



## News Release

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For Immediate Release

### **LARGE ACADEMIC GAINS IN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE, BROOKINGS-AIR STUDY FINDS**

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.— Students in classrooms of team teachers led by Opportunity Culture “multi-classroom leaders” showed sizeable academic gains, according to a new [study](#) from the American Institutes for Research and the Brookings Institution. The team teachers were, on average, at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in the student learning gains they produced before joining a team led by a multi-classroom leader. After joining the teams, they **produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers in the top quartile in math and nearly that in reading**, said the report, released on January 11, 2018, through the CALDER Center.

The gains the study attributes to team teachers are **equivalent to those of teachers from the 75<sup>th</sup> to 85<sup>th</sup> percentile in math, and, in six of the seven statistical models, from 66<sup>th</sup> to 72<sup>nd</sup> percentile in reading.**

In each Opportunity Culture school, a team of teachers and administrators adopts new roles to reach more students with teachers who have produced high-growth student learning. Multi-classroom leaders lead a teaching team, providing guidance and frequent on-the-job coaching while continuing to teach, often by leading small-group instruction. Accountable for the results of all students on the team, they also earn supplements averaging 20 percent (and up to 50 percent) of teacher pay, within the regular school budget. The schools redesign schedules to provide additional school-day time for teacher planning, coaching and collaboration. The national [Opportunity Culture initiative](#) now includes more than 160 schools in about 20 districts in nine states.

These results show that **students can consistently experience top-quartile teaching in math, and teaching nearly that good in reading, if schools place excellent teachers in charge of small teams of typical teachers.**

Study authors Ben Backes of American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Michael Hansen of Brookings used rigorous econometric methods to study student growth in Opportunity Culture schools. The study compared student growth in classrooms led by teachers in Opportunity Culture roles with student growth in non-Opportunity Culture classrooms in both the same schools and in different schools, controlling for various factors including student background and prior performance.

The study covered about 15,000 students and about 300 teachers, looking at three years of data for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and two years for Cabarrus County Schools, both in North Carolina, and two years for the Syracuse (N.Y.) City School District. About 90 percent of the students included were in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In these three districts in 2015–16, 74 percent of Opportunity Culture schools were eligible for Title I based on the percentage of low-income students.

“We’re excited about the results teachers have achieved,” said Bryan C. Hassel, co-president of Public Impact, which founded the Opportunity Culture initiative. Key to understanding the results, he noted, is that schools selected excellent teachers for multi-classroom leader (MCL) roles, and put them in charge of small teams.

The researchers found that among MCLs whose teaching effectiveness could be quantified through student learning growth data, all were in the top quartile of effectiveness before being selected as MCLs. In 2015–16, MCLs led a median of five team teachers each, and 42 percent had teams of four or fewer, in schools providing team-size data to Public Impact.

“The overwhelming challenge of ensuring *all* children have access to excellent teachers has not been met through the traditional human capital strategies of hiring, firing and development,” said Denise Watts, superintendent of the Project L.I.F.T. learning community within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the first district leader in the nation to adopt Opportunity Culture. “Opportunity Culture was a viable strategy to not only promote student access to high-quality teachers and teacher-leaders, but also to provide a solution to my schools’ recruitment and retention obstacles.”

Students’ math gains were statistically significant in all seven of the researchers’ statistical models. Reading gains were statistically significant in six of the seven models. The seventh, comparing classrooms within schools that did and did not have an MCL, showed no statistically significant impact, because reading improved in both types of classrooms after multi-classroom leaders began leading some of the teachers in each school.

Among the statistical analyses showing positive effects, the “effect sizes” for team teachers ranged from 0.11 to 0.17 in math, and 0.05 to 0.07 in reading. “If students had this level of teaching every year, many more would leap ahead to advanced work,” Hassel said.

“There’s more work ahead to fulfill the potential of Opportunity Culture and to reach schools nationwide,” Emily Ayscue Hassel, co-president of Public Impact, said. “But Opportunity Culture teachers are showing how much they can achieve when they get the right support. We will investigate and share how top MCLs in each subject helped their teams—and other teachers—achieve strong outcomes.”

The researchers’ findings indicate that gains in Opportunity Culture classrooms were substantially higher than those in schools with no Opportunity Culture roles, and in Opportunity Culture schools prior to the implementation of these roles.

Differences were smaller between classrooms within Opportunity Culture schools that did or did not have Opportunity Culture educators. Most schools implement the roles gradually, allowing in-school comparisons. The researchers acknowledge that these smaller differences could indicate positive “spillover” effects.

Public Impact sees several possible sources of spillover effects. For example, some strong teachers who applied for but did not get Opportunity Culture roles took other teaching jobs in the Charlotte schools, in hopes of moving into future Opportunity Culture positions. And the Charlotte superintendent who first used Opportunity Culture quickly announced his plans to expand it to half of the district’s schools; local media repeated his message.

“Unfortunately, statistics can’t tell the whole story,” Emily Hassel said. “We know from interviews with Opportunity Culture educators that multi-classroom leadership changed the culture of their schools fast. Collaboration, coaching and support for everyone became the norm. If that support spills beyond Opportunity Culture classrooms, students benefit.”

In some Opportunity Culture schools, excellent teachers reached more students directly, rather than leading a team. The researchers’ findings were mixed for these teachers, some of whom used extra online learning (“blended-learning teachers”) and some of whom did not (“expanded-impact teachers”). Effects for expanded-impact teachers were positive and in the same range as those for MCLs’ team teachers, but were statistically significant in only half of the researchers’ models. The effects for blended-learning teachers were mixed, generally not statistically significant, and negative in some reading models.

“This suggests these teaching roles should be embedded in MCL teams,” said Lucy Steiner, who leads Public Impact’s work with districts and schools.

Public Impact leaders note that districts must work to maintain results as they scale up Opportunity Culture, keeping a tight focus on the [principles of an Opportunity Culture](#) and other key lessons from the first districts to implement it.

“This research shows that the MCL model has the potential to make the longstanding Opportunity Culture vision possible—to reach 100 percent of students with excellent teaching,” Bryan Hassel said.

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**For quotes from several multi-classroom leaders in Charlotte, see below**—a few of the many who have [written](#) about their roles and who are available for interviews. For help arranging an interview with these or other Opportunity Culture educators, contact Sharon Keschull Barrett at [Sharon.Barrett@publicimpact.com](mailto:Sharon.Barrett@publicimpact.com); 919.590.4154.

“Being an MCL has not only had a positive impact on our students’ achievement, but a major impact on my career in education as well. This position has created an opportunity for excellent educators to grow in their adult leadership skills while still impacting scholars firsthand. MCLs provide real-time feedback, instruction intervention, and manageable action steps for their team of teachers so that they can get better faster. As a multi-classroom leader, I have the pleasure of having the best of both worlds, impacting adults and the scholars that I love!” —*Bobby Miles, science MCL at Ranson IB Middle School, in the Project L.I.F.T. zone*

“The MCL role is so powerful because we are in classrooms every day and truly have a pulse on every teacher and student on our team at all times. All other coaching and facilitator models stretch their teacher-leaders too thin and are ineffective in comparison.” —*Erin A. Burns, the former biology MCL at West Charlotte High School now serving as the MCL for its International Baccalaureate program teachers*

“As a multi-classroom leader, I am not only a change agent for the students within my school, but for the success of classes and generations to come! I am able to positively impact and shape the future of teachers and teacher-leaders, and in turn I watch them grow professionally, while seeing academic growth for students!” —*Jacqueline Smith, MCL at Nations Ford Elementary*

“The power of being an MCL is building relationships with teachers where they are receptive to coaching. The teachers take what they learn during coaching sessions and implement better teaching practice in their classrooms. As an MCL, I am building the teacher/leader capacity within the staff. Teachers are more knowledgeable and confident in their pedagogy. This ultimately impacts the growth of students!” —*Julie Hill, MCL at Nations Ford Elementary*

“For an MCL, nothing is more important than student success. In order for students to succeed, it’s of paramount importance that teachers feel supported and empowered to tackle the many challenges that impede student growth. MCLs aren’t backseat drivers—they are co-pilots that help navigate the journey towards greatness! Mission accomplished: there is no challenge too great!” —*Erin K. Williams, now a program specialist for Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s Opportunity Culture work who previously served as an English MCL at James Martin Middle School*

## **About Public Impact**

Public Impact is a national organization whose mission is to improve education dramatically for all students, especially low-income students, students of color, and other students whose needs historically have not been well met.

Learn more about an Opportunity Culture on the [OpportunityCulture.org](http://OpportunityCulture.org) website, which provides [tools](#)—all free—to help educators implement an Opportunity Culture, [videos of teachers and principals](#), and related [resources](#). Funding for development of resources to help schools design and implement Opportunity Culture models and support teachers taking on new roles has been provided by [national foundations](#).

Educators who have worked in Opportunity Culture schools are [publishing a series of columns](#) about their work on national news sites.

To arrange an interview with Public Impact, contact Sharon Keschull Barrett at [Sharon.Barrett@publicimpact.com](mailto:Sharon.Barrett@publicimpact.com); 919.590.4154.