to share best practices and to get help with dilemmas they were encountering in their classrooms. As one of the teachers explained,

*The focus was to improve school culture. So you see this is a big school; we have two buildings. Many of us don't even know the names of the teachers in the other building. The purpose was to make an inclusion type of group of people that can connect in a professional but also personal way. So our PLC included the music teacher, the art teacher, and teachers from higher and lower grades. The purpose was to create a community of learners. ... It worked. One of the teachers did an inquiry on how the PLC impacted other teachers. It was amazing, how the levels of anxiety were*

*lowered in the teachers, how comfortable they felt bringing up their dilemmas in the classrooms and viewing other teachers' expertise as that, and not being afraid of accepting others' opinions, and not seeing it as criticism.*

Master's teachers in some schools also have been given the opportunity to run their own professional development sessions. For example, in one school two Cohort 2 teachers partnered together to offer a half-day professional development session for the rest of the staff on the benefits of morning meetings. A teacher from another school led a professional development session for third- through fifth-grade teachers geared toward helping them understand the new reading series through Common Core.

Not all schools offered equal opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles. For example, in one school four teachers formally developed a professional development session on culturally responsive classroom management through a class project but had not yet had an opportunity to implement it.

### **Teacher Researcher**

The final goal of the ECTLSI program is to help teachers develop the ability to engage in inquiry to improve their teaching. Teachers learn how to research their own instructional practice by conducting formal inquiry projects on topics of their choice. But beyond what teachers learn from any one inquiry project, program faculty hope to inculcate teachers with new habits of mind such that they are constantly inquiring, reflecting, and seeking ways to improve their practice. As one of the professors-in-residence explained,

*Inquiry is the crux of the entire program. The first course they take is Guided Teacher Inquiry. So it's not just about doing a formal inquiry, but having that inquiry stance where they are constantly reflecting on their practice and constantly deprivatizing their practice, so they are sharing what they are learning. So that isolation that normally teachers have is broken because the conversation changes in schools from griping all the time to "You know what I'm trying out in my classroom? And it's really working."*

Many teachers also spoke broadly about how the program taught them to be more reflective regarding their practice. One teacher explained that the program helped her to "think about my own thinking, reflect on what I am doing, what isn't working. I am always looking for different ways to do things." Another teacher emphasized,

*The most beneficial part of the program is I'm learning how to reflect...thinking about what's not working, why it's not working, how it's not working. Just getting more in depth in the problem and not just on the surface. ... Before, I didn't take time to reflect. Now I do that almost daily. I sit down at the end of day—look back at what was taught. Do I need to dig deeper? Do I need to do differentiation?*

Another teacher described how the inquiry stance is a more purposeful version of something she was already doing:

*I think that as teachers we're always doing it without knowing it. Those who really care about improving their practice find ways of implementing something new that might work better. But now I'm doing it more consciously. That's exactly what I'm doing, I'm putting into practice something that I am inquiring about. Could this work? Why not, let's try it and see if it works or not. In essence, that is research.*

One kindergarten teacher discussed how during the Guided Teacher Inquiry course she had an epiphany that test scores are not the only valid type of data:

*I learned a lot about inquiry, that data is not scary, its doable, and it's in your classroom. ... Through the class I learned that data inquiry doesn't have to be an entire 18 [students]; it can be that one student that you tried that one strategy with. And you can collect data and it doesn't necessarily have to be a percentage; it can be written notes. What did you see? What did she say? Pictures. So I have learned the different ways that I can collect data for myself, and it doesn't necessarily have to show she went from a 30 to a 90. It can be written observations, you know: she started walking in screaming, now she is walking in and saying "good morning," and I see the growth in that just based off written observations. So definitely, I've learned to expand my horizons in terms of data collection is not just a test score.*

## **Program Strengths**

Master's degree students across both cohorts were overwhelmingly positive about the program. Consistent with the 2012 FMTI formative report, the three most widely cited program strengths were (1) the applicability of the course content to the participants' instructional practices, (2) the collaboration it engendered both within and across schools, and (3) the support the students received from UF faculty, both the professors-in-residence and Gainesville-based faculty.

### ***Applicability***

The ECTLSI program was explicitly designed to be job embedded and to encourage teachers to immediately apply what they learned through their coursework to their own classrooms. As one professor-in-residence explained, "If you are not seeing the value this course has to your practice and it's not immediately impacting your practice, then I'm not doing a good job making that connection for you." This strong emphasis on applicability was extremely well received by teachers across both cohorts. For example, one teacher praised the way the professors facilitated discussions of the course readings, focusing on helping teachers adapt what they learned to their own situations.

Several teachers pointed out how the applicability of the coursework was different from their original education training or other master's degree programs. One teacher explained,

*When I did my [first] master's, I did so many things and none of them really applied to what I was doing. It gets annoying. The advantage of this program is getting to do things in class that I can implement in my own classroom. It makes it fun and easier to do work and do my assignments.*

Similarly, a teacher from a different school said,

*When you go to school to learn to be a teacher, you're learning all of these things but you don't put it into practice until you become a teacher. So this is amazing; you just put it in; okay, it doesn't work for me; all right, let's try something different. And it's all within the class, and you're also getting feedback from your classmates.*

Indeed, several teachers referenced the combined benefit of the ECTLSI program's applicability and the collaboration it engenders. These two program features mutually reinforce one another because teachers not only are able to immediately apply their learnings to their own classroom, they also are able to get immediate feedback by comparing their strategies with similar or different approaches employed by other colleagues in the program.

### **Collaboration**

The collaborative nature of the ECTLSI program both encourages teachers to learn from one another and helps them to feel less isolated. In schools with more than one participant, many teachers 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 teacher explained:

*It's really rewarding; it's motivating; you're not just by yourself in the world. With this program you're not alone; everybody is together, and we're all having the same issues. "This is how I dealt with it; how did you deal with it? Maybe I should try that. Maybe you should try what I did." And I love that, definitely being part of a team, and that is what education is: we are all a team trying to help our students.*

In one school with a high level of participation in the ECTLSI program (two teachers in Cohort 1 and six teachers in Cohort 2), the participants took the initiative to start their own professional learning community dedicated to offering each other support in their master's work and strategizing how to translate what they learned in the program to improvements in schoolwide teacher morale. One of the teachers from this school emphasized the importance of the cohort aspect to her overall experience:

*You could just take the online course and do the work, but it's not the same as doing it with a cohort. Fortunately, we have a large cohort of participants in the master's program in this school. We're constantly collaborating about things we need to do for class or reflecting on things we've done in class. And it's easy to do because we're all here together.*

In addition to the benefits of interacting with ECTLSI colleagues within their own schools, several teachers reported their appreciation for the opportunities the program provides for connecting with colleagues across school boundaries. One teacher explained how the online forum allowed the teachers in her school to "communicate with other professionals, to give our opinion, and get their opinion." Another teacher explained that even though they are often required to respond to only two teachers' posts online, "you want to go back and see what all of

them have to say, and sometimes you want to respond to more than two. I love reading what they respond back to me.”

### ***Support from UF Faculty***

The third 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. Teachers described the professors as “friendly and easy to contact,” “understanding,” and “empathetic.” One teacher favorably contrasted her experience with the professors-in-residence to her undergraduate experience: “It’s not just like you’re just another face, you’re just another number in passing...sometimes in college that is what I felt. ... No, they meet you, they get to know you, they embrace you, they nurture you.”

When asked what characteristics allowed them to do their jobs so effectively, both professors-in-residence cited their experience teaching in the Miami public schools as critical to their ability to translate course content to the context in which the ECTLSI teachers are operating. Master’s teachers echoed the importance of their professor’s prior teaching experience when discussing the strengths of the program. One teacher explained, “they are coming from a situation that is similar so they are relatable.” Another teacher emphasized:

*They were there, so they understand what it is to be working as well as doing your master’s. When implementing, sometimes you might not have the environment to do that and they will say, “You know what, let’s adapt it for you; let’s make it so it works for you in your environment.” They’re not just like “Deal with it.” They say, “Let’s change it up so you’re kind of doing the same assignment but within what you have, what can you do with the group that you have.” They are just amazing.*

Program participants were also 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. A few teachers had major life events or family emergencies take place while they were in the program. They explained that the flexibility and supportiveness of their professors helped them get through those periods successfully.

### **Program Challenges**

All teachers in the master’s degree program spoke highly of the program and its strengths. A few, however, did bring up challenges. Consistent with the 2012 FMTI formative report, a common challenge was finding time to complete assignments, especially with other school and family obligations. But despite this frequent complaint, teachers largely described the program as “doable,” despite how much they had on their plate.

### ***Being Designated an ETO School***

Teachers working in schools operating under the oversight of the Education Transformation Office reported more serious challenges to implementing the new instructional practices learned in their courses. As of the 2013-14 school year, 10 of the 20 FMTI schools were identified as ETO schools because of their persistently low achievement on state standardized tests. One of

the professors-in-residence explained that the teachers in these schools are under such pressure, that she cannot push them to the same extent as other teachers:

*But then you have the ETO students that you have to be very careful with...those you try to support more on the level of inquiry. For example, "Well, if you are going to have to do that anyway, why don't you do an inquiry on it?" You don't push them as a teacher leader because they are ready to burst. You try to push them as master teachers and teacher researchers.*

Although ETO oversight comes with extra supports for schools, such as additional coaches, some teachers reported that the school climate under ETO was not conducive to the type of experimentation advocated by the ECTLSI program. "Everyone is walking on eggshells," one teacher explained. As a teacher from a different school described, "coaches [are] all over the place. And you're being told today is A, and tomorrow is B, and then the next day is C—it's a lot." A third teacher from yet a different ETO school concluded,

*The biggest barrier in this school is that we're ETO. Since our grade was low performing, we have a lot of restrictions. We're very much scripted to what we need to do, at what time, and how. It's hard to follow those rules and still incorporate the building of classroom communities and the feeling of a family when you have 10 minutes for this, 15 minutes for that, and let's move. We're under a lot of scrutiny.*

When the challenges with ETO schools began to surface, UF faculty worked with one of their doctoral students, who runs the elementary division of ETO, to help teachers understand that the ECTLSI program and the goals of ETO can be mutually reinforcing. One Cohort 2 teacher specifically mentioned that this effort helped assuage some of her concerns:

*Initially it was [challenging], because we didn't know how to channel what we learn into what ETO is expecting of us, but after talking to other teachers in ETO schools and even after talking to the ETO supervisor, who came out to one of our classes and spoke to us and told us it wasn't something separate and apart. She's in the UF program too. She was saying how everything can be incorporated, it's not one thing versus something else. ... I don't think it's challenging anymore. I did feel it before, but now I don't.*

A Cohort 1 teacher from the same school discussed how one of the recent ECTLSI courses she took helped her implement the practices required by ETO:

*Now that we are under ETO they are requesting differentiated instruction, so everything has fallen into place. I just took that course last semester, so I am able to implement that and, because of the course, we were able to put the planning to use. ... I know the reason WHY it works, and now I am able to put it in practice because I have the tools.*

### **Conflicts with Principal Policies or Goals**

Another challenge mentioned by some teachers was the conflict between school policies set by a principal and some of the practices promoted by the ECTLSI program. For example, the practices encouraged around family engagement sometime conflicted with school policies. One teacher described,

*What I want for this year is to have my parents impact the classroom more, use their funds of knowledge, and having them be part of their children's education. But we sort of have a closed campus, which doesn't really invite parents unless we do a big activity, but we have to jump through hoops to get those things done.*

Similarly, some teachers and program staff mentioned lack of principal buy-in or full understanding of the purpose of FMTI in certain schools being a challenge. For example, one teacher explained,

*I would say that there is a lack of knowledge about the true purpose of the program...because at times we've been directed with our professional learning communities topics that we should discuss, but this is not what we are doing. The purpose of the PLC is not to support the administrator's agenda.*

### **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 improved their instructional practice, developed their leadership skills, and adopted an inquiry stance toward reflecting on their teaching. 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.

One of the most frequently cited strengths of the ECTLSI program is the immediate applicability of course content to teachers' classrooms. Unfortunately, the implementation of this beneficial program feature was hindered in education transformation schools, where teachers and administrators felt intense pressure to conform to scripted instructional plans provided by the ETO. Districts wishing to replicate the ECTLSI program should think carefully about selecting schools that are already engaged in substantial reform initiatives or are under district or state oversight. If such schools are included, program staff should coordinate with the entities providing oversight to ensure that the practices promoted by the master's degree program do not conflict with their requirements. Moreover, the message that these initiatives are coordinated and mutually reinforcing must be strongly communicated to both teachers and administrators in participating schools.

### 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 master's degree program. The Teacher Fellows program functioned in Year 2 similarly to the way it operated in Year 1. Over the course of a year, a Teacher Fellows facilitator (TFF), often a teacher in the master's program, 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 districtwide Learning Showcase. Teacher Fellows earn a \$400 stipend and professional development credit hours for participation. The Teacher Fellows facilitators receive training in facilitation, support, and materials from UF staff, and 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 other FMTI and Miami Counts schools.

#### *Teacher Fellows PLC Meetings*

In 2012-13, 18 of the 20 treatment schools ran Teacher Fellows programs and held the required six program sessions, with groups meeting formally about once a month. Across the 18 schools, participation rates among teachers ranged from 14% to 69% of the instructional staff. On average, about 30% of teachers at each school participated in the Teacher Fellows program. The overall number of teacher fellows grew slightly from Year 1 to Year 2, from 220 to 242 teachers.

Most ECTLSI teachers participated in the Teacher Fellows program and often led the groups, serving as TFFs. Non-ECTLSI teachers provided a variety of reasons for participating. Consistent with the 2012 FMTI formative report, the most common reasons for participating were prior positive experiences with action research and inquiry, the opportunity for collaboration with other teachers, and the opportunity to examine their own practices. A teacher fellow explained why the Teacher Fellows program was of interest to her:

*I find the PLCs more helpful than traditional professional development because we [teachers] all have a lot of expertise; we've been teaching for a long time. It's the ability to share our expertise, and knowledge, and best practices that work that we can take or reject. With a professional*

*development you are supposed to be just a recipient of these ideas and implement them, and it doesn't work traditionally.*

The majority of teachers who chose to participate in the Teacher Fellows program showed active and consistent engagement. Ninety-four percent of teacher fellows attended all six sessions, 98% presented at the Learning Showcase, and nearly all of the teachers wrote and submitted a summary of their inquiry (Exhibit 3). Of the teachers interviewed, only two mentioned challenges related to completing their inquiry projects, and both of them said their challenge was related to finding the time needed to complete the projects.

### **Exhibit 3. Participation in Teacher Fellows Activities**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Teacher Fellows 2011-12</b>		<b>Teacher Fellows 2012-13</b>	
	<b>Number (n = 235)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number (n = 242)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Attended all six sessions	219	93	228	94
Presented at Learning Showcase	217	92	238	98
Submitted written summary of inquiry	220	94	240	99

Data sources: Teacher Fellows sign-in sheets for 2012-13; administrative data of teacher fellows receiving credit and receiving a stipend for participating.

As in Year 1, literacy continued to be the most popular inquiry topic. Among interviewed teachers, just under half focused their 2012-13 inquiry projects on topics related to literacy, such as fluency, reading comprehension, or phonetics. Other teacher fellows focused on math-related topics, such as multiplication. Other topics mentioned by only one or two teachers included parent engagement and science instruction. The most frequently mentioned strategies investigated included using music or movement to promote learning and testing the effectiveness of learning software (e.g., Accelerated Reader).

#### ***Learning Showcase***

The Learning Showcase is a 1-day districtwide conference held in May that provides an opportunity for K–8 teachers, early education teachers, principals, assistant principals, and community involvement specialists to present their inquiry projects to the wider M-DCPS community. The event acknowledges the efforts of educators to improve their practices and provides an opportunity for educators to share best practices and new innovations in education.

In May 2013, UF and M-DCPS hosted the fifth Learning Showcase in Miami, and the second Learning Showcase to involve FMTI schools. The showcase also featured the inquiry projects of educators from other schools, including schools participating in Miami Counts. In addition, district administrators, including the superintendent, attended the showcase and many of the presentation sessions.

Of the more than 900 attendees, 235 were teacher fellows from FMTI schools. While teachers made up the largest percentage of participants, other staff such as paraprofessionals, community involvement specialists, and administrators from the FMTI schools presented as well (Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 4. Types of Staff with Showcase Presentations from FMTI Schools**

Staff Type	Number of Staff
Teacher*	233
Paraprofessional	2
Community involvement specialist	2
Assistant principal	3
Principal	3
Counselor	1

\* Includes classroom and special area teachers, as well as reading coaches and media specialists.

Data source: May 2013 Learning Showcase program.

The showcase presentations focused on a broad spectrum of topics, including language arts, math, science, art and technology, early childhood education, and student engagement (Exhibit 5). The most common presentation topic was literacy. In addition, a few presentations focused on school culture, special education, and leadership.

**Exhibit 5. Inquiry Project Topic Areas for FMTI Schools in 2012-13**

Topic Area	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff
Literacy	89	35
Student engagement	66	27
Science, technology, art, and math	31	13
Early childhood education	31	13
School culture	23	9
Exceptional student education (ESE)	4	2
Leadership	4	2
Total	245	100

Note: Many teachers did projects and presentations as a group. Therefore, these numbers are higher than the actual number of presentations.

Data source: May 2013 Learning Showcase program.

The majority of teacher fellows interviewed reported the Learning Showcase to be a positive experience. Teachers spoke positively about the opportunity that the Learning Showcase provided to learn from and share with their peers. Two teachers below described their experiences at the Learning Showcase:

*I got to see that something works. You go to workshops and you're always given information...[and] everything looks great...but [you think,] "Yeah, but not with my kids." But it actually works with all levels...of kids. ... I like having the sessions because you get so much from different teachers. You hear so many different perspectives on things, and then you can take that back and say, "I'm going to try this, I'm going to try that, or I'm going to do that differently. Maybe it's not working because of this."*

*I love going to the showcase and learning about what everyone else is doing. I always walk away with a whole bag of goodies.*

However, some teacher fellows provided mixed or negative feedback on the showcase. Negative feedback included reports that several of the presentations or inquiries were of low quality or were not useful to inform their own practices. As one teacher said, "The other presentations I went to were really disappointing. ... The quality of the research and the inquiry itself was not good."

## **Benefits and Outcomes**

The Teacher Fellows program provides an accessible way to engage a wide range of teachers in FMTI. It provides all teachers an opportunity to become teacher researchers and engage in refining their practices as a master teacher might. It also provides opportunities for some teachers to serve as teacher leaders by becoming a facilitator of the group. Consistent with the 2012 FMTI formative report, the majority of teachers interviewed spoke positively about their experience in the program.

### ***Teacher Researcher***

The core activity of the Teacher Fellows program is the development and implementation of an inquiry project. Teachers identify a question or "wondering" related to their practice, spend time researching the topic, and develop a plan of action. Typically, teachers identify an area of student academic need and an approach for addressing that need. Core to the inquiry process is the collection and analysis of data to evaluate the efficacy of the approach. Teachers become researchers by engaging in this formal cycle of inquiry.

Teachers used various data sources, including standardized assessments (e.g., FAIR), teacher-developed assessments, and surveys, to answer their inquiry questions and to make decisions about whether to continue or modify the approach moving forward. One teacher fellow explained how she tested the efficacy of using movement to support student learning:

*I used...vocabulary spelling words for a 10-week period. The first week used movement [to learn vocabulary words], and then we took our vocabulary test. ... [T]he even weeks, I didn't incorporate movement, and...the grades were lower on the weeks that didn't incorporate*

*movement. ... By the sixth and eighth weeks, [students] started coming up with their own movements...[and] taking ownership of the strategy.*

As a result of the Teacher Fellows program, many participants have developed a more reflective, data-driven practice. One principal, for example, reported that her fourth- and fifth-grade teachers were using data more often to inform their instruction as a result of their inquiry project:

*One set of the [fourth- and fifth-grade] intermediate teachers...use the data each month the way that they calculated the data for their project. I see them do it now prior to us doing data checks. They did it based on their math inquiry; now they use it for their data checks. They use data more to inform their instruction.*

Another principal described how the teacher fellows were taking more ownership of their learning and the impact that had on student achievement:

*They are taking more ownership in their learning. I've seen a change in FAIR scores. I've seen a change in attitude: "Let's try to make those scores better. Last year my students did this, and this year I'm going to do that." And these are people not in ECTLSI but are in the Teacher Fellows program. That's exciting because energy is being bounced around.*

In addition, three teacher fellows explicitly talked about how their participation in the Teacher Fellows program moved them to a more reflective practice. One teacher reported that the program helped her to reflect on her approach to teaching as a whole, not just looking at and changing a specific strategy or lesson:

*I think the impact on my learning...[has been] a lot. ... There were many things that I changed from last year to this year. I learned it through Teacher Fellows, but it had nothing to do with [my] inquiry. I'm doing centers, I'm doing differentiated instruction, I co-teach. I used to be the teacher who would never let anyone teach my math lesson, and [I realized] I need to trust, because I have 30-something students, I have to. I'm doing problem of the day, which I wasn't doing before. So I am doing a lot of little things, because I said how can I improve? How can I better facilitate my students? My teaching has changed because of Teacher Fellows.*

### **Master Teacher**

The Teacher Fellows program provides an opportunity for teachers to refine their classroom practice by exploring new programs, approaches, or testing and fine-tuning existing ones. The culminating Learning Showcase provides a venue for learning about new strategies to take back to the classroom that have been vetted by their peers.

The majority of teachers reported that the strategies implemented as part of their inquiry projects during Year 2 resulted in positive academic, behavioral, or attitudinal changes in their students. The inquiries helped teachers make decisions about whether to continue using specific strategies in their classroom. More than two-thirds of teachers continued or planned to continue using the strategy explored during their inquiry. The teacher who conducted the inquiry on using

movement to help students learn vocabulary decided to use the strategy in math as well because it worked so well. As she described, “It’s carried on...to math. For instance, we’re doing adding and subtracting...using a number line on the floor.... So we’re incorporating movement into other areas.”

A handful of teachers reported mixed or hard-to-interpret findings. For a few of these teachers, the inquiries helped them decide to discontinue a practice that seemed to be ineffective. One teacher found that a particular strategy worked better with higher- than lower-achieving students, so she continued to use the strategy only with her higher-achieving students. She also reported being more cognizant of whether a strategy would work for students of all levels:

*The Teacher Fellows program has taught me if I made this mistake there, let me not make it here, let me do something different. ... Now I’m always thinking about the low-achieving students: is this lesson equipped for those students?*

Principals also talked about benefits of specific inquiry projects for teacher or student outcomes. One principal described how the results of an inquiry project that focused on behavior shifted not only the participating teachers’ approach to discipline, but that of nonparticipating teachers as well:

*For the primary teachers I did notice a change. They did a project on reinforcing positive behaviors, and they really utilized that. I see them using it even now, and they taught the other teachers that weren’t a part of it how to use the process. ... With that primary group and the positive discipline, I see less behavioral issues.*

The Learning Showcase also exposed teachers to others’ inquiry projects. Many teachers reported implementing instructional strategies based on teachers’ presentations at the Learning Showcase. For example, after viewing multiple presentations on inquiries related to collaborative learning, one teacher started implementing more group work:

*A lot of them [teachers presenting at the Learning Showcase] were speaking about collaborative learning. It’s okay for you to stand up and lecture and teach, but sometimes students learn more from each other. So you have to let go and let them work out a problem...together and challenge each other...and let them take ownership.*

### **Teacher Leader**

The Teacher Fellows program also provides an opportunity for teachers to step into a leadership role as Teacher Fellows facilitator. All TFFs participate in a facilitator training and a coaching training to build their skills in the use of protocols and meeting facilitation.

Teachers discussed how serving as TFF helped build their leadership capacity. One ECTLSI teacher said that learning how to be a leader was her most useful learning experience, and that the TFF opportunity was an important part of this transformation:

*I would say...[the most useful learning experience has been] learning how to be a school leader... I can tell teachers are more trusting; they’re more open to listening to me. They ask me for my opinion... That has been*

*because I've had the opportunity to lead being the facilitator and even sharing what I did as a Teacher Fellows participant. That helps a lot.*

Another TFF talked about how being a TFF enabled her to understand how to create a supportive environment for sharing:

*[T]he ability to communicate better, with a non-judgmental... determination of someone's viewpoint is important [for leadership] because you don't want people to feel like you're not listening to them because you don't agree with them. So that has really helped out, to be careful of your wording and making them feel comfortable to be able to express [themselves].*

For one TFF, playing the role of facilitator empowered her to take on other leadership roles, including applying for and managing a grant for the school:

*Last year I [got] a grant...for the school. It was following my first leadership role as a TFF. It kind of gave me the wings, the feeling of leadership and starting something. ... I think it was the direct result of stepping in the leadership role of TFF. I just took off on my own. .... That has been fulfilling for me professionally.*

In addition to developing teachers into researchers, master teachers, and leaders, FMTI seeks to build a professional learning community. The Teacher Fellows program helped further this goal, as described next.

### ***Teacher Collaboration and Community***

As was reported in the 2012 FMTI formative report, teachers cited the opportunity to meet and collaborate through the Teacher Fellows program as a benefit of participation. Teachers reported that finding time to talk with peers during the school day can be a challenge, and most often any structured planning time happens in grade-level teams. A few of the teacher fellows appreciated the opportunity to meet cross-grade through the program. As one teacher shared, "I have the opportunity to collaborate with people that I wouldn't normally be able to because it's so multi-grade. It really helps a lot."

Teachers also mentioned a stronger sense of community and increased openness to sharing practice as benefits of the program:

*When we do Teacher Fellows, we meet as colleagues and learn about passions. Some like science and others literacy. Some are more into methods, and others are looking into things that involved community and social justice. It allowed us to get to know each other and appreciate each other as professionals.*

*In many ways it has opened the communication as well. We've learned to accept people's points of view, and I think some have learned to open up and not be afraid to say "I don't like this" or "I prefer this" or whatever their viewpoint may be without the fear of critical or judgmental behaviors. So that really opens up the doors.*

*It has helped me come out of my shell. ... If I am not certain about something I will come and ask. I've learned that you don't have to reinvent the wheel; teachers are willing to help and the administration is supportive. I am more willing to ask for help. I've found that the resources are here.*

## **Program Strengths**

The majority of teachers spoke positively of their experience in the Teacher Fellows program. Nearly all interviewed teachers had participated in the program for two years and planned to participate again during the upcoming school year. The aspects of the program that contributed to teachers' positive experience included the layers of support embedded in the program, the clearly structured process and materials available for leading teachers through the inquiry process, and the protocols and time for collaboration. These findings mirror those presented in the 2012 FMTI formative report.

### ***High-Quality Training and Facilitation***

High-quality training and facilitation continued to be important for supporting successful Teacher Fellows programs. The Teacher Fellows program is structured so that TFFs receive training in facilitation and support from UF staff, and the teacher fellows receive support from the facilitators and their peers. A TFF said, "I'm the one that is going to support everyone...and say 'You can do it. If you have any problems, I'll try to help you.' Just to be that supportive person."

This tiered structure creates an environment in which all participants have resources to draw on as they work together on their inquiry. Reflecting on their past two years as a TFF, a few teachers recalled initially feeling "intimidated" or "nervous" in the role. However, the training and support from the professors-in-residence supported the TFFs throughout the process. Furthermore, a few teachers mentioned the importance of trainings in developing their skills to use meeting protocols and effectively run the TFF meetings. One TFF described the importance of the coaches' training for her:

*The coaches' training was a huge thing. I didn't know what the protocols were before that, and with that we learned community agreements, how to build the relationships with the teachers.*

UF bolstered the support this year by increasing the length of the training and planning session for TFFs from two afterschool sessions to two half-day sessions. TFFs also valued having a co-facilitator at their school to engage in the work together.

### ***Clearly Structured Process and Materials***

The Teacher Fellows program provides a clear structure for leading teachers through an inquiry project over the course of six sessions. Each session has a clear focus, and TFFs are provided materials to support them in leading these sessions. The TFFs receive sample agendas, protocols, suggested activities, and readings for each of the meetings. UF strengthened the materials for Year 2 by tailoring them to the local context and providing examples specifically from Miami. TFFs reported that having all of these materials helped them feel prepared to lead the Teacher

Fellows program. One TFF also noted that having all the Teacher Fellows materials available electronically in Year 2 made it much easier to find and adapt forms, protocols, and other materials for Teacher Fellows meetings.

### ***Protocols and Time for Collaboration***

A key aspect of the Teacher Fellows program is the opportunity for teachers to share their instructional practice and learn from each other in a supportive environment. The structure of the program, including the collective establishment of group norms and use of protocols to guide conversations, explicitly tries to develop this environment. One initiative leader summarized the benefit of providing time and structure to support deep professional conversation among teachers:

*Providing teachers with a formal opportunity for meeting, talking, and learning from one another is very powerful. As teachers we often walk into the building, nose to the grind, and that's it before we come up for air. Because of demands, some of the conversations aren't deep enough and become venting sessions. ... [G]iving them tools to have a conversation that it doesn't become a venting session, and giving them a frame to think about their craft and improve whatever they decide, that mechanism is very powerful. I think that's why it's so successful.*

One teacher articulated how the Teacher Fellows program created a space in which teachers felt safe to share and engage with their peers:

*Teacher Fellows brings the school together. You can speak and don't need to worry it will leave the room, and everyone is actively listening. Teachers don't like to share, but UF promotes norms that it's okay to share.*

Teachers also appreciated having specific time set aside to meet as professionals, given the challenges of finding time within the school day to talk with peers. One teacher described this challenge:

*There is a designated time for collaboration because you know as a teacher it's almost impossible to do that. You're in your classroom with kids and this notion that we are all going to get together and collaborate, well fine, just pay me an extra day and I'll collaborate with the teachers. Our job is to spend time with our students. So having a designated time to collaborate is definitely a plus.*

### **Program Challenges**

Although comments about the Teacher Fellows program were generally positive, teachers and FMTI staff noted several challenges.

#### ***Some Inquiries of Mixed Quality***

As mentioned earlier in the report, not all inquiry projects are of high quality. This theme was new regarding Year 2 and may reflect higher expectations or a deeper understanding of inquiry

as the program matures. One teacher believed that some teachers did not present true inquiries into their practice:

*I would say that the only thing that I was a little on the fence about was that some [presentations] were not inquiry based; it was more like a presentation. They just showed us what they were doing in their classroom, but there was no “This was my question, this is what I implemented, this was my result.” It was more like, “This is what we do in our school.”*

A few initiative leaders echoed the observation that some of the inquiry projects were weaker than others. Several hypothesized that the stipend attracted some teachers more interested in the money than engaging in a deep inquiry; however, they believed teachers still benefit:

*The quality of some of the inquiries...is really great, and sometimes not so great ... The majority are good, [but] for people who want \$400, it might not be of good quality. At the end of the day I want more quality, but the fact that you sit in six meetings talking about your practice, at the very least...if we increased...discussion that’s great. I feel it is giving teachers the idea that research is not scary...and you have power in your classroom.*

*Like everything you have your bell curve. There are some teachers who are doing their action research and they’re trying to find something that will help them, and there are some that are a little more superficial. Perhaps they don’t get it or something else. In all, the process and the platform does help everyone, the fact that they get to turn around and share with colleagues; they find that voice.*

### **Impacts Limited to Participating Teachers**

Another challenge for the Teacher Fellows program is the difficulty of affecting teachers not participating in the program. The impacts of the Teacher Fellows program remained primarily within the group of program participants. Spillover effects were restricted by a lack of opportunities for teacher fellows to share their inquiries with other staff and a school culture of isolation. Two participants talked about these limits:

*The ones that participate, [Teacher Fellows] has gotten us a little closer. ... It gives us a bond, just by meeting during Fellows meeting. That’s why I requested that we try to get the whole staff involved.*

*The teachers more involved in the activities have more of a family feel, more comfy going to each other for advice, but more than half aren’t involved.*

When talking about the differential impact on collaboration across grade spans, one teacher implied that preexisting norms around collaboration partially explained the differences in participation and impacts:

*Collaboration is a really positive change because of the Teacher Fellows program. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers are all involved. ... Those two grade levels work really well together as a team. They have good communication. They have less fighting. [I] can't say the same things for upper grades that are less involved. Their collaboration is not as strong.*

In addition, opportunities to share inquiries with peers within schools were limited. At the end of Year 1, some teachers mentioned plans to share inquiries the following year; however, most of these plans fell through. One school provided time for teachers to present their inquiries to their peers by recreating a mini-showcase within the school. In most schools, however, teacher fellows did not have a venue to share their work with teachers who did not participate in the program.

### **Time Commitment**

Similar to Year 1, a few teachers mentioned the time commitment associated with participating in the program as a challenge for completing the inquiry and recruiting teachers to the program. Finding alternative afterschool childcare and needing additional time beyond the TFF meetings to work on their inquiries with their group were the specific reasons mentioned.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The Teacher Fellows program continues to attract teachers from most of the FMTI schools who are interested in conducting an inquiry project to inform their practice. Many of these teachers also participate in the Learning Showcase, where they present their inquiry projects and attend presentations by other teacher fellows. Teachers reported that through their participation they have learned various ways to assess their own practices and their students' outcomes, and they have developed a more reflective, data-driven practice. Teachers also reported adopting new classroom practices that they identified as effective and discontinuing practices they identified as ineffective. Through opportunities to become trained as TFFs, some teachers also learned and practiced leadership skills. Finally, as a result of the Teacher Fellows program, teacher collaboration and community increased in the schools, at least for a subset of teachers.

Because of the high-quality training provided and tiered support, both TFFs and teacher fellows were able to be successful in their roles. UF also has developed a very structured process and materials to facilitate teachers' inquiry. Finally, having time set aside ensures that teachers can engage in the inquiry process in a way that is not usually available to them.

Despite these factors contributing to the program's success, teachers' inquiries are of mixed quality. To foster more high-quality inquiry projects, UF may want to consider expanding the role of the TFF. Currently, TFFs facilitate the inquiry process without providing much feedback on quality. It would take additional training for them to be able to provide such feedback, but it might contribute to stronger inquiry projects. Also, while teacher fellows benefit from participation, their learning tends to remain within the group of fellows. UF staff already sit down with each principal annually to discuss FMTI. During that meeting, they could discuss concrete ways for teacher fellows to share their learning with other teachers in the school.

## 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 included 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
- Inquiry projects in which principals can work with each other, with teachers, or on their own to study the effectiveness of new leadership and instructional practices, and have opportunities to present what they have learned at the Learning Showcase.

The ways in which the three components have been implemented have changed each of the past 3 years based on feedback from participating principals and the district's calendar.

FMTI also has provided other school supports that help principals share leadership and engage in data-driven decision making. One such support has been 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, in which school leadership teams interpret data from the two surveys and other data and create school-specific action plans. The implementations of both the school surveys and the Summer Leadership Institute have also changed across years, based on feedback and scheduling considerations.

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

### Principal Fellows Meetings

The frequency, focus, and membership of the Principal Professional Learning Community meetings have changed over the past 3 years.

#### *Frequency and Focus of Principal Fellows Meetings*

In 2011-12, the PPLC met locally five times during the school year. At the end of Year 1, principals provided feedback to UF faculty that there were too many meetings. Also, it was difficult to attend meetings after school, when principals often had to address pressing issues that had arisen during the day. In response, the UF team reduced the number of meetings for 2012-13 from five to four, increased their length from 2 to 4 hours each to allow deeper conversation, and held them in the morning rather than after school so as to avoid unexpected conflicts. For 2013-14, UF plans to hold three PPLC meetings rather than four because the district professional development calendar could not accommodate more. The final meeting will occur shortly after the end of the school year to minimize conflicts with other district meetings.

The focus of the PPLC meetings also changed between Year 1 and Year 2. The first year of the PPLC focused primarily on having principals learn about and personally experience the inquiry

process. All principals were required to conduct an inquiry project, and many principals shared their inquiry work at the Learning Showcase (see Inquiry Projects section below). Even though principals reported that the inquiry projects had been valuable, they let UF faculty know that these projects were too much work on top of their heavy workloads. The principals also requested that Year 2 PPLC meetings include more content and resources, such as a book study on Appreciative Leadership. In response, the UF team decided to make inquiry projects optional and to make the PPLC into more of a learning community that uses the UF Lastinger Center protocols to share dilemmas and ideas for how to solve them. In particular, the UF team introduced the protocol of “principal talk.” This protocol involves having a different principal host each PPLC meeting. The host principal brings in data or a dilemma and shares it with the other principal fellows. The protocol guides the group through an analysis of the issues and possible solutions in a safe and supportive environment. In 2013-14, the PPLC will be held in a central location and continue to function as a learning community that allows principals to share their issues, data, dilemmas, and solutions.

Almost all principals who attended the PPLC meetings reported enjoying the new format of “principal talk” and felt it helped them develop a trusted professional network of principals who support each other, provide ideas for how to address issues, and share resources. For example, principals shared the following:

*One of the things I did like about the format from last year was they were based in a school, and the person that was hosting talked about a problem they were having at their school or something that we could all help with, bringing theory to practice, and worked on strategies that could assist that school. They shared good and bad, also what we could learn from them.*

*I developed more collegial friendships, which is nice because we are a lot of principals in the district, and we have something in common. ... It's kind of nice because it's a little group that takes care of each other. We have that affinity, that friendship. So you feel safe.*

*Your day can be full of negativity [as a principal]. You go to a PLC and you have all these things swirling around in your brain; you can vent and get advice, get solutions from other principals. ... Everyone pipes in and you hear lots of voices, and it's like you did a month's worth of research and now you're ready to write your paper. I always say, a lot of the time you may be frustrated that you have to come to this morning meeting, but I've never seen it take place with the principals that attend that they don't always leave smiling or saying that it was well worth their time.*

One principal who was interviewed did not feel that some of the PPLC meetings were relevant for improving practices at his school. He would have preferred a greater focus on analysis of school data and strategies to improve instruction.

Finally, the regional or districtwide composition of the PPLC meetings changed from year to year. In Year 1, three PPLC meetings were held by region and two brought all of the principals together as a single group. In Year 2, the UF team held only regional PPLC meetings and combined the FMTI principals with principals from the district's 26 Miami Counts partner school sites in their regions, who were also receiving professional development from the same

UF team. For the 2013-14 school year, the UF team has moved away from regional meetings to holding only centrally located meetings with all principals from the 20 FMTI schools. Principals mentioned they enjoyed networking with principals from other regions and that they do not normally get that chance to talk with colleagues outside of their regions.

**Participation in Principal Fellows Meetings**

Participation in the PPLC decreased between 2011-12 and 2012-13, even though the second year had fewer meetings. In Year 1, almost two-thirds of the principals attended all five PPLC meetings (Exhibit 6). In Year 2, none of the principals attended all four meetings, and most attended two or fewer meetings. Some of the reasons for decreased participation in 2012-13 mentioned by the UF team and principals included the initial negative reaction to inquiry projects required in Year 1; the designation of several schools as ETO schools, which required them to attend to other pressing tasks and meetings; and the lack of a second statewide principal institute, which may have lowered the sense of community among the 20 FMTI school principals.

**Exhibit 6. Attendance at Principal Fellows Meetings**  
(n = 20)

Number of Principal PLC Meetings Attended	Percentage of Principals 2011-12	Percentage of Principals 2012-13
0	15	20
1	10	5
2	0	55
3	0	20
4	10	0
5	65	NA

One principal mentioned conflicts with district requirements leading to his low participation:

*The time and timelines [of the PPLC] overlap with other requirements that sometimes interfere with what any person can get to humanly. But I think the portions of the program that I have been involved in have been good.*

However, one principal reflected on how the change to fewer meetings may have reduced her ability to participate and get the full benefit of the program.

*I enjoyed those meetings, but I remember I couldn't get to one, and then I felt like I only had two chances to see everyone.... I was probably one of the ones complaining about how it was a lot. But it almost forced you to do something, which was better than having the opportunity not to do something. So for me, in hindsight I would probably prefer to go back to meeting more.*

## 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. There were two statewide institutes in 2011-12, but only one in 2012-13 because of conflicts with the district professional development calendar. In 2011-12, most of the principals attended both institutes, and only 10% missed both institutes (Exhibit 7). In 2012-13, a quarter of the principals were not able to attend the one institute held, but the majority (75%) of principals were in attendance.

**Exhibit 7. Attendance at Principal Institutes**  
(*n* = 20)

Number of Principal Institutes Attended	Percentage of Principals 2011-12	Percentage of Principals 2012-13
0	10	25
1	20	75
2	70	NA

The statewide institutes in 2011-12 were held in two different Florida locations: Naples and Jacksonville. The focus of the first institute was on inquiry and Appreciative Leadership; the second institute focused on cognitive strategies to promote student learning and engagement. In 2012-13, one statewide institute was held in May in Tampa, and included school administrators and district personnel from Hillsborough County Public Schools. The focus was on effective leadership and teacher evaluation. Participants learned about Hillsborough's peer-supported teacher evaluation model through a panel discussion and school site visits. The group also learned about best practices in teacher evaluation from a national expert, Dr. Robert Pianta, Dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Dr. Pianta spoke about the importance of using clear, concise language and exemplars to facilitate the dialogue between principals and teachers. He also addressed the use of teacher evaluation as a catalyst for professional development.

Principals reported that getting outside the M-DCPS district and their buildings helped them to be more present and focused, to develop a deeper sense of camaraderie with each other, and to make them more open to thinking about new strategies. Principals shared how unique and beneficial visiting other districts was for them, and one mentioned wanting to visit districts outside of the state:

*I like the fact that we get to visit other places, talk to other principals, and see what other districts are doing. That's another part of the networking that we don't necessarily have budgets for. We don't get to travel to conferences any more, so this is a great experience to get out and talk to others.*

*If I had anything to say, they better not change the opportunities they give to us to go outside of the district. I don't know what the confinement of the*

*grant is. I would like to go to other big districts outside of the state, like New York. I would love to see how other urban public schools handle things.*

Some principals implemented new practices in their schools as a result of the institutes, and some principals cited examples of borrowing best practices from the Year 2 institute as well as earlier statewide institutes:

*Hillsborough was doing this process where the teachers were participating in evaluations. ... I started [using it] with having the grade-level chairs do an informal observation, based on Hillsborough.*

*[From a school in Hillsborough] I took their idea of “accountable talk.” It’s been implemented in that school for a long time, and now there is research on accountable talk. So I took the blueprint and I gave it to my leadership team, and they are working on a schoolwide plan for what accountable talk should look like from K through fifth grade.*

*Because of [the institute], we started an accelerated reader program; we stole that from one of the Jacksonville schools. ... In Year 1, we went to Naples; the idea that I stole from there was an interactive early childhood play area within the classroom.*

Even though not all principals introduced new practices to their schools based on the statewide institutes, they found the trips thought provoking. As shared by two principals:

*I got ideas but didn’t really make changes. I could see what a typical day was like at the school you visited compared to how your day goes, just the different issues and problems.*

*What had really resonated through my trips is equity in education. I learned so much about how that is really such a challenge. ... You know that, but when you hear other administrators share their experiences...it gave me a different point of view about equity in education.*

## **Inquiry Projects**

As part of the PPLC, principals in 2011-12 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. Conducting an inquiry project was optional in 2012-13. As a result, only three (15%) of principals completed an inquiry project. Two of these principals focused their inquiries on leadership, and one principal focused on literacy.

Even though there was concern about requiring principals to conduct an inquiry, principals reported that the inquiry projects had changed their practices and funding decisions about specific interventions in Year 1. One principal shared that doing the inquiry project was one of the most valued aspects of the Principal Fellows program:

*The most important thing that I took away was I learned what an inquiry was and I learned how to conduct an inquiry and how to write it up, analyze it, and how to present it at the showcase. I like inquiries because it*

*focuses you on a wondering, on something that you should be looking at to try to improve in your building. That would be my biggest takeaway, aside from the collegial friendships.*

## Other School Supports

FMTI tried to help schools further strengthen their school climate, shared leadership, and student engagement by using data from two schoolwide surveys and a Summer Leadership Institute. Although not directed exclusively 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. FMTI has conducted two surveys: the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) and the 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.

In 2011-12, most schools participated in the surveys, but fewer did so in 2012-13 (Exhibit 8). In particular, many fewer schools implemented the IPI.

**Exhibit 8. Participation in Surveys**  
(*n* = 20)

	Percentage of Schools 2011-12	Percentage of Schools 2012-13
Instructional Practices Inventory	85	50
School Culture Survey	90	80

Even though fewer schools implemented the IPI, some principals found the IPI data very useful and shared examples of how they used it in the past:

*The IPI was done in the first year, but not last year. I already knew what they were going to find, know what my strengths and weaknesses are. I struggle like other principals. The intensity is not as high after FCAT, so [instructional scores are] not as high on the second visit. I intentionally didn't tell them when the second visit was going to happen. I took the raw data back to the teachers and talked about how if we don't make a shift it sends a message to children that school is only until FCAT. So we did use the data from those visits, but I knew I was going to see that.*

*The data enlightened the teachers. The person who went in found that teachers were mostly talking, not students. They were alarmed at the*

*percent [of time] that teachers were talking. For me, it confirmed what I saw during walk-throughs; for them, it made them more conscious.*

One principal mentioned needing more support to address the issues identified by the School Culture Survey, given the many barriers principals face that affect school climate:

*I feel we need more direction on how to improve school culture because we're up against a lot of barriers and changes that we have to balance. There's the union contract; they want us to do extra hours, and the teachers are resistant. ... We have to do an accreditation survey by October 31. And I just made major changes due to class size. ... What UF should do is more follow-through with us on the climate surveys. ... How do you take that information and make positive changes so those attitudes are changed?*

Principals expected to receive new data in the spring of 2013 but did not receive anything from UF and were not sure what had happened. A couple of principals said they would be interested in participating in the IPI if it were offered again. As one noted:

*We are interested if they do it again. In the year before, it was useful; we discussed some things as a leadership team—grade-level chairs, counselor, AP, special education chair. People decided how they would make changes on their levels.*

The UF team decided to discontinue doing the two surveys for the 2013-14 year because of the relatively low level of interest from and use of data by principals, given the high level of effort and resources required to conduct the surveys. However, the UF team planned to support the few schools that did want to continue to use the IPI to track efforts to improve student engagement.

### **Summer Leadership Institutes**

Another way that 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 community involvement specialist (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.

The 2013 Summer Institute was held in late July. It focused on Appreciative Leadership, a method that identifies the key strengths of an organization and uses them as levers for change. Each school team was asked to define a big, audacious statement about what they want their school to be, identify their strengths that could be used as levers for change, and narrow their list down to three specific strategies. Teams built structures that represented their dreams and visions and labeled all the parts clearly so others could easily understand them. They then used big

boards to lay out structured plans for how they will get to their dreams and visions. Teams took both of these items back to their schools to share with the rest of their faculties.

The intent is to have each school team include the principal, assistant principal, and teacher leaders. Schools differ in their team composition in large part because there is never a perfect time during the summer when everyone can attend. The UF team held its first and second Summer Leadership Institutes in June, but changes in principal assignments were made in July after the institutes. As a result, new principals did not have an opportunity to be part of the institute. In response, in 2013-14 school year, the team held the Summer Leadership Institute in late July, but several principals were on vacation at that time.

Although most schools sent representatives to the Summer Leadership Institute (95% of schools in 2013, 85% of schools in 2012, and 95% of schools in 2011), most principals and more than half of the assistant principals did not attend in any given year, and participation of school administrators dropped in Year 3 (Exhibit 9). However, almost all the schools had teacher leaders present, and more than half included a teacher in the FMTI master’s degree program in July 2013. Also, all the schools present at the institute submitted a school action plan.

**Exhibit 9. Participation at Summer Leadership Institutes**  
(n = 20 schools)

Type of Attendee	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Principal	8	40	8	40	5	25
Assistant principal	6	30	9	45	7	35
Teacher leader or community involvement specialist	18	90	17	85	19	95
FMTI master’s program student	7	35	7	35	11	55
No representatives	1	5	3	15	1	5
Submitted school action plan	19	95	17	85	19	95

Many of the principals interviewed did not participate in the most recent Summer Leadership Institute or attended only one day because of conflicts with vacations or other commitments or because they felt it was an opportunity to delegate leadership to their assistant principals or teacher leaders. District leaders, the UF team, and teachers agreed that the Summer Leadership Institute works best when the principal attends and is invested. They also noted it was a good way for new principals to begin work with their staff. When principals do not attend, teachers develop a school improvement plan that the principal may not buy in to. To ameliorate this situation, when a principal does not attend the Summer Leadership Institute, the UF team meets with him or her at the beginning of the school year to review with them the school plan that was developed and provides dates and other information about upcoming FMTI activities for the year.

A few principals reported being excited about the plans their staff had developed at the Summer Leadership Institute and the progress being made on them.

*Teachers came up with an amazing plan, and they are doing it. It’s around building a positive school culture. There was a lot of negative sentiment*

*about becoming an ETO school. Over the course of 3 days they dipped into that and unpacked it. They said let's take the temperature and do a survey at the beginning of the year and come up with different committees to address aspects of school culture. The principal let them do it. I saw her last month, and she is very excited about how the plan is going.*

*At the summer institute we developed our focus on unity, and we felt good about our best practices. They gave us a big area to do protocols to build team and unity. We did a few of them at faculty meetings. Then class size hit and it all went down the tubes. The TLSI students are helping me get that moving again.*

*Our motto is "building a stairway to success" [shows a faculty meeting agenda that has five I's: Inspiration, Illumination, Inclusion, Integrity, Inquiry]. My leadership team came up with that. It's important enough to me that I want to remind people every time we step into a meeting that I want this to be our driving force. We did a protocol for the five I's, what do they each mean, as part of our opening school debrief with the whole faculty.*

*It was useful work because we geared it towards what we wanted to do in school, 16 Habits of Mind, and how that tied into our ESAC, our PTA, and getting everyone involved, so it was something that we were able to work on and use as opposed to just doing it for the sake of doing it.*

Some teachers who attended the Summer Leadership Institute also were excited about the plans developed at the institute and the opportunity it gave them to talk about challenges with their school's administration and across schools.

*It was wonderful. I loved everything about it. You're with people who are passionate about the same things that you are concerned about...and you are sitting in a room with them and you are hearing powerful stuff; and they are having the same issues that you are having, the same concerns, maybe the same strengths, and you are there to share everything.*

*Collaboration was the most useful, the ability to collaborate and listen to how other schools are doing things. We don't get a chance to do that.*

*It was nice to see and hear the different points of view from the different levels. Sometimes they were the same as ours and sometimes they weren't. Opening up lines of communication breaks down the walls.*

However, there were mixed reports from teachers about whether the school action plans developed at the summer institute were actually implemented. Teachers at a couple of the schools reported that their plans were successfully implemented. However, most of the teachers interviewed who attended the summer institute reported that it was hard to implement their plans back in their schools because the plans were not fully developed. For example, as shared by two teachers:

*I think we wanted more time to think about what they were going to do with our mission. And that is what made it slow to implement when you got back. You're opening school, and thinking about another project is impossible unless you have a mind like Einstein's.*

*Having to implement something you haven't fully fleshed out and opening school, no one is going to do that.*

A few teachers reported that without representation from the school administration or broad representation from teachers across grades, it was difficult to develop meaningful school plans and the institute was much less valuable.

*Unfortunately, for many reasons, I only had another teacher with me. So really, that whole plan that we did was not effective because the staff who we needed there wasn't. At least one administrator should have been there and at least one person from each grade level.*

*Summer institutes could be valuable if you go with principals and the leadership team. The year I went it was with the reading coach. ... We wrote a plan during the training, but I just don't remember it being applied.*

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The Principal Fellows program has changed each year in response to principal feedback, district schedules, and observations by the UF team. The program has been streamlined so that there are fewer PPLC meetings and only one statewide institute, and doing an inquiry project is optional. Still, principals have continued to appreciate the opportunity to discuss leadership with other principals and be exposed to new strategies that work in schools similar to their own. Some principals reported that they changed their own leadership practices and some of their schools' instructional practices because of participation in the Principal Fellows program.

Participation in the Principal Fellows program afternoon meetings was inconsistent in Year 2, largely because of the unpredictability of a principal's job and unexpected issues that arose. The UF team changed meeting times to mornings to avoid some of these conflicts and reduced the number of meetings as well. It is unclear whether principal participation will increase or decrease with fewer meetings being held. However, with fewer meetings, it will be important to encourage attendance and identify the most important agenda items, since topics will necessarily be limited. UF also may want to consider developing a platform for communication among principals between meetings to nurture networking among them.

In addition, changes have been made to the use of school surveys and the Summer Leadership Institute. Many schools did not implement one or both of the school surveys. Principals mentioned that the surveys had been informative but that they needed more support from the UF team to develop strategies to address the issues identified by the surveys for them to truly be useful. The UF team concluded that conducting the two schoolwide surveys was not core to their work and required too many resources for the limited benefits they produced. As a result, the Summer Leadership Institutes focused on Appreciate Leadership rather than on data from the schoolwide surveys during the most recent summer institute in July 2013. Although most

participants found value in attending the institute, a number of schools were unable to implement their school action plans. Giving more attention to strategies for enacting the plans might strengthen the impact of the summer institute.

The UF team moved the summer institute to late July to increase involvement of principals who would be at the FMTI schools in the coming year. Unfortunately, principal participation decreased further because of conflicts with summer vacations. Thus, the benefits of holding the institute in July were never realized. Given the importance of having principals attend the institute, if UF does any future summer institutes, it should reconsider the timing of the event, perhaps taking a poll of existing principals to determine the best possible dates for their attendance.

## 5. Program Enhancements

Because of some cost savings due to low enrollment in the master's degree program, FMTI had surplus resources for the initiative. Based on input from teachers, principals, and the district, FMTI program staff decided to apply these extra funds to three program enhancements that further promote the goals of the initiative:

- The Assistant Principal Fellows program, which builds the leadership skills and professional support network of assistant principals across the 20 FMTI schools through Assistant Principal Professional Learning Community meetings and an Assistant Principal Institute.
- The Transition to Kindergarten Professional Learning Community, which supports pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers in aligning curriculum between the two grades and smoothing the transition for children between preschool and kindergarten.
- The post-baccalaureate (post-bac) program, which offers a non-degree-bearing, four-course version of the ECTLSI program designed to help teachers who have participated in the Teacher Fellows program further improve their instructional practice.

The motivation to enhance the original FMTI model with these three additional program components evolved out of a desire to both further strengthen the program and maximize resources. Because of the challenges in meeting recruitment goals for the master's degree program, the ECTLSI component of the initiative did not use all of its allotted funding. Program staff shared that they chose to turn "lemons into lemonade" by using the extra funds as an opportunity to take what they learned from the first two years of implementation to address perceived gaps in the initiative.

### Assistant Principal Fellows Program

The Assistant Principal Fellows program was introduced during the 2012-13 school year to address the needs of administrators holding this position in schools. APs' roles and responsibilities are wide ranging, covering everything from curriculum to discipline to day-to-day management. Despite the importance of APs in the successful functioning of schools, district staff explained that APs are often overlooked because most professional development programs target either principals or teachers. As one district official described,

*Assistant principals at the elementary level are often forgotten in terms of everything. Communications, workshops, trainings, information sessions are all [targeted to] principals. The assistant principal and the principal really need to work as a unit in schools because a lot of times the principal isn't going to be the executive director. The day-to-day operations of schools often fall to assistant principals, who are at times disconnected from the information and the why.*

The idea for creating a fellows program to provide APs with the space and support to develop their leadership skills reportedly evolved organically through feedback that program staff received from both principals and APs. The overall input was that APs would benefit from a program similar to the Principal Fellows program that supports networking and skills

development. The AP Fellows program has two components: APPLC meetings and an AP Institute.

### ***Assistant Principal Fellows Meetings***

In 2012-13, the APPLC met four times. The all-day meetings were held at various locations throughout the district. Topics included Appreciative Leadership, reflective discourse, understanding the significance of learning communities, and identifying strategies for eliminating barriers in their work, among others. Participants also were encouraged to network and to build collaboration among assistant principals within and across regions. Both district staff and UF faculty were extremely enthusiastic about the addition of the APPLC meetings. For example, one of the professors-in-residence explained,

*They are the best group we've worked with. They are so excited. If you know anything about school administrators, the AP is usually the gofer; they fill in the gaps. At the elementary level they do everything from curriculum to discipline. Unlike in high schools, they are usually the only AP in the building. In most cases principals don't treat APs very respectfully and teachers blame them for everything. ... They are very isolated. Having a chance to come together with other APs—not in a district meeting where they are just sitting and listening, but in a meeting where they actually get to speak and talk about challenges and support each other—it becomes a support group for these people. ... They are so hungry for the support of each other.*

In 2012-13, the APPLC meetings were open to APs from the FMTI schools as well as Miami Counts schools. Among the 25 APs from FMTI schools (several schools employ more than one AP), 8 or 9 reportedly attended the APPLC meetings regularly. Low participation rates from FMTI schools may have been due to the nature of the APs' job. One of the professors-in-residence explained that when APs did not attend it was usually because their principal said "No, you can't attend because I need you in the building and you can't leave," or because they don't know anyone in that group who gives them a push saying, "Hey, come join us, it's really great." Moving forward, the APPLC meetings will be open only to APs from the 20 FMTI schools.

### ***Assistant Principal Institute***

The first Assistant Principal Institute was held in October 2013 in Gainesville. The 2-day AP Institute provided an opportunity for APs to get away from their daily work to focus on learning and sharing practices with APs from other schools. The institute was open to all APs from the FMTI treatment schools, but only seven attended. The institute focused on responsive leadership, utilizing the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning framework developed by the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington. The group also learned about the importance of early childhood as a foundation for later school success from a UF faculty member and early childhood expert, Dr. Patricia Snyder. Finally, the APs had the opportunity to visit a local elementary school with a well-developed early childhood program, a positive school culture, and a strong leadership team.

## Transition to Kindergarten PLCs

The second FMTI program enhancement is the Transition to Kindergarten PLCs being implemented at all 20 FMTI schools. Introduced in the 2013-14 school year, the structure of the Transition PLCs replicates that of the traditional Teacher Fellows PLCs—they will be inquiry based and operate at the school level. Unlike the Teacher Fellows, however, Transition PLCs will be open only to prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers (including paraprofessionals). They will be co-facilitated by one kindergarten and one prekindergarten teacher.

Because of their specific emphasis on improving children's transition between preschool and kindergarten, FMTI district and program staff decided to give the Transition PLC facilitators more structure than Teacher Fellows facilitators by guiding their focus and giving them a list of three inquiry topics to choose from: social-emotional development, aligning standards, or barriers to transition. These topics were chosen because they are grounded in the early childhood literature. As the UF faculty member in charge of content for the Transition PLCs explained,

*When we did the facilitator training, we did some foundational reading on why this is important and why we are concerned, and then we have ready-to-go, stockpiled readings for whichever topic they pick to support them.*

In general, UF faculty members view the Transition PLCs as an opportunity to place added focus on the early childhood core of the FMTI initiative:

*It's something we've really wanted to address to a greater extent in the graduate program, but it's been difficult because we don't have that many preK or kindergarten teachers. We do talk about it in the Policy and Transitions course, but it's pitched more as transition between grade levels is always a big change for a child and is always something we should be aware of. But the kind of transition to school work that the district really wanted, we haven't been able to do because we just haven't had preK and kindergarten teachers in large enough numbers. So I think this allows us to address what has very much been a district concern but has been difficult for us to hit in other places.*

At the time we interviewed school staff, the teacher facilitators for the Transition PLCs had attended training sessions but the PLCs had not yet commenced meeting. Although the implementation of the Transition PLCs has only begun to unfold, there are positive expectations for the program from both district staff and teachers.

## Post-Baccalaureate Professional Development

The third FMTI program enhancement is a non-degree-bearing, post-baccalaureate (post-bac) program, consisting of four of the core ECTLSI courses. The courses included in the post-bac program are Guided Teacher Inquiry, Culturally Responsive Classroom Management, Differentiated Instruction, and Families. These four courses were selected because of their emphasis on improving teachers' instructional practice. As one UF faculty member explained,

*We picked courses that were targeted towards improving instruction. They were not supposed to be theoretical courses, they were supposed to be practical, applied courses that will help them improve practice. I think the*

*one exception to that is the inquiry course, because that is really an approach, or a stance towards studying your own practice. We felt that one was critical, because it helps them develop the idea of focusing on their own practice, to help them improve it. ... So the purpose of the post-bac was really to only focus on the master teacher piece of our three goals.*

The logic behind the creation of the post-bac program was to provide an additional avenue of professional development for teachers that required less of a commitment than the full master's program, did not require taking the GRE, and was not restricted to teachers in early grades (preschool through third grade). Like the master's program, the post-bac graduate courses are free to participating teachers.

Because the post-bac course sequence does not lead to a degree, however, participation does not result in salary increases. The incentives to teachers, rather, are receiving four graduate courses for free (which is one-third of a degree program), trying out a graduate program to see whether it is plausible for them, and completing coursework toward recertification (although it is more than is needed).

Despite these benefits, both recruitment and retention have been disappointing. Although FMTI has sufficient funding for 40 post-bac teachers, only 17 teachers enrolled. Of those initial 17, 5 teachers dropped before courses began and 1 more dropped after the first couple of classes. Consequently, at the time of our data collection, only 11 teachers remained in the post-bac program. When teachers who were not in the post-bac program were asked why they did not apply to the program, most teachers cited their busy schedules or conflicts with their families or personal lives. It is possible that, given how busy teachers are already, an incentive greater than free graduate coursework is necessary to motivate them to add to their already taxing schedules.

Regarding retention, several program staff speculated that in their efforts to reduce the barriers to recruitment, they may have unwittingly created a situation where enrolling was so easy that teachers did not form any attachment to the post-bac program.

*Our speculation is that people don't feel they have skin in the game if they are not paying for coursework. The entry bar was set so low: they didn't have to take the GRE, no application fee. They are essentially in without any attachment that keeps them there or anything on their part.*

*The whole program is a freebie to teachers, but if they have to take the GRE and they know if they hang in there they'll have a graduate degree, then perhaps there will be a greater degree of commitment of those teachers. If you're handed it and didn't have to do anything, then for some teachers it may not be the same degree of commitment and they don't see a product.*

## **Summary and Recommendations**

To improve the FMTI initiative and maximize resources, program leaders created three enhancements: the AP Fellows program, the Transition to Kindergarten PLCs, and the post-baccalaureate course sequence. Because these programs are new, it is too early to fully evaluate

their implementation or effectiveness. Early indicators suggest that the AP Fellows program has been well received by participating APs. However, participation levels among FMTI schools in the AP Fellows program remains relatively low. The UF team will need to continue to reflect on ways to increase AP participation, including gaining greater commitments from principals to send their APs to meetings and institutes. The Transition PLCs have achieved deeper penetration into FMTI schools, with all 20 schools involved in at least the early stages of facilitator training. Although PLCs had not started meeting at the time of our data collection, both teachers and program staff were optimistic about the program. As with the Teacher Fellows program, supporting the quality of the inquiries will be important if those inquiries are to result in potential best practices for the district. Finally, the post-bac program has struggled with both recruitment and retention of teachers. The UF team will need to decide whether additional incentives can be offered to increase participation.

## 6. Key Factors Affecting FMTI Implementation

FMTI is a complex and multifaceted initiative. It comprises multiple programmatic components, each targeted at different audiences; it is operating in 20 different schools of various sizes, demographics, resources, and needs; and it is being implemented by a team composed of different organizations, each with its own set of assets and constraints. Given the complicated nature of the program, successful implementation is not a guarantee. It requires coordination across multiple organizations and departments, stakeholder buy-in at various levels, the ability to develop and deliver high-quality programming on a large scale, and flexibility to adapt to unexpected developments. In this chapter, we discuss the factors that support and challenge the implementation of FMTI to inform program improvement in M-DCPS and to support implementation in other districts planning similar programs.

### Supports

As described in Chapters 2–5, FMTI staff have successfully developed and implemented all three primary program components—the master’s degree program, the Teacher Fellows program, and the Principal Fellows program. In addition, they have developed three program enhancements—the AP Fellows program, the Transition PLCs, and the post-baccalaureate program. 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’s implementation has been due in large part to the strong collaborative relationships across FMTI partners, partners’ knowledge of the district and schools, and partners’ reflective stance.

#### *Partner Collaboration*

Coordination and collaboration across partners has been supported by strong, positive teamwork that started prior to the current i3 grant and has continued throughout the current program. The FMTI partners have a shared history through their work on Ready Schools Miami, a project running from 2007 to 2011, which also included the job-embedded master’s degree program, the Teacher Fellows program, and the Principal Fellows program. Through this earlier work, the partners developed mutual respect, established trust, and created good communication, all of which contributed to good cross-organization collaboration.

As reported in the 2012 FMTI formative report, because of the credibility UF had established 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 and principals also mentioned the credibility of UF as a reason for wanting to participate in FMTI programs.

FMTI partners continue to cite their history of collaboration as an important factor in the successful implementation of the program. As one staff member said, “There was already trust, a lot of good will among all of the partners.”

While the partners were able to build on their already established relationships, several other factors contribute to the continuing effective working relationship among them. One factor is the regular and open communication established. The full project team—including the district, UF, and SRI—meet monthly to discuss progress made, challenges faced, and upcoming work. These

full-team meetings are in addition to other regularly scheduled meetings between the district and UF, between the professors-in-residence and their Gainesville-based UF colleagues, and ad hoc meetings. As one team member said, “We meet and are in constant communication. There is no lag time that something might go without being discussed. There is always a give and take.”

A second factor contributing to the effective collaboration is the purposeful allocation of roles among team members. Staff members are involved in different ways, building on their particular knowledge and strengths. One staff member, for example, led a study of the Cohort 1 teachers in the master’s degree program to better understand the program’s strengths and weaknesses. Several other team members led the development of the new early childhood courses and the Transition PLCs. Others led the development of the Principal Fellows sessions and the statewide institute. As one staff member described, individuals’ involvement “ebbs and flows as people’s strengths become important.” Another staff member likewise said, “We play to our strengths.”

### ***Partner Knowledge of the District and Schools***

M-DCPS is the fourth-largest school district in the country, comprising 392 schools, 345,000 students, and 40,000 employees. Being able to function successfully in such a large environment requires knowledge of its policies, structures, and culture. In addition to strong collaboration, another factor supporting the successful implementation of FMTI is the deep knowledge of the district held not just by district staff, but by UF staff as well. Many of the UF staff have been involved with previous projects in the district, and both professors-in-residence worked in the school district prior to FMTI. One described the district as “home.” Knowing the district and how to navigate its systems enabled FMTI to get off the ground quickly and successfully. A UF professor described the benefits of this knowledge:

*If we had to start from scratch in a new district, with brand new professors-in-residence who were recently hired, it would have taken much longer to get the project off the ground. But we were building on a partnership that had been in place since 2003. And so we already knew a lot of the district workings and the people; we had people embedded in the district that knew the system, were already respected and had contacts. That’s challenging when you think about bringing our model to new places. You’re going to need a lot of up front work to establish those partnerships and connections.*

The UF’s team’s knowledge of the district was recognized and appreciated by the principals. As one principal said, “They are starting to understand the mechanics of our school district... UF has grown a lot. The UF folks have grown to understand about the politics of the district.” A principal at another school said, “I think they know how to navigate now through the district’s red tape.”

In addition to understanding how to work within the district, UF staff also understand the schools and teachers and how best to work with them. For several years, UF staff have met individually with each principal to discuss the program’s offerings and discuss the calendar. Several principals noted that they appreciate the time that UF staff take in getting to know the schools.

Furthermore, staff who had previously worked on Ready Schools or other similar projects understand how working with full-time teachers differs from working with traditional master's degree students. UF professors talked about these differences:

*University instructors might be used to working with full-time students on campus, but if they are working with full-time educators...for this kind of graduate education, you need to re-center and put those students, teachers, their lives at the center. ... They're bright and engaged, but they're different.*

*We certainly learned that these are busy people and can't be considered traditional students in a lot of ways. We have been thinking carefully about requirements for courses and the timing of assignments. We moved some earlier so they wouldn't coincide with things going on in the district.*

Their understanding of the context and people has enabled FMTI staff to work effectively in M-DCPS.

### **Partner Reflection**

Finally, the implementation success of FMTI also can be attributed to the partners' practicing the same inquiry stance that they promote in the schools. FMTI partners spend time both formally and informally reflecting on the program and making changes to address any weaknesses identified and to strengthen the program.

Many FMTI staff cite examples of changes made over the past 2 years to help the program run more smoothly and to address concerns expressed by program participants. For example, at one point principals attending the Principal Fellows program were divided by region and separate meetings were held in the north and the south. However, program staff recognized that even though the planned content was consistent, the meetings were quite different because of differences in the presenters and participants. To ensure that the programming is consistently strong, FMTI staff decided to bring all the principals together for Year 3.

Also reflecting the inquiry stance of FMTI staff, UF faculty conducted an interview study of all the Cohort 1 teachers during their second year in the program. The interview asked teachers to reflect on the perceived impact of the program and the features of the program that they thought were important. Program staff then used teachers' feedback to make midcourse adjustments to the program. Staff will be conducting similar interviews with Cohort 2 teachers as well.

This inquiry stance and the focus on program improvement are appreciated by the principals:

*They are very good with reflection and making adjustments to the program to make it better. If you put something on paper as far as what you think, by the time you get to the next meeting there are some adjustments. You feel that you are a part of something important, that you have a voice.*

Through this reflective stance the UF team identified ways to further enhance FMTI through the addition of the AP Fellows program, the post-bac program, and the Transition PLCs. They also identified aspects of the program, such as the two school surveys, to discontinue based on the relatively low value these activities added to the initiative overall.

## Challenges

Although the implementation of FMTI can generally be called a success, it is not without challenges. School accountability pressures, strict protocols for doing business in the district, competing demands for schools' attention, and a staff stretched too thin all affect program implementation. The looming end of the i3 grant in 2015 also may prove a challenge for sustainability and scale-up in the not-so-distant future.

### *School Accountability Pressures*

The district and schools are under unrelenting pressure to improve education and increase student learning. In the Miami-Dade district, schools that are not able to meet expected achievement levels are no longer left on their own; rather, they receive both scrutiny and support from the district to help them improve. Ten of the 20 FMTI schools have been identified as needing improvement and have been subsumed by the Education Transformation Office (ETO).

ETO is a double-edged sword for schools. On one hand, it brings needed resources to the schools. One school, for example, has received three instructional coaches, one each for reading, math, and science, which the principal describes as very useful to teachers. The school also receives support from a district curriculum specialist who is at the school once a week, and support from state personnel who come to the school twice a week. On the other hand, ETO status brings mandates and restrictions, including scripted curriculum and specifications for how to allocate time during the day. One of the teachers in the master's program said that it was difficult to implement certain practices promoted in the ECTLSI program, such as morning meetings, because there was no additional time in the day for such activities.

Furthermore, being an ETO school adds anxiety and tension. Teachers feel under the gun when they have district administrators checking their lesson plans, observing their instruction, and reviewing what is written on their boards. As one teacher said, "That brought a lot of stress to the school."

In addition to putting pressures on principals and teachers, ETO has made it more difficult to administer the FMTI program more generally, especially the scheduling of professional development activities. For example, when meeting with the school operations office to schedule the FMTI professional development plan for the year, the district prioritized district-sponsored professional development for ETO schools, and FMTI had to find openings around the ETO calendar. Further, FMTI had to compromise some programming because there was not enough available time. For example, FMTI staff wanted to schedule four principal and four AP meetings, but could calendar only three meetings each. Additionally, having to work around the district's calendar and being a secondary priority means that the scheduling is never quite secure. It was made clear to FMTI staff at the beginning of the year that because ETO was going to be restructured the district's professional development calendar could change, and if the FMTI dates coincided with any new ETO dates, the ETO plan would override the FMTI plan. As one FMTI staff member said, "It was a clear message. If you are serving 20 schools and they have 300 plus schools that they are working across, we are not the main priority."

## ***District Protocols***

Typical of many large school districts, M-DCPS has strict protocols for communication and working. Sometimes these protocols slow down the work of FMTI or create difficulties in moving forward.

An early challenge detailed in the 2012 formative report was getting information about FMTI out to schools. District protocols required that communication about FMTI go through regional superintendents and the district; FMTI staff could not communicate directly with schools about the program. Further, communications to schools were included in weekly principal briefings. These protocols made it challenging to get the proper message out about what FMTI offered, 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. With the less-than-clear communications, some confusion was evident among principals about who could apply to the master's degree program, and clarifications had to be made by senior district staff rather than UF staff.

FMTI staff continue to attribute school recruitment challenges to these protocols. As one staff member said:

*With recruitment, had we been able to have names of schools that were going to participate earlier on instead of having to go through all these steps before we could even send messages to schools about even applying to i3, I mean, recruiting in January was way late for a deadline that was in February that we ended up having to extend.*

In addition to slowing communication, district protocols also make some aspects of the work difficult. For example, UF staff do not have access to the district's professional development portal because they are not district employees, even though they provide the professional development for the FMTI program. As a result, they do not have access to information such as the number of participants signed up for any particular program, making planning difficult. As one staff member described:

*I understand this is a large district, but sometimes the district becomes a huge obstacle because you need to follow protocol and you can't directly do something yourself. The professional development portal has been a huge obstacle. We used to have access to it. Usually we would know for days what the enrollment is. The lack of access to the professional development portal is a huge problem, and it's because we're not employees of the school system.*

Another staff member said, "The professional development calendar, the dates, the scheduling, the communication. If we had freedom to do it however we would do it, it would be better."

## **Competing Demands**

Aside from ETO, all schools across the district face competing demands for their attention. For example, all schools are working to implement the Common Core State Standards and preparing for a new achievement test, the PARCC, expected to come on line in spring 2014. One principal described this time as “very hectic for teachers.”

One principal described the flurry of policies impacting the schools:

*With the state of Florida and the Department of Education, every year there is always something new rolling out, from how we assess to how we evaluate. One year it's this, the next year it's that. ... Within the last 5 years in public education there has not been any normalcy. Every year teachers have to retrain, retool, redo something.*

In addition, schools are adopting additional programs that they feel meet their own particular needs. For example, one school has an initiative to implement the 16 Habits of Mind. As part of this initiative, the school as a whole focuses on one of the habits weekly. Some of the teachers and administrators have attended a training and have begun the coursework to become a “Habits of Mind school.” Although they believe their school will benefit greatly from this program, it is in addition to all the other changes occurring simultaneously.

## **Understaffing**

Another challenge to implementation is the amount of work demanded of a program staff that is stretched much too thin. Professors-in-residence, for example, not only teach graduate classes, visit schools and meet with principals, recruit participants, and plan and facilitate Principal Fellows meetings, but they must also buy snacks for the meetings, provide moral support to struggling teachers, and arrange for meeting space. Although other team members are willing to step in and help wherever needed, they are likewise being pulled in multiple directions and find themselves working beyond capacity. Without having enough staff members dedicated to the project full-time, finding the time and energy needed to implement each of the individual programs at the high quality expected is difficult. As one staff member said, “Trying to make sure we have continual focus on the work has been challenging.”

## **Sustainability**

Although not a challenge yet, sustainability of FMTI is looming as a potential problem. Staff and school personnel alike have expressed a desire for the program to continue after the i3 grant expires. As one FMTI staff member said, “I think the hope is the district and university will continue to have some sort of level of partnership where we can look at pieces of the model.” Another said, “It would be wonderful if we could replicate and scale up.”

However, currently little attention is being paid to planning or securing additional funds for the future. As an FMTI staff member said, “The model as a whole, I don't know that that has been talked about.” Another said, “We don't have a plan. Is the district repurposing funds to make sure the program continues beyond the grant? No. I would think that continued implementation and scale-up would be contingent upon other funding by an outside funding source.” Other staff confirmed that currently no planning was under way to sustain the program: “I don't know about conversations right now about this but we would be receptive if the opportunity arose.” “I think

people will be open to finding a grant to submit together in the future, but I haven't heard active talk about it." Thus, the future of FMTI is "uncertain at this point," as one staff member said.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The successful implementation of FMTI can be attributed to the strong history of partner collaboration and strong collaborative practices, partners' deep knowledge of the district and schools, and partners' engagement in reflective practice to make adjustments for program improvement. However, challenges continue to affect the program. While schools will continue to face accountability pressures and have to work within the constraints of the ETO office, FMTI staff can continue to clarify how FMTI works to support ETO efforts and provide concrete examples of the synergy between the two. Being able to understand more concretely how the programs complement each other may help principals and teachers in ETO schools more fully engage with FMTI. Additionally, to address the understaffing of the program, FMTI leadership should look at grant resources and determine whether additional funds can be allocated for program staff. For example, having assistants who can reserve meeting rooms, track attendance, and buy snacks for professional development meetings could free up time of professors-in-residence to enable them to spend more time with principals and teachers. Finally, with the end of the grant in sight, FMTI partners should begin actively to consider the sustainability and possible scale-up of the model. It is never too early to begin conversations with district staff and possible outside funders about the promising practices developed as part of the i3 grant.

## 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 and collaborative culture in schools. Teachers reported improvements in student learning and behavior as a result of these changes. These strategies form a coherent and comprehensive program for improving the academic achievement of high-need children in preschool through third grade.

FMTI has successfully implemented the key components of its model for 2 years. All the courses for the master's degree program were developed, implemented, and well received. The Teacher Fellows program was successfully implemented at 90% of the treatment schools. The UF team held statewide institutes and local meetings for principals to learn about and observe new leadership practices and develop a professional network and learning community with other principals of FMTI schools. However, recruitment and participation levels in the master's degree program and Principal Fellows program have been a challenge. FMTI partners are working to further strengthen all these programs, based on their experiences from the first 2 years of implementation and the formative evaluation findings.

The UF team also made some changes to some of their key program components, including reducing or discontinuing certain activities and adding new activities to enhance the initiative. Specifically, they reduced the number of Principal Fellow PLC meetings and statewide institutes, and made the doing of an inquiry optional for principals, based on principal feedback. They also discontinued the programwide implementation of the two school surveys, based on the relatively low value these activities added to the initiative overall. Finally, the UF team added the AP Fellows program, the post-baccalaureate program, and the Transition PLCs to further enhance FMTI.

As the initiative continues to unfold, the evaluation of FMTI is continuing to collect both implementation and outcome data for the summative evaluation. The evaluation team will gather more implementation data through administrative records. Academic outcomes will be measured for students schoolwide and for students of teachers in the master's degree program. The evaluation also will report on changes in instructional quality as measured by CLASS for teachers in the master's degree program and a matched comparison group. Finally, the evaluation will measure school culture through a follow-up teacher survey. The findings about implementation and impact of FMTI will be presented in the final evaluation report, to be prepared in June 2015. Although the impact of FMTI will not be known for several years, data collected during the first 2 years show that, at least in terms of implementation, FMTI is on the right track but that obtaining the desired levels of participation in the master's degree program and Principal Fellows program has been a challenge. Also, although more measurable student and teacher outcome data are not yet available, principals and teachers, in general, report that FMTI has made a positive difference to them and their schools.