



2014

# FAST START

Training Better Teachers Faster, with  
Focus, Practice and Feedback

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why a Fast Start Matters

Conventional wisdom about new teachers is loaded with misperceptions. For example, it is a common belief that success for a first-year teacher means simply surviving, and that true instructional skill develops only with more experience on the job.

The facts say otherwise. In our 2013 report, *Leap Year*, we showed that some new teachers begin to thrive in the classroom almost immediately, and that many others improve by leaps and bounds in their first few months. But many new teachers really do struggle every day—and these teachers are far less likely than their peers to ever become effective, even years later. Assuming that struggling novices will become dramatically better teachers over time is a bad bet that schools across the country make every year, one that leads mainly to mediocre instruction and lackluster student learning. In *Leap Year*, we discussed how schools can identify which of their first-year teachers are most likely to be successful over the long run and respond appropriately.

But there's another important question to consider: If a teacher's initial success in the classroom is so important, how can teacher preparation programs help more teachers get off to a fast start?

*If a teacher's initial success in the classroom is so important, how can teacher preparation programs help more teachers get off to a fast start?*

There are thousands of programs across the country that train prospective teachers, yet very few understand or impart the skills teachers need to be effective right away. In fact, most preparation programs don't even try to teach specific instructional skills, focusing instead on theory and concepts that may be important in the long term but probably won't help first-year teachers. It's like teaching rookie firefighters about combustion and fluid dynamics, but not how to operate a ladder.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed explanation of the shortcomings of teacher preparation in the U.S., see the National Council for Teacher Quality *Teacher Prep Review* (2013); Levine, A. (2006). *Educating School Teachers*, Washington, D.C.: The Education Schools Project; and MetLife Foundation (2006). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, Expectations and Experiences*.

Instead, the responsibility for practical teacher development falls to districts and schools that hire novice teachers—a responsibility they rarely have the capacity to fulfill. As a result, too many new teachers struggle to reach their students because they lack the basic skills to do so. The field of teacher preparation is falling short of its most important responsibility: ensuring the teachers we train are ready to do the job.

We should know. For more than a decade, our own preparation programs produced teachers who were no more or less effective than teachers from any other program—some were great, some were poor, most were about average. To us, these results were unacceptable. Our teachers were not nearly skilled enough to consistently help all their students achieve at high levels. We were part of the problem.

Over the course of several years, we've worked hard to develop a new approach to teacher preparation. As we discussed in *Leap Year*, we began by setting clearer, higher expectations that our teachers need to meet in their first year in order to earn certification. We knew that simply expecting more was not enough. We needed to help our teachers meet those expectations. To do that, we decided to rebuild our pre-service training program from the ground up, based on the latest research and our own experiences with tens of thousands of new teachers.

The result was an approach to teacher preparation we call Fast Start. It's radically different than the typical pre-service training program. Fast Start places a singular focus on helping teachers master basic, essential

instructional skills. Instead of racing to cover every aspect of good teaching, Fast Start focuses on four skills teachers must master to be effective right away, and lays the foundation for learning more advanced skills down the road.

Unlike most programs, Fast Start is not grounded in exposure to theory, but in intensive practice of the skills teachers are called upon to use every day—because what teachers can actually do in their own classrooms

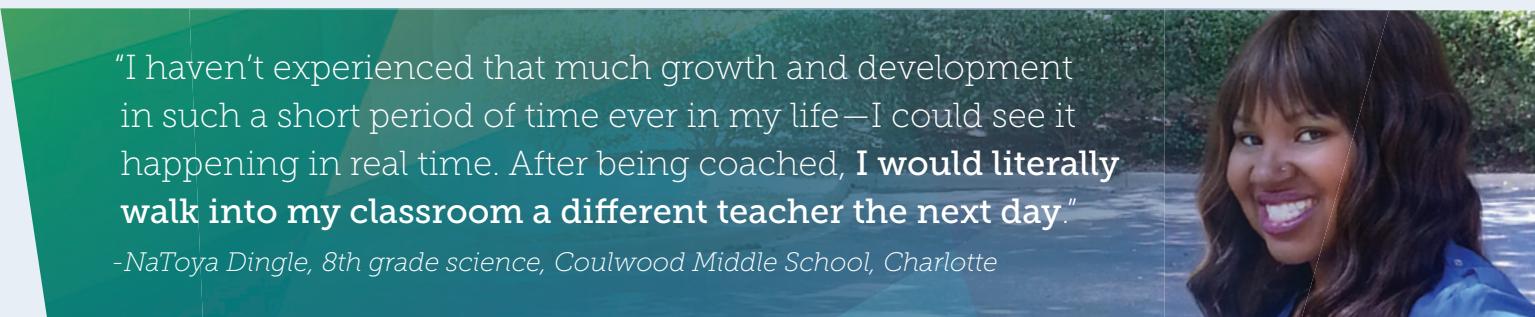
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matters more than what they have read about in a textbook. Instead of expecting prospective teachers to improve on their own, Fast Start gives teachers specific feedback on what they should do differently in their very next lesson.

This paper is the story of Fast Start. We will explain exactly how we transformed our approach to pre-service training and built Fast Start, and what we've learned along the way. We hope that our experience—including our failures—can serve as a road map for other preparation programs that want to find new ways to help new teachers find success.



"I haven't experienced that much growth and development in such a short period of time ever in my life—I could see it happening in real time. After being coached, I **would literally walk into my classroom a different teacher the next day.**"

-NaToya Dingle, 8th grade science, Coulwood Middle School, Charlotte

## BACKGROUND

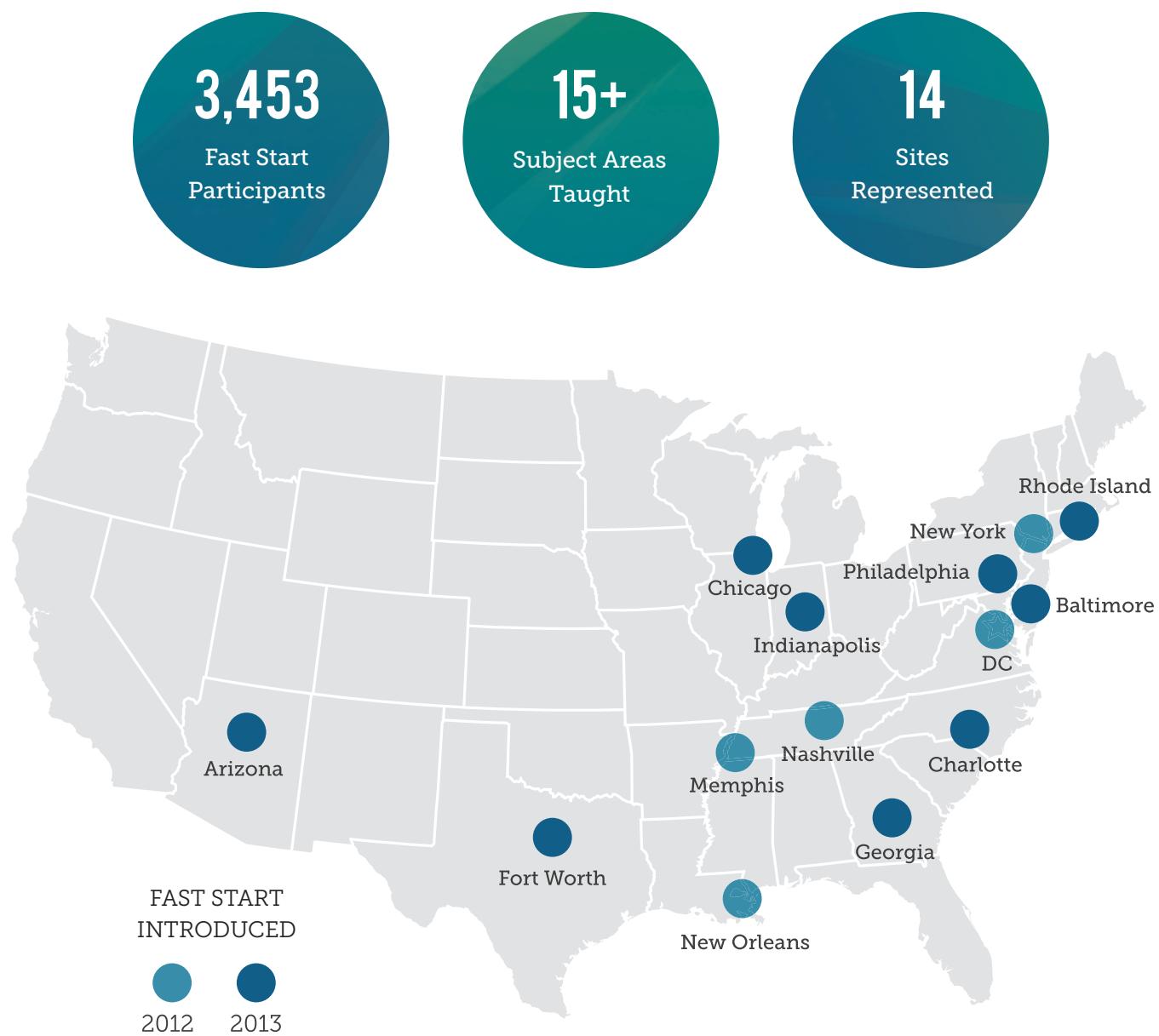
### TNTP's History with Teacher Training

TNTP is one of the largest teacher preparation programs in the United States. Since 1997, we have recruited or trained more than 50,000 teachers for urban classrooms, mainly in hard-to-staff subject areas such as special education, math, science and bilingual education. We have done this work primarily through our TNTP Teaching Fellows programs, which attract accomplished, demographically diverse career-changers and recent college graduates to teach in cities across the country. Currently, we operate Teaching Fellows programs in 14 locations.

Most of our teacher preparation programs use the same basic approach. Teachers participate in an intensive five-week pre-service training during the summer before their first year of teaching. Throughout that first year, they receive coaching and support from TNTP, and complete their training by attending evening seminars. At the end of the year, teachers are either recommended for certification or not based on the results of our Assessment of Classroom Effectiveness (ACE), a tool we developed to evaluate the effectiveness of first-year teachers using multiple measures of performance.<sup>2</sup> Some teachers whose performance is borderline are monitored closely in their second year, at which point a final certification decision is made.

We developed Fast Start two years ago as an upgrade to our previous approach to pre-service training, with the goal of having teachers who completed it be more effective as beginning teachers. In the summer of 2012, we piloted Fast Start in five of our preparation programs, expanding to 14 sites in the summer of 2013 (*Figure 1*). In the past two years, about 3,500 teachers participated in Fast Start pre-service training.

<sup>2</sup> For more details about ACE, see our 2013 report, *Leap Year*.

**FIGURE 1 | TEACHING FELLOWS PROGRAMS USING FAST START TRAINING, SUMMERS 2012 AND 2013**

Includes 1,379 participants in summer 2012 and an estimated 2,074 participants in summer 2013. Actual 2013 figures may be higher. Source: TNTP.

"It's important to understand what is expected of you in the fall, and pre-service training gives you an exceptionally realistic view. I truly internalized those core skills, and that gave me confidence that I would be a successful teacher on day one—and for the rest of my life." -Whitney Bartel,

5th grade, Simon Elementary School, Washington, D.C.



## FAST START

### Three Core Principles

Fast Start is designed to give new teachers the tools they need to be successful from the moment they set foot in their classrooms. Like our previous approach to pre-service training, Fast Start is a five-week program, and teachers who complete Fast Start still participate in additional training during their first year. However, nearly every other aspect of Fast Start differs from our old model.

More specifically, Fast Start represents three fundamental shifts from our old training model and from the way most preparation programs around the country currently operate.

#### 1. FOCUS

A narrower curriculum focused only on the most essential teaching skills.

#### 2. PRACTICE

An emphasis on practicing skills instead of just learning about them.

#### 3. FEEDBACK

Intensive coaching that provides regular, specific feedback on changes to instructional techniques.

## 1. FOCUS

Preparation programs rarely focus on the specific skills prospective teachers need to master in order to be successful during their first year. Instead, many programs try to provide a whirlwind tour of everything there is to know about teaching, on the assumption that the more information teachers can absorb during their training, the better off they'll be.

This was the approach we took for years. Our old pre-service training curriculum attempted to cover 10 topics that encompassed everything from classroom culture to differentiated instruction to planning to broad out-of-classroom behaviors like “impacting change as a newcomer.”

Many other programs resist teaching any specific instructional skills at all, reflecting a belief that teaching is more art than science and far too complex to distill to a set of core skills. These programs tend to stress that there is no “right” way to do anything when it comes to teaching, and see the goal of educator preparation as giving teachers an opportunity to develop their individual approach to instruction. In this vision, teaching is less a profession with an established body of knowledge than a journey of discovery.<sup>3</sup>

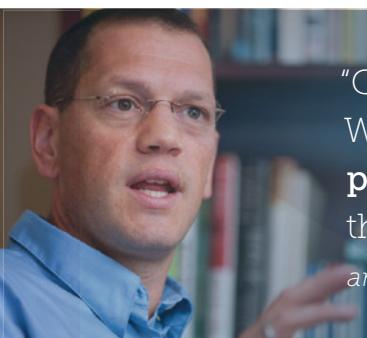
With Fast Start, we tried a different approach: Discern which skills seem to make the biggest difference during a teacher’s first year, and focus pre-service training on mastery of those skills.

We started by looking at evaluation results for thousands of teachers from several large school districts. Each place we looked, we found that fluency in the same basic skills—often related to classroom culture—separated new teachers who grew rapidly into effective practitioners from those who struggled or regressed. This was true whether we looked at our own teachers or those prepared by other programs.

For example, in one large urban district, we found that first-year teachers who struggled to manage their classrooms early in the school year rarely learned how to do it over time. In fact, these teachers ended their first year less skilled in classroom management than the typical new teacher is at the beginning of the year. Not surprisingly, ineffective classroom management was also a strong predictor of ineffective overall job performance.

Broadly speaking, the four key skills whose mastery had the greatest connection to first-year performance were:

- 1. Delivering lessons clearly**
- 2. Maintaining high academic expectations**
- 3. Maintaining high behavioral expectations**
- 4. Maximizing instructional time**



“Great teaching is an art that relies on a set of essential techniques. We’ve found that **teachers master those skills through focused practice and intensive coaching**, and this approach builds on that critical foundation.” -*Doug Lemov, author of Teach Like a Champion and Managing Director, Uncommon Schools*

<sup>3</sup> For example, while 97 percent of teacher preparation programs include some coverage of classroom management, only 21 percent teach a core group of proven techniques: NCTQ (2013). *Training Our Future Teachers: Classroom Management*.

In another large urban district, teachers who demonstrated proficiency in these four areas during their first semester not only outpaced their peers in the short term, but remained more effective even one and two years later.<sup>4</sup>

The trend was too clear to ignore. That's why Fast Start focuses almost entirely on helping prospective teachers master these four skills.

We could not have done this alone. Early in our work to build Fast Start, we went into the field to visit the educators and school leaders we admire most. We wanted to see if their experience on the ground matched what we were seeing in the data. We also wanted to know how they addressed the challenge of building fluency in basic teaching skills.

One of our first visits, in January 2012, was to Albany, N.Y., where Doug Lemov has quietly led a revolution in teacher training. Doug is a founder of several successful Uncommon Schools campuses and the author of a best-selling textbook, *Teach Like a Champion*.

It turned out that Doug and his Uncommon Schools colleagues, including Erica Woolway, were kindred spirits grappling with the very same questions. We formed a partnership aimed at marrying the four Fast Start skills with the individual, practicable techniques outlined in *Teach Like a Champion*. These techniques became the heart of the Fast Start curriculum.

During the first year of Fast Start (summer 2012), we taught 17 of these techniques, spending about the same amount of time on each one. But when teachers entered the classroom, results showed that some techniques had a stronger relationship to on-the-job effectiveness than others. Teachers who mastered four particular techniques during pre-service were more likely to be successful in their classrooms right away.

Those four techniques were:

- 1. 100%:** The expectation that the only acceptable percentage of students following a direction is 100%.
- 2. Positive framing:** Making corrections to student behavior consistently and positively.
- 3. Strong voice:** A way for teachers to establish authority in their classrooms.
- 4. What to do:** Providing students with specific, concrete, sequential and observable directions.<sup>5</sup>

Based on these results, we rewrote the curriculum for the summer of 2013. Teachers spent more than two-thirds of their time during pre-service training learning about and practicing those four techniques.

Narrowing our focus during pre-service training has two main benefits for our teachers: It gives them a clear picture of exactly what they should be able to do after they complete pre-service training, and it lets them devote their full attention to each skill for long enough to actually become proficient in five weeks.

To be clear, our view is not that other teaching skills are inconsequential; it's that the fundamentals matter. Basketball players who cannot dribble and pass will not be very good at executing complex offensive plays. Likewise, teachers who have not mastered basic classroom culture or lesson delivery will not have a chance to master advanced instructional skills. This is just common sense.

Fast Start gives teachers a solid foundation upon which they can build more advanced skills. We cover these advanced skills during the training we provide to our teachers over the course of their first year, and we preview them during pre-service training through coursework, videos and discussions. Getting the sequencing right means that we and our teachers are on the same page about which skills they need to master now, and which skills they will be working toward during their first year.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Kane, T.J., Taylor, E.S., Tyler, J.H., & Wooten, A.L. (2010). *Identifying Effective Classroom Management Practices Using Student Achievement Data* (NBER Working Paper No. 15803); and Grossman, P. et al. (2010). *Measure for Measure: The Relationship between Measures of Instructional Practice in Middle School English Language Arts and Teachers' Value-Added Scores* (CALDER Working Paper 45). Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Lemov, D. (2010). *Teach Like a Champion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## Fast Start – Three Fundamental Shifts

Fast Start represents three major shifts from our old training model, and from the way most preparation programs currently operate.

### BEFORE

*Teaching for Student Achievement*

### NOW

*Fast Start*

10  
Topics  
Taught

4  
Skills  
Taught

MORE FOCUS

0  
Practice  
Hours

26  
Practice  
Hours

MORE PRACTICE

0  
Coaching  
Hours

32  
Coaching  
Hours

MORE FEEDBACK

### THE GOAL:

Teachers master basic, essential instructional skills to be effective right away.



## New Skills, the Second Time Around

Norma Toner had what she thought were all the necessary elements to teach middle-school math: After a career in the business world, she had three years of teaching experience, plus a master's degree in education. But when she moved with her family from Connecticut to suburban Atlanta, she needed a Georgia teaching license to get a job. She enrolled in TNTP's Georgia Teaching Fellows program as a quick path to a credential.

"I thought I was just doing what I had to do because the state made me," she said, "but I walked out recognizing how naïve I was and how much I truly learned from all the content learning, coaching observations and *Teach Like a Champion* techniques. Georgia Teaching Fellows taught me how to be an effective teacher."

Even after earning a master's degree, "everything I'd done up to that point in education was self-taught. When I walked into that first day of pre-service training, I was scared to death. I was overwhelmed. But once we started putting the classroom management techniques and planning into practice, they hand-held me through the whole process."

She described her Fast Start pre-service training and full-year seminar instructor as "my role model."

"She wasn't just explaining, she was providing examples. She gave me everything I needed. She would give me a new strategy by explaining, demonstrating, role-playing and coaching. She was so involved in everything that I did—I still email her when things go well."

Last year, Norma volunteered to teach math to a group of struggling students, including one sixth grader who hadn't passed annual state tests in math since third grade. "At the beginning of the year, she could barely do half a page of multiplication. But she was so engaged, and she wanted to learn." After months of study, the student passed the sixth grade statewide exam. Norma finished the year with an "exceptional" rating from her school and passed TNTP's Assessment of Classroom Effectiveness "with distinction."

"I would not be an exceptional teacher had it not been for Georgia Teaching Fellows," she said. "It made a huge difference for me. I walked in thinking, 'I am a teacher, I don't need this program.' I look back now, and I was nowhere near what I am today. It's amazing. If you want to make a difference in a child's life, that's why I'm where I am."

## 2. PRACTICE

In a performance-based profession, you acquire a new skill mostly by practicing. A pianist learns a new piece of music by playing it over and over, not just by listening to it or studying it. A golfer masters putting by practicing that skill on the course hundreds or thousands of times, not just by watching a video of someone who can already putt well. Emergency medical technicians don't just read about giving injections and using external defibrillators; they practice using them. In professions like these, getting it—understanding a new skill—is not the same as actually doing it.

*Emergency medical technicians don't just read about giving injections and using external defibrillators; they practice using them. In professions like these, getting it—understanding a new skill—is not the same as actually doing it.*

Teaching is a performance-based profession, too, but we don't treat it that way. Typical teacher preparation programs rarely give teachers the opportunity to practice skills often enough to master them. The issue is not a lack of time, but a choice on the part of most programs to emphasize theory over practice.

Our experience has taught us that in the absence of frequent, directed practice of basic techniques, many teachers do not find their way. For example, who hasn't seen a novice teacher whose lesson plans have become

narrow and rote because his classroom management skills don't support more inventive lessons? We are doing new teachers no favors by refusing to show them how to succeed.

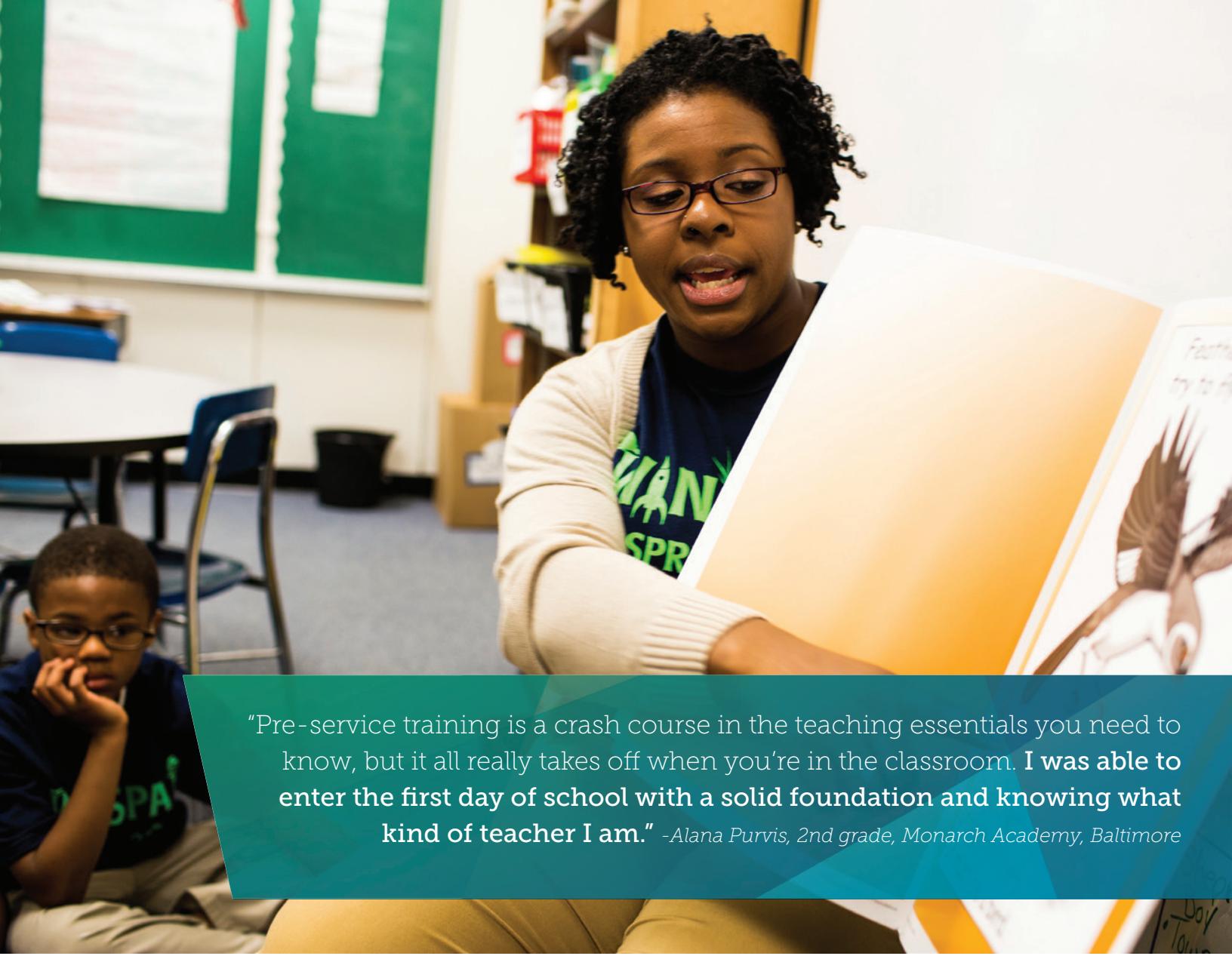
With Fast Start, we changed not only what we teach during pre-service training (by narrowing our focus), but how we teach it: With practice instead of just theory. Our approach builds on the work of experts inside and outside the education field, including our partners at Uncommon Schools.<sup>6</sup>

This focus on practice has fundamentally changed our pre-service training experience. For example, under our old training model, we asked teachers to think about how they would handle the various classroom management challenges they were likely to face and create a blueprint for how they would address them. The result, not surprisingly, was a lot of teachers who had thoughtful, thorough classroom management blueprints—and chaotic classrooms.

In Fast Start, we start by showing teachers examples of what an effective classroom culture looks like (through video and modeling by instructors), and identifying the specific techniques they need to master. Then we immediately ask them to practice these techniques with their colleagues—not just once, but over and over, day after day. They practice until they can execute them consistently. When we walk into the classrooms of teachers who have completed Fast Start, we usually find the kinds of environments we taught them to create.

Our prospective teachers now spend at least 26 hours of their training practicing teaching skills (in addition

<sup>6</sup> For more, see Lemov, D., Woolway, E., & Yezzi, K. (2012). *Practice Perfect*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; and Coyle, D. (2009). *The Talent Code*. New York: Bantam Dell.



"Pre-service training is a crash course in the teaching essentials you need to know, but it all really takes off when you're in the classroom. **I was able to enter the first day of school with a solid foundation and knowing what kind of teacher I am.**" -Alana Purvis, 2nd grade, Monarch Academy, Baltimore

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*Freeing up mental space to focus on what matters most is the real power of practice.*

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to the hours they spend teaching in real summer school classrooms). Under our old model, participants didn't spend any time on this kind of hands-on practice. Instead, they spent about eight hours of their coursework on role-playing and other less focused activities that were dispersed across a much wider range of skills and did not lead to mastery of specific techniques through repetition.

The result of all this practice is that crucial instructional techniques already start to become second nature to teachers by the end of pre-service training. This means that from their first day in the classroom, our teachers do not have to stop and think about basic decisions like when to give students a direction, where to stand during each part of the lesson, or how to correct minor misbehavior. Instead, they can devote more brainpower to more important decisions, like whether every student understood an explanation or how to re-teach something in a different way. Freeing up mental space to focus on what matters most is the real power of practice.

### 3. FEEDBACK

Teachers cannot get the full benefit from practice without constant, individualized feedback from a second set of eyes. The same is true in every other performance-based profession. It's why athletes have coaches and actors have directors.

The problem is that when it comes to teacher preparation, coaching has a long history of delivering lackluster results.<sup>7</sup> School districts across the country spend a lot of money to run coaching and mentoring programs, but research suggests they do little to help teachers improve. Teachers receive feedback that is too lengthy but also too general. Coaching conversations are too long and meandering to be useful. And coaches don't consistently follow up to ensure that teachers make the adjustments they agree to make.

Fortunately, when we scoured the country we found several promising coaching models. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo of Uncommon Schools advocates giving teachers specific, actionable feedback during coaching.<sup>8</sup> Lee Canter's work with Real Time Teacher Coaching showed the power of helping teachers make adjustments in the middle of real lessons.<sup>9</sup> The coaching and feedback models developed at Mastery Charter Schools, North Star Academy and MATCH Teacher Residency heavily influenced our approach. We also saw a natural opportunity to build what we'd learned about practice with Doug Lemov and Erica Woolway into coaching.

The result was an approach to coaching in Fast Start built around three basic ideas, all designed to help

teachers make progress toward mastering essential instructional skills.

**Active observations:** When coaches visit our teachers' classrooms, they do not sit quietly in the back of the room. They circulate during a lesson and will even stop to model a particular skill. They will also intervene with more subtle techniques, such as holding up signs or whispering to prompt certain actions from the teacher.

**Direct, specific feedback:** During lesson debriefs, coaches provide bite-sized feedback on one or two aspects of a teacher's performance—the one or two things they think will make the biggest difference the very next lesson. Coaches do not tell a teacher what to work on in general terms; they tell the teacher exactly what to do differently next time. The result: Teachers have a specific, manageable to-do list for their next lesson rather than a long laundry list of issues to address.

**Immediate practice:** Fast Start coaching conversations do not end after coaches deliver feedback. Teachers practice the new techniques they have agreed to try right away, in front of their coaches, until they feel comfortable they can really put them to use in their next lesson. Again, this is the difference between "getting it" and "doing it."

Under our old training model, prospective teachers did not receive any one-on-one coaching beyond simply receiving feedback from classroom observations. Participants in Fast Start receive about 32 hours of one-on-one and small-group coaching.



"As a former athlete, my coach wouldn't have waited until the end of the game to give me feedback. **It's been critical to my success.**" -David Cioch, special education, Hawthorne High

School, Charlotte

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Garet, M. et al. (2008). *The Impact of Two Professional Development Interventions on Early Reading Instruction and Achievement*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

<sup>8</sup> For more details, see Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2012). *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>9</sup> For more, see <http://www.transformativeteachertraining.com>

## A Day in Pre-Service Training with Corrine Handy, TNP Teaching Fellow



Corrine Handy, a third grade teacher in Baltimore, describes a typical day during pre-service training.

**7:00am:** Arrive at school. I teach three hours of summer school each morning, so I arrive at my classroom two hours early to help my co-teacher set up and prepare for the day's lessons.

**8:00am:** Morning professional development. My placement school provides an extra professional development session for new teachers, focused on behavior management and literacy instruction.

**9:00am-12:00pm:** Teaching time. I teach kindergarten with a co-teacher, who gives me a lot of freedom to practice different skills. I teach guided reading lessons, whole group lessons and language instruction.

I also practice classroom management skills I learned in pre-service training, like building routines for transitions. My coach observes me, which I love. I'm someone who needs immediate feedback. Each time I get feedback, I feel that I am becoming a stronger teacher and instructor, and my lessons improve.

**12:00-1:00pm:** Lunch with colleagues.

**1:00-2:30pm:** Afternoon Training, Part I: Culture Class. We learn behavior management techniques and how to design routines, like the best way to enter the classroom, or how to ensure students transition smoothly between centers and work well with partners.

One of the most important skills is "do not engage." It's a way of deflecting the constant questions from students about why they have to do this or that in a

certain way. We watch videos of teachers performing the strategy, then script our own versions and then practice in drill rounds with our colleagues posing as students. That way, we can practice, get feedback and then practice again, immediately implementing that feedback, over and over again, until we are really nailing it. This is the best part of the training—being able to practice and implement feedback right away.

In the classroom, I can only get to instruction once my class has decent behavior. We have to master that first, which is what the pre-service training is helping us do. On the first day of school, I will know exactly what my entry routine is going to look like!

**2:30-6:00pm:** Afternoon Training, Part II: Coaching or Literacy Instruction. In coach class, we work with a smaller group of 8-10 people who teach our same age level or subject. Our coach walks us through different aspects of Common Core standards-based instruction. We get pointers on how to use data to inform our instruction and how to create lesson plans based on the standards.

In literacy instruction class, we learn to view literacy as cross-curricular, no matter what you teach. We watch videos of teachers modeling how to include literacy in all subjects, and then we script lessons—not just literacy lessons, but also science and social studies or math lessons that incorporate literacy.

**6:00pm:** Head home. At home, I work on my lesson plans for the following week. We have to turn these in and get feedback on them from our coaches.

**10:00pm:** Get ready to do it all over again tomorrow. The pre-service training is a really intense time. I had no idea it was going to be so intense, but I'm glad it is, because I wouldn't become a good teacher otherwise.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

We are optimistic that pre-service training centered on these core principles—focus, practice and feedback—will produce a greater percentage of teachers who are effective in their first year than other approaches. The big question, of course, is whether it's working. Because just two cohorts of teachers have entered the classroom after completing Fast Start, we do not yet have definitive answers, but we have seen some promising signs.

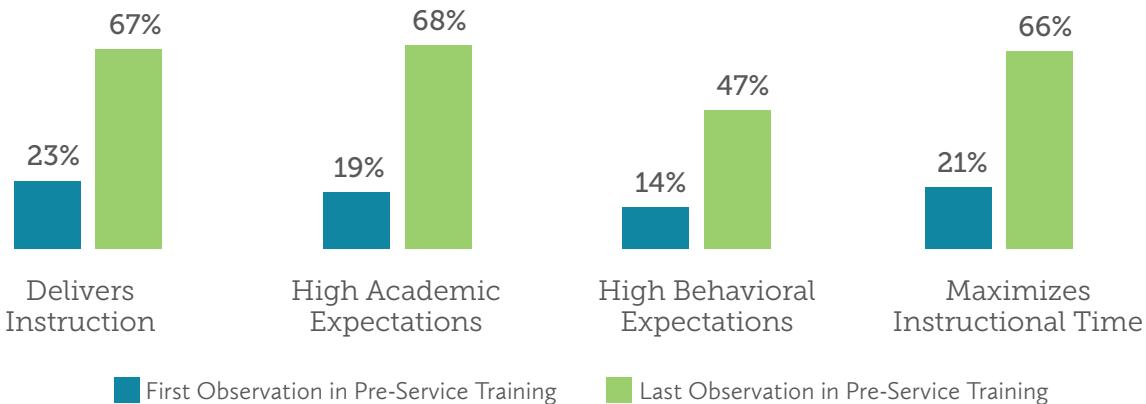
Below, we candidly discuss early results from Fast Start and share some additional lessons we've learned so far. Our goal is not to declare victory but to share our experience with others who may want to follow a similar path.

**LESSON 1****Teachers can improve rapidly during a five-week pre-service training program if given enough opportunities to practice basic skills.**

Most teachers who participated in Fast Start made dramatic progress on the four key skills over the course of five weeks. After their first week of training, only about a quarter of teachers earned a passing score on each of the four skills. As Figure 2 shows, that percentage more

than doubled—and in some cases tripled—by the end of training.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of teachers who participated in Fast Start either mastered the four key skills by the end of training or are on track to master them during their first year.

**FIGURE 2 | PARTICIPANTS MEETING EXPECTATIONS IN FAST START SKILLS, SUMMER 2012**



**PARTICIPANTS WERE MORE THAN TWICE AS LIKELY TO EARN A PASSING SCORE IN EACH SKILL BY THE END OF TRAINING.**

Includes 361 participants in four sites in summer 2012. Source: TNTP.

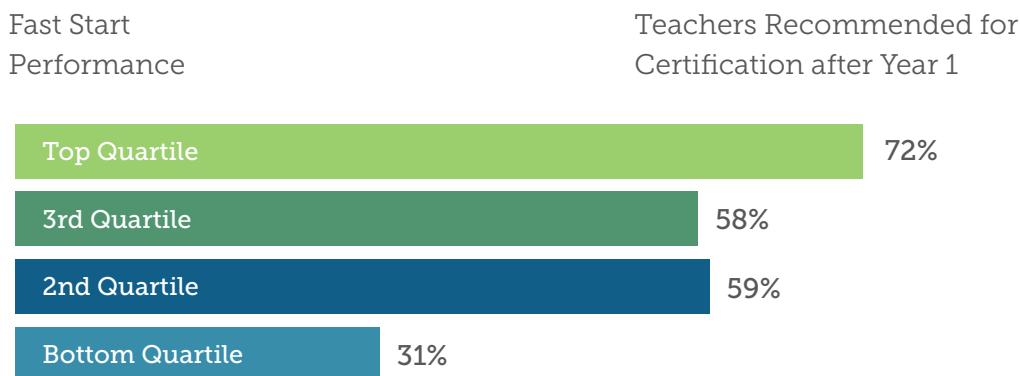
**LESSON 2****Teachers who master a small number of essential skills during pre-service training are more likely to be successful in their first year.**

We built Fast Start around the idea that success during a teacher's first year depends on mastering a handful of specific, important instructional skills during pre-service training. Early results appear to confirm this hypothesis. We know this because we make regular assessments of our teachers' performance—not just during pre-service training, but also throughout their first year in the classroom, through our ACE evaluation process (which we discussed in detail in *Leap Year*).

Nearly three-quarters of the top performers during the first year of Fast Start—those who scored in the top quartile of pre-service training in summer 2012—went on to pass ACE (Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> Twenty-two percent of those teachers passed with distinction, the highest possible rating for first-year performance. Among teachers who scored in the lowest quartile during pre-service training, though, only 31 percent passed ACE, and only 6 percent passed “with distinction.” In other words, teachers who came closer to mastering the Fast Start skills during pre-service training were more likely to meet our standard for first-year success.

<sup>10</sup> The data we report here exclude one 2012 Fast Start site for which not all results were available.

<sup>11</sup> Comparable results from the second year of Fast Start—teachers who completed training in summer 2013—will not be available until those teachers complete their first year of teaching later in 2014.

**FIGURE 3 | PARTICIPANTS RECOMMENDED FOR CERTIFICATION, BY FAST START PERFORMANCE, 2012-13**

**TEACHERS WHO PERFORMED BETTER DURING FAST START WERE MORE LIKELY TO MEET OUR STANDARD FOR FIRST-YEAR SUCCESS.**

Percentages based on participants' scores on TNTP's evaluation model for first-year teachers, the Assessment of Classroom Effectiveness (ACE), in four Fast Start sites in SY2012-13. Pairwise correlation coefficients between PST Performance and the ACE Composite are as follows: PST Observation Mean ( $r=0.18$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ), Anchor Technique Mean ( $r=0.16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Non-Anchor Technique Mean ( $r=0.06$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), PST Composite Score ( $r=0.21$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Includes 224 total PST and SY participants in 2012-13. Source: TNTP.

The link between success in Fast Start and success in the classroom holds on other measures, too. For example, as part of ACE, we ask principals to make independent ratings of how a teacher compares to other first-year teachers in terms of ability to raise student achievement. Principals rated 59 percent of teachers who scored in the top quartile during the first year of Fast Start as “better or much better than” other first-year teachers, and 93 percent at least “as good as” other first-year teachers. Among teachers who scored in the bottom quartile during pre-service training, only 39 percent were rated “better or much better” than other first-year teachers, and only 83 percent were even rated at least “as good as” other first-year teachers.

In one urban district, we were also able to compare performance during the first year of Fast Start to performance on the district’s own multiple-measures teacher evaluation system. Only half of the teachers in this district who scored in the bottom quartile during Fast Start went on to earn at least an “effective” rating through the district’s evaluation system during their first year. But 65 percent of teachers who scored in the top quartile earned an “effective” rating or higher.

These results suggest that a leaner pre-service training curriculum focused on mastery of specific skills can prepare teachers to be successful in all aspects of their instruction during their first year.

**LESSON 3**

**Preparation programs should view pre-service training like a training camp where not everyone will make the cut, because pre-service training is a powerful predictor of success in the classroom.**

Over the years, some preparation programs (including our own) have spent enormous amounts of time and energy perfecting their selection models—trying to predict who will be an effective teacher based on an application, an interview and maybe a sample lesson.

Selection into a preparation program has been the main door to the teaching profession; once teachers are admitted, they are essentially guaranteed teaching positions as long as they complete a certain number of hours of coursework and the required exams.

*Performance during Fast Start explains nearly three times as much of a teacher's overall first-year performance compared to selection criteria.*

The problem is that no preparation program has found a way to consistently identify effective teachers without actually seeing them teach. Even the most selective programs often produce teachers that are no more effective, on average, than teachers from less selective programs.<sup>12</sup>

But training is different. Evidence of a teacher's performance during pre-service training does have a relationship to on-the-job success. In fact, we've found that performance during Fast Start pre-service training explains nearly three times as much of a teacher's overall first-year performance compared to selection criteria.

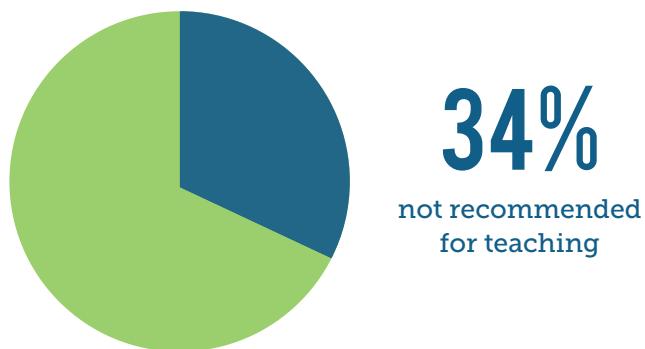
That's why we now place much more emphasis on how teachers perform during pre-service training. Prospective teachers must still meet rigorous minimum standards to earn an invitation to pre-service training, but we are much more willing than we have been in

the past to give people a tryout. We do not want to risk shutting out capable candidates who might have what it takes to be great teachers.

Where we do not take risks is in putting teachers into the classroom. Prospective teachers who do not become proficient in Fast Start skills cannot continue beyond pre-service training, because they probably won't be able to consistently help their students learn as full-time teachers. In 2012, the first year of Fast Start, 34 percent of participants were not recommended for teaching after pre-service training (*Figure 4*).

Preparation programs clearly have an obligation to help teachers become effective. At the same time, it is unreasonable to expect that 100 percent of teachers will successfully complete pre-service training. Teaching—especially in high-need schools—is extraordinarily difficult. Some people simply are not cut out to be teachers, and it's impossible to identify those people without seeing them teach. Programs should hold themselves to high standards when it comes to developing teachers, but they should also hold a high bar when it comes to recommending participants for full-time teaching positions—and make that bar clear to participants from the very beginning of pre-service training.

**FIGURE 4 | PARTICIPANTS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR TEACHING, SUMMER 2012**



**IN 2012, 3 OUT OF 10 FAST START PARTICIPANTS WERE NOT RECOMMENDED FOR TEACHING.**

312 of 474 total participants in four Fast Start sites were recommended to advance to teaching in summer 2012. Source: TNP.

<sup>12</sup> Koedel, C., Parsons, E., Podgursky, M., & Ehlert, M. (2012). *Teacher Preparation Programs and Teacher Quality: Are There Real Differences Across Programs?* (CALDER Working Paper 79). Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.



"I'm not going to say it's been easy; it's the hardest thing I've ever done. But the program prepares you to be ready even when you think you're not. **People who come through are effective teachers and leaders, and have a sense of urgency that I haven't seen in all traditional public schools.**" -*Brent Freeman, school director, The Excel Center, Indianapolis*

## WHAT'S NEXT

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The early results from Fast Start have been promising, but we are just beginning to refine a new approach to teacher preparation.

Most notably, our curriculum is still a work in progress. While we selected the initial group of skills and techniques for the curriculum based on compelling data and years of experience, we had always planned to make changes based on our teachers' performance during pre-service training and during their first year in the classroom. When we find that particular techniques or activities have an especially high correlation to success in the classroom, we revise our curriculum to emphasize those techniques even more.

We are also working on ways to make the Fast Start experience richer—for example, by providing more models of advanced instructional techniques—without losing our focus on the fundamental skills that seem to matter most for first-year success. We have redesigned many of the practice activities in our training sessions and improved the training we give our coaches based on feedback from Fast Start participants. This year, we are revising our observation rubric to better determine whether our teachers are delivering instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and we are piloting other changes to help teachers deliver more rigorous instruction during their first year.

We are especially interested in finding better ways to support our teachers after they complete pre-service training. We want to ensure that the Fast Start skills stick with our teachers during their first few months in the classroom, and help them develop more advanced skills around Common Core-aligned lesson planning and instructional delivery—to take full advantage of the strong classroom cultures they built with the Fast Start skills.

In the coming years, we will also be conducting more in-depth studies on the impact Fast Start is having on teachers and students. For example, does Fast Start really establish a foundation that helps teachers master more advanced skills later in their careers? Do teachers who complete Fast Start help their students make significantly more academic progress than other teachers? These are crucial questions that we cannot answer until we have an additional year or two of results.

After two years, we are more optimistic than ever that the Fast Start approach can help new teachers thrive in their classrooms right away. We will continue to share what we learn as we improve and expand Fast Start in the years to come.

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The Fast Start model was designed by a team across TNTP that included Jessica Varevice, Karla Oakley, Liz Cutrona, Valerie Barron, Rebecca Cutler, Rebecca Sarradet and Joan Schunck. That work was informed by critical partnerships with our peers in the field, most notably Doug Lemov and Erica Woolway of Uncommon Schools.

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We also are inspired by the teachers who have participated in Fast Start, and the impact we see them making in the classroom. We extend our most heartfelt thanks for their partnership.

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*The text face is Calluna Regular, designed by Jos Buivenga in 2009. The typeface used for headers, subheads, pull-quotes and figure labels is Museo Slab, also designed by Jos Buivenga. Figure labels are set in Calluna Sans, and figure call-outs are set in Bebas.*



## About TNTP

TNTP is a national non-profit organization working to end educational inequality by ensuring that all students get excellent teachers. Founded by teachers and inspired by the power of great teaching to change lives, we help schools, districts and states grow great teachers, manage their teaching talent strategically, and build systems that prioritize effective teaching in every classroom. Since 1997, we have recruited or trained nearly 50,000 teachers for high-need schools, catalyzed large-scale reform through acclaimed studies such as *The Widget Effect* (2009) and *The Irreplaceables* (2012), pioneered next-generation teacher evaluation and development systems, and launched one of the nation's premiere awards for excellent teaching, the Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice. Today TNTP is active in more than 25 cities.