



**Vermont Agency of Education
FirstSchool Pilot Project
2015-2017 Evaluation
Executive Summary &
Summary Report**

*A comprehensive report of the analysis and findings
of the change and improvement between
Year One and Year Two
and overall evaluation of the success of
the FirstSchool Pilot Project.*

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December 26, 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Horn Research would like to thank the FirstSchool team for promptly providing the information necessary to complete this report as well as generously providing background information, advice and feedback. We would also like to thank the Vermont Agency of Education for the opportunity to examine this important effort to bring quality education to all students.

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VERMONT AOE FIRSTSCHOOL PILOT PROJECT YEAR 2015-2017 EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In the fall of 2014, as part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (2014), Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) entered into a partnership with FirstSchool to pilot a Pre-K through 3rd grade system to support children's early learning and development by integrating and coordinating the early childhood birth through age 5 system with the kindergarten through 3rd grade system.

Six Pre-K through 3rd grade school communities in Vermont volunteered to participate in the FirstSchool pilot project. These schools were grouped into four sites: Smilie Elementary School, St. Albans City School, St. Johnsbury Elementary, and Tunbridge/Chelsea/Orange.

As part of the pilot project, a two-year evaluation process was developed to assess the success of the program. This final evaluation report provides information on each of five areas:

- overall project implementation
- a comparison of:
 - pre- and post-test knowledge assessments;
 - Year One (2015-2016) and Year Two (2016-2017) EduSnap data;
 - 3rd grade achievement results from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years
- a summary of qualitative evaluation data from project participants.

Key Findings

Project Implementation

Throughout the pilot project, FirstSchool provided two and one-half years of professional development (e.g., yearly summer institutes, onsite coaching) to the administrators and educators in the Pre-K through 3rd grade learning communities. A review of documents show that despite several obstacles, FirstSchool staff provided the pilot sites with extensive coaching and support to help these school communities meet their goals. In addition, FirstSchool staff exhibited significant flexibility in adapting to the changing needs and requirements of the project.

Post-Test Knowledge Assessment

A pre-and post-test knowledge questionnaire was conducted with participants to guide coaching efforts and to provide a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of that coaching. The questionnaire tests participants' knowledge of brain research, developmental science, and protective factors. The questions were based on six concepts: developmental science, seamless education, collaborative inquiry, balanced teaching approaches, equity/bias, and student communication. The data from the pre- and post-test questionnaire was intended to address whether the outcome identified in the RTT-ELC grant proposal, *"75% of administrators and early childhood educators (Pre-K - 3rd Grade) in the "Pre-K - 3rd Grade Learning Communities" demonstrate they are knowledgeable about brain research, developmental science, and protective factors,"* was achieved. The design and implementation of the pre- and post-test knowledge assessment did not allow for a matched analysis by participant and as such, it is not possible to test the percentage of participants who demonstrated knowledge. Available data did, however, allow an analysis of the differences between the group averages of the pre- and post-test results. These results show an overall improvement in the knowledge of participants.

EduSnap

EduSnap is a time-sampling observation measure that quantifies the activities, interactions and learning and teaching approaches children experience in Pre-K through Grade 5 classrooms. During EduSnap observations, targeted children are monitored over a series of time to provide a minute by minute assessment of the activity setting and content areas the child is engaged in as well as the student learning approaches and teaching approaches being utilized. EduSnap data is not intended to serve as an evaluative tool for teacher quality, but as a professional development tool to provide teachers with information on how children in their classrooms are spending their time. The data helps teachers and administrators identify areas where their focus may be modified to support a more balanced teaching approach.

According to FirstSchool, the primary EduSnap predictors for positive third grade outcomes are high levels of small group instruction, peer collaboration, oral language development, vocabulary development, scaffolded instruction, and metacognition. Of the teachers with EduSnap scores from both Year One and Year Two, two-thirds increased the amount of time their students spent in oral language, vocabulary, and collaborating with their peers. In addition, nearly 70% of teachers provided more scaffolded instruction in Year Two. Almost half of teachers increased the amount of time their students spent in small groups and engaging in metacognition. For the project overall, there were statistically significant increases in the percent of time students spent in several content areas including oral language, vocabulary, writing and science. In addition, there were statistically significant increases in the percent of time students spent collaborating with peers, using metacognition and the amount of time teachers used a scaffolding approach. These results suggest that the FirstSchool pilot project successfully met the RTT-ELC grant proposal goal: *“50% of early childhood educators in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities improve the effectiveness of their instruction as shown through a comparison of Snapshot (EduSnap) data collected over two years.”*

3rd Grade Achievement Results

A comparison of the 3rd grade achievement scores from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Smarter Balanced Assessments was completed for two¹ of the FirstSchool pilot project schools (St. Albans and St. Johnsbury), three comparable non-pilot schools (Swanton, Bristol, and Molly Stark) and the State of Vermont. ELA and MATH scores declined in the pilot project schools and did not improve compared to the non-pilot schools. It appears from the data that the pilot project was unsuccessful in meeting the goal articulated in the RTT-ELC grant proposal that *“3rd grade reading and mathematics achievement levels of children in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities are significantly higher than comparable children that are not in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities.”* However, there are several limitations to these data including the short time frame of the project, the lack of data for two of the four pilot project sites, and the newness of the Smarter Balanced Assessments. As such, it is Horn Research’s opinion that these data give very little insight into the value of the FirstSchool project and should not be relied on to determine whether the pilot project was successful.

Participant Qualitative Data

At the final summer institute in 2017, teachers and administrators from participating schools were asked a series of open-ended questions about their experiences with the FirstSchool pilot project. When asked to describe the impact FirstSchool had on their schools, classrooms, and students, participants most frequently commented on how their school and classroom environments had become much more

¹ Data was not available for Smilie, Tunbridge, Orange, and Chelsea due to small class size

supportive. Several participants said that changes made through the FirstSchool process had helped students to feel more loved, cared about, and appreciated. Other participants shared how the supportive environment had allowed students to develop a greater interest in, and ownership of, their learning. Participants also said their students had gained independence, had more opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences and were more able to self-regulate as a result of FirstSchool.

When asked to describe what aspects of the pilot project had worked well for them, participants most frequently commented on the *Conscious Discipline* training and the EduSnap data. Several participants said the support and guidance they received from FirstSchool staff was vital to the success of the project. Participants also said they appreciated having the time and opportunity to work in teams within their own school community as well as collaborate with cohorts from other schools across the state.

Participants were asked to describe what challenges and concerns they had experience throughout the FirstSchool pilot project. The most frequently noted concern was the lack of data collection in Year Two for EduSnap, CLASS and TS Gold. Participants said these tools were an important aspect of improving their practice and it was frustrating to lose access to the data during the pilot project. Participants also noted they had some challenges with buy-in among staff within their own school communities.

When asked if they felt the FirstSchool pilot project had enhanced the potential of Vermont, participants resoundingly agreed. However, the bulk of participants were concerned about how to sustain the work that had been accomplished and wondered what supports would be in place for continuing their efforts.

Conclusion

Despite several challenges in implementation and gaps in the data, analyses suggest that the FirstSchool pilot project has successfully met the goals outlined in the RTT-ELC grant proposal and that continued and enhanced support of the FirstSchool concept would be a benefit to the Vermont educational system. Students in the pilot schools experienced greater exposure to key content areas and teaching approaches while engaging in collaboration and metacognition more frequently. Participants uniformly agree that the FirstSchool approach has positively changed the culture of their schools and classrooms and created an environment where students feel supported and are engaged in learning. While the results of FirstSchool pilot project are generally positive, it is clear that more robust support and engagement from AOE will be required for the benefits to continue and expand to other learning communities across Vermont. On-going access to the observational data collection tools such as EduSnap and CLASS in conjunction with coaching and professional development opportunities will provide the pilot schools and other learning communities the opportunity to continue to improve current teaching practices. In addition, support for the pilot schools to share their experience with other learning communities will offer the prospect of expanding the vision for a coordinated Pre-K through 3rd grade system.

**VERMONT (AOE) FIRSTSCHOOL PILOT PROJECT
2015-2017 EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT
BACKGROUND**

The FirstSchool Pilot Project was developed as part of the Vermont Agency of Education’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant proposal. As articulated in the grant proposal, the goal of Project 23: Sustaining Program Effectiveness is to: “...build a Birth through 3rd Grade system for supporting our children’s learning and development that integrates and coordinates the early childhood 0-5 systems with our K-12 system in order to (1) sustain improved child outcomes throughout K-3, (2) reduce the Achievement Gap, (3) establish a culture of collaborative inquiry, shared language, and aligned instructional practices across Pre-K-3rd Grade, and (4) maintain a developmental perspective across Pre-K-3rd Grade.”² As part of the pilot project, a two-year evaluation process was developed to assess the success of the program. The RTT-ELC grant proposal outlined four outcomes for the FirstSchool Pilot Project to guide the evaluation process (*Table 1.*) The evaluation process includes three reports. The first year report provided baseline information on each of four metrics for the 2015-2016 (Year One) school year. The second year evaluation report presented an analysis of the data gathered in the 2016-2017 (Year Two) school year. This third evaluation report will compare the results from data gathered for Year One and Year Two as well as analyze qualitative evaluation data gathered from program participants.

Table 1. Outcomes for Project 23

<i>Outcomes</i>
Three to four “school communities” (i.e. elementary schools and Pre-K partner programs) serving a large percentage of children with high needs participate in a Pre-K - 3rd Grade initiative to improved educator effectiveness and child outcomes.
75% of administrators and early childhood educators (Pre-K - 3rd Grade) in the “Pre-K - 3rd Grade Learning Communities” demonstrate they are knowledgeable about brain research, developmental science, and protective factors.
3rd grade reading and mathematics achievement levels of children in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities are significantly higher than comparable children that are not in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities.
50% of early childhood educators in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities improve the effectiveness of their instruction as shown through a comparison of Snapshot (EduSnap) data collected over two years.

As delineated in the RTT-ELC grant proposal, the evaluation of the FirstSchool pilot project was to be based on four main metrics: a pre- and post-test knowledge assessment of teachers and administrators, 3rd grade achievement levels, and the results of observations from the EduSnap and CLASS systems. This 2015-2017 evaluation report will provide a detailed examination of the results for each of these metrics, with the exception of CLASS data, in addition to an analysis of qualitative data gathered from project participants.

Pre- and Post-Test Knowledge Assessment

During FirstSchool’s initial 2015 and final 2017 summer institutes, participants completed a pre- and post-test questionnaire to assess their knowledge of brain research, developmental science, and protective factors. The questions were based on six concepts: developmental science, seamless education, collaborative inquiry, balanced teaching approaches, equity/bias, and student communication. Responses were collected anonymously and therefore it was not possible to connect

² Vermont RTT-ELC Application for Funding [CFDA 84.412A] Proposal and State Plan, p. 321-324.

the pre- and post-test responses with each other or with EduSnap data. Analysis of the pre- and post-test results is limited to a comparison of group means at the project level.

3rd Grade Achievement Levels

Third grade achievement levels were measured through Vermont’s Smarter Balanced Assessment scores for 3rd grade reading (ELA) and 3rd grade mathematics (MATH.) The Smarter Balanced Assessments were developed through a consortium of states with the goal of creating a customized assessment that is accessible to all students and designed to support teachers and parents to help students succeed in school and after. Smarter Balanced Assessment scores were not available for Tunbridge, Chelsea, and Orange due to small class size and are therefore not available for comparison. In addition, 2016-2017 scores were not available for Smilie. Three non-pilot project schools were selected for comparison based on the availability of data, the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, and geographic dispersion. These schools are: Swanton in Franklin County, Bristol in Addison County, and Molly Stark in Bennington County.

EduSnap Classroom Observation Measure (EduSnap)

EduSnap was born out of the Emerging Academics Snapshot (EAS) and the FirstSchool SnapShot (FSS) observational tools. During EduSnap observations, over a series of time, targeted children are monitored to provide a minute by minute assessment of the activity setting and content areas the child is engaged in as well as the student learning approaches and teaching approaches being utilized (*Table 2.*)

Table 2. EduSnap Data Points

<i>Activity Settings</i>	<i>Content Areas</i>	<i>Student Learning Approaches</i>	<i>Teaching Approaches</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Group • Small Group • Individual • Choice • Group Work • Transitions • Meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read To • Reading • Comprehension • Word Identification • Vocabulary • Writing • Oral Language • Numbers • Geometry • Algebra • Science • Gross Motor • Social Studies • Aesthetics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Metacognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolds • Didactic

EduSnap data is *not* intended to serve as an evaluative tool for teacher quality, but as a professional development tool to provide teachers with information on how the children in their classroom are spending their time. The data helps to identify areas where the focus may be modified to support a more balanced teaching approach.

EduSnap data was collected in each pilot project classrooms once during the 2015-2017 school year and once again during the 2016-2017 school year. EduSnap data is not available for comparable non-pilot project schools. Comparison EduSnap data has been analyzed and reported on the project, site, and grade levels for teachers who were observed during both Year One and Year Two periods.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

CLASS is a widely used measurement tool used to support the professional development process for teachers. The CLASS tool offers schools and community programs the opportunity to evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions and provide specific feedback to teachers for improving practice. While not included as a metric in Vermont’s original RTT-ELC grant proposal, the CLASS measure was integrated into the FirstSchool process in Year One to enhance the data and information available to educators and administrators. CLASS has been found to be predictive of child academic outcomes and is considered a reliable measure for evaluating classroom quality and as such is an important metric to include in the evaluation process.

Unfortunately, CLASS data was not collected during Year Two of the pilot project. The lack of CLASS data eliminates the possibility of evaluating the change in the quality of teacher-child interactions and poses a challenge in determining the level of improvements achieved through the FirstSchool process.

Qualitative Data

Teachers and administrators from schools participating in the FirstSchool pilot program answered a series of open-ended questions about their experiences with the project. These questions included opportunities for participants to share what challenges they faced during the pilot project, the ways they felt the project had impacted their students and schools, and what concerns and questions they had for the future. The responses to these open-ended questions were coded and analyzed to identify the primary patterns in the data.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout the pilot project, FirstSchool provided two and one-half years of professional development (e.g., yearly summer institutes, onsite coaching) to the administrators and educators in the Pre-K through 3rd grade learning communities. Four sites participated throughout the duration of the pilot project and included six Pre-K through 3rd grade school communities: Smilie Elementary School, St. Albans City School, St. Johnsbury Elementary, and Tunbridge, Chelsea, and Orange³. A review of documents show that despite several obstacles, FirstSchool staff provided extensive coaching and support to help the teachers and administrators at the pilot sites meet their goals. In addition, FirstSchool staff exhibited significant flexibility in adapting to the changing needs and requirements of the project.

Summer Institutes

FirstSchool hosted three summer institutes for participants. The first four-day institute, in 2015, launched the project and offered participants the opportunity to learn about FirstSchool concepts and the research supporting the approach. The programming allowed participants to interact and engage with each other and the content. Daily evaluations showed that participants were pleased with the content and structure of the sessions and that FirstSchool had successfully adapted to the desires of participants.

In August, 2016, FirstSchool hosted a two-day summer institute to continue the work of creating a “culture of caring, competence and excellence” in the pilot schools. Initially, the summer institute was planned to be a four days long, but after discussion and agreement with AOE, FirstSchool planned for a

³ Tunbridge, Chelsea and Orange have been grouped into one site.

two-day institute and added one professional development day for each school community to better support the individual goals of each site. Results from the evaluation questionnaires from the second summer institute showed that participants were satisfied with the content and quality of the sessions.

In the summer of 2017, FirstSchool hosted the final summer institute which offered participating schools the opportunity to present their experiences and successes with the pilot project. Participants also completed qualitative evaluations of the overall pilot project.

Professional Development & Coaching

A key to the FirstSchool approach is providing teachers and administrators in participating schools coaching and professional development support. Information from FirstSchool reports show that the team thoughtfully tailored their coaching efforts to each individual teacher and school's needs. FirstSchool staff spent a great deal of time building relationships and identifying the strengths and challenges of each site. FirstSchool staff effectively helped participants identify areas where they felt they would most like to change their teaching practices as well as supported efforts to improve classroom management and student support. FirstSchool staff appeared to be extremely flexible in adapting to both schools' needs and AOE changes while remaining closely connected to the fundamental tenets of the approach. FirstSchool reports show that staff were consistently aligning their coaching and assessment efforts with the results from the original pre-test. This combination of flexibility and consistency was critical to the success of the pilot project.

Classroom Data Collection

The pilot project was burdened with challenges related to classroom data collection. In Year One, CLASS data was gathered early in the school year while EduSnap data was gathered throughout the fall and spring semesters. In Year Two, CLASS data was not collected and EduSnap data, originally planned to be collected twice, was only collected once late in the school year.

The elimination of one series of EduSnap observation and delays in the Year One and Year Two series had a significant impact on the success of the project. The FirstSchool process is highly connected to the use of observational data to help teachers and administrators become aware of how they spend their time with their students and identify areas where they might choose to improve their instruction or change their focus.

The lack of data collection was not a fault of FirstSchool staff. AOE was tasked with recruiting and hiring data collectors for both CLASS and EduSnap. FirstSchool identified out-of-state data collectors willing to travel to Vermont and conducted observations to ensure that EduSnap data was collected in Year Two and modified coaching and data feedback schedules to accommodate the delays in data collection.

FirstSchool Online Course

FirstSchool was originally slated to provide an online course as a supplement to their coaching and sites visits. However, as challenges developed with EduSnap data collection efforts, FirstSchool agreed that instead of offering the online course they would provide weekly conference calls with data collectors and provide data collection support.

PRE & POST-TEST KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

A pre-and post-test knowledge questionnaire was conducted with participants to guide coaching efforts and to provide a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of that coaching. The data from the pre- and post-test questionnaire was intended to address whether the outcome identified in the RTT-ELC grant proposal “75% of administrators and early childhood educators (Pre-K - 3rd Grade) in the ‘Pre-K - 3rd Grade Learning Communities’ demonstrate they are knowledgeable about brain research, developmental science, and protective factors” was achieved. The design and implementation of the pre- and post-test knowledge assessment did not allow for a matched analysis by participant and as such, it is not possible to test the percentage of participants who demonstrate knowledge. Available data do, however, allow an analysis of the differences between the group averages of the pre- and post-test results and thus determine the level of, if any, improvement in knowledge.

Forty-two teachers and administrators completed the pre-assessment questionnaire and twenty-seven completed the post-assessment questionnaire. Participants exhibited areas of knowledge in each of the areas tested in both the pre- and post-test questionnaire. Overall, more participants answered correctly in 9 of the 17 questions in the post-test than in the pre-test (*Table 3.*) An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the percent of correct responses in the pre- and post-test. Statistically significant differences were found for five questions, four of which saw increased percentages of correct responses. On average, participants in the pre-test knowledge assessment answered 50% of the questions correctly. On the post-test, participants answered, on average, 57% of the questions correctly. It appears from this data that there was an overall positive improvement in the knowledge of participants.

Table 3. Percent of Correct Responses in Pre- and Post-Test

	Percent Correct		Stat. Sig. Diff.
	<i>Pre (N=42)</i>	<i>Post (N=27)</i>	
Using rewards is better for motivating students than using punishments.	5%	41%	*
Vigorous physical activity improves children’s attention.	93%	89%	
In which section of the brain are most emotions processed?	21%	63%	*
At what age does the brain contain the most neural pathways?	48%	30%	
Kindergarten class activity settings should be more similar to third grade activity settings than Pre-K activity settings.	90%	30%	*
In the average K-3 classroom, the most frequent activity setting is Whole Group.	57%	78%	
An entity theory of intelligence is better than an incremental theory of intelligence.	40%	44%	
Effective teachers minimize didactic instruction and use scaffolded instruction almost exclusively.	21%	52%	*
Asking children to explain how they solved a problem in math does not build metacognitive skills because there is only one correct answer.	95%	96%	
In the graph, approximately how many minutes of the day are spent in Choice?	33%	70%	*
Children of color receive frequent messages that they are not valued.	74%	81%	
With hard work and effort, it is possible to be truly color blind.	40%	33%	
Equity implies that all children receive the same level of support.	71%	81%	
Improving students’ vocabularies improve their decoding skills.	93.0%	89.0%	
Children are more effective than adults at scaffolding one another’s oral language.	10.0%	19.0%	
On average, students in Pre-K-3 classrooms talk with adults for ____ percentage of the day.	10.0%	19.0%	

In addition to questions assessing participants' knowledge, the pre- and post-test questionnaire also included questions which assessed participants' perceptions. Results show that a greater percentage of participants' responses in the post-test were in alignment with FirstSchool principles for five questions (*Table 4.*) The rest of the questions showed very small increases or decreases in alignment. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the responses in the pre- and post-test. There was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test means for any of the questions.

Table 4. Participants' Perceptions Pre- and Post-Test

	Percent of Responses in Alignment with FirstSchool Tenets	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
A teacher's main job is to teach children what they need to learn in order to be successful in life.	65.0%	75.0%
Adapting teaching to students' learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) is an important part of pedagogy.	97.6%	100.0%
Play is an effective way to deliver curriculum.	100.0%	96.3%
I have a lot of room to improve with my teaching practice.	95.2%	92.6%
Nobody is doing anything important with all the data collected in teachers' classrooms.	59.5%	70.4%
Professional learning communities in my school are governed by explicit social agreements.	56.3%	52.0%
At my school we talk about data too much.	87.2%	100.0%
Teachers at my school ask more closed ended questions than open ended questions.	45.7%	50.0%
Teachers at my school talk to children more than they talk with children.	46.2%	50.0%
Too much emphasis is placed on race in schools.	90.0%	84.6%
Some students cannot meet learning expectations, no matter what teachers and other school staff do, because of their home environment and related factors.	63.8%	77.7%
When I design activities that promote student conversation, they generally stay on topic.	75.0%	72.0%
Keeping student talk to a minimum during whole group time ensures that lessons are paced more effectively.	83.3%	100.0%
I talk to my children more than they talk to me.	71.1%	70.4%

EDUSNAP DATA

EduSnap data was collected in the fall and winter of 2015 (Year One) and in the winter and spring of 2017 (Year Two). Students in 53 teachers' classrooms were observed in both Year One and in Year Two. The comparison data is limited to these 53 classrooms in order to more accurately assess what changes may have taken place as a result of the pilot project.

The RTT-ELC grant proposal identified a goal of “50% of early childhood educators in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities improve the effectiveness of their instruction as shown through a comparison of Snapshot (EduSnap) data collected over two years.” A key challenge in evaluating whether the FirstSchool pilot project met this goal is that EduSnap data is not intended to evaluate quality of instruction, but rather to provide feedback to teachers on the details of their instruction. CLASS data is a more effective tool for evaluating teacher quality but was not collected for Year Two.

According to FirstSchool, the top EduSnap predictors for positive third grade outcomes are high levels of small group instruction, peer collaboration, oral language development, vocabulary development, scaffolded instruction, and metacognition. Of the teachers with EduSnap scores from both Year One and Year Two, two-thirds increased the amount of time their students spent in oral language, vocabulary, and collaborating with their peers (*Table 5.*) In addition, nearly 70% experienced more scaffolded instruction in Year Two. Almost half of teachers increased the amount of time their students spent in small groups and engaging in metacognition. These results suggest that the FirstSchool pilot project successfully met the goal identified in the RTT-ELC grant proposal.

Table 5. Percent of Classrooms with Improvement between Year One and Year Two for Key EduSnap Predictors

Predictor	Percent of Classrooms with Improvement between Year One and Year Two
Small Group	41.5%
Oral Language	69.8%
Vocabulary	64.2%
Collaboration	66.0%
Metacognition	45.3%
Scaffolded Instruction	69.8%

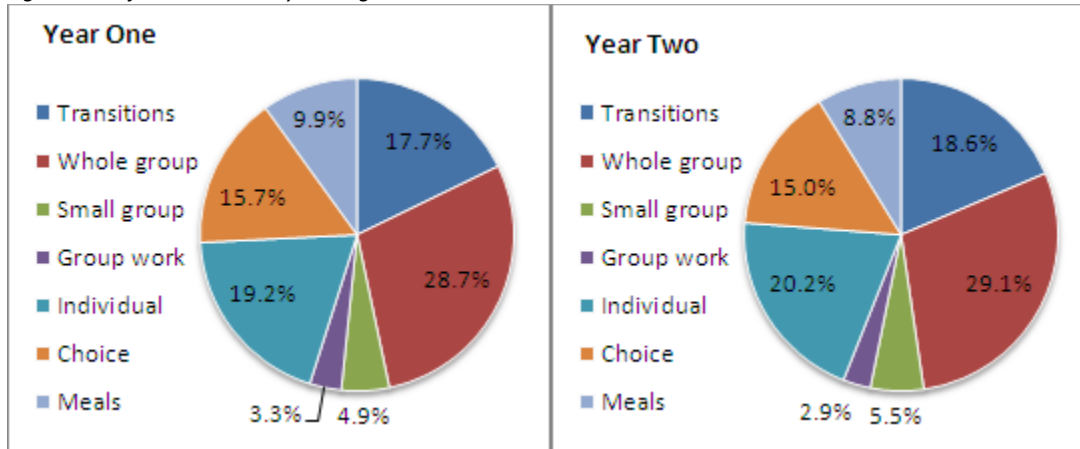
These key predictors were also analyzed to determine whether statistically significant change in the amount of time spent in each area occurred between Year One and Year Two for the project overall, by site, and by grade level. In addition, site-specific content area and teaching approach goals were identified through a review of FirstSchool's quarterly site visit reports. EduSnap results were reviewed to determine whether each site made progress in their identified goal areas.

Project Level Results

Activity Settings

An examination of activity settings for the project overall show a 1% increase in individual time and transitions and a slight increase in the amount of time spent in small group and in whole group settings (Figure 1.) These changes were not statistically significant.

Figure 1. Project Level Activity Settings - Years One and Two



Content Areas

For the project overall, there were increases in the percent of time students spent in several content areas between Year One and Year Two (Table 6.) In particular, there was a 3.7 point increase in oral language, a 1.2 point increase in vocabulary, and a 2.7 point increase in writing. These statistically significant changes⁴ point to a substantial shift in the classrooms' focus on literacy development. The increase in the amount of time students were engaged with science was also statistically significant.

Table 6. Project Level Content Areas - Years One and Two

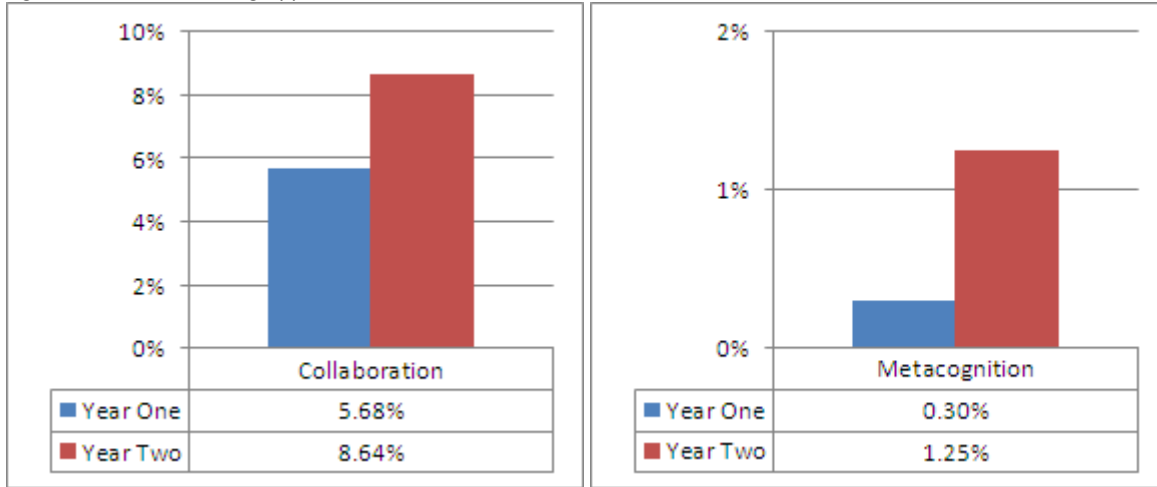
Content Area	Year One	Year Two
Read To	3.9%	4.5%
Reading	8.1%	6.9%
Comprehension	4.2%	4.2%
Word Identification	7.3%	6.2%
Vocabulary	2.0%	3.2%
Writing	3.5%	6.2%
Oral Language	11.2%	14.9%
Numbers	11.5%	11.6%
Geometry	3.3%	4.4%
Algebra	8.3%	9.9%
Science	3.6%	6.0%
Gross Motor	8.0%	7.3%
Social Studies	9.1%	9.9%
Aesthetics	5.7%	6.0%

⁴ Paired t-test; vocabulary: $t(52)=3.514$, $p=.001$; writing: $t(52)=2.922$, $p=.005$; oral language: $t(52)=2.649$, $p=.011$; science: $t(52)=2.249$, $p=.029$

Student Learning Approaches

Both of the student learning approaches tracked by EduSnap, collaboration and metacognition, are related to 3rd grade outcomes. Results show a statistically significant increase in the amount of time students utilize both approaches between Year One and Year Two (Figure 2)⁵.

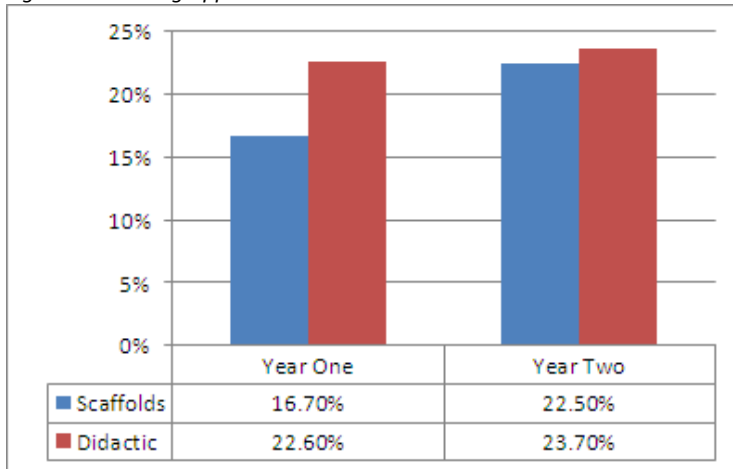
Figure 2. Student Learning Approaches - Years One and Two



Teaching Approaches

EduSnap data shown in Figure 3 reveal that children in the FirstSchool pilot project experienced statistically significantly more scaffolded instruction (engaging in academic conversation to promote deeper understanding and learning) in Year Two (22.5%) than they had in Year One (16.7%).⁶ According to FirstSchool, scaffolded instruction is a predictor for positive third grade outcomes. The use of a didactic approach (providing information, modeling and/or demonstrating) stayed relatively steady between Year One (22.6%) and Year Two (23.7%).

Figure 3. Teaching Approaches - Years One and Two



⁵ Paired t-test; collaboration: $t(52)=3.180$, $p=.002$; metacognition: $t(52)=4.884$, $p=.000$

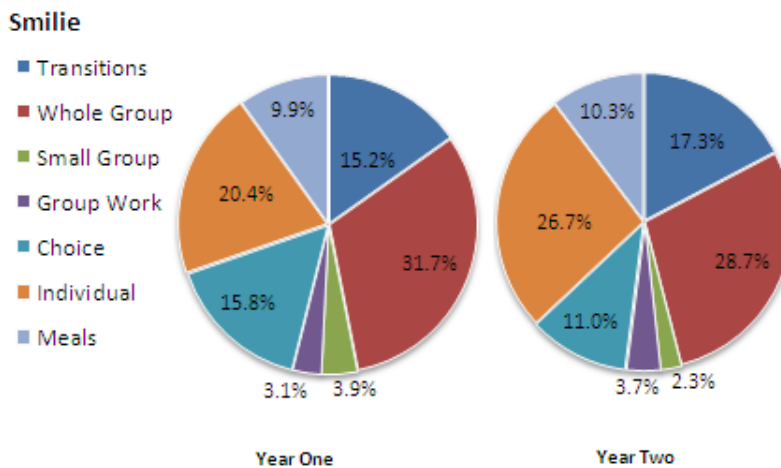
⁶ Paired t-test; $t(52)=3.322$, $p=.002$

Site Level Results

Activity Settings

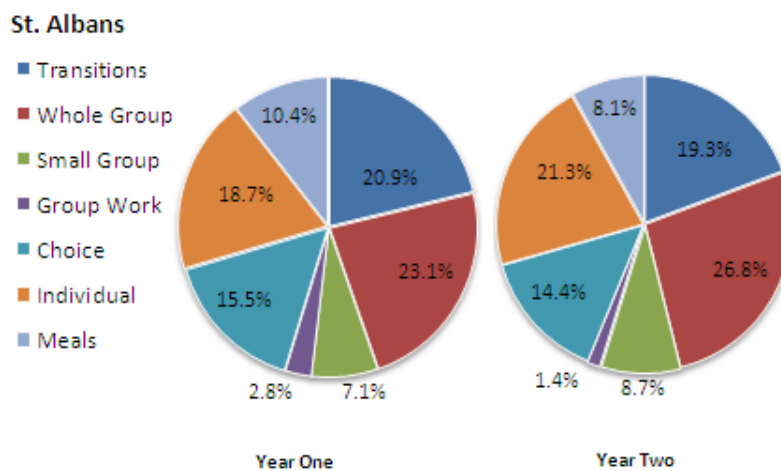
The FirstSchool site visit reports did not identify any particular goal at Smilie related to activity settings other than the desire to increase project-based learning. The Smilie site activity settings shifted to incorporate much more individual time while reducing whole group, small group, and choice activity settings (Figure 4.) There were moderate increases in transitions, group work, and meals. The result was a more balanced distribution of activity settings in Year Two, but due to the small sample size, these changes did not meet the threshold for statistical significance.

Figure 4. Activity Settings for Smilie - Years One and Two



At the St. Albans site, there was a slight shift to a greater percentage of time being spent in whole group, small group and individual settings with less time spent in choice, transitions, meals, and group work (Figure 5.) The only setting where there was a statistically significant difference was in meals.⁷ Site visit reports did not identify any goal related to activity settings for St. Albans.

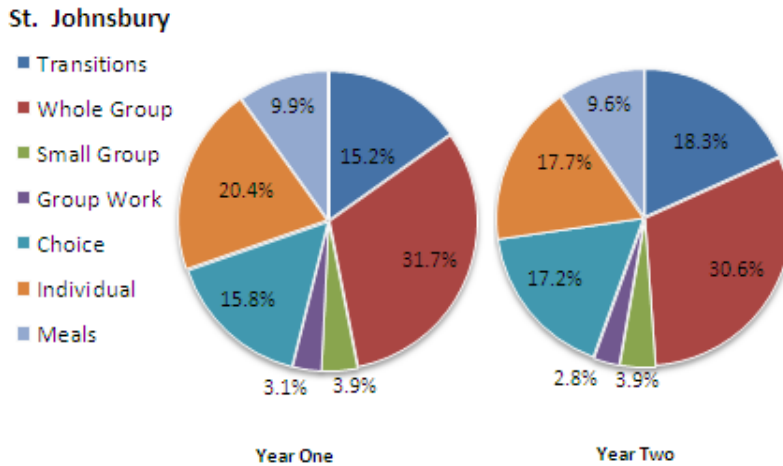
Figure 5. Activity Settings for St. Albans - Years One and Two



⁷ Paired t-test; $t(18)=-2.955$, $p=.008$

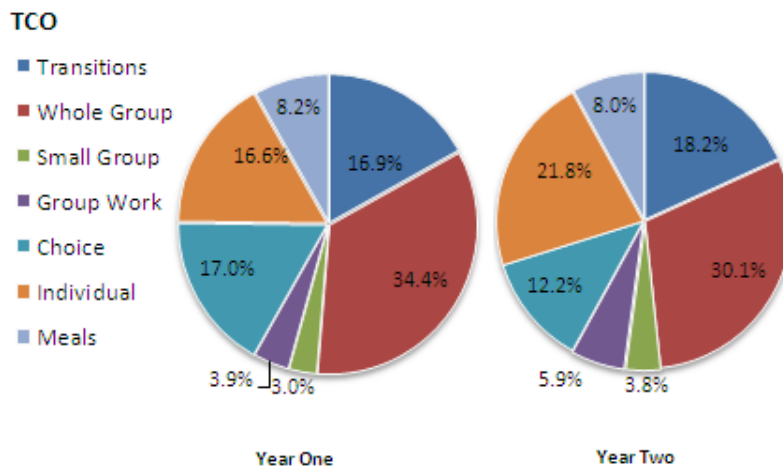
At the St. Johnsbury site, activity settings remained largely the same with the exception of small increases in transitions and choice and slight decreases in individual and whole group settings (Figure 6.) Analysis show a statistically significant difference in the amount of time spent in transitions between Year One and Year Two.⁸ St. Johnsbury had identified increasing the percent of time children spent in small groups. Data show that the percentage of time spent in small groups did not increase among teachers who were observed in both Year One and Year Two.

Figure 6. Activity Settings for St. Johnsbury - Years One and Two



EduSnap data show that at the Tunbridge, Chelsea, and Orange site, there were shifts in activity settings between Year One and Year Two (Figure 7.) Site visit reports showed that Tunbridge, in particular, had a goal of increasing small group time. In Year Two, children spent much less time in whole group and choice settings and increased the amount of time spent in individual, group work, and small group settings. Analysis show that the rather large percentage changes in activity settings are not statistically significant, most likely due to the small sample size.

Figure 7. . Activity Settings for TCO - Years One and Two



⁸ Paired t-test; t(21)=3.636, p=.002

Content Areas

Each pilot project site identified the content areas where they hoped to increase the amount of time children were engaged. For the most part, sites increased the percent of time children were observed to be engaged in those areas (*Table 7.*) Smilie increased the percent of time children spent engaged with vocabulary and writing, but decreased the amount of time spent with oral language. There was a statistically significant change between Year One and Year Two in vocabulary at the Smilie site.⁹

St. Albans dramatically increased the amount of time students spent with oral language and had a moderate increase in the amount of time engaged with vocabulary. There was a statistically significant change between Year One and Year Two in both reading and vocabulary at the St. Albans site.¹⁰

At St. Johnsbury students spent statistically significantly more time with both vocabulary, writing and oral language.¹¹ Of particular note is the increase in oral language at St. Johnsbury from 9.5% to 15.0%.

Tunbridge, Chelsea, and Orange students increased the amount of time they spent with vocabulary and science, but the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 7. Percent of Time Spent in Content Areas by Site

Content Area	Smilie		St. Albans		St. Johnsbury		TCO	
	Goal: oral language, writing, vocabulary		Goal: oral language, vocabulary		Goal: vocabulary, writing		Goal: vocabulary, science	
	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two
Read To	3.3%	4.7%	3.8%	4.3%	4.3%	4.2%	3.3%	5.6%
Reading	8.7%	10.0%	8.6%	5.5%	8.0%	7.9%	6.9%	7.0%
Comprehension	5.3%	2.3%	4.4%	3.5%	4.1%	4.3%	3.6%	6.1%
Word Identification	6.7%	7.7%	7.9%	6.4%	8.1%	6.6%	4.4%	4.3%
Vocabulary	0.0%	2.3%	2.4%	3.4%	1.5%	2.8%	3.0%	3.8%
Writing	8.7%	9.0%	2.1%	5.8%	3.2%	5.5%	5.4%	7.9%
Oral Language	8.3%	6.3%	11.1%	16.7%	9.5%	15.0%	16.2%	13.8%
Numbers	11.3%	11.3%	10.8%	13.1%	11.5%	10.5%	13.1%	11.0%
Geometry	2.0%	6.7%	3.3%	3.9%	3.7%	5.0%	2.6%	3.3%
Algebra	8.0%	7.7%	7.7%	9.3%	8.2%	9.9%	9.6%	11.8%
Science	5.3%	0.3%	4.5%	6.0%	3.3%	7.2%	1.9%	5.2%
Gross Motor	8.3%	4.7%	8.6%	9.3%	8.1%	6.3%	6.2%	6.3%
Social Studies	5.7%	1.7%	6.7%	9.9%	9.3%	10.9%	15.0%	10.2%
Aesthetics	6.0%	3.0%	4.9%	6.3%	6.2%	6.4%	5.8%	5.7%

Student Approaches

All sites increased the amount of time students spent in collaboration between Year One and Year Two (*Figure 8.*) The Tunbridge, Chelsea, and Orange site had articulated a desire to increase collaboration as part of their goal setting. The site doubled the amount of time students collaborate from 5.9% in Year One to 11.9% in Year Two. St. Albans' increase in collaboration reached statistical significance while the Tunbridge, Chelsea, Orange site approached statistical significance.¹²

⁹ Paired t-test; t(2)=7.000, p=.02

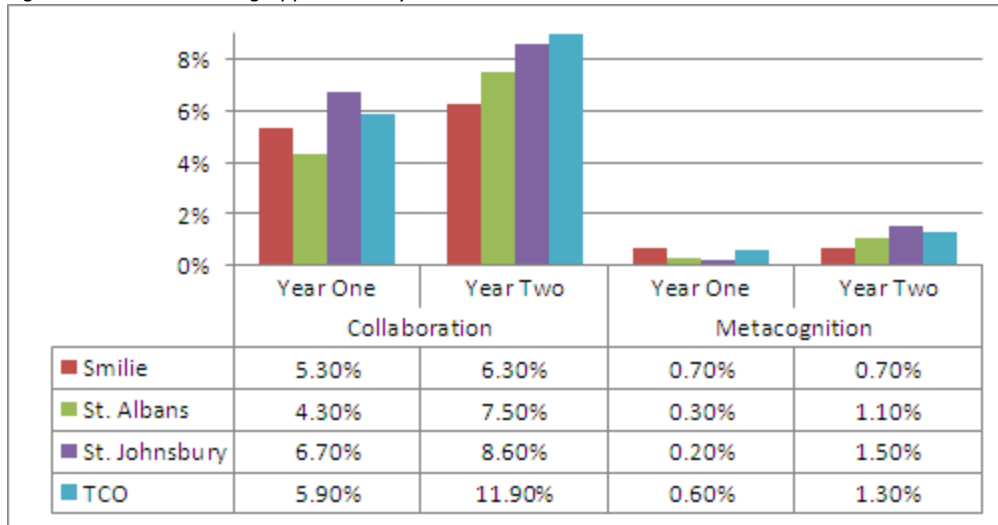
¹⁰ Paired t-test; reading: t(18)=2.337, p=.031. vocabulary: t(18)=2.626, p=.017

¹¹ Paired t-test; vocabulary: t(21)=2.758, p=.012. writing: t(21)=2.248, p=.035; oral language: t(21)=3.488, p=.002

¹² Paired t-test; St. Albans: t(18)=2.220, p=.039, TCO: t(8)=1.964, p=.085s

All sites, with the exception of Smilie, also increased the amount of time students were engaged with metacognition between Year One and Year Two. St. Johnsbury had identified increasing metacognition as one of their goals for the pilot project and increased the percent of time their students used the approach dramatically from 0.2% in Year One to 1.5% in Year Two. The change between Year One and Year Two in metacognition was statistically significant at both the St. Albans and St. Johnsbury sites.¹³

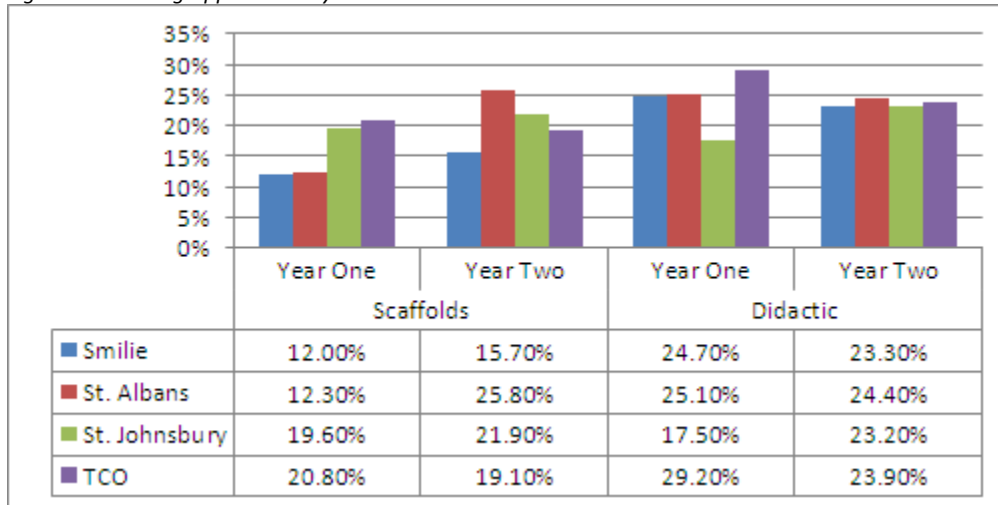
Figure 8. Student Learning Approaches by Site - Years One and Two



Teaching Approaches

Smilie, St. Albans, and St. Johnsbury increased the percent of time spent in scaffolded instruction (Figure 9.) St. Albans more than doubled the amount of time using this teaching approach between Year One and Year Two resulting in a statistically significant change¹⁴. The Tunbridge, Chelsea, Orange site had an statistically insignificant decrease in scaffolded instruction between Year One and Year Two.

Figure 9. Teaching Approaches by Site - Years One and Two



¹³ Paired t-test; St. Albans: $t(18)=2.616$, $p=.018$, St. Johnsbury: $t(21)=4.018$, $p=.001$

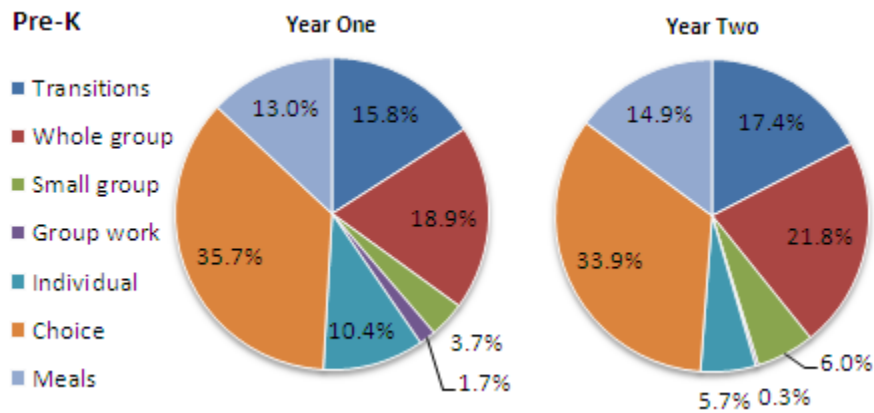
¹⁴ Paired t-test: $t(18)=4.676$, $p=.000$

Grade Level Results

Activity Settings

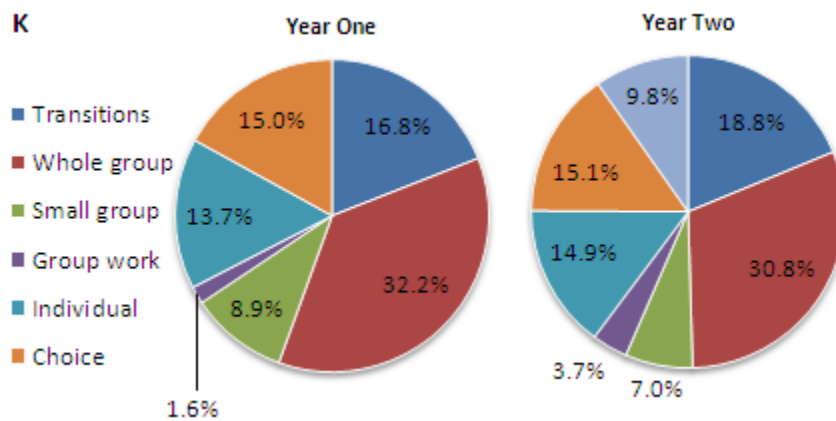
While it appears that the percent of time Pre-K students spent in activity settings became more balanced between Year One and Year Two, there was not a statistically significant difference found in any of the activity settings (*Figure 10.*)

Figure 10. Pre-K Activity Settings - Years One and Two



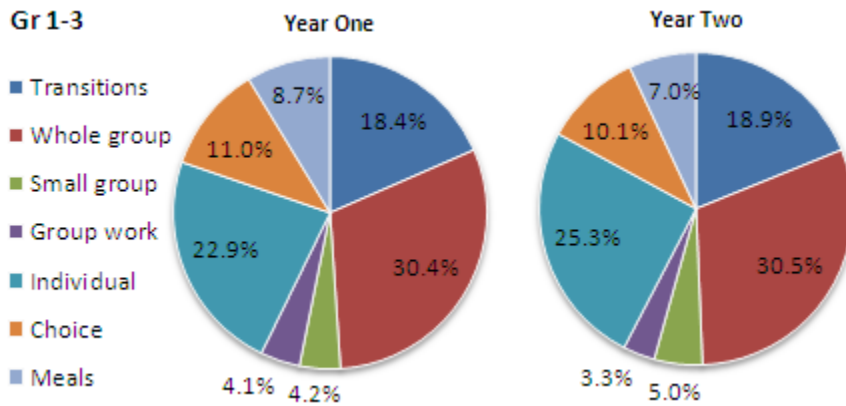
There was not a statistically significant difference found in any of the activity settings for Kindergarten students between Year One and Year Two (*Figure 11.*)

Figure 11. Kindergarten Activity Settings - Years One and Two



There was not a statistically significant difference found in any of the activity settings for Grade 1-3 students (*Figure 12*) between Year One and Year Two with the exception of Meals which decreased from 8.7% of students' time to 7.0%.

Figure 12. Grades 1-3 Activity Settings - Years One and Two



Content Areas

A review of the percent of time students spent in content area by grade level revealed some significant changes (Table 8.) Pre-K students in the pilot project were engaged statistically significantly more often in vocabulary and algebra. In addition, the increase in time Pre-K students spent engaged with numbers and gross motor activities approached statistical significance.¹⁵ Kindergarteners experienced statistically significant increases in the amount of time they spent with vocabulary, oral language, algebra and science between Year One and Year Two.¹⁶ Children in Grades 1-3 increased the amount of time they spent in writing, oral language and geometry between Years One and Two.¹⁷

Table 8. Percent of Time Spent in Content Areas by Grade Level

Content Area	Pre-K		K		Gr 1 to 3	
	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two
Read To	3.3%	4.0%	5.3%	4.3%	3.7%	4.7%
Reading	3.6%	2.9%	4.7%	6.9%	10.1%	8.1%
Comprehension	1.8%	1.6%	2.7%	2.8%	5.2%	5.3%
Word Identification	3.9%	6.1%	13.9%	11.3%	6.5%	4.9%
Vocabulary	0.6%	1.9%	1.2%	3.2%	2.6%	3.5%
Writing	0.6%	0.3%	3.7%	4.9%	4.2%	8.1%
Oral Language	16.3%	16.6%	10.1%	16.4%	10.1%	14.1%
Numbers	2.8%	6.0%	8.2%	10.6%	14.6%	13.3%
Geometry	7.9%	7.4%	5.0%	4.6%	1.7%	3.6%
Algebra	1.3%	4.9%	3.9%	9.9%	11.1%	11.1%
Science	4.0%	7.1%	3.3%	8.0%	3.6%	5.3%
Gross Motor	12.8%	8.2%	7.6%	6.9%	6.9%	7.1%
Social Studies	13.2%	17.8%	10.7%	9.6%	7.7%	8.0%
Aesthetics	8.8%	11.7%	8.2%	7.1%	4.2%	4.3%

¹⁵ Paired t-test: vocabulary: t(8)=2.530, p=.035, algebra: t(8)=2.512, p=.036, numbers: t(8)=2.100, p=.069, gross motor: t(8)=2.181, p=.061

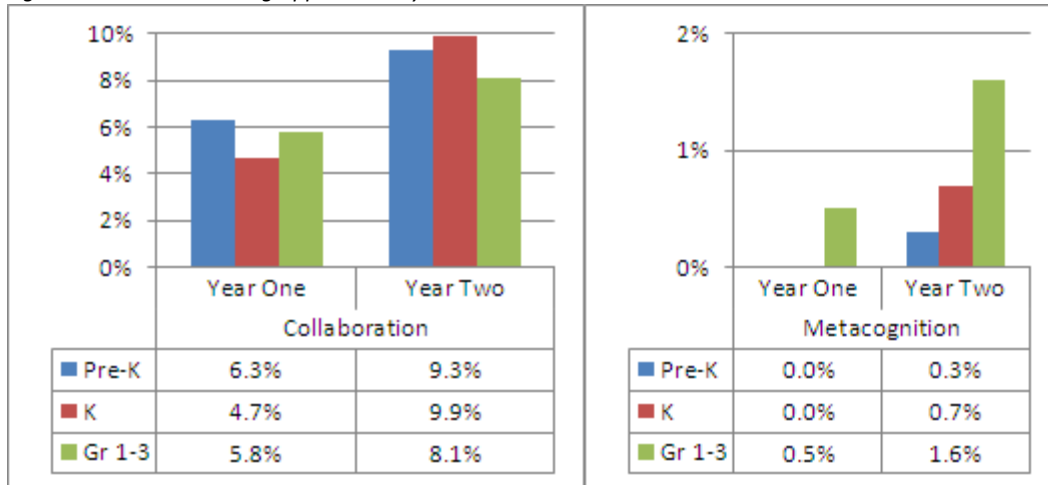
¹⁶ Paired t-test: vocabulary: t(8)=6.000, p=.000, oral language: t(8)=2.352, p=.047, algebra: t(8)=3.286, p=.011, science: t(8)=3.255, p=.012

¹⁷ Paired t-test: writing: t(34)=3.018, p=.005, oral language: t(34)=3.230, p=.003, geometry: t(34)=2.526, p=.016

Student Learning Approaches

While children in Pre-K increased the amount of time they spent engaged with collaboration and metacognition, analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between Years One and Two (Figure 13.) In contrast, kindergarten students and students in grades 1 to 3 engaged in collaboration and metacognition statistically significantly more often in Year Two than they had in Year One.¹⁸

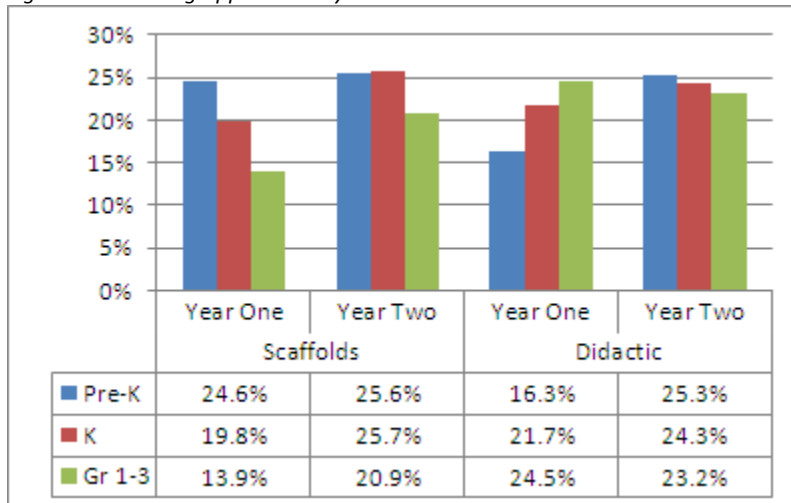
Figure 13. Student Learning Approaches by Grade Level - Years One and Two



Teaching Approaches

Pre-K students experienced statistically significantly more didactic instruction in Year Two than they had in Year One while students in Grades 1-3 experienced significantly more scaffolded instruction (Figure 14.)¹⁹

Figure 14. Teaching Approaches by Grade Level - Years One and Two



¹⁸ Paired t-test; K: collaboration $t(8)=2.950$, $p=.018$, metacognition: $t(8)=2.309$, $p=.050$; Gr 1-3: collaboration: $t(34)=2.125$, $p=.041$, metacognition: $t(34)=4.333$, $p=.000$

¹⁹ Paired t-test; K: didactic $t(8)=2.792$, $p=.023$; Gr 1-3: scaffolds $t(34)=4.706$, $p=.000$

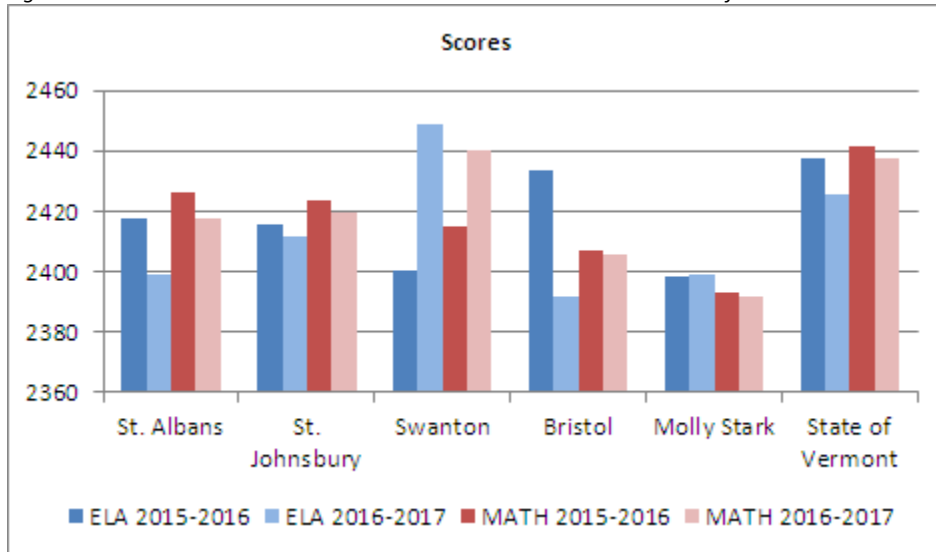
3RD GRADE ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

A comparison of the 3rd grade achievement scores from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Smarter Balanced Assessments was conducted on two²⁰ of the FirstSchool pilot project schools (St. Albans and St. Johnsbury), three comparable non-pilot schools (Swanton, Bristol, and Molly Stark) and the State of Vermont. It appears from the data that the pilot project was unsuccessful in meeting the goal articulated in the RTT-ELC grant proposal that “3rd grade reading and mathematics achievement levels of children in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities are significantly higher than comparable children that are not in the Pre-K - 3rd Grade learning communities.” However, there are several limitations to these data including the short time frame of the project, the lack of data for two of the four pilot project sites, and the newness of the Smarter Balanced Assessments. As such, it is Horn Research’s opinion that these data give very little insight into the value of the FirstSchool project and they should not be relied on to determine whether the pilot project was successful. The data are provided for reference.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Scores

Third grade ELA and MATH scores at schools across Vermont declined between the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 testing periods including at the two pilot project schools and one of the three comparison schools (Figure 15.) Because standard deviation data is not available, it is not possible to determine whether the decreases are statistically significant. An examination of the percent change in scores show that both St. Albans and St. Johnsbury scores decreased by less than 1% (Table 9.)

Figure 15. 3rd Grade ELA and MATH Smarter Balanced Assessment Scores for Years One and Two



²⁰ Data was not available for Smilie, Tunbridge, Orange, and Chelsea due to small class size

Table 9. Percent Increase or Decrease in 3rd Grade ELA and MATH Scores between Years One and Two

	Percent Increase/Decrease	
	<i>ELA</i>	<i>MATH</i>
St. Albans	-0.79%	-0.34%
St. Johnsbury	-0.18%	-0.14%
Swanton	2.04%	+1.03%
Bristol	-1.71%	-0.05%
Molly Stark	0.03%	-0.03%
Vermont	-0.50%	-0.18%

Smarter Balanced Assessment Percent Proficient

In addition to the average scores from the Smarter Balanced Assessments, Vermont Agency of Education also provides the percent of students who tested proficient in both ELA and MATH. The percent of third-grade students found to be proficient in ELA decreased in the two pilot project schools, two of the comparison schools and the state of Vermont overall (*Figure 16.*) The decrease in the percent of students proficient in ELA ranged widely among (*Table 10.*) For MATH, St. Albans and St. Johnsbury both increased the percent of third-grade students identified as proficient between Year One and Year Two.

Figure 16. Percent of 3rd Graders Proficient in ELA and MATH for Years One and Two

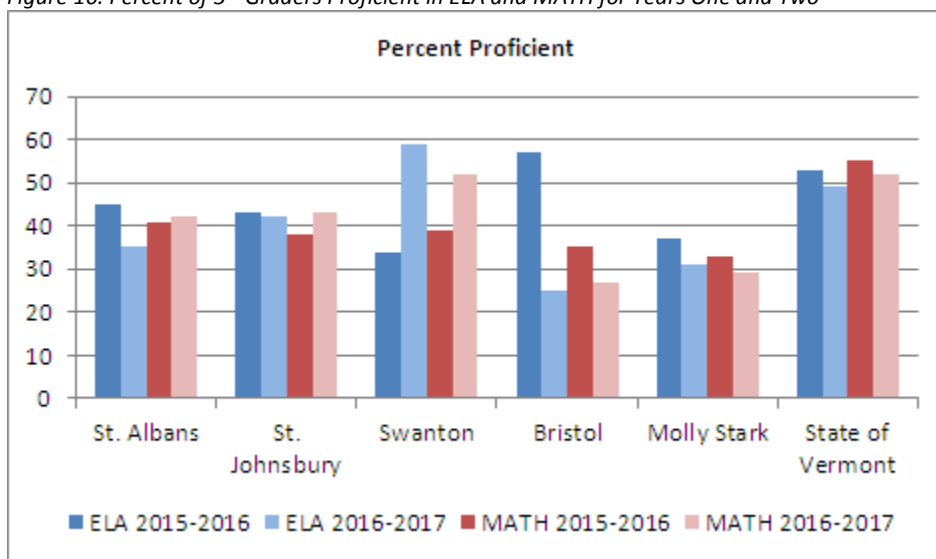


Table 10. Percent Increase or Decrease in 3rd Graders Proficient in ELA and MATH between Years One and Two

	Percent Increase/Decrease	
	<i>ELA</i>	<i>MATH</i>
St. Albans	-22.2%	2.4%
St. Johnsbury	-2.3%	13.2%
Swanton	73.5%	33.3%
Bristol	-56.1%	-22.9%
Molly Stark	-16.2%	-12.1%
Vermont	-7.5%	-5.5%

Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible Students

One of the key goals of the RTT-ELC is to reduce the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. In both the 2015-2016 and the 2016-2017 school years, FRL students scored significantly lower than other non-FRL students in both pilot schools and non-pilot schools. The gap between FRL and non-FRL student scores and percent proficient increased in the pilot schools and at one comparison school for both ELA and MATH. St. Johnsbury had the biggest discrepancy between FRL and non-FRL in the percent of students meeting the proficiency criteria for both ELA and MATH (*Table 11 & Table 12.*)

Table 11. Percent Gap in Achievement in ELA Scores and Percentage deemed Proficient between 3rd Grade FRL and Non-FRL Students in Years One and Two

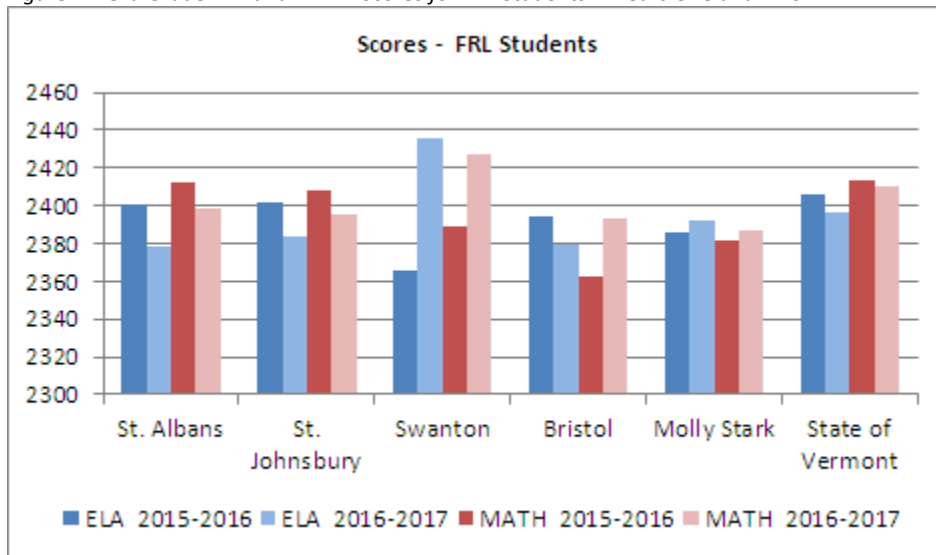
ELA	Scores		Percent Proficient	
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2015-2016	2016-2017
St. Albans	-53.5	-61.4	-23.8%	-32.6%
St. Johnsbury	-42.8	-98.8	-16.7%	-33.3%
Swanton	-59.6	-33.7	-27.4%	-19.4%
Bristol	-67.3	-29.2	-38.6%	-14.3%
Molly Stark	-28.9	-30.6	+7.7	-9.0%

Table 12. Percent Gap in Achievement in MATH Scores and Percentage deemed Proficient between 3rd Grade FRL and Non-FRL Students in Years One and Two

MATH	Scores		Percent Proficient	
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2015-2016	2016-2017
St. Albans	-40.6	-58.8	-23.7%	-27.4%
St. Johnsbury	-46.7	-86.9	-10.4%	-39.6
Swanton	-44.9	-30.3	-16.3%	-23.8%
Bristol	-77.2	-29.0	-40.4%	-21.0%
Molly Stark	-26.2	-24.1	0.0%	-12.0%

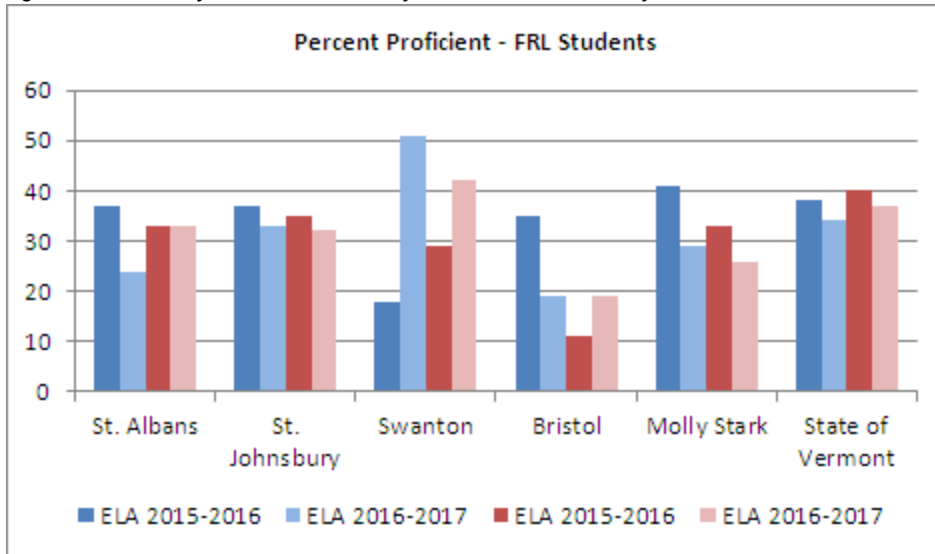
When comparing the Year One and Year Two scores of 3rd grade FRL students only, data show that ELA scores declined at both pilot project schools and increased in two of the comparison schools (*Figure 17.*) MATH scores declined at both pilot project schools and increased in all three of the comparison schools.

Figure 17. 3rd Grade ELA and MATH Scores for FRL Students in Years One and Two



The percentage of 3rd grade FRL students scoring proficient in ELA and MATH was lower at both St. Albans and St. Johnsbury in Year Two than in Year One (*Figure 18.*) Swanton, a comparison school, increased the percent of FRL students scoring proficient in both ELA and MATH while Molly Stark’s percentages decreased.

Figure 18. Percent of FRL 3rd Graders Proficient in ELA and MATH for Years One and Two



PARTICIPANT QUALITATIVE DATA

At the final summer institute in 2017, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their experiences with FirstSchool. Participants shared their perception of the impact of the project on their schools and students as well as the successes, challenges, and concerns they have for the future. Participants' responses were analyzed by identifying, coding, and categorizing primary patterns in the data.

Impact

When asked to describe the impact the FirstSchool project had on their schools, classrooms, and students, participants most frequently commented on how their school and class environments had become much more supportive. Several participants said that changes made through the FirstSchool process had helped students to feel more loved, cared about, and appreciated. One participant shared, *"Children learned how to care for each other and how to become integral parts of their classrooms. They had jobs in the classroom before FirstSchool, but it became intrinsic that they were parts of their classrooms. They learned to care deeply and genuinely for each other, which in turn went home with them to care for their families."* Another participant said, *"The children in my classroom experienced an environment that engaged them in a "school family" learning setting. They developed a strong sense of caring about and for each other, being important, loved members of our family who are valued, noticed, and wished well each day. This foundation allowed them to more fully participate in all aspects of learning (trying, making mistakes and trying again or fixing their mistakes)."* Other participants shared how the supportive environment had allowed students to develop a greater interest in, and ownership of, their learning. A teacher shared, *"Students in my classroom were empowered to question their own thinking, my thinking and each other's. They were expected to be supportive of each other's thinking and learning."* Another participant remarked, *"The students in my classrooms became part of the process. They "owned" the classrooms equal to me. My students began to experience learning as something they were a part of, not something that was done onto them. They believed they were writers."*

Participants also said their students had gained independence through the FirstSchool project. One participant shared, *"We have seen an increase in student independence and confidence since our work with FirstSchool. Students feel a greater affinity with their classroom settings as they are rarely "sent away" for minor infractions. Students are now taking greater responsibility for their own actions and those of their classmates. They are learning to use their "big voices" and letting their friends know when conflict arises."* Another noted, *"Children have become more independent throughout the day. They have choice time daily (which did not always happen). Students can walk freely to and from the classroom. Students are feeling more like a group of learners."*

Participants said students had more opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences as a result of FirstSchool. One participant said, *"Over the past two years our students have become engaged and excited in the process of creating a culture of caring. I believe the students feel more heard and have felt more involved in our classroom setting."* Another shared, *"I have noticed a marked change in the teacher role in the schools I visit. The development of a real community classroom is evident, teachers are increasingly asking students to explain their thinking, small group work is increasing, and students have a voice in the classroom. "*

Participants also said that students were more able to self-regulate since implementing FirstSchool practices. One participant shared, *"Students were able to think about their feeling (neither as "good" or*

“bad”) but as something that we all have and learned how to regulate them within our space.” Another participant said, “Classroom communities were not only created but nurtured throughout the years. For those children starting as 3 year olds, rituals, language and routines were established and their second (and for some 3rd) year was familiar. Expectations were clear and children became more autonomous. Self-regulation led the classroom to self-governance. Children did not automatically look to the teacher for help but often, to one another. A culture of caring makes life much easier, less chaotic, more intentional and certainly requires mindfulness.” A teacher said that with the changes, “children were allowed to have big feelings and work through them (self-regulate).”

Participants said that the training and support from FirstSchool as well as the EduSnap and CLASS data had been integral in their success. One participant said, *“Because of the Conscious Discipline training that came out of this experience, children in our school feel even more part of a school family than before this. Our PreK-3 collaboration has made it possible for children to feel connected to school much sooner than before when they started just in kindergarten.”* Another said, *“Overall, the use of the data instruments, use of data, Conscious Discipline book groups, and consultants transformed our classrooms and our schools.”* Another noted, *“Being a part of this experience really helped me to look at data in a whole new light. The data we collected as part of this project helped me to influence my practice. I put a huge emphasis on read aloud, oral language and collaboration. The pieces we worked on in relation to the culture of caring transformed our classroom community. Students seemed to be more connected and willing to endure more social conflict in stressful peer situations.”* Another shared, *“I am noting that the focus on specific initiatives, based on the data we received from Edusnap and CLASS, has improved classroom teaching practices and the culture of the school. We were, once again, given permission to take the time needed to developing caring classroom communities. It was great to have PreK-3rd receive similar training and feedback as to Best Practices.”*

Keys to Success

When asked to describe what about the FirstSchool pilot project worked well for them, participants most frequently commented on the *Conscious Discipline* training and the EduSnap data. One participant said, *“The Conscious Discipline training has changed me as a professional. I have a better understanding of how changing me changes the reactions from children.”* Another said, *“The Conscious Discipline work was immediately tangible strategies that I could take to my class after reading each chapter and try out. It provided me with immediate feedback about how powerful the strategies and talk are.”* Another shared, *“I liked feeling part of a community that was implementing Conscious Discipline. I liked knowing that other teachers were doing this in my school and our partner schools. There was excitement and there still is. I loved learning about all the techniques of talking with students and creating a classroom community. It was easy to implement and I could appreciate the reasoning behind it.”* A teacher said, *“Conscious Discipline has been amazing! The book, theory, and practice of it are amazing and is something that I truly foster and believe in as an educator and individual.”* Another remarked, *“Conscious Discipline has been a great resource. I’ve really begun to look at the reasons kids sometimes frustrate me. I’ve learned to S.T.A.R (Smile, Take a deep breath, And Relax) (a lot) and am much better able to empathize with where my kids are coming from and what might be causing problems. This has been huge!”*

Participants also noted the importance of the EduSnap and CLASS data in helping them refine their practice. One participant said, *“The EduSnap information was so helpful in reflecting on my teaching practices and being mindful of what I do teach and how I teach it.”* Another said, *“I loved getting trained in EduSnap and CLASS because it allowed me the opportunity to tweak, improve, and validate my teaching.”* Another participant shared, *“Being able to see data through a day, or a few hours, of the lens*

of my students was super powerful. This allowed me to see what was a strength and what I needed to work on. I was able to think about things differently.” Another remarked, “The EduSnap and CLASS data helped me look at those areas I needed to focus more on and how shifting my intent and use of structures could make a big difference in my students experiences as learners.” An administrator said, “I was able to see the value of data in terms of instructional practices, impact on individual and groups of students and also how to support adults with their data.” A teacher explained, “The EduSnap (data) has given me a powerful lens to use in my role as an instructional leader. I am more intentional about the questions I ask and am working to hone my skills and repertoire of techniques so that I can better facilitate the process of collective inquiry.”

Several participants said the support and guidance they received from FirstSchool staff was vital to the success of the project. One participant said, *“The leadership of UNC FirstSchool professionals was amazing to all of the pilot schools in Vermont. I know that the work that has been made during the last two-plus years will sustain itself.”* Another said, *“It was great to have the First School team here along every step of the way. They were all very validating, as well as, moved me forward in my own professional growth by questioning and prompting.”* Another participant shared, *“I really loved the data, feedback and coaching from the FirstSchool team. I trusted and felt supported by them.”*

Participants also said they appreciated having the time and opportunity to work in teams within their own school community as well as collaborate with cohorts from other schools across the state. An administrator shared, *“Time away with staff over the course of the last two years was critical. And working with, while hearing from, similar public schools in Vermont was critical as a cohort group.”* Another shared, *“Not only did we learn from educators across the state working with this grant, but that was a nice complement to the team from FirstSchool in terms of new learning and collaborative learning environments.”* Another participant said, *“I enjoyed connecting with others that held the same position as I had in other places with the state. I loved the fact that the schools got to know our early ed staff and program, and we truly worked together to plan goals for our schools and families.”* A teacher remarked, *“Creating a reflective school community and having administrative buy-in was and is particularly important.”* Another teacher said, *“Being part of a larger group to discuss and brainstorm was great. Having the people from (FirstSchool) to guide us on our journey was very helpful (as was) hearing from other schools and hearing about their struggles.”* Another shared, *“I liked being part of this team and working closely with my colleagues. It was great getting to interact with those who are in other schools and learning from them what has worked and why, how they did it, and what shifts have been made in order to meet student needs and bring the focus back.”*

Challenges

Participants were asked to describe what challenges and concerns they had throughout the FirstSchool pilot project. The most frequently noted concern was the lack of data collection for EduSnap, CLASS and TS Gold. Participants said these tools were important and it was difficult to lose access to the data during the pilot project. One teacher was frustrated with the, *“lack of follow-through in support of EduSnap and CLASS data as well as TS Gold Expanded. Our teachers were really excited and motivated to change practices to achieve competencies in the 3rd grade indicators or success. EduSnap/CLASS were measures we wanted to use to drive professional development and chart individual, team, and school progress. We also hoped to fully implement TS Gold Expanded from PreK-3 to encourage parents and teachers to see children through a developmental lens. We were discouraged when both the data collection and TS Gold platform was not supported.”* Another teacher said, *“I was not happy that half of staff was trained in TS Gold Strategies and then was told that we weren’t going to continue with it the second year. Why not? And when will we? I felt it very valuable to have that continuum of data.”*

Another remarked, *“Lacking in all of the data collections was frustrating for me.”* Another teacher shared, *“I became very frustrated when we were told that we would not be able to access EduSnap or CLASS. The data from these tools was and is very important to our work.”*

Some participants said they felt the lack of continuity with the data collection was due to AOE’s lack of support for the pilot project. One administrator said, *“My major concern has been the lack of visible support for FirstSchool from the AOE.”* A teacher shared, *“The turnover and immense workload at the AOE, with the Race to the Top work and multiple initiatives, was a disservice to the FirstSchool work reaching its full potential. This is one piece of the Race to the Top work that I would like to see come back at some point when more attention can be paid to it. It can be used to further both the e-MTSS & SPDG work cohesively, instead of as separate pilots. I’d also like to see more opportunities for EduSnap training.”* Another participant said, *“I am concerned about the disconnect with the FirstSchool grant and the funding from the AOE. The EduSnap data, CLASS data, and TS Gold all provided consistency, accountability, data to drive growth and evident improvements. However, all of these fell apart. The data collections were not frequent or did not happen and TS Gold completely fell through. I believe these are crucial in moving forward with a PreK-3 focus.”* Some participants shared concern that there would not be continued support to ensure the sustainability of the work. One participant said, *“(One of my) long term concerns (is whether) there will be resources and support from the AOE to sustain the work.”*

Participants also noted they had challenges with buy-in among staff within their own school communities. One teacher said, *“A concern has been how to get all adults on board (specials teachers, librarian, guidance, support, paras, etc.) so we are consistent in our intentions throughout the entire school day.”* Another teacher remarked it was a challenge *“having everyone in the work environment be on the same page.”* Another said, *“How to help those who don’t buy in feel comfortable making a change was tricky.”* Another participant mentioned, *“Trying to have co-workers be on board. Especially when my students go to specials and the atmosphere is very different.”* A teacher said, *“Some teachers do not see this as a personal mindset shift but still think of this as a way to ‘change kids.’”*

Several participants noted they had concerns about students they felt they couldn’t reach through the conscious discipline approach and feeling unsure about how to proceed. One participant said, *“One of my ongoing concerns is how to handle situations with the “15%” of children that the conscious discipline approach doesn’t seem to work with. What supports/intervention is appropriate for the most challenging students?”* Another said, *“There are still some students for whom the things we try just don’t seem to be working. What do you do with an 8 year old who looks you in the eye and says, “I can do this all day,” when he’s refusing a direction over and over. For me, that’s a piece that’s still missing.”* A couple of participants said they were concerned about how to reach students who are and have experienced trauma. One administrator said, *“Although it isn’t changing how we operate, but it is still difficult to reach those children who experience intense trauma when they aren’t with us. We are still striving to meet everyone’s needs. I worry about the second hand trauma our teachers experience and how to handle that as an administrator.”*

Going Forward

When asked if they felt the FirstSchool pilot project had enhanced the potential of Vermont, participants resoundingly agreed. One participant said, *“I do and hope we can continue the work as we strive toward our vision. I believe our work helped highlight areas we collectively and individually can/ should/must focus on to move forward.”* Another said, *“Yes, I believe our work enhanced the potential of Vermont to support quality PreK-3 education. It started a valid, valuable conversation which highlighted areas we need to continue to align.”* Another participant shared, *“I believe that the work we did enhance the*

potential of our PreK-3 education. We have over the last three years have created a network, received training, and development a common “language” base on how to begin to meet the needs of students.” A teacher replied, “Yes! Getting the professionals and systems together and collaborating for all kids PK-grade 3 certainly got the ball rolling in the right direction. These collaborations and this work needs to find a way to continue!” Another participant shared, “Yes, I think it will help. All of the progress that has been shown through various means like EduSnap, CLASS, TS Gold, etc. shows the growth that is being made within this. In addition, our comments, worries, successes, etc. will hopefully help show the state the need and importance of supporting this program and the overall education taking place in our state.”

Participants were asked what questions and concerns they had going forward from the pilot project. The bulk of participants were concerned about how to sustain the work that had been accomplished and wondered what supports would be in place for continuing their efforts. One administrator said, *“I worry about the sustainability of this work if it is not supported at the SU or state level.”* Some participants questioned whether they would have continued access to FirstSchool staff and EduSnap. One teacher asked, *“How can we help to make a greater impact in our schools, surrounding communities, and our state. Will FirstSchool be able to support us in some way? Will our schools have funding/ access to EduSnap, CLASS, and TS Gold PreK-3? How will the pilot schools and FirstSchool continue to communicate and move this amazing work forward?”* Another asked, *“Will AOE continue to support the initiatives and further “grow” this work?”* Another teacher said, *“How will the state support and continue the work we have started? Is there a plan? Who will be leading it?”* Another participant echoed, *“How will the state AOE help schools to continue with his work? What are the next steps?”*

Several participants noted they had concerns about AOE’s commitment to ensuring the progress made is not lost. A participant said, *“I believe we enhanced the potential by providing useful data to classroom teachers, administration and support teachers. However, it makes me wonder if the AOE sees the enhancement given there are no plans to expand the project and keep the teams going. Feels we are on the brink of starting some second order changes and I would hate to see this not happen.”* Another participant said, *“I believe that this work has been great for the pilot schools in the state of Vermont. I don’t think that the state has a clear vision on how this will impact the rest of the state.”* Another noted, *“Without support it will probably be lost along the way.”* Another participant said, *“It was very important that the AOE was able to attend and listen to a variety of our concerns. I hope they all understood that we need partnerships and that we were not trying to be adversarial. I do believe that our input will be critical to the AOE to support quality PreK-3 education.”*

CONCLUSION

Despite several challenges in implementation and gaps in the data collection, analyses suggest that the FirstSchool pilot project has successfully met the goals outlined in the RTT-ELC grant proposal and that continued and enhanced support of the FirstSchool concept would be a benefit to the Vermont educational system. Students in the pilot schools experienced greater exposure to key content areas and teaching approaches while engaging in collaboration and metacognition more frequently. Participants uniformly agree that the FirstSchool approach has positively changed the culture of their schools and classrooms and created an environment where students feel supported and are engaged in learning. While the results of FirstSchool pilot project are generally positive, it is clear that more robust support and engagement from AOE will be required for the benefits to continue and expand to other learning communities across Vermont. On-going access to the observational data collection tools such as EduSnap and CLASS in conjunction with coaching and professional development opportunities will provide the pilot schools and other learning communities the opportunity to continue to improve current teaching practices. In addition, support for the pilot schools to share their experience with other learning communities will offer the prospect of expanding the vision for a coordinated Pre-K through grade 3 system.

DATA NOTES

Table 13. Number of Teachers with Data from Years One and Two in Pilot Project by Site and School

Site	School	Number of Teachers	Percent of Total
Smilie	Smilie	3	5.7%
St. Albans	St. Albans	19	35.8%
St. Johnsbury	St. Johnsbury	22	41.5%
TCO	Tunbridge	3	5.7%
TCO	Chelsea	5	9.4%
TCO	Orange	1	1.9%

Table 14. Re-Categorization of Grade Level and Number of Teachers by Grade Level

Original Categories			Re-categorization		
Grade	Number	Percent	Grade	Number	Percent
Pre-K	4	7.6%	Pre-K	9	17.0%
Pre-K Community	2	3.8%			
Pre-K School	3	5.7%	1-3	35	66.0%
K	9	17.0%			
1	4	7.5%			
2	4	7.5%			
3	8	15.1%			
1 & 2	4	7.5%			
2 & 3	0	0.0%			
3 & 4	1	1.9%			
Explorers (1-3)	2	3.8%			
Imagination (1-3)	4	7.5%			
Investigators (1-3)	4	7.5%			
Travelers (1-3)	4	7.5%			