

Teach For America Rural School Leadership Academy Evaluation

Final Summative Report

Melissa Brown-Sims | Eric Larsen | Melissa Arellanes | Sarah Mae Olivar | Damon Blair | Jasmine James

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Abstract

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) has conducted an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Teach For America (TFA) Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA), a 1-year professional development program designed for two streams of aspiring and current leaders. The objective of RSLA is to recruit and provide professional training and supports to cohorts of educators across multiple states to serve and grow their careers as school administrators in rural communities. TFA recruits groups of individuals to participate in RSLA: Stream 1 includes teachers and other student-facing educators with little or no school leadership experience, and Stream 2 includes current teacher leaders and midlevel administrators in rural schools who may be on the path to becoming a school principal.

The primary component of RSLA is to develop cohorts of professional learning communities through the Learning Cycles. Our evaluation found that two of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and three of four cohorts of Stream 2 participants met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance. Learning Cycle attendance among Cohort 2 participants was low during the spring cycle, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. If not for the pandemic, it is likely that three of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and all cohorts of Stream 2 participants would have met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.

Using a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences design, AIR's impact analysis focused on Stream 2 participants, who are school-level leaders able to influence student outcomes schoolwide. Due in part to the pandemic, we were only able to include 17 Stream 2 participants in our evaluation of program impact on schoolwide student proficiency, which limited our power to identify statistically significant program impacts. We estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, ELA proficiency was 2 percentage points higher and math proficiency was 1 percentage point lower, on average, in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. These differences, which are equivalent to effect sizes of 0.050 and -0.026 respectively, are not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

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Executive Summary

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) has conducted an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Teach For America (TFA) Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA), a 1-year professional development program designed for two streams of aspiring and current leaders. The objective of RSLA is to recruit and provide professional training and supports to cohorts of educators across multiple states to serve and grow their careers as school administrators in rural communities. TFA recruits groups of individuals to participate in RSLA: Stream 1 includes teachers and other student-facing educators with little or no school leadership experience, and Stream 2 includes current teacher leaders and midlevel administrators in rural schools who may be on the path to becoming a school principal.

Guided by a unique vision for school-level leadership, TFA's uses its School Leadership Competency (SLC) Framework, which consists of a set of principles that clearly defines the expectations for effective school leadership, and sets practical and consistent standards anticipated of RSLA participants (i.e., creating a vision, fostering equity, considering context, facilitating learning, managing people and systems, acting strategically, building culture, driving innovation) to guide its RSLA programming. Specifically, the RSLA program aims to increase the number of effective principals in high-need rural schools, build a network of rural school leaders and principals who support each other in leading effective schools, and increase the retention rate of educators in rural communities by currently offering 1 year of engagement in quarterly Learning Cycles, one-on-one coaching, completion of a Capstone Project,¹ and participation in virtual or in-person site visits to rural schools.

The AIR study addressed the following research questions, which align with RSLA's logic model:

1. Was RSLA implemented with fidelity in participating school sites? What program features support or inhibit the fidelity of implementation of the program?
2. What aspects of RSLA do participants value the most, and what factors or elements influence their decision to remain in the program?
3. Do Stream 2 participants' instructional leadership skills improve during their participation in RSLA?
4. What are the effects of 1 year of participation in RSLA Stream 2 on schoolwide elementary, middle, and high school student proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics in comparison to similar schools that did not participate in RSLA?

¹ Only two cohorts (out of four) participated in the Capstone Project. TFA discontinued the inclusion of the Capstone Project in its third year of the grant.

This final summative evaluation presents AIR’s findings on program implementation and impact based on data from the 2018–19, 2019–20, 2020–21, and 2022–23 school years. Findings related to program impact and implementation can be summarized as follows:

Fidelity of Implementation

- The number of RSLA participants ranged from 35 to 50 annually between Cohort 1 (2018–19) and Cohort 4 (2021–22).
- The primary component of RSLA is to develop cohorts of professional learning communities through the Learning Cycles. Two of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and three of four cohorts of Stream 2 participants met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.
 - Learning Cycle attendance among Cohort 2 participants was low during the spring cycle, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. If not for the pandemic, it is likely that three of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and all cohorts of Stream 2 participants would have met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.
 - According to focus group and interview data, the factors that effectively supported the implementation of Learning Cycles included (a) coordination between TFA staff and session facilitators, and (b) delivery of content that was not only meaningful and relevant to participants’ day-to-day leadership practices but also responsive to each of their individual contexts.
- Coaching support is considered a secondary component of RSLA. Two cohorts of Stream 1 participants were offered coaching, but neither of these cohorts met the threshold for adequate coaching implementation. Three cohorts of Stream 2 participants were offered coaching, and all three of these cohorts met the threshold for adequate coaching implementation.
 - In focus groups, RSLA participants noted that the opportunity to receive individualized support from BetterLesson coaches facilitated their engagement.
 - However, focus group and interview responses suggest that better coordination between TFA and BetterLesson could further improve leadership coaching support to RSLA participants.
- The Capstone Project, another secondary component of the RSLA intervention, was a participant-designed project that promoted professional reflection and action within the school. Both streams of participants from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 met the fidelity of implementation threshold for the completion of their Capstone Projects.

Alumni Career Trajectories

- Surveys of alumni conducted in 2021–22 indicate that 95% of RSLA alumni who responded to the survey remained in the education field, even if they did not remain in rural schools. In interviews, alumni who remained in rural communities in 2021–22 reported that they did so because they felt as if they made an impact.
- Moreover, Cohort 4 (2021–22) survey respondents reported that they intend to work in a rural community and as a school leader for at least the next 3–5 years and that RSLA impacted this decision.

Improvements in Participants' Instructional Leadership Skills

- TFA's School Leadership Competency (SLC) Survey, which is aligned to the broader SLC Framework mentioned above, is a self-assessment created and administered by TFA to RSLA Stream 1 and 2 participants. The survey items are aligned with eight categories of TFA's SLC Framework, and RSLA expects that participants will grow in 26 competencies during their participation in the program.
 - AIR analyzed changes in participants' self-assessed leadership competencies between fall and spring for Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohorts 2–4. Our analysis excludes Cohort 1, which completed an earlier version of the survey that is not comparable to the survey administered to Cohorts 2–4.
 - The categories that showed the highest average growth among Stream 1 participants included the following:
 - » 2019–20 (Cohort 2): Builds Culture: Fosters Teams
 - » 2020–21 (Cohort 3): Facilitates Learning: High Standards for Student Learning
 - » 2021–22 (Cohort 4): Manages People and Systems: Performance Management
 - The categories that showed the highest average growth among Stream 2 participants included the following:
 - » 2019–20 (Cohort 2): Facilitates Learning: Grows Strong Teachers
 - » 2020–21 (Cohort 3): Context: Commitment to Place
 - » 2021–22 (Cohort 4): Manages People and Systems: Performance Management
- To measure changes in RSLA participant leadership skills, AIR also utilized results from the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). VAL-ED is a validated measure of instructional leadership quality and includes six core domains related to school performance: (1) High Standards for Student Learning, (2) Rigorous Curriculum (content focused), (3) Quality Instruction (pedagogy focused), (4) Culture of Learning and

Professional Behavior, (5) Connections to External Communities, and (6) Performance Accountability.

- VAL-ED was administered as a self-assessment to Stream 2 participants in Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 as well as the teachers working with RSLA participants. Stream 2 participants and teachers working with them completed VAL-ED in the fall and spring, which allowed AIR to track perceived changes in each leadership component.
- On average, among the 31 Stream 2 participants who completed both the fall and spring self-assessment, participants' self-reported leadership skills increased on all six domains, and these gains were statistically significant.
- Teachers' reports of Stream 2 participants' leadership skills showed modest gains on five of the six dimensions and a slight decline on one of the dimensions. None of these changes in teachers' assessments of Stream 2 participants' leadership skills are statistically significant at conventional levels.

Impact on Schoolwide Proficiency in ELA and Math

- AIR's impact analysis focused on Stream 2 participants, who are school-level leaders able to influence student outcomes schoolwide.
- On average, proficiency rates in Stream 2 participants' schools were 0.3 percentage points higher in ELA and 0.9 percentage points lower in math than comparison schools at baseline.²
- Due in part to the pandemic, we were only able to include 17 Stream 2 participants in our evaluation of program impact on schoolwide student proficiency, which limited our power to identify statistically significant program impacts.
 - After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, ELA proficiency was 2 percentage points higher³ in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. However, this difference is not statistically significant at $p < .05$.
 - After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, math proficiency was 1 percentage point lower⁴ in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. However, this difference is not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

² The absolute values of the standardized mean differences in baseline ELA and math were 0.008 and 0.023, respectively, which is lower than the threshold set by the What Works Clearinghouse to demonstrate baseline equivalence between intervention and comparison groups.

³ This is equivalent to an effect size of 0.050.

⁴ This is equivalent to an effect size of -0.026.

Background

Within rural communities nationwide, the availability of principal training programs is lacking, with only 14% of rural school districts reporting that they have a professional development program for their aspiring principals, compared with 38% of urban districts that offer this same resource (Gray et al., 2013). A 2018 report by Goldring and Taie found that 19% of rural schools surveyed experienced principal turnover. In addition, with limited resources, the mental stress of having to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and working conditions, and having to work with smaller school budgets, principals more broadly, regardless of their locale, are reporting higher levels of discontent and plans to leave the principalship (Superville, 2022).

Funded by a 6-year Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant, Teach For America's (TFA's) Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA program, which was created a decade ago, is a research-informed professional development program that is geared toward two groups of educators in 17 TFA rural regions as well as nationwide.⁵ Stream 1 of RSLA targets teachers with little or no leadership experience to accelerate them into teacher leadership positions, and Stream 2 targets existing teacher leaders or midlevel school leaders who are considering a school leadership career pathway.

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®), the independent evaluator of RSLA, has completed an implementation and impact study of the program. This final summative report begins by briefly summarizing the RSLA program and AIR's evaluation methods, including the study's research questions and activities. Next, the report presents AIR's findings on the extent to which the program was implemented as designed. The implementation evaluation section also describes adjustments that were made to the program over the course of the grant, aspects of the program that participants report valuing the most, and factors or elements that participants report influenced their decision to remain in the program. Finally, the report describes changes in Stream 2 participants' instructional leadership skills over the course of the yearlong program, and presents findings on the impact of RSLA on schoolwide student proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and math. The presentation of impact evaluation findings is designed to provide all the information necessary for a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence review.

⁵ In Year 6 (2022–23), TFA added a third stream, which focused on school principals interested in building and sustaining their leadership. However, AIR's evaluation focused on individuals who participated in Stream 1 and Stream 2 between 2018–19 and 2021–22.

RSLA Professional Development Design

The RSLA program aims to increase the number of effective principals in rural schools, build a network of rural school leaders and principals who support each other in leading effective schools, and increase the retention rate of educators in rural communities. This section of the report presents the RSLA logic model and key components designed to realize the program's goals.

RSLA Logic Model and Key Components

This program seeks to achieve the following two goals:

1. **Stream 1:** To develop participants' competencies in areas that are foundational to any leadership position and foster greater educator retention in rural communities.
2. **Stream 2:** To build participants' instructional leadership skills, motivate aspiring principals to pursue state administrative certification, retain aspiring leaders in schools, and, importantly, improve student performance in schools where the aspiring leaders are currently placed.

As outlined in the RSLA theory of action (Appendix A), the RSLA intervention consists of the following primary and secondary components for participants in Stream 1 and Stream 2:

Cohorts of Professional Learning Communities: The primary component of RSLA is to develop cohorts of professional learning communities (PLCs) through the Learning Cycles. Learning Cycles are formal, content-focused professional development experiences that include meetings (e.g., retreats, workshops, school visits) and opportunities for RSLA cohort participants to network and engage in PLCs. TFA RSLA program staff have partnered with the following external service providers to serve as Learning Cycle facilitators who are responsible for developing content and facilitating sessions during each of these quarterly sessions: [Dr. Erica Jordan Thomas](#), [Inspiring Educators](#), [oneTILT](#), [Elevating Equity](#), and [Jeana Marinelli](#).

In addition, although not included as part of AIR's evaluation and the RSLA theory of action, the inclusion of rural school site visits was quickly identified as an important element of the RSLA intervention by TFA RSLA program staff. These site visits, which were offered in person and virtually prior to, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, served as an opportunity for RSLA participants to observe successful rural school leaders and learn how they applied best practices and built trusting relationships with their students, families, and communities.

Coaching: Through BetterLesson, TFA’s coaching provider, RSLA participants⁶ receive biweekly, one-on-one coaching sessions to support the professional goal attainment and application of learning in schools. Participants, not the TFA RSLA program, identify the foci of the coaching topics. Coaching support is considered a secondary component of RSLA.

Capstone Project: The Capstone Project, another secondary component of the RSLA intervention, was a participant-designed project that promoted professional reflection and action within the school. As part of this assignment, earlier cohorts of RSLA participants would choose an instructional leadership goal to apply their learning to within their school context.⁷ They were tasked with developing an action plan that met their leadership goal. Each Capstone Project resulted in a product that the school could use to improve student outcomes. At the end of the project, each RSLA participant shared their learning with fellow cohort members.

Recruitment

As a starting point for its recruitment, TFA relies heavily on its current base of existing TFA corps members and alumni nationwide. Specifically, TFA draws on two mechanisms for recruiting: (1) TFA regions recruiting heavily on the ground among their corps members and alumni, and (2) nominations from current and former RSLA participants.

1. **Regional Recruitment Process:** Each October, RSLA program staff engage TFA’s 17 rural regions and partnering local education agencies (LEAs) to initiate recruitment for RSLA. This engagement consists of a kickoff call to describe the RSLA program, walk through the recruitment timeline, and describe recommended strategies to ensure robust recruitment for the program. These strategies include (a) whole-group outreach leveraging each region’s social media platforms; (b) small-group outreach to groups, specifically women and people of color, who are traditionally underrepresented in school leadership and principal positions; (c) having RSLA program staff host Q and A calls for interested candidates; and (d) engaging in one-on-one outreach with their most promising candidates.

Moreover, TFA encourages regions to recruit at least five applicants, with the goal of having two RSLA participants per region, although regions may adjust their targets up or down depending on their capacity, the size of their corps and alumni base, and other factors. Once the application is open in October, the RSLA team sends a report to all regions tracking the number of applications started and completed within each region to inform regions of any additional recruitment needs.

⁶ Because TFA did not offer coaching supports in Year 1 (2017–18) of the AIR evaluation, Cohort 1 was the only cohort in which no RSLA participant received coaching. TFA’s partnership with BetterLesson was formalized in Year 2 (2018–19), but only Stream 2 participants from Cohort 2 received coaching support. Starting in Year 3 (2019–20), TFA began offering one-on-one coaching supports to both Stream 1 and Stream 2 participants.

⁷ In Year 3 (2020–21), TFA removed the Capstone Project as a core component of its programming.

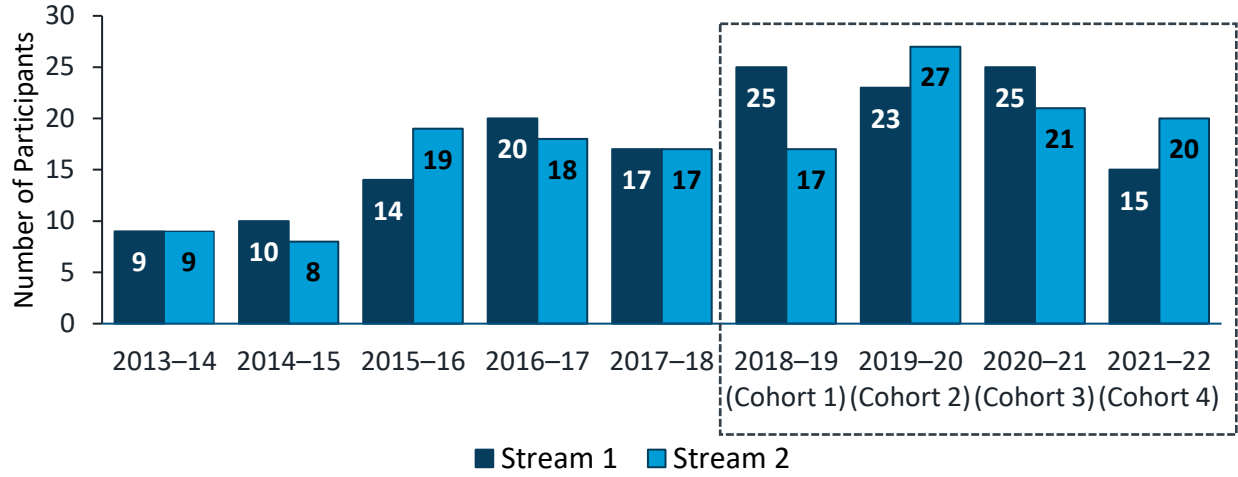
- 2. Nomination Process:** TFA also requests nominations from current and former RSLA participants. This is one of the most successful strategies for recruiting future participants. Upon receiving the names of potential candidates, TFA then sends each nominee a personal email to encourage them to apply to RSLA and offers application support through the RSLA team or the nominee’s region. These nominations also serve to give an edge to an applicant if their application is on the cusp of admittance or rejection.

RSLA employs a rigorous selection process to ensure that it accepts those applicants best positioned to intentionally develop their leadership and become a rural school principal. The RSLA team developed and uses a detailed rubric to score each application based on specific SLC Framework competencies they believe are prerequisites for the RSLA program. The RSLA team recruits and trains a group of 10–20 selectors from TFA staff and RSLA alumni to review and score applications. Selectors make a recommendation based on their full application review. For those applicants who meet a certain bar from this initial review, the RSLA team then consults the applicant’s LEA or TFA region for additional input. Finally, after reviewing all the evidence provided by selectors and the region, the RSLA team makes a final determination to accept or reject the applicant for entry into the program.

Eighteen participants completed RSLA each year in 2013–14 and 2014–15, and between 33 and 38 participants completed RSLA each year between 2015–16 and 2017–18 [Figure 1](#))⁸ During the 4-year period covered by the current EIR grant (2018–19 to 2021–22), TFA was able to increase the number of RSLA participants, which ranged from 35 to 50 between 2018–19 (Cohort 1) and 2021–22 (Cohort 4). The remainder of this report does not report on the first five cohorts of RSLA participants, as those cohorts predate the period supported by the current EIR Early-Phase grant, and only includes data for those RSLA participants from Cohorts 1–4 who successfully completed the program.

⁸ Throughout this report, we define “participant” to mean “an individual who completed the RSLA program.”

Figure 1. Number of RSLA Participants, by Cohort and Stream



Note. The first two cohorts of RSLA participants, in 2013-14 and 2014-15, were not grouped into the two different streams. To better track the characteristics of RSLA participants across time for all cohorts to date, AIR reviewed the professional roles that participants from these two earlier cohorts held and categorized them as Stream 1 if the participant was in a classroom teacher role or Stream 2 if the participant was in another professional role.

Information on the characteristics of RSLA participants can be found in Appendix B.

Overview of the Evaluation

The primary purpose of AIR’s independent evaluation of RSLA was to provide TFA with both formative and summative data about fidelity of program implementation and the impact of RSLA on ELA and math proficiency among students who had Stream 2 participants⁹ as school leaders. This summative evaluation report provides TFA, its partners, and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) with results on the extent to which RLSA met its two primary program objectives of (1) developing Stream 1¹⁰ participants’ competencies in areas that are foundational to any leadership position, and fostering greater educator retention in rural communities; and (2) building Stream 2 participants’ instructional leadership skills, motivating aspiring principals to pursue state administrative certification, retaining aspiring leaders in schools, and, most importantly, improving student performance in the schools where aspiring leaders are currently placed.

Box 1 presents the research questions (RQs) that AIR’s RSLA study was designed to answer. RQs 1 and 2 address implementation and are primarily descriptive. RQ 3 describes changes in Stream 2 participants’ instructional leadership skills during the yearlong intervention. To address RQ 4, the study team employed a quasi-experimental research design. RQ 4 was registered in the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies.¹¹

BOX 1. RSLA EVALUATION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

AIR’s evaluation was guided by four RQs:

- **RQ 1:** Was RSLA implemented with fidelity in participating school sites? What program features support or inhibit the fidelity of implementation of the program?
- **RQ 2:** What aspects of RSLA do participants value the most, and what factors or elements influence their decision to remain in the program?
- **RQ 3:** Do Stream 2 participants’ instructional leadership skills improve during their participation in RSLA?
- **RQ 4:** What are the effects of 1 year of participation in RSLA Stream 2 on schoolwide elementary, middle, and high school student proficiency in ELA and mathematics in comparison to similar schools that did not participate in RSLA?

Details on the data sources and analytic approaches that AIR used to evaluate RSLA implementation, mediators, and impact can be found in Appendix C.

⁹ Stream 2 participants included current teacher leaders and midlevel administrators who were interested in or became school administrators during the program’s tenure.

¹⁰ Stream 1 participants included teachers and other student-facing educators with little or no school leadership experience.

¹¹ The registry entry is #6461.1v2 RSLA (Early08) Student Outcomes; see <https://sreereg.icpsr.umich.edu/sreereg/>.

Fidelity of RSLA Implementation

This section summarizes findings of the evaluation regarding the fidelity of RSLA implementation and the corresponding successes and barriers to implementation.¹² For each key program component, we present the indicators of implementation fidelity; the thresholds for high, moderate, and low implementation fidelity for each key program component; and the threshold for program-level fidelity of implementation for each cohort and stream. The thresholds at the indicator and program levels were set by TFA and AIR staff. We then present findings on the extent to which each key component of the program was implemented with fidelity by each RSLA stream in each cohort of participants.

We also present findings from interviews and focus groups with RSLA participants and staff on factors that influenced RSLA participants' engagement in the program. Additional details on the interviews and focus groups can be found in Appendix E.

The results of AIR's findings on fidelity of RSLA implementation are presented in Table 1 and can be summarized as follows:

- The primary component of RSLA is to develop cohorts of professional learning communities (PLCs) through the Learning Cycles. Two of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and three of the four cohorts of Stream 2 participants met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.
 - Learning Cycle attendance among Cohort 2 participants was low during the spring cycle, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. If not for the pandemic, it is likely that three of four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and all cohorts of Stream 2 participants would have met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.
 - According to focus group and interview data, the factors that effectively supported the implementation of Learning Cycles included (a) coordination between TFA staff and session facilitators, and (b) delivery of content that was not only meaningful and relevant to participants' day-to-day leadership practices but also responsive to each of their individual contexts.

¹² Following guidance from our technical assistance providers at Abt Associates, AIR analyzed and reported fidelity of implementation separately for each key component of the intervention and each cohort of participants (Abt Associates, 2019). We also followed guidance from Abt Associates to present fidelity of implementation findings separately for Streams 1 and 2, so that the participants included in the Stream 2 fidelity-of-implementation sample overlap with the participants included in the impact analysis. Following guidance from Abt Associates, we do not aggregate fidelity of implementation across streams, cohorts, or key components.

- Coaching support is considered a secondary component of RSLA. Two cohorts of Stream 1 participants were offered coaching, but neither of these cohorts met the threshold for adequate coaching implementation. Three cohorts of Stream 2 participants were offered coaching, and all three of these cohorts met the threshold for adequate coaching implementation.
 - During focus groups, RSLA participants noted that the opportunity to receive individualized support from BetterLesson coaches facilitated their engagement.
 - Even so, focus group and interview responses suggest that better coordination between TFA and BetterLesson could further improve leadership coaching support to RSLA participants.
- The Capstone Project, another secondary component of the RSLA intervention, was a participant-designed project that promoted professional reflection and action within the school. Both cohorts of Stream 1 and 2 participants who were expected to complete the Capstone Project (Cohorts 1 and 2) met the fidelity of implementation threshold for that component.

Table 1. Percentage of RSLA Participants Meeting Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level and Obtainment of Adequate Implementation at the Program Level

Program Component	Stream 1				Stream 2			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Develop Cohorts of Professional Learning Communities Through Four Learning Cycles	100% ^a	70%	76%	93% ^a	94% ^a	81%	100% ^a	90% ^a
BetterLesson Coaching	NA	NA	76%	67%	NA	64%	86% ^a	85% ^a
Capstone Project	96% ^a	87%	NA	NA	94% ^a	70%	NA	NA

Note. NA = not applicable.

^a Data in these cells indicate that adequate implementation was achieved at the program level.

Additional details about AIR’s analysis of RSLA implementation as well as our findings can be found in Appendix C.

Aspects of RSLA That Participants Value Most and Factors That Influence Their Decision to Stay in the Program

In 2020–21 and 2021–22, AIR solicited the perspectives of RSLA alumni from Cohort 1 (2018–19) and Cohort 2 (2019–20) as well as RSLA participants who completed the program between 2013–14 and 2017–18 (i.e., prior to the period supported by the EIR Early-Phase grant). Alumni perspectives were solicited through surveys,¹³ focus groups,¹⁴ and interviews.¹⁵ Alumni were asked about their perceptions of the different RSLA key components as well as the program’s influence on their career trajectory. Alumni also were asked whether they were currently working in education, in rural schools, or both, and whether they planned to work in education, in rural schools, or both within the next 3 to 5 years.

Most Valuable Components of RSLA

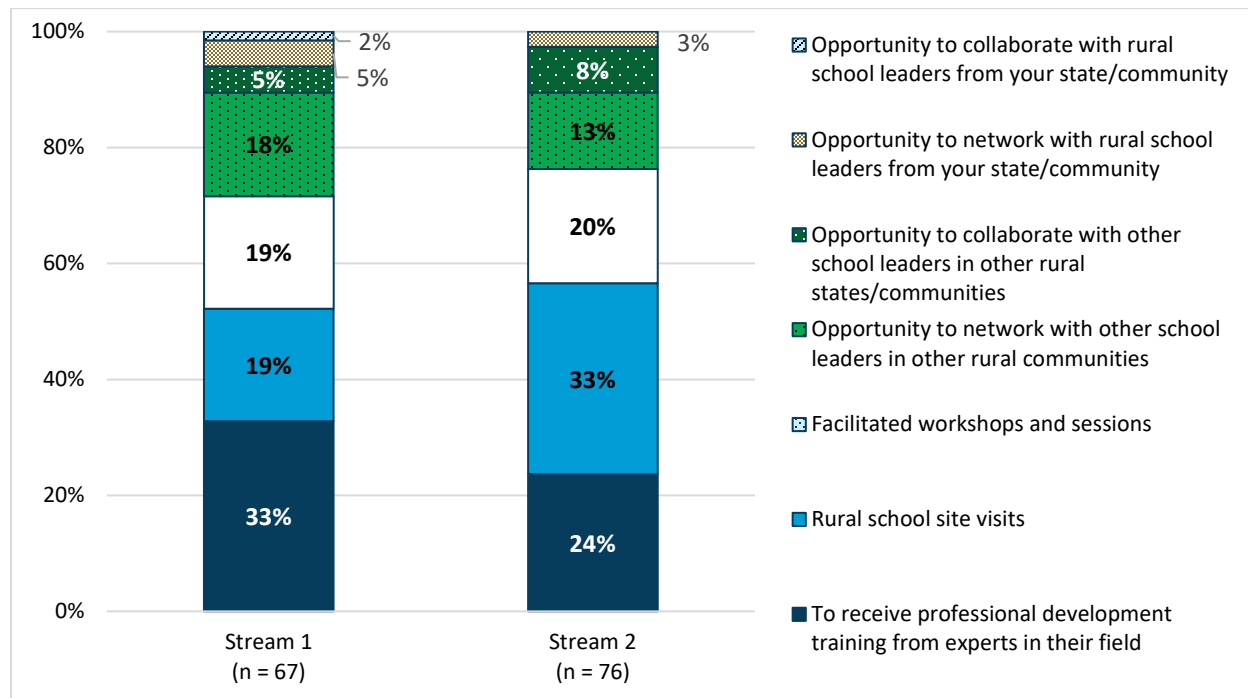
To analyze the value of RSLA programs, the alumni survey asked participants to select one program area that they thought was the most valuable to their experience. Alumni from Stream 1 viewed “receiving PD [professional development] training from experts in their field” as the most valuable aspect of the RSLA program according to the AIR inaugural alumni survey administered during the 2020–21 school year (Figure 2). Stream 1 focus group participants that year noted that the professional development they received supported the development of skills that are applicable to their work, including how to have challenging conversations and building and executing a vision. Alumni survey respondents also identified “school visits,” “facilitated workshops and sessions,” and the “opportunity to network with other school leaders in other rural communities” as valuable program components (exhibit not pictured). For Stream 2, alumni stated that they highly valued the school visits (Figure 2). Additional information about the specific factors that RSLA participants identified and found to be of value as they relate to rural school visits and opportunities to collaborate through TFA-facilitated network opportunities are described below.

¹³ In Year 4, 144 alumni (a 62% response rate) completed the survey. In Year 5, 139 alumni (a 52% response rate) completed the survey.

¹⁴ In Year 4, AIR conducted one focus group with eight RSLA alumni who represented five prior cohorts.

¹⁵ In Year 5, AIR conducted twenty-two 30-minute virtual interviews with alumni across all prior cohorts.

Figure 2. RSLA Alumni Reports on the Aspect of the RSLA Program That Was Most Valuable, by Stream



Note. Data are from AIR’s Year 4 (2020–21) survey of TFA RSLA alumni.

Factors That Influenced RSLA Participants’ Engagement in Learning Cycles

This subsection presents findings from interviews and focus groups conducted with RSLA participants, TFA staff, and Learning Cycle facilitators. These findings relate to the factors that influenced—either facilitated or inhibited—their engagement in Learning Cycles. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Facilitators of and Barriers to Implementation of Learning Cycle Sessions

Facilitators	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TFA staff coordinated with Learning Cycle session facilitators, established a collaborative planning process, and engaged in ongoing program improvement conversations to ensure high program quality. A virtual learning environment eliminated the need for travel, offered flexibility, and minimized distraction, which helped maintain participant engagement. Learning Cycle facilitators’ use of authentic, real-life examples to make sessions more meaningful and relevant to participants helped maintain participant engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating space for Learning Cycle facilitators to coordinate with one another and learn what each was “bringing to the table” could help them “make cross-connections” between sessions. A shortened time window for virtual Learning Cycles made engaging in comprehensive and in-depth discussions on specific topic areas challenging.

The coordination between TFA staff and Learning Cycle facilitators effectively supported the implementation of Learning Cycles. In 2019-20 TFA staff interview respondents noted strong and collaborative relationships with Learning Cycle facilitators in planning large-group meetings, presentations, and technical support. TFA staff reported meeting one-on-one with each facilitator weekly or every other week. These meetings focused on “developing the objectives, developing the materials and the resources they intend to provide, [and] getting updates on how the cohort is doing and what the cohort has requested,” according to one TFA staff member.

Learning Cycle facilitators interviewed in 2020-21 reported that RSLA established a collaborative planning process and engaged in ongoing program improvement conversations—before and after each cycle—with each of them. RSLA provided them with descriptive information about each participant to help them plan their Learning Cycles. However, Learning Cycle facilitators suggested the need to create a space to coordinate with one another to learn what each person was “bringing to the table” and to “make cross-connections” between sessions.

The unexpected and sudden shift to a virtual learning format was associated with both challenges and opportunities. In 2019-20, RSLA staff interviewed reported that they adapted the way they implemented the program to align with nationwide state-level mandates related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, TFA fully transitioned to a virtual professional development model for all incoming RSLA participants who were part of Cohort 3. The shift began soon after school closures in spring 2020 during the pandemic, affecting the fourth and final in-person gathering of Cohort 3. During interviews, one TFA senior staff member explained, “We generally redesigned [the fourth gathering] . . . [we] took the sessions apart basically . . . the pieces of what we would have done [in person] and placed them over the course of a three-week calendar.”

TFA RSLA continued to offer Learning Cycles virtually in 2020-21. In interviews that year, Learning Cycle facilitators reported that the remote learning environment eliminated the need for travel, offered flexibility, and minimized distraction, which helped maintain participant engagement. However, some Learning Cycle facilitators stated that having a shortened time window for each session because of the transition from in-person learning to an entirely virtual environment made engaging in comprehensive and in-depth discussions on specific topic areas challenging.

TFA staff and Learning Cycle facilitators used different strategies to maintain RSLA participants’ active engagement. Recognizing that frequent online meetings can cause fatigue, AIR examined the strategies that Learning Cycle facilitators used to foster and maintain active

engagement of Cohort 3 and 4 participants in virtual sessions. For example, RSLA focus group responses revealed that facilitators made Learning Cycle sessions meaningful and relevant to Cohort 3 participants by connecting contents to their personal experiences and current needs. Facilitators also used authentic, real-life examples, which helped participants see the immediacy of the application of Learning Cycles to their day-to-day work. In addition, Cohort 3 participants highlighted the importance of having a facilitated dialogue, especially in small breakout groups, to help cultivate a sense of connection and encourage engagement among fellow cohort members. Moreover, they noted that having earlier and on-demand access to online resources before Learning Cycles and having facilitators who designed their prework assignments so that they did not require large amounts of participants' time also facilitated their engagement.

On the basis of feedback from previous years, TFA RSLA program staff provided Cohort 4 participants with advance and frequent notice of the program schedule, and offered flexible date and time options for engagement. This gave Cohort 4 members the flexibility to build skills and knowledge by participating in Learning Cycles whenever it was most convenient for them. This flexibility, according to focus group respondents, promoted their engagement in Learning Cycles. They also suggested that Cohort 4 members were given opportunities to participate in dialogue that led to tangible solutions to school-level issues faced by RSLA participants, which kept them engaged in Learning Cycles, a sentiment similar to that expressed by Cohort 3 participants.

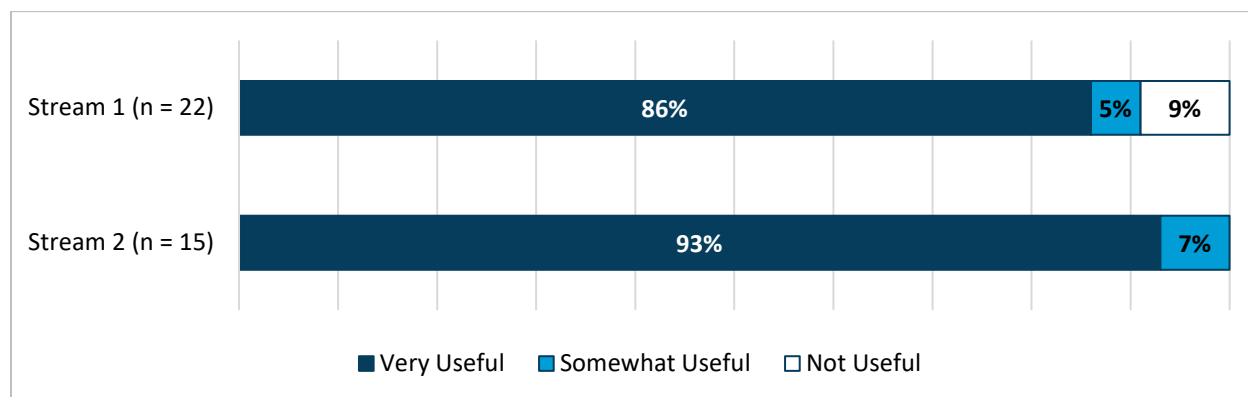
RSLA participants found Learning Cycle content to be applicable to their day-to-day leadership practice. AIR specifically examined Cohort 3 and 4 participants' perceptions regarding whether Learning Cycles were contextually relevant and meaningful to them, in line with the assumption that adults engage in learning opportunities based on what is immediately applicable to them—often to solve a problem. Cohort 3 participant survey data and focus group responses revealed that participants valued Learning Cycles and considered all topics covered useful. Likewise, a majority of Cohort 4 survey respondents (e.g., 73% of Stream 1 and 61% of Stream 2) reported that they often applied what they learned from Dr. Erica Jordan-Thomas's sessions focused on leadership decision-making in their leadership practice.

Consistent with survey data, comments from focus group respondents also identified Dr. Jordan-Thomas's session titled "Decision Making and Communication" as one of the most helpful sessions because "it allowed [them] to have a better sense of how schools progress through decision-making processes." In addition, the various frameworks introduced to RSLA participants during this session "were really helpful" in guiding discussions with work colleagues, according to focus group participants. Likewise, Cohort 4 survey data also showed that Stream 1 respondents in particular viewed program facets focused on decision-making and

communication and working in rural communities as most applicable to their leadership development. Stream 2 respondents also rated program facets about decision-making and communication and expert professional development as most applicable to their roles.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) were intentional foci of Learning Cycles. A review of TFA RSLA program documents suggests that TFA intentionally centered DEI in RSLA participants’ leadership development by providing them with a range of Learning Cycles and resources on topics such as antiracism, valuing diversity, responding to racial microaggressions, and promoting equity. For example, DEI-focused Learning Cycle sessions were provided by three organizations in Cohort 2: oneTILT and Elevating Equity, which facilitated sessions that focused on leading for equity, and Transcend, which led sessions on reimagining school content. Most Cohort 3 participants who completed the survey—86% of Stream 1 and 93% of Stream 2 (Figure 3)—reported that Learning Cycles focused on developing DEI were “very useful.”

Figure 3. Cohort 3 Participants’ Perception of Usefulness of DEI Sessions



All six Cohort 4 focus group participants agreed that DEI-focused Learning Cycle sessions prepared them to address the racial and class inequities faced by students and families in their communities. In addition, these participants provided examples of how they have applied the knowledge and skills they gained from these sessions in their day-to-day leadership practices. For instance, RSLA participants reported that their attendance at Learning Cycles equipped them with a framework for engaging in conversations about race and racial disparities, adding that the framework was “hugely important” because it reminded them of the value of empathy in promoting DEI. Focus group participants also reported leading equity-focused professional development sessions for their school staff during which they used RSLA-provided DEI resources (e.g., case studies).

However, RSLA participants identified three primary barriers that prevented them from applying what they learned in the DEI-focused sessions in their leadership practices. These barriers included a lack of buy-in and training across school stakeholders, and the need to

further develop situational awareness—referring to the degree to which one perceives what is happening around them—so they can effectively address DEI-related issues “in the moment.” Moreover, these participants noted that some DEI-focused Learning Cycles did not explicitly address the “incredibly different” social, racial, economic, and political contexts within each rural region, which made real-world application of their knowledge challenging.

In comparison, RSLA alumni reported that they have regularly applied what they learned from the Learning Cycles that focused primarily on DEI, explaining that these sessions increased their self-awareness and helped them better understand their own cultural and social identity. These DEI-focused sessions also helped them gain knowledge of and value diverse social and cultural identities and perspectives, gain the confidence and courage to engage in difficult discussions about DEI issues, recognize and check biases, and know how their identity plays into systemic oppression. Alumni interviewed reported that their attendance at DEI-focused training sessions helped them implement inclusive hiring practices, employ a restorative justice framework for managing student behavior, demand social justice, and engage in antiracist development work as part of their current practice. However, four alumni reported personal, interpersonal, and political barriers at the state and school levels that often prohibited them from successfully engaging in DEI-related conversations with their staff.

Rural School Visits

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person gatherings allowed RSLA participants to visit rural schools in various locales nationwide, with the goal of helping them to better understand the context, challenges, and opportunities that other rural school leaders face. In 2019–20, for example, TFA had six different partner sites in New Mexico, Eastern North Carolina, and Rio Grande Valley who helped organize and host visits to their schools for RSLA participants. During these school visits, Cohort 2 RSLA participants learned about various leadership styles of the leaders in these schools. One TFA staff member interviewed by AIR considered the partnerships with these site visit school leaders as being “critical partners” in their work. Unfortunately, COVID-19-related school closures in 2020 prevented site visits from occurring during the spring Learning Cycles in 2019–20 and throughout the entirety of 2020–21 (impacting Cohort 3).

In 2021–22, virtual school visits took place in February 2022 during the winter Learning Cycles that year. Based on survey data, Cohort 4 RSLA participants did not find these *virtual* school visits applicable to their leadership development. This is because although the virtual format allowed for flexibility and the ability for participants from across the United States to meet, it did not allow for the creation and maintenance of authentic connections among RSLA participants like an in-person gathering would. However, Cohort 4 focus group participants indicated that the *in-person* school site visit held during the spring 2022 sessions was more valuable. These participants explained that not only did the spring site visit allow them to

connect with others within their cohort and other alumni, but it also provided them an opportunity to learn from leaders in other rural school districts.

Notwithstanding, according to 2020–21 and 2021–22 RSLA alumni focus groups, interviews, and surveys, participants from across both streams of Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 reported the benefits of participating in site visits. For instance, focus group participants in 2020–21 agreed that the school visits they participated in during RSLA showed them “what was possible for rural schools.” In 2021–22, alumni interview data indicated that site visits that year gave them insight on lessons learned, such as “seeing education through different lenses and what education can be,” and nurturing a vision of “a high-performing rural school” and best practices applicable to their careers, such as establishing trusting relationships with rural school community members.

Networking Opportunities

Interviews in 2019–20 reveal that some RSLA participants appreciated the opportunity to meet other members of their RSLA network, mainly other cohort members and Learning Cycle facilitators. They added that in-person gatherings encouraged peer-to-peer accountability throughout their yearlong program.

In 2021–22, Cohort 4 focus group respondents agreed that RSLA fostered a connection among participants that carried beyond their four scheduled Learning Cycles and other formally structured collaborative opportunities. Moreover, focus group polling results reveal that most participants found engaging with other cohort members valuable. However, RSLA participants maintained that engaging with the RSLA network, including other participants, was challenging in a virtual environment.

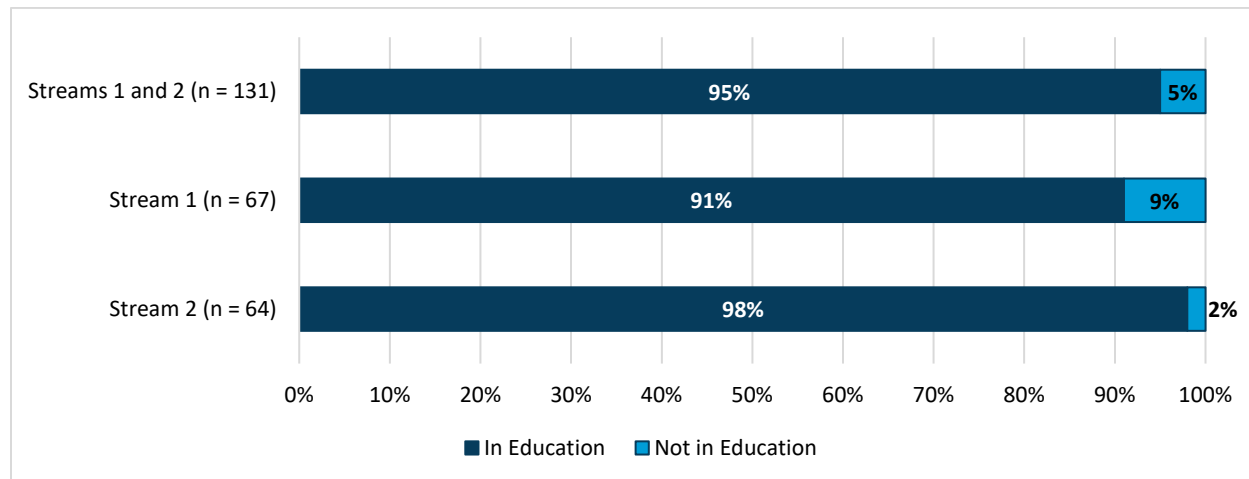
In addition, separate interviews with RSLA alumni in 2021–22 indicated that the personal and professional relationships they cultivated during RSLA with their fellow cohort members and TFA positively affected their careers in different ways. These included relying on colleagues to serve as a source of support, such as being an avenue to help identify and discuss possible solutions to work challenges, and serving as thought partners when it comes to thinking about possible career options and aspirations.

Alumni Career Trajectory

In 2021–22, focus groups and surveys with alumni revealed that, regardless of stream, RSLA alumni have remained in the education field, even if they did not remain in rural schools (Figure 4). Specifically, of 75 respondents from Streams 1 and 2 in 2021–22 who currently worked in school-based roles, 31 (41%) are currently a director, dean, assistant principal, or principal; 21 (28%) are currently a lead teacher or instructional specialist; and 23 (31%) are classroom

teachers. Moreover, more than half of the alumni interviewed (13 of 22) indicated that they are not currently working as a school leader.

Figure 4. Percentage of RSLA Alumni Who Remain in Education



Note. Data came from AIR’s Year 5 (2021–22) survey of TFA RSLA alumni.

However, in-depth interviews with alumni who remained in rural communities in 2021–22 reported that they did so because they felt as if they made an impact. The majority of RSLA alumni surveyed in 2021–22 (75% of Stream 1 and 84% of Stream 2 alumni) (Figure 5) expect to continue to work in education in the next 3 to 5 years. An additional 43% of Stream 1 and 46% of Stream 2 alumni from that year also indicated that they plan to pursue the principalship within this same period. (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Stream 1 Alumni Expecting

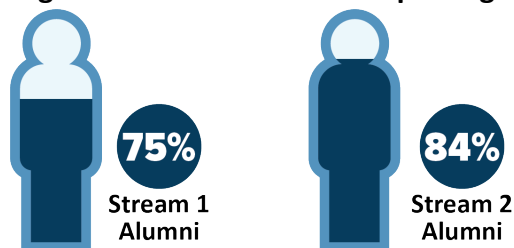
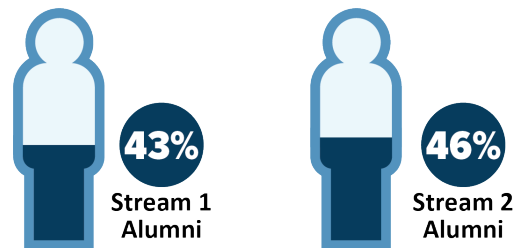


Figure 6. Stream 2 Alumni Planning



In both 2020–21 and 2021–22, few alumni interviewed reported leaving the education field or their rural school community entirely and, for those who did, it was for a better job opportunity, not specifically because of salary reasons. Alumni who remained in their rural community reported they did so because of their family, the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., uncertainty about other job opportunities during the height of the pandemic), and a strong network of support within their community. Those who left identified three factors that led them to leave rural education: family (i.e., the need to be near family for childcare or transferring because a partner got a job offer), the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., not having the proper safety and cleaning equipment needed to keep

themselves, staff, and students safe once schools reopened), and the desire for more job flexibility.

RSLA's Influence on Participants' Career Trajectory

Year 3 interview data suggest that most RSLA participants planned to continue serving as rural school leaders, a decision influenced largely in part by their participation in and what they were able to glean from RSLA. Specifically, six of eight RSLA participants noted that the program exposed them to equity issues in rural schools, expanded their school leadership network, provided them with professional development directly related to rural school leadership, and increased their understanding of how leaders in rural schools can make a difference. Similar to Year 3, Year 4 survey data from Cohort 3 RSLA participants revealed that RSLA impacted their likelihood to “remain an educator,” “remain in a rural school,” and “pursue a principalship at some point in [their] career.”

In Year 5, Cohort 4 survey respondents reported their intention to work in a rural community and as a school leader for at least the next 3–5 years and that RSLA impacted this decision accordingly. In follow-up interviews, RSLA alumni suggested that their decision to continue serving as a rural school leader was influenced by their sense of making an impact on their community, adding that RSLA helped them develop the leadership and advocacy skills needed to make such an impact. Alumni also shared that RSLA helped them identify strategies they could use to better understand how to support their rural communities, including leveraging and building on the school community's strengths to address student needs and make way for meaningful changes.

Perceived Changes in Participant Leadership Skills

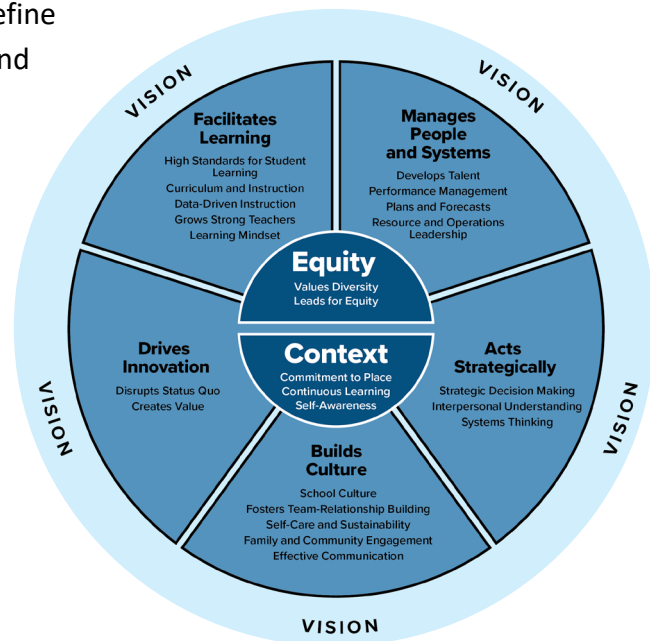
School Leadership Competency Framework

RSLA is guided by TFA’s SLC Framework, which is comprised of a set of principles that clearly define expectations for effective school leadership and establish practical and consistent standards anticipated of RSLA participants.

The SLC Framework serves the following two functions:

- To articulate a unique vision for school-level leadership supported by TFA, which emphasizes educational equity for students and teachers.
- To support professional reflection and encourage growth through leadership practice.

Figure 7. Teach For America’s School Leadership Competencies



The survey items are aligned with eight categories of TFA’s SLC Framework, and RSLA expects that participants will grow in 26 competencies during their participation in the program. Figure 7 summarizes TFA’s SLC Framework. A description of all 26 competencies for this survey can be found in Appendix G.

The SLC survey is a self-assessment created and administered by TFA to RSLA Stream 1 and 2 participants in fall and spring of each year. AIR analyzed changes in participants’ self-assessed leadership competencies between fall and spring for Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohorts 2–4. Our analysis excludes Cohort 1, who completed an earlier version of the survey that is not comparable to the survey administered to Cohorts 2–4.

A total of 57 Stream 1 and 57 Stream 2 participants completed both the fall and spring surveys between 2019–20 and 2021–22.

- Cohort 2: 96% of Stream 1 (22 of 23) and 93% of Stream 2 (25 of 27) participants
- Cohort 3: 84% of Stream 1 (21 of 25) and 81% of Stream 2 (17 of 21) participants
- Cohort 4: 93% of Stream 1 (14 of 15) and 75% of Stream 2 (15 of 20) participants

SLC survey self-ratings range from a score of 1 (Unfamiliar) to 5 (Executing Proficiently). Stream 1 participants reported experiencing the most growth in the following SLC categories:

- Cohort 2:
 - Builds Culture: Fosters Teams (0.86 growth)
 - Drives Innovation (Breaks Limits): Creating Value (0.77 growth)
- Cohort 3:
 - Facilitates Learning: High Standards for Student Learning (0.90 growth)
 - Builds Culture: Fosters Teams (0.86 growth)
- Cohort 4:
 - Manages People and Systems: Performance Management (1.07 growth)
 - Manages People and Systems: Develops Talent (1.07 growth)

Stream 2 participants reported experiencing the most growth in the following SLC categories:

- Cohort 2:
 - Facilitates Learning: Grows Strong Teachers (0.84 growth)
 - Context: Continuous Learning (0.64 growth)
- Cohort 3:
 - Context: Commitment to Place (0.76 growth)
 - Context: Self-Awareness (0.65 growth)
 - Drives Innovation (Breaks Limits): Disrupts Status Quo (0.65 growth)
- Cohort 4:
 - Acts Strategically: Interpersonal Understanding (1.40 growth)
 - Acts Strategically: Systems Thinking (1.20 growth)

For both Stream 1 and Stream 2, the competencies with the most growth tended to have lower average ratings at the pre-RSLA period (i.e., average ratings below 3). Appendix G provides a brief description of the specific subcompetencies or categories in which RSLA Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 and their corresponding Stream 1 and Stream 2 participants showed the highest rating and growth.

Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education

To measure changes in RSLA participant leadership skills, AIR also utilized results from the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). VAL-ED is a validated measure of instructional leadership quality and includes six core domains related to school performance: (1) High Standards for Student Learning, (2) Rigorous Curriculum (content focused), (3) Quality Instruction (pedagogy focused), (4) Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior, (5) Connections to External Communities, and (6) Performance Accountability. VAL-ED was selected as a measure because its six domains align with a majority of TFA’s leadership competencies.

VAL-ED was administered as a self-assessment to Stream 2 participants in Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 as well as the teachers working with participants. Stream 2 participants and the teachers working with them completed VAL-ED in the fall and spring, which allowed AIR to track the perceived changes in each leadership component. On average, among the 31 Stream 2 participants who completed both the fall and spring self-assessment, participants’ self-reported leadership skills increased on all six domains, and these gains were all statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3. RSLA Participant VAL-ED Self-Assessment

VAL-ED Component	Average Scores in Fall	Average Scores in Spring	Mean Difference	P-Value
High Standards for Student Learning	3.13	3.49	0.36	.00
Rigorous Curriculum (content)	3.11	3.44	0.33	.01
Quality Instruction (pedagogy)	3.13	3.51	0.39	.00
Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	3.17	3.65	0.48	.00
Connections to External Communities	2.53	3.10	0.56	.00
Performance Accountability	2.89	3.22	0.33	.02

Note. $N = 31$ RSLA Stream 2 participants. P -values are based on a paired-sample t -test. VAL-ED measures leader effectiveness on the following 5-point scale: 1.00 = Ineffective, 2.00 = Minimally Effective, 3.00 = Satisfactorily Effective, 4.00 = Highly Effective, and 5.00 = Outstandingly Effective (Elliot et al., 2009).

Teachers’ reports of Stream 2 participants’ leadership skills showed modest gains on five of the six dimensions and a slight decline on one of the dimensions (Table 4). None of these changes in teachers’ assessments of Stream 2 participants leadership skills are statistically significant at $p < .05$, although the increase in the High Standards for Student Learning—from 4.10 to 4.20—is significant at $p < .08$.

Table 4. Teacher VAL-ED Ratings of RSLA Participants

VAL-ED Component	Average Scores in Fall	Average Scores in Spring	Mean Difference	P-Value
High Standards for Student Learning	4.10	4.20	0.09	.08
Rigorous Curriculum (content)	3.95	4.04	0.09	.32
Quality Instruction (pedagogy)	4.14	4.12	-0.02	.81
Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	4.13	4.21	0.07	.28
Connections to External Communities	3.91	4.09	0.18	.03
Performance Accountability	3.96	4.02	0.07	.38

Note. $N = 44$ RSLA Stream 2 participants assessed by teachers in their schools. P -values are based on a paired-sample t -test.

On average, teacher assessments of participants' leadership skills were higher than participants' self-assessments of their own leadership skills in both fall and spring.

Impact of RSLA

This section of the report summarizes findings from AIR’s analysis of RSLA’s impact on student ELA and math proficiency rates in the schools of RSLA Stream 2 participants. Additional details on the impact analysis can be found in Appendix H.

Using a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences design, AIR’s impact analysis focused on Stream 2 participants, who are school-level leaders able to influence student outcomes schoolwide. The RSLA theory of action is that Stream 2 participation will be associated with improved instructional leadership, which creates conditions for increased student learning (an outcome). Participants were included in the evaluation of RSLA on student ELA and math proficiency if they could reasonably affect student ELA and math proficiency through their professional role. For example, assistant principals were included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and math proficiency, but a science department chair was excluded.

The impact analysis analyzed three cohorts of RSLA Stream 2 participants in schools in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. Cohort 1 began participation in summer 2018, Cohort 3 began participation in summer 2020, and Cohort 4 began participation in summer 2021. Because statewide assessment data from spring 2020 are not available due to the pandemic, Cohort 2 (2019–20) participants were excluded from the analysis.

Each RSLA Stream 2 participant’s school was matched to three similar comparison schools in the same state and year. ELA and math proficiency rates among students in participants’ schools were compared with similar comparison schools not participating in the intervention (business as usual).

Due in part to the pandemic, we were only able to include 17 Stream 2 participants in our evaluation of program impact on schoolwide student proficiency, which limited our power to identify statistically significant program impacts. Across the three cohorts, the ELA analysis sample includes a total of 68 schools (17 intervention and 51 comparison schools), and the math analysis sample includes a total of 64 schools (16 intervention and 48 comparison schools).

We used a difference-in-differences design with a matched comparison group to evaluate the impact of RSLA on student proficiency rates. Student proficiency was measured by schoolwide proficiency rates in each grade in ELA and math on statewide standardized tests for the 2017–18 (baseline) and 2018–19 (outcome) school years for Cohort 1, for the 2018–19 (baseline) and 2020–21 (outcome) school years for Cohort 3, and for the 2020–21 (baseline) and 2021–22

(outcome) school years for Cohort 4. Because spring 2020 assessment data are not available, we used spring 2020 proficiency rates as the baseline measure for Cohort 3.

On average, intervention schools' proficiency rates were 0.3 percentage points higher in ELA and 0.9 percentage points lower in math than comparison schools at baseline.¹⁶

The statistical models we used to measure program impact accounted for state, cohort, school level (elementary, middle, or high), and urbanicity as well as number of students tested and student demographics (percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program, percentage of students who are English learners [ELs], percentage of students who are disabled, and percentage of students who are African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Native American, or are in multiple ethnic groups).

After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, ELA proficiency was 2 percentage points higher¹⁷ in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, math proficiency was 1 percentage point lower¹⁸ in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. We did not find evidence that RSLA has an impact on ELA or math proficiency rates among students in Stream 2 participants' schools.¹⁹

The evaluation of the impact of RSLA on schoolwide student ELA and math proficiency rates was designed to meet WWC standards with reservations. However, because states nationwide did not administer student assessments in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AIR was not able to measure student achievement outcomes for Cohort 2. In spring 2021, the AIR team explored options for retaining the impact analysis despite these issues with internal experts, TFA, and Abt Associates. However, all parties concluded that the original impact design could not be salvaged for Cohort 2 (2019–20). The impact analysis for Cohort 3 may not meet WWC standards with (or without) reservations²⁰ because baseline student achievement data for this cohort are missing from spring 2020.

¹⁶ The absolute values of the standardized mean differences in baseline ELA and math were 0.008 and 0.023, respectively, which are lower than the threshold set by WWC to demonstrate baseline equivalence between intervention and comparison groups.

¹⁷ This is equivalent to an effect size of 0.050.

¹⁸ This is equivalent to an effect size of -0.026 .

¹⁹ We are unable to reject the null hypothesis of no program impact on student proficiency in ELA or math with a p -value less than .05.

²⁰ Independent certified WWC reviewers will determine whether the impact analysis meets WWC standards.

Conclusion

Summary of Implementation Findings

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Year 3 (2019–20), RSLA was a resource-intensive program that provided RSLA participants from across the United States with multiple opportunities to engage in in-person programming and networking opportunities. However, the pandemic and its longstanding impact immediately required TFA, its partners, and RSLA participants to rethink and engage differently, both in terms of program operations and with each other.

When it comes to the RSLA primary component—attendance at the Learning Cycles and professional learning community networking—TFA RSLA met the required level of implementation with three (of four) RSLA cohorts attending the minimum 60–80% of the required Learning Cycles offered by RSLA and the Learning Cycle facilitators. However, the pandemic forced TFA to change the format of these Learning Cycles from being in-person to virtual for two of the four participating cohorts (e.g., Cohorts 3 and 4). This transition to an online format in 2020 did not have a negative impact on overall RSLA participant engagement for these last two cohorts.

Interviews and focus groups with TFA RSLA program staff, Learning Cycle facilitators, and RSLA participants identified the following five factors—the shift to a virtual format, coordinated connections between TFA and Learning Cycle facilitators, employing different strategies to make content more engaging, ensuring the content of the Learning Cycles is personalized and applicable to school educators’ day-to-day lives, and having an intentional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)—that positively influenced and helped to maintain RSLA participant engagement in the Learning Cycles.

When it comes to the secondary component, receiving coaching supports, the TFA RSLA program met the adequate level of implementation fidelity. Specifically, across all four participating cohorts, Stream 2 participants were more likely to receive the average required minutes suggested for coaching than their Stream 1 counterparts. Through focus groups, RSLA participants noted that the opportunity to receive individualized supports from BetterLesson coaches further facilitated their engagement in the program as a whole. However, both BetterLesson coaches and RSLA participants reported the need for better coordination and clearer communication between TFA and BetterLesson to further improve RSLA participants’ leadership coaching support.

For the third component, the completion of the Capstone Project, the vast majority of RSLA participants from Cohorts 1 and 2 met or exceeded the fidelity-of-implementation threshold for completing the Capstone Project. These projects, according to RSLA participants, focused on cultural identity and biases, DEI, and schoolwide strategies that aligned with their school's needs or goals. However, the pandemic resulted in many RSLA participants from Cohort 3 from being able to complete or present on their Capstone Project that year. The need to reprioritize the time, schedule, and capacity of both RSLA participants and TFA RSLA program staff resulted in TFA eliminating this nonmandatory component of the program after 2020.

These changes in the three core elements of the RSLA program, and the corresponding and tailored support that RSLA participants received during their 1-year tenure in the program, may have positively influenced RSLA participants' self-assessments of their leadership skills as assessed by the SLC Framework survey.

For the SLC survey, which set and self-assessed RSLA participants' expectations for effective school leadership, AIR's analysis found that there were four (of five) key overarching components (e.g., Builds Culture, Drives Innovation, Facilitates Learning, and Manages People and Systems) that Stream 1 teachers showed the highest growth in. Within these components, teachers and other student-facing educators specifically demonstrated gains in the areas of creating value, having high standards for student learning, fostering teams, performance management, and developing talent.

In comparison, Stream 2 participants, or teacher leaders and other midlevel administrators within a school, showed the most growth in the following four (of five) SLC Framework components: Facilitates Learning, Context, Drives Innovation, and Acts Strategically. Within these components, Stream 2 participants showed the highest gains in the areas of growing strong teachers, continuous learning, commitment to place, self-awareness, disrupting the status quo, interpersonal understanding, and systems thinking.

RSLA alumni found that participating in the professional development trainings, taking part in in-person rural school site visits, and engaging in opportunities to network with others as the three most valuable aspects of their RSLA participation. Moreover, RSLA alumni report that they intend to remain in the education field and in rural communities in the next 3 to 5 years, even if they did not remain in leadership roles postprogram. However, RSLA participants remain committed to making an impact in their communities, and more than 40% of Stream 1 and Stream 2 alumni note plans to pursue a leadership position in the next 3 to 5 years. For the subset of alumni who no longer work in rural schools or education, family, COVID-19, and the desire for job flexibility were the three cited reasons for why they left.

Summary of Impact Findings

TFA notes that the primary objectives and goals of TFA are (a) to offer RSLA participants located in rural communities nationwide with opportunities to engage in Learning Cycles that are focused on equity, decision-making, communication, and personal school leadership development; (b) to provide cohort-based opportunities for collaboration and exchange of diverse ideas; (c) to offer opportunities for on-site or virtual school visits that will expose RSLA participants to diverse contexts and practices; and (d) to provide participants with individualized, application-based one-on-one coaching. Taken together, these four program components will result in networks of trusted peers who work in similar rural school contexts and will help program participants employ what they have learned through RSLA in their roles as rural school leaders. To this aim, the RSLA program could be considered successful. The distal aim of improving ELA and math achievement, although important, is a secondary goal of the program. Due in part to the pandemic, we were only able to include 17 Stream 2 participants in our evaluation of program impact on schoolwide student proficiency, which limited our power to identify statistically significant program impacts.

On average, intervention schools' proficiency rates were 0.3 percentage points higher in ELA and 0.9 percentage points lower in math than comparison schools at baseline.²¹

After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, ELA proficiency was 2 percentage points higher²² in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. However, this difference is not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that after 1 year of participation in RSLA, math proficiency was 1 percentage point lower²³ in Stream 2 participants' schools than in comparison schools. However, this difference is not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

²¹ The absolute values of the standardized mean differences in baseline ELA and math were 0.008 and 0.023, respectively, which are lower than the threshold set by WWC to demonstrate baseline equivalence between intervention and comparison groups.

²² This is equivalent to an effect size of 0.050.

²³ This is equivalent to an effect size of -0.026 .

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Appendix A. Rural School Leadership Academy Theories of Action

The Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) theories of action for Stream 1 (Table 5) and Stream 2 (Table 6) include the following key components, activities, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes:

Table 5. Teach For America (TFA) RSLA Stream 1 Theory of Action

Key Components	Activities	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>Primary Component: Develop Cohorts of Professional Learning Communities Through Four Learning Cycles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Fall Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Winter Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Spring Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Rural school visits, which typically occurred either virtually and/or in-person annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of leadership competencies, self-selection into teacher leadership roles, and improved retention of teacher leaders in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five years after program completion: increased retention of educators in rural communities
<p>Secondary Component: BetterLesson Coaching (Cohorts 3 and 4 only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching: Leaders and coaches meet for 30 minutes biweekly to discuss leadership development. 		
<p>Secondary Component: Capstone Project (Cohorts 1 and 2 only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capstone Project: Informed by measures from the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) assessment, participants choose an instructional leadership goal to apply their learning to the home context. Participants develop an action plan to meet the goal that includes creating a product that the school can use to improve student outcomes. At the end of the project, participants share their learning with RSLA participant peers. 		

Table 6. Teach For America (TFA) RSLA Stream 2 Theory of Action

Key Components	Activities	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>Primary Component: Develop Cohorts of Professional Learning Communities Through Four Learning Cycles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Fall Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Spring Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Summer Learning Cycles facilitated by the TFA RSLA team or partner organizations • Rural school visits, which typically occurred either virtually and/or in-person annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased instructional leadership skills and knowledge, self-selection into a principal preparation program, and improved retention of midlevel leaders in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased schoolwide student proficiency in English language arts and mathematics
<p>Secondary Component: BetterLesson Coaching (Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching: Leaders and coaches meet for 30 minutes biweekly to discuss leadership development. 		
<p>Secondary Component: Capstone Project (Cohorts 1 and 2 only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capstone Project: Informed by measures from the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) assessment, participants choose an instructional leadership goal to apply their learning to the home context. Participants develop an action plan to meet the goal that includes creating a product that the school can use to improve student outcomes. At the end of the project, participants share their learning with RSLA participant peers. 		

Appendix B. Characteristics of Rural School Leadership Academy Participants

This appendix summarizes the characteristics of Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) participants.

Participant Gender

The gender identity of RSLA Stream 1 participants is presented in Table 7. Across these four cohorts of Stream 1 participants, 67 (76%) of 88 participants identified as female, and 21 (24%) identified as male.

Table 7. Stream 1 Participants’ Gender Identity, by Cohort

Stream	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Total
Female	18	20	17	12	67
Male	7	3	8	3	21
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0

The gender identity of RSLA Stream 2 participants is presented in Table 8. Across the four cohorts of Stream 2 participants, 58 (68%) of 85 participants identified as female, 26 (31%) identified as male, and 1 (1%) did not state a gender identity.

Table 8. Stream 2 Participants’ Gender Identity, by Cohort

Stream	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Total
Female	14	17	14	13	58
Male	3	10	7	6	26
Unknown	0	0	0	1	1

Participant Race/Ethnicity

Research shows that having school leaders who represent and can relate to the lived experience of both the students and families they serve as well as teachers of color can yield positive benefits in terms of academics and school culture.²⁴ Teach For America (TFA) RSLA program staff note that recruiting a more representative and diverse cohort of RSLA participants who currently work or were willing to work in rural (as opposed to urban) cities

²⁴ New Leaders. (2023). *Why leaders of color make a lasting impact*. <https://www.newleaders.org/blog/why-leaders-of-color-make-a-lasting-impact>

was a high priority for TFA RSLA program staff as well as having increased representation from Black, Hispanic, Latinx, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Indigenous candidates.

The largest percentage of Education and Innovation Research (EIR)-funded RSLA participants in Stream 1 identified themselves as non-Hispanic White (between 40% and 72%), while between 13% and 32% of participants from these same four cohorts identified themselves as African American, Black (Figure 8). RSLA was more successful in recruiting racially diverse participants into Stream 2 than Stream 1 (Figure 9). Between 33% and 45% of Stream 2 participants self-reported as African American, Black, and between 19% and 47% self-identified as non-Hispanic White.

Figure 8. Race/Ethnicity of RSLA Stream 1 Participants, by Cohort

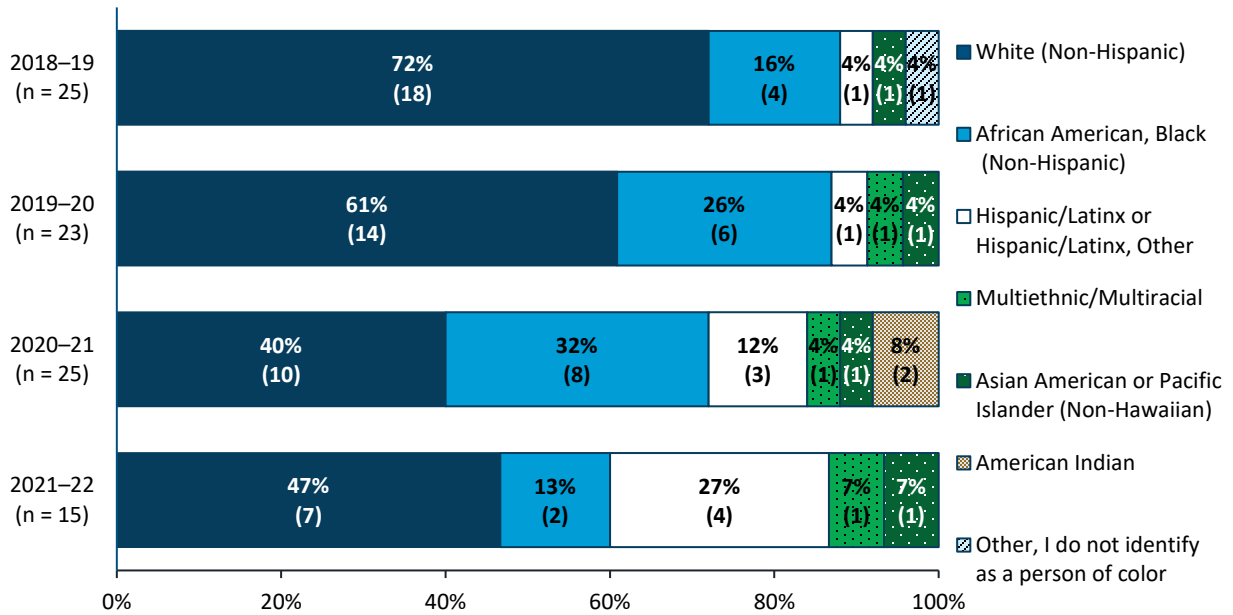
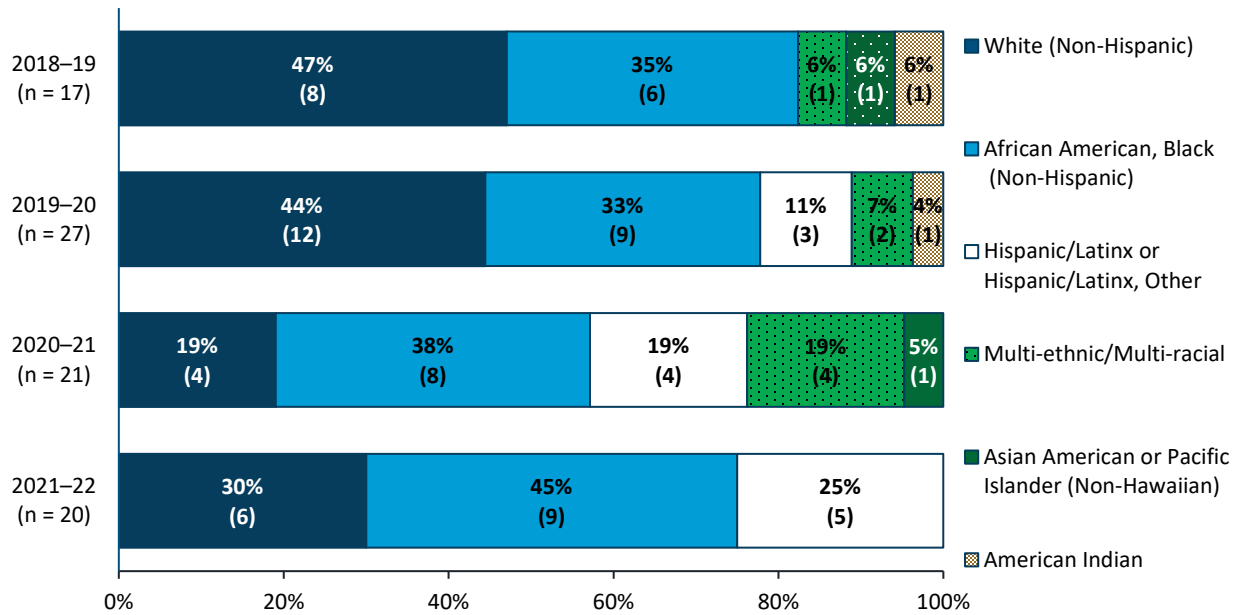


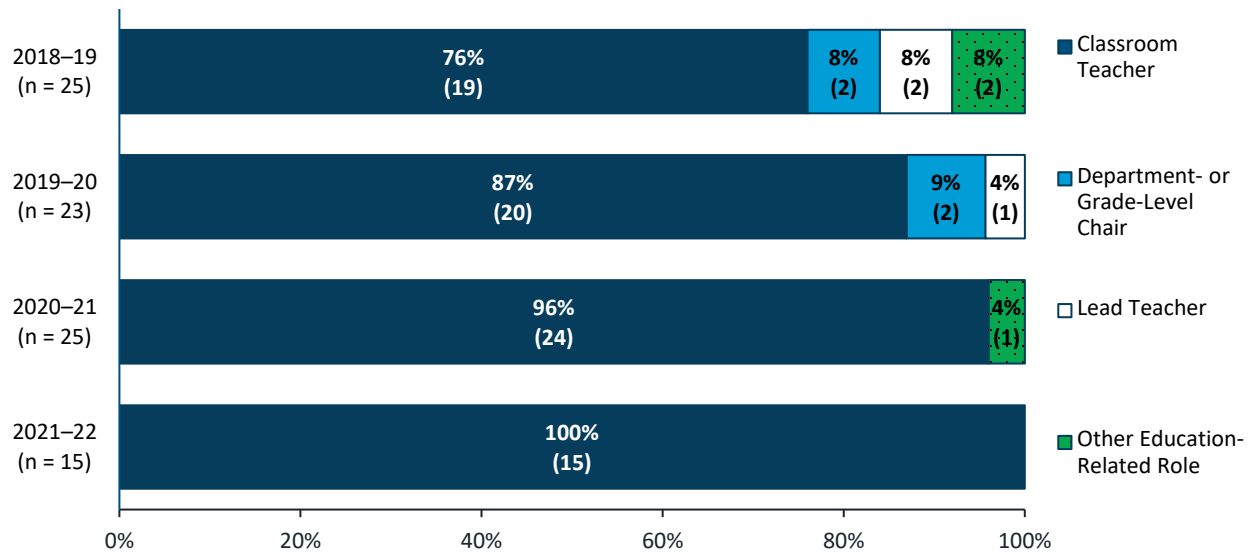
Figure 9. Race/Ethnicity of RSLA Stream 2 Participants, by Cohort



Participant Roles

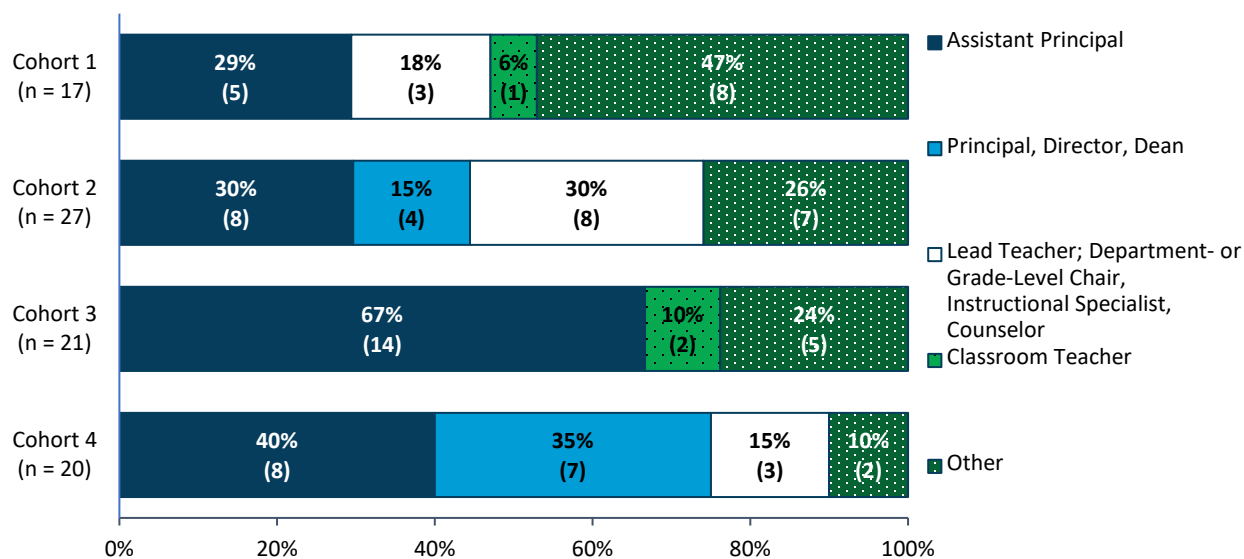
RSLA’s target population for its Stream 1 participants are classroom teachers without a formal leadership role, and at least three quarters of Stream 1 participants were classroom teachers (Figure 10). In comparison, between 29% and 67% of Stream 2 participants served as assistant principals (Figure 11).

Figure 10. RSLA Stream 1 Participant Roles by Cohort



Note. Examples of “Other” Stream 1 roles include business educator, career and technical education coordinator, testing coordinator, interventionist, and school counselor.

Figure 11. RSLA Stream 2 Participant Roles by Cohort



Note. Examples of “Other” Stream 2 roles include TFA staff member, teacher leader developer, and roles within education-focused nonprofit organizations.

Participant Location

At the time of their participation in RSLA, more than half of Stream 1 participants were located in the following five states: North Carolina (13 participants), South Carolina (10 participants), and Arkansas, New Mexico, and Idaho (eight participants each) (Figure 12). In contrast, more than half of Stream 2 participants were from the four AIR focus states:²⁵ North Carolina (22 participants), Louisiana (12 participants), Texas (eight participants), and South Carolina (seven participants) (Figure 13). Other most-represented states include Arkansas (six participants), Mississippi and Hawaii (five participants each), and New Mexico (four participants).

²⁵ AIR’s broader focus on the fidelity of implementation addresses cohorts recruited from 2018–19 to 2021–22 and includes both streams, whereas the impact analysis focuses on only Stream 2 participants for these same cohorts. More specifically, AIR’s impact study will focus on Stream 2 participants recruited from the following four states only: North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Texas. This is because the greatest proportion of RSLA candidates were expected to be recruited from these states.

Figure 12. Number of RSLA Stream 1 Participants by State

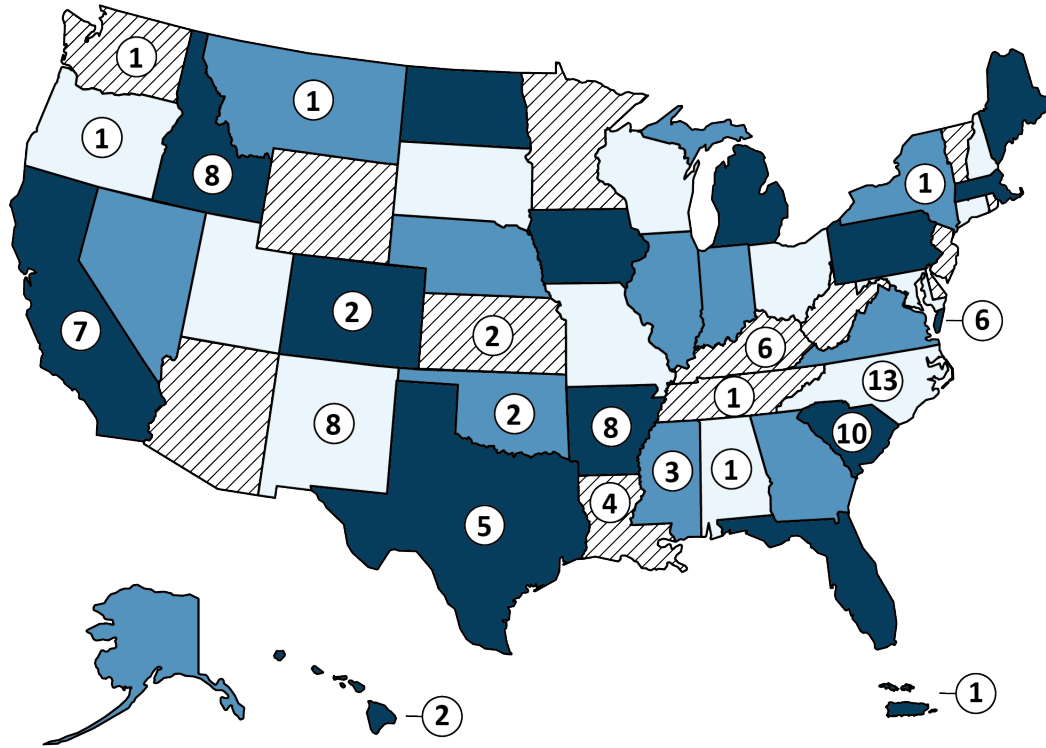
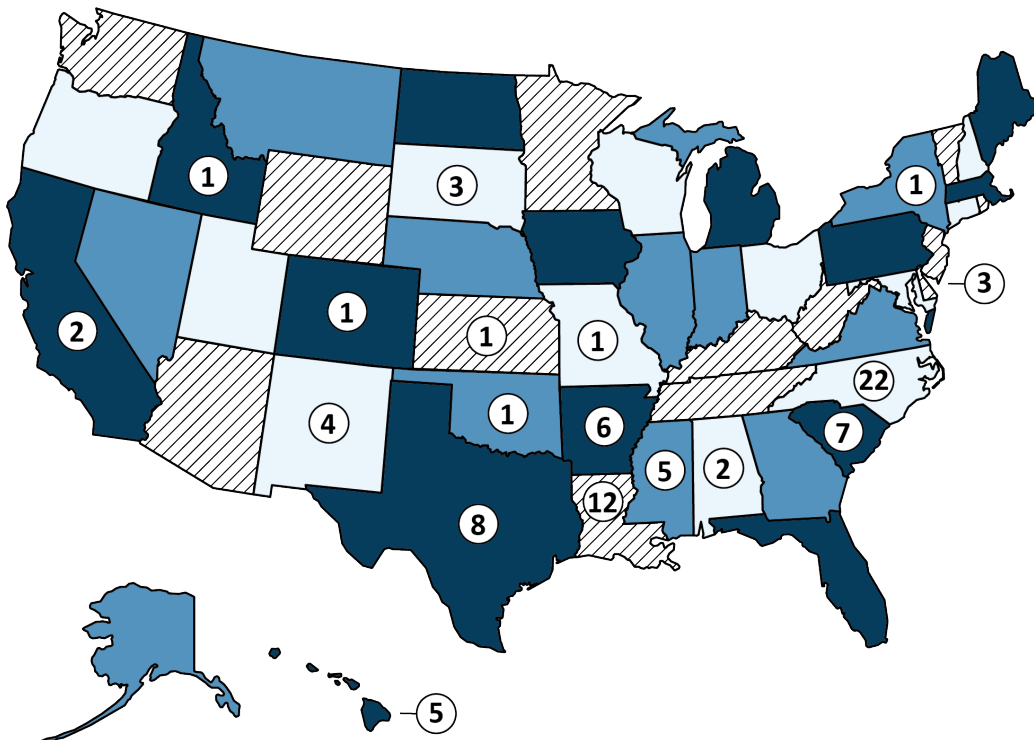


Figure 13. Number of RSLA Stream 2 Participants by State



Appendix C. Evaluation Data Sources and Analytic Approaches

To provide Teach For America (TFA) with a complete picture of their Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) program, including whether the program was implemented with fidelity and the overarching changes to RSLA and the role of COVID-19 on programming, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) reexamined the various indicators used to measure RSLA Learning Cycle attendance, coaching participation, Capstone Project completion, RSLA participant demographic data, and perceived RSLA participant changes to their leadership skills, as measured by the TFA-administered School Leadership Competency (SLC) survey. Analysis of these existing data—in addition to our analysis of existing qualitative data collected from TFA RSLA program staff, RSLA participants, Learning Cycle trainers, and BetterLesson coaches—has allowed us to evaluate and report fidelity of program implementation at both the participant and program levels for each of the four cohorts (2017–18, 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21) of RSLA participants. Details of the data sources and analytic approaches used to measure RSLA program implementation, mediators, and impact are presented in [Table 9](#).

Table 9. Data Sources and Analytic Approaches Used to Analyze RSLA Implementation, Mediators, and Impact

Data Source	Data Collected	Analytic Approach
TFA Learning Cycle Attendance Data	Quarterly (summer, fall, winter, and spring) Learning Cycle attendance data for RSLA Cohorts 1–4. RSLA Learning Cycles were offered in a virtual, in-person, or hybrid setting.	AIR descriptively analyzed RSLA participant attendance data for Cohorts 1–4, which were collected by TFA, to measure implementation fidelity for this primary program component.
BetterLesson Coaching Log Data	An online dashboard maintained by BetterLesson, a TFA partner organization, which collected and shared biweekly coaching logs that included both foci and frequency of engagement for Cohort 2 Stream 2 and all RSLA participants in Cohorts 3–4. Coaching was not offered to Cohort 1 RSLA participants.	AIR descriptively analyzed existing coaching log data to measure implementation fidelity for this secondary program component.
TFA Capstone Completion Data	Evidence of a Capstone Project plan and end-of-program presentation to fellow RSLA cohort members. The inclusion of Capstone Projects as a core component of the RSLA program was discontinued by TFA after Cohort 2.	AIR descriptively analyzed TFA-provided Capstone Project completion data.
RSLA Participant Demographic Data	Demographic data collected by TFA from RSLA participants.	AIR generated summary statistics describing RSLA participants.

Data Source	Data Collected	Analytic Approach
Interviews and Focus Groups With TFA RSLA Program Staff, Partners, and Participants	Interview and focus group data collected from TFA RSLA program staff, Learning Cycle trainers, BetterLesson coaches, and RSLA participants annually between 2018–19 and 2020–21. The purpose of these interviews and/or focus groups was to capture and expand upon themes pertaining to RSLA’s life cycle of supports, factors, benefits, and challenges that led to the impetus of various RSLA programmatic changes, and make suggestions for program improvements. No interviews or focus groups were conducted in the first year (2017–18) of the evaluation.	AIR reanalyzed qualitative data collected between Years 2 and 4 to identify, document, and capture changes and trends over time.
School Leadership Competency (SLC) Survey	A TFA-administered pre- and postsurvey given to RSLA participants in Cohorts 2–4. The SLC survey is a self-assessment created and administered by TFA to RSLA Stream 1 and 2 participants. The survey items are aligned with the components of TFA’s SLC Framework, and RSLA expects that participants will grow in these competencies during their participation in the program.	AIR analyzed changes to RSLA participants’ self-rating on the SLC survey competencies and categories from the pre- and postadministration periods using paired-sample <i>t</i> -tests.
Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED)	The VAL-ED survey is a validated measure of instructional leadership practice quality (Elliott et al., 2009). The survey was administered in fall and spring to teachers who worked directly with an RSLA Stream 2 participant to measure instructional leadership practice. The survey also was administered to the Stream 2 participants themselves in fall and spring.	AIR used paired-sample <i>t</i> -tests to compare VAL-ED ratings from fall and spring.
School-Level Proficiency Data for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics	Schoolwide student ELA and mathematics proficiency data were collected for students tested in Grades 3–10 in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.	These data were used to conduct baseline equivalence testing, an analytic approach to ensure that potential comparison schools were similar to RSLA Stream 2 treatment schools in terms of key variables of interest. ²⁶ Once comparison schools were identified, AIR conducted a difference-in-differences design with a matched comparison group to evaluate the impact of RSLA on student achievement.

²⁶ School-level variables of interest include the following: school type (elementary, middle, or high school); urbanicity status; school enrollment; percentage of students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or two or more races; percentage of students who have a disability; percentage of students who are English learners; and percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Appendix D. Additional Details on Fidelity of Rural School Leadership Academy Implementation

This appendix presents additional details about the American Institute for Research's (AIR's) analysis of Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) implementation as well as our findings. Following guidance from our technical assistance providers at Abt Associates, AIR analyzed and reported fidelity of implementation separately for each key component of the intervention and each cohort of participants (Abt Associates, 2019). We also followed guidance from Abt Associates to present fidelity-of-implementation findings separately for Streams 1 and 2, so that participants included in the Stream 2 fidelity-of-implementation sample overlap with participants included in the impact analysis. Following guidance from Abt Associates, we do not aggregate fidelity of implementation across streams, cohorts, or key components.

Primary Component: Develop Cohorts of Professional Learning Communities Through Four Learning Cycles

The primary component of RSLA is the development of cohorts of professional learning communities through Learning Cycles. In this section, first, we report fidelity of implementation for the Learning Cycle component for Cohorts 1 and 2, and then for Cohorts 3 and 4. Cohorts 1 and 2 attended in-person Learning Cycle retreats, with the exception of the spring 2020 session, which was held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning Cycles were conducted remotely for Cohorts 3 and 4 because of the pandemic. Because the format of the Learning Cycles for Cohorts 3 and 4 was different from the format for Cohorts 1 and 2, the criteria and data used for evaluating fidelity of implementation for each set of cohorts differed. Given these differences, we report results separately for Cohorts 1 and 2 and for Cohorts 3 and 4.

Cohorts 1 and 2

Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohorts 1 and 2 were asked to attend one summer intensive session and three in-person or virtual retreats as part of the 1-year program. In partnership with TFA, AIR developed and used a three-step process for assessing the implementation fidelity of the Learning Cycles component of the program for Cohorts 1 and 2 (Table 10).

- First, AIR assigned 0 (low fidelity), 1 (moderate fidelity), or 2 (high fidelity) points to each participant on the basis of the percentage of Learning Cycles content (i.e., percentage of days for Cohort 1 and percentage of activities for Cohort 2) they attended.
- Second, AIR summed each participant's assigned points across all four Learning Cycles. Participants were assigned between 0 points (if they attended the summer intensive session and all four Learning Cycles at low fidelity) and 5 points (2 points for the summer intensive

session and 1 point for each subsequent Learning Cycle). AIR then determined whether each RSLA participant met the minimum threshold, 4 points, for the Learning Cycle component of RSLA.

- Finally, to determine whether the program’s Learning Cycle component was implemented with fidelity at the program level, we aggregated individual participant information up to the program level by stream. Before the start of the intervention, TFA and AIR decided that the Learning Cycle component would be implemented with fidelity at the program level if at least 85% of RSLA participants met the minimum threshold of 4 points.

Attendance thresholds differ by cohort because AIR received daily attendance data for every RSLA participant in Cohort 1, but we received attendance data for each activity on every day of each Learning Cycle for Cohort 2. In addition, in spring 2020, TFA changed the format of the spring Learning Cycle from in-person sessions to multiple, shorter virtual sessions to accommodate RSLA participants’ varying schedules during the pandemic.

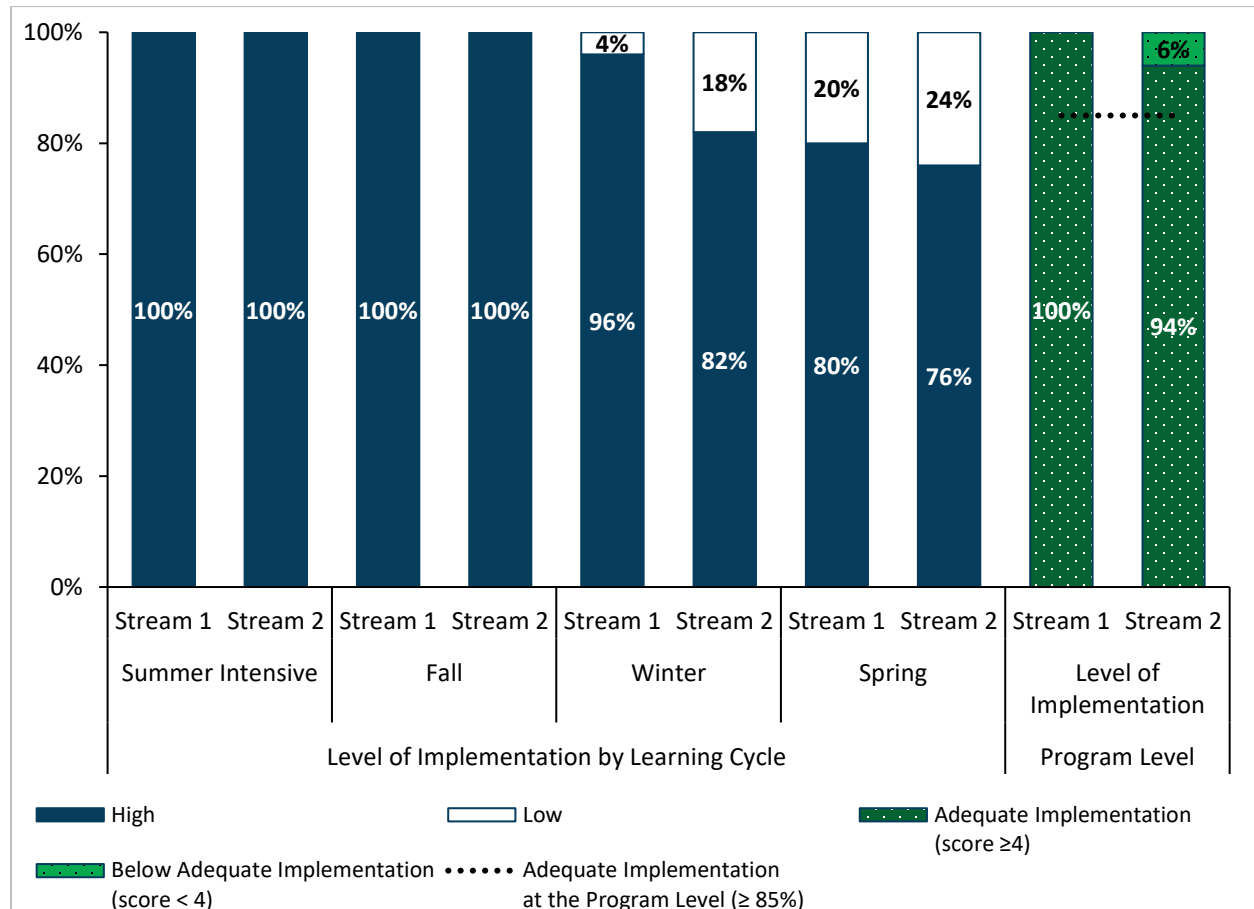
Table 10. Fidelity of Implementation for the Professional Learning Communities Component: Cohorts 1 and 2, Streams 1 and 2

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants attend summer intensive session	<p><u>Cohort 1:</u> High (2): Participates in activities for all 5 days Moderate (1): Participates in activities for 4 days Low (0): Participates in activities for < 4 days</p> <p><u>Cohort 2:</u> High (2): Participates in 100% of activities across all 5 days Moderate (1): Participates in ≥ 80% (or 4 out of 5 days) of activities Low (0): Participates in < 80% of activities (3 or fewer days)</p>	Score ≥ 1 (4 days or 80% of sessions)	85% or more of RSLA participants in each stream score ≥ 4
RSLA participants attend fall group training	<p><u>Cohort 1:</u> High (1): Participates in activities for 2 days Low (0): Participates in activities for < 2 days</p> <p><u>Cohort 2:</u> High (1): Participates in ≥ 80% of activities across all days Low (0): Participates in < 80% of activities across all days</p>	Score ≥ 1 (both days or 80% of activities across days)	

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants attend winter group training	<u>Cohort 1:</u> High (1): Participates in activities for 2 days Low (0): Participates in activities for < 2 days <u>Cohort 2:</u> High (1): Participates in ≥ 80% of activities across all days Low (0): Participates in < 80% of activities across all days	Score ≥ 1 (both days or 80% of activities across days)	
RSLA participants attend spring group training	<u>Cohort 1:</u> High (1): Participates in activities for 2 days Low (0): Participates in activities for < 2 days <u>Cohort 2:</u> High (1): Participates in at least 80% of virtual sessions Low (0): Participates in fewer than 80% of virtual sessions	Score ≥ 1 (both days or 80% of activities across days)	

Figure 14 presents the percentage of Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohort 1 who met fidelity-of-implementation thresholds at each level for each session as well as the percentage of participants who met the adequate attendance threshold overall. For Cohort 1, attendance rates at RSLA retreats met the fidelity-of-implementation standard set by TFA and AIR. However, attendance was lower at the winter and spring retreats.

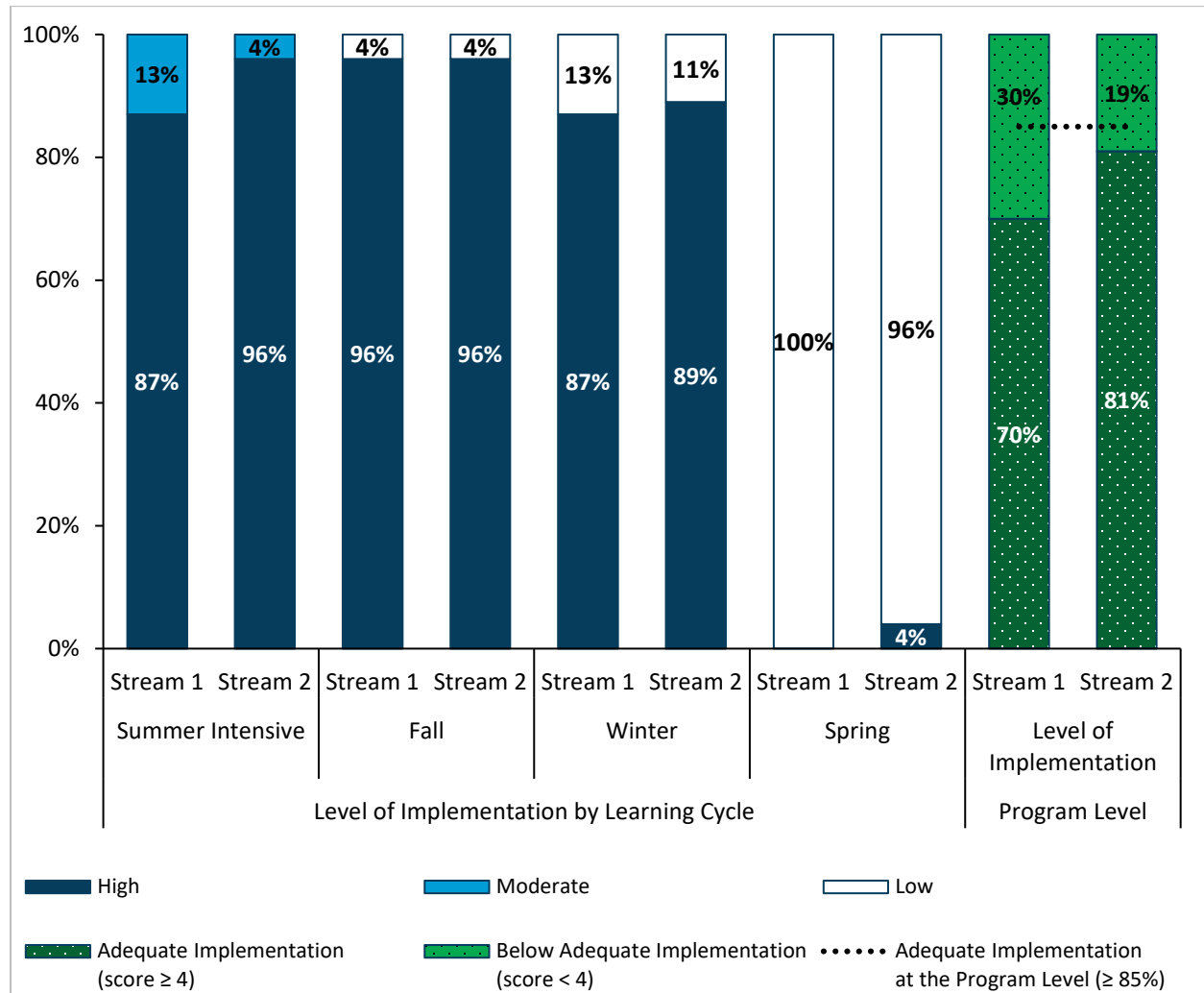
Figure 14. Percentage of Cohort 1 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Professional Learning Communities Component, by Stream



Note. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Attendance Tracker (Stream 1: $n = 25$; Stream 2: $n = 17$).

In Cohort 2, Streams 1 and 2 met the threshold for adequate attendance across the first three Learning Cycles. However, Cohort 2 participants did not meet the threshold for adequate attendance at the spring session, which occurred in a virtual environment because schools were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 15). Although both streams of Cohorts 1 and 2 met the threshold for adequate attendance across the first three Learning Cycles, neither stream of Cohort 2 met the criteria for implementation fidelity at the program level, due to low attendance at the spring Learning Cycle, but this cannot be considered the fault of the program.

Figure 15. Percentage of Cohort 2 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Professional Learning Communities Component, by Stream



Note. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Attendance Tracker (Stream 1: $n = 23$; Stream 2: $n = 27$).

Cohorts 3 and 4

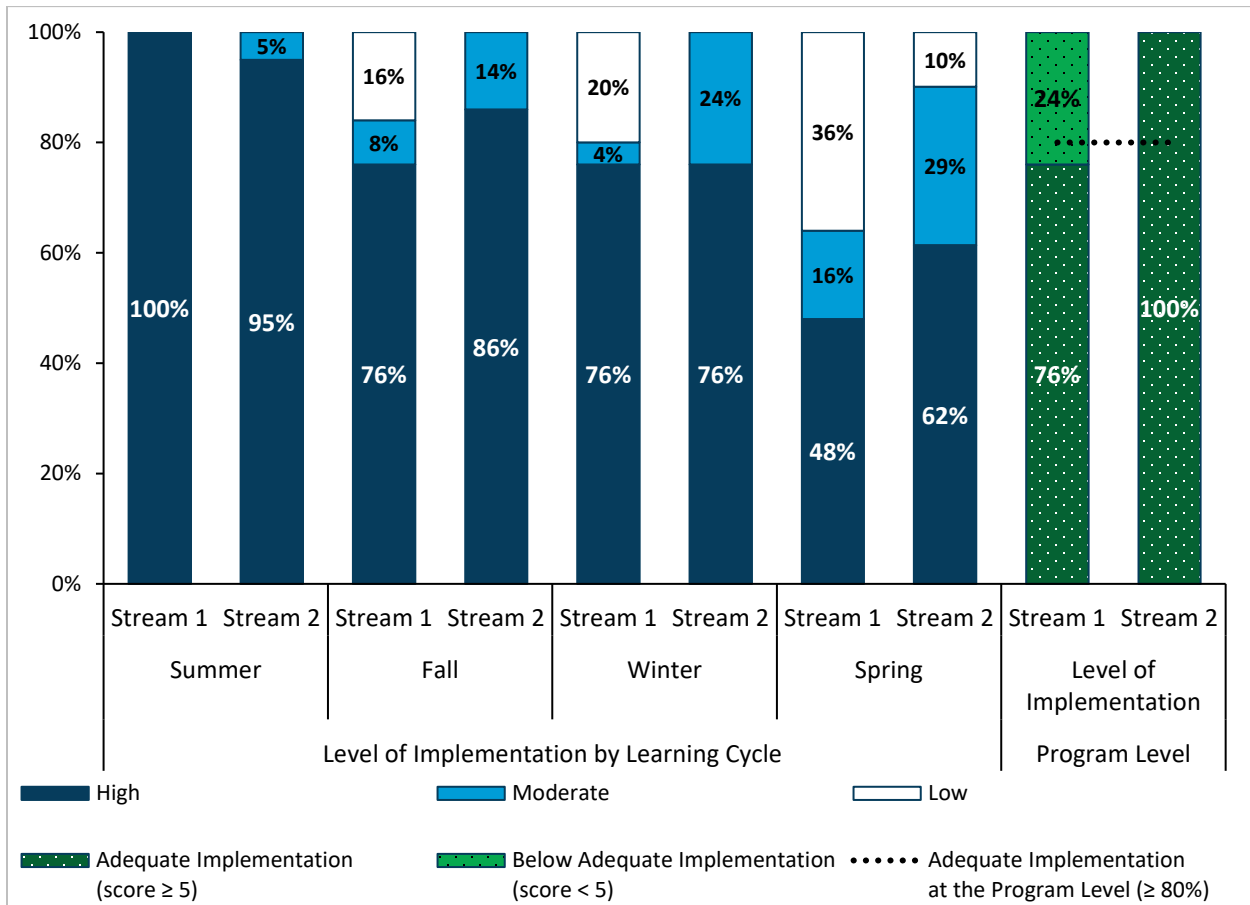
Stream 1 and Stream 2 participants in Cohorts 3 and 4 were asked to participate in virtual Learning Cycles in summer, fall, winter, and spring. In partnership with TFA, AIR developed and used a three-step process, presented in [Table 11](#), analogous to the process we used for Cohorts 1 and 2.

Table 11. Fidelity of Implementation for the Professional Learning Communities Component: Cohorts 3 and 4, Streams 1 and 2

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants attend virtual summer intensive session	High (2): Participates in > 80% of all required sessions Moderate (1): Participates in 60–80% of all required sessions Low (0): Participates in < 60% of all required sessions	Score ≥ 1 (participates in ≥ 60% of sessions)	80% or more of RSLA participants in each stream score ≥ 5
RSLA participants attend virtual fall training	High (2): Participates in > 80% of all required sessions Moderate (1): Participates in 60–80% of all required sessions Low (0): Participates in < 60% of all required sessions	Score ≥ 1 (participates in ≥ 60% of sessions)	
RSLA participants attend virtual winter training	High (2): Participates in > 80% of all required sessions Moderate (1): Participates in 60–80% of all required sessions Low (0): Participates in < 60% of all required sessions	Score ≥ 1 (participates in ≥ 60% of sessions)	
RSLA participants attend virtual spring training	High (2): Participates in > 80% of all required sessions Moderate (1): Participates in 60–80% of all required sessions Low (0): Participates in < 60% of all required sessions	Score ≥ 1 (participates in ≥ 60% of sessions)	

According to AIR’s analysis of Learning Cycle attendance data among Cohort 3 (2020–21) participants, the attendance rate in Stream 2 met the fidelity-of-implementation standard set by TFA and AIR, whereas the attendance rate in Stream 1 was just below the standard (Figure 16).

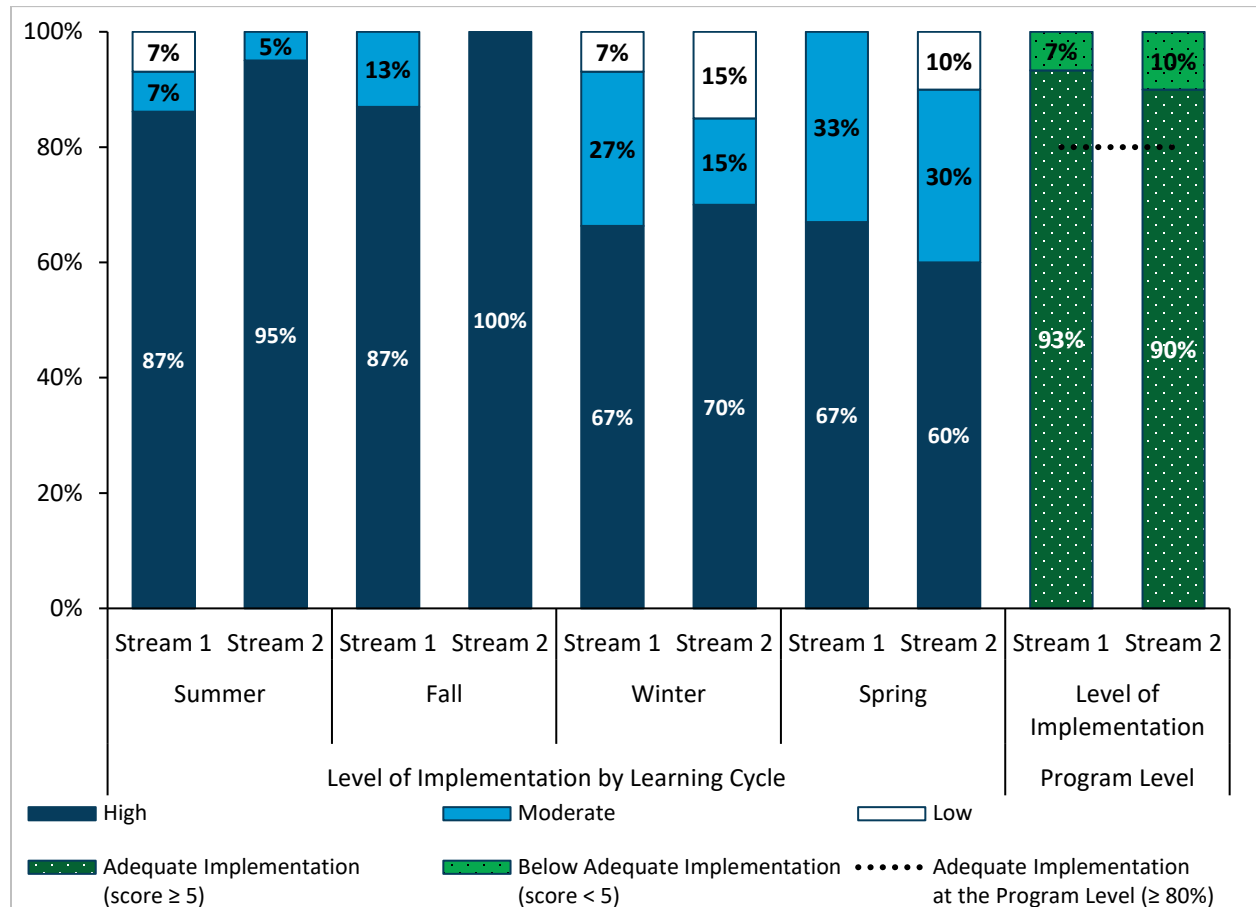
Figure 16. Percentage of Cohort 3 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Professional Learning Communities Component, by Stream



Note. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Attendance Tracker (Stream 1: $n = 25$; Stream 2: $n = 21$).

Cohort 4 met the Learning Cycles fidelity-of-implementation standard set by TFA and AIR (Figure 17). According to AIR’s analysis, 14 Stream 1 participants (93%) and 18 Stream 2 participants (90%) met the minimum threshold for adequate implementation at the program level required for attendance at the Learning Cycles.

Figure 17. Percentage of Cohort 4 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Professional Learning Communities Component, by Stream



Note. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Attendance Tracker (Stream 1: $n = 15$; Stream 2: $n = 20$).

In summary, two of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and three of the four cohorts of Stream 2 participants met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance, the primary component of RSLA. Learning Cycle attendance among Cohort 2 participants was low during the spring cycle, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. If not for the pandemic, it seems likely that three of the four cohorts of Stream 1 participants and all cohorts of Stream 2 participants would have met the fidelity-of-implementation standards set by TFA and AIR for Learning Cycle attendance.

Secondary Component: Coaching

A secondary program component of RSLA, which was not implemented until Cohort 2, was one-on-one coaching support. In Cohort 2, coaching was offered only to Stream 2 participants; however, because of the availability of funds following the sudden shift from in-person to virtual Learning Cycles, TFA began offering coaching support to both streams in Cohort 3. The coaching was provided by BetterLesson, an organization founded by teachers in 2008 that

offers one-on-one coaching, design workshops, learning series, and learning walks for educators (BetterLesson, 2021). Coaches were expected to meet with participants for 30 minutes once or twice each month during the school year.

To help AIR track implementation fidelity, BetterLesson coaches were asked to complete a log after every coaching session with an RSLA participant. AIR analyzed the BetterLesson coaching data and calculated the median number of minutes that coaches met with RSLA participants each month. AIR then calculated the median number of coaching minutes from November through May for Cohort 2 and from September to May for Cohorts 3 and 4.

TFA and AIR determined high, moderate, and low thresholds for coaching based on monthly coaching session engagement time (Table 12 and Table 13). AIR assigned 0 (low fidelity), 1 (moderate fidelity), or 2 (high fidelity) points to each participant on the basis of the median number of monthly minutes that the participant received coaching across the specified months during the school year. To determine whether the program’s coaching component was implemented with fidelity at the program level, we calculated the percentage of participants who received at least 1 point (typically received at least 20 minutes of monthly coaching) by stream. TFA and AIR decided that the coaching component would be implemented with fidelity at the program level if at least 85% of participants in Stream 2 of Cohort 2 and at least 80% of participants in Streams 1 and 2 of Cohorts 3 and 4 met the minimum threshold of 1 point.

Table 12. Fidelity of Implementation for the Coaching Component: Cohort 2, Stream 2

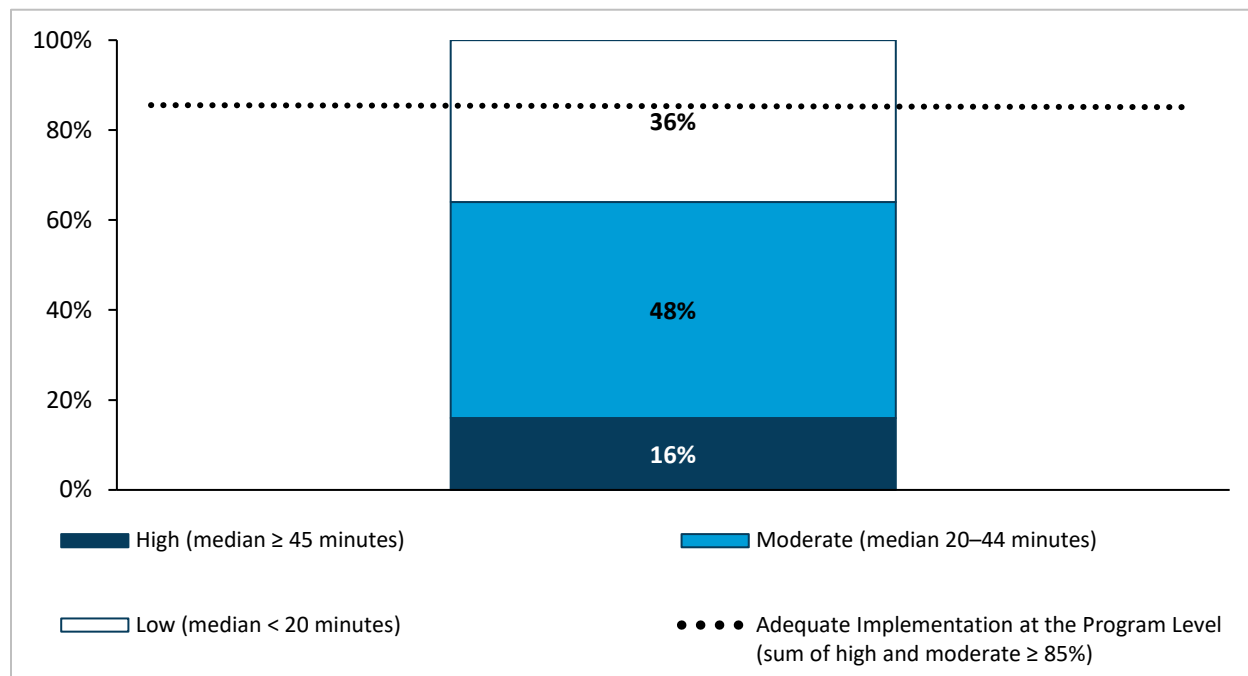
Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants receive coaching	Median number of monthly coaching minutes, November–May: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High (2): ≥ 45 minutes Moderate (1): 20–44 minutes Low (0): < 20 minutes 	Score ≥ 1 (moderate = 20–44 minutes)	85% or more of RSLA participants in each stream score ≥ 1

Table 13. Fidelity of Implementation for the Coaching Component: Cohorts 3 and 4, Streams 1 and 2

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants receive coaching	Median number of monthly coaching minutes, September–May: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High (2): ≥ 40 minutes Moderate (1): 20–39 minutes Low (0): < 20 minutes 	Score ≥ 1 (moderate = 20–39 minutes)	Cohorts 3 and 4: 80% or more of RSLA participants in each stream score ≥ 1

Figure 18 presents the number and percentage of Stream 2 participants in Cohort 2 who received coaching at high, moderate, and low levels of implementation. Among Stream 2 participants in Cohort 2, 64% met the component with adequate fidelity. Because adequate implementation at the program level requires 85% of participants to meet this component, the coaching component was deemed to not have been implemented with fidelity for Cohort 2.

Figure 18. Percentage of Stream 2 Participants in Cohort 2 Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Coaching Component



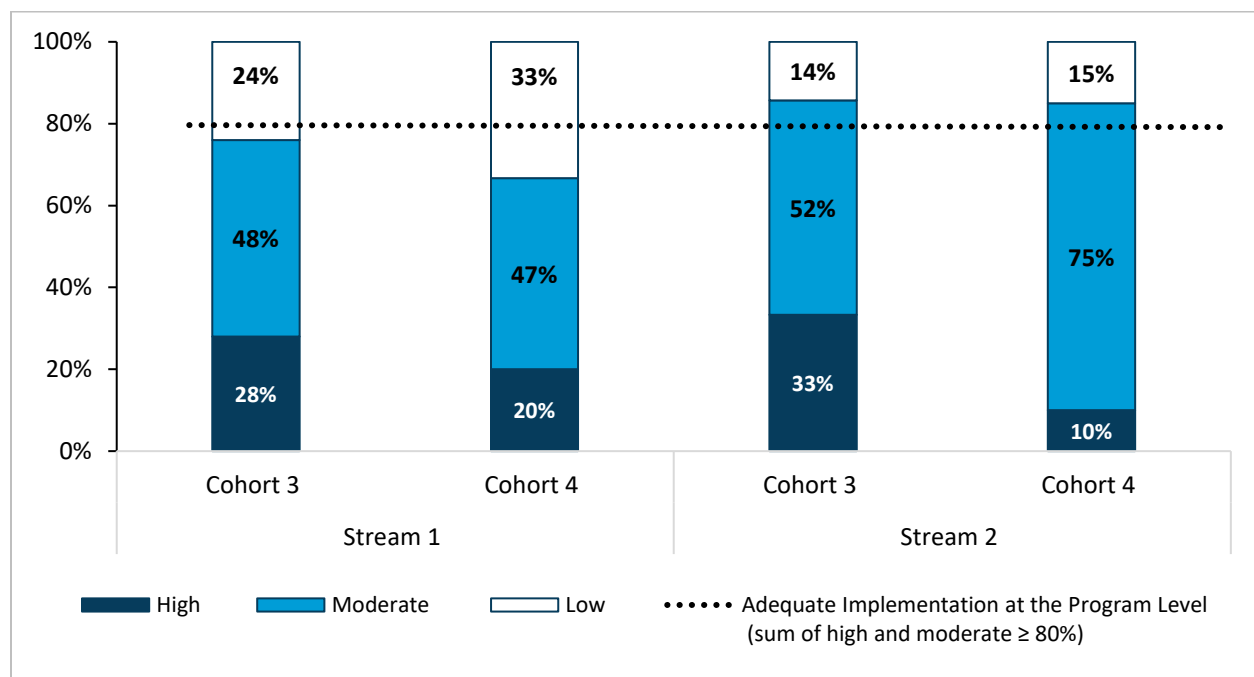
Note. Because the coaching component includes only one activity, the implementation threshold for the coaching activity is equivalent to the implementation threshold for the coaching component at the program level. The dotted line indicates the threshold for adequate implementation of the coaching component at the program level. These results are based on the 25 participants for whom we received coaching data. No coaching activities were reported for two RSLA participants because they did not hold an eligible Stream 2 job position and therefore did not receive coaching that year. These results exclude the coaching sessions that occurred in September 2019, October 2019, and June 2020 because of the delays in getting RSLA participants assigned to a coach. Data are from the TFA RSLA Meeting Tracker, Cohort 2 ($n = 25$).

Figure 19 presents the number and percentage of Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohorts 3 and 4 who received coaching at high, moderate, and low levels of implementation. Among Stream 1 participants in Cohort 3, 19 of 25 (76%) received a median of at least 20 minutes of coaching per month. Thus, the coaching component of RSLA fell just short of the 80% threshold for implementation fidelity for Stream 1 in Cohort 3. Of the 21 Stream 2 participants in Cohort 3, seven (33%) met the coaching component with high fidelity, and 11 (52%) met the coaching

component with moderate fidelity. Therefore, 18 of 21 participants (86%) met the coaching component with adequate fidelity, meeting the threshold needed at the program level.

Of the 15 Stream 1 participants in Cohort 4, three (20%) met the coaching component with high fidelity, and seven (47%) met the coaching component with moderate fidelity. Therefore, the coaching component of RSLA fell short of implementation fidelity. Of the 20 Stream 2 participants in Cohort 4, two (10%) met the coaching component with high fidelity, and 15 (75%) met the coaching component with moderate fidelity. Therefore, 17 participants (85%) met the threshold for adequate coaching implementation.

Figure 19. Percentage of Cohort 3 and 4 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Coaching Component, by Stream



Note. Because the coaching component includes only one activity, the implementation threshold for the coaching activity is equivalent to the implementation threshold for the coaching component at the program level. The dotted line indicates the threshold for adequate implementation of the coaching component at the program level. Data are from the TFA RSLA Meeting Tracker, Cohort 3 ($n = 46$): Stream 1 ($n = 25$), Stream 2 ($n = 21$); Cohort 4 ($n = 35$): Stream 1 ($n = 15$), Stream 2 ($n = 20$).

Factors That Influenced RSLA Participants' Engagement in BetterLesson Coaching

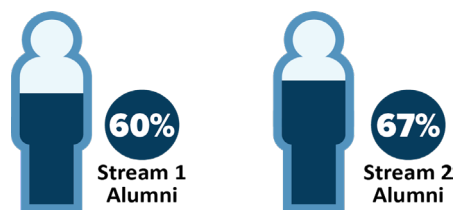
This subsection presents findings based on interviews and focus groups related to the factors that facilitated or inhibited RSLA participants' engagement in coaching sessions with BetterLesson. More specifically, having the opportunity to receive individualized support helped participants continue to engage with BetterLesson coaches. However, an area for growth is the coordination between TFA and BetterLesson.

BetterLesson coaches provided RSLA participants with individualized support. During interviews, TFA staff described BetterLesson coaches' role as being "a resource to [RSLA] participants" rather than being responsible for executing explicit parts of the training content. Cohort 3 RSLA focus group participants indicated that they valued the support they received from their BetterLesson coaches; they acknowledged their coaches' ability to create a safe space, promote open learning, encourage self-reflection, and cultivate trusting relationships. In addition, participants reported that their BetterLesson coach tailored the support to their needs, which allowed participants to focus on topics that not only captured their interest but were responsive to the needs of their school community.

BetterLesson coaches also described their tailored approach to providing coaching (i.e., "try-measure-learn") to help participants develop individualized instructional and leadership practices. Moreover, one TFA staff member added that RSLA designed the BetterLesson coaching components to be collaborative rather than directive, allowing RSLA participants to "name [their] priorities for development" and receive explicit strategies and feedback from their coaches toward their goals.

Results from Cohort 4 focus group participants indicated that participating in one-on-one virtual coaching sessions was valuable because their BetterLesson coaches offered knowledge, skills, and resources specific to, and therefore immediately applicable to, each participant's unique school context. Moreover, most Cohort 4 survey respondents (e.g., 60% of Stream 1 and 67% of Stream 2) reported that they often applied what they learned from their BetterLesson coach in their day-to-day leadership practices (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Stream 3 Alumni Reporting That They Often Applied What They Learned From



Coordination between TFA and BetterLesson has been an area for improvement. TFA staff and BetterLesson coaches reported infrequent meetings and limited opportunities for collaboration not only between themselves but also between BetterLesson coaches and Learning Cycle facilitators. TFA staff explained that coordinating with BetterLesson coaches was not an expectation; rather, they relied on the designated BetterLesson communication liaison to serve as a conduit between their coaches and TFA. Still, BetterLesson coaches expressed concerns about the lack of alignment between their coaching sessions and being able to meet RSLA program expectations. They reported the need for more information and clarity on how the supports they provided tied directly to, informed, and aligned with the broader goals of RSLA, which will help them (a) offer differentiated coaching supports that meet the individual needs of their assigned RSLA participants, and (b) ensure that sessions center on topics that align with

RSLA’s overall goals. Relatedly, about half of Cohort 4 focus group participants stated that although they found value in engaging in coaching sessions, the objectives of the RSLA program and how they connected to RSLA participants’ work appeared unclear to some of their BetterLesson coaches.

TFA staff and BetterLesson coaches suggested ways to improve communications between the two organizations. These included providing BetterLesson coaches with a comprehensive overview of the RSLA program, creating a centralized and online communication hub, and increasing the frequency with which the BetterLesson communication liaison meets with TFA RSLA staff.

Secondary Component: Capstone Project

The completion of the Capstone Project was a secondary component of the RSLA program. The Capstone Project was designed for RSLA participants to apply what they have learned from the RSLA program to their school contexts. Participants were asked to develop an action plan to meet an instructional leadership goal, including a product that the school could use to improve student outcomes. The Capstone Project was eliminated in spring 2020 due to COVID-19-related school closures and is no longer a key program component.

TFA and AIR determined high, moderate, and low thresholds for completion of the Capstone Project. AIR assigned 0 (low fidelity), 1 (moderate fidelity), or 2 (high fidelity) points on the basis of the progress that participants made on their Capstone Project. AIR reviewed and analyzed self-reported data for Cohorts 1 and 2 from the TFA Capstone survey to determine implementation fidelity. Because Cohort 1 participants were expected to present their Capstone project during the spring Learning Cycles, Cohort 1 attendance data from the spring Learning Cycles retreat also was reviewed and analyzed to determine implementation fidelity. TFA and AIR decided that the Capstone Project component was implemented with fidelity at the program level if at least 85% of RSLA participants met the minimum threshold of 1 point. A description of these thresholds is presented in Table 14.

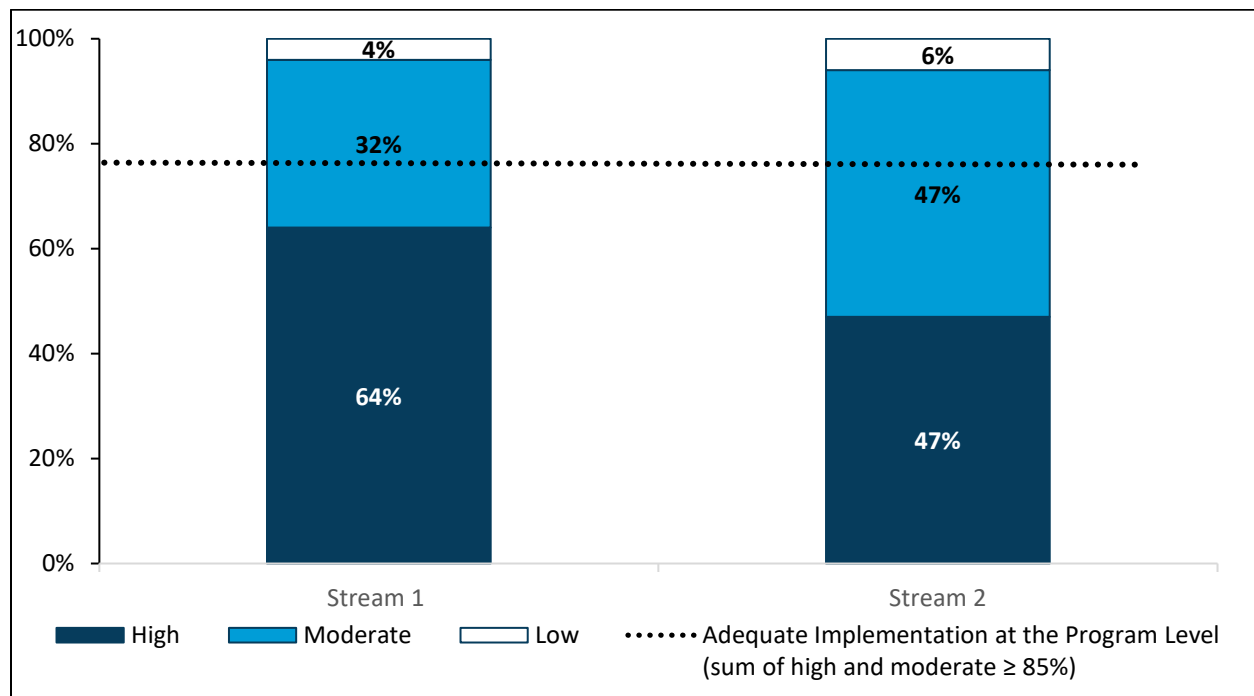
Table 14. Fidelity of Implementation for the Capstone Component: Cohorts 1 and 2, Streams 1 and 2

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
RSLA participants complete a yearlong project on the topic of their choosing	High (2): Individual submits an action plan and presents results by the end of the year. Moderate (1): Individual submits an action plan or presents results by the end of the year.	Score ≥ 1 (moderate)	85% or more of participants score ≥ 1

Program Component	Implementation Levels (score)	Adequate Implementation at the Participant Level	Adequate Implementation at the Program Level
	Low (0): Individual does not submit an action plan or present results by the end of the year.		

Figure 21 presents the percentage of Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohort 1 who completed a Capstone Project at high, moderate, and low levels of fidelity. Overall, in Cohort 1, 96% of Stream 1 participants and 94% of Stream 2 participants met or exceeded the threshold for adequate Capstone Project implementation at the individual level. Stream 1 and 2 participants were well above the 85% threshold for adequate implementation at the program level.

Figure 21. Percentage of Cohort 1 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Capstone Project, by Stream

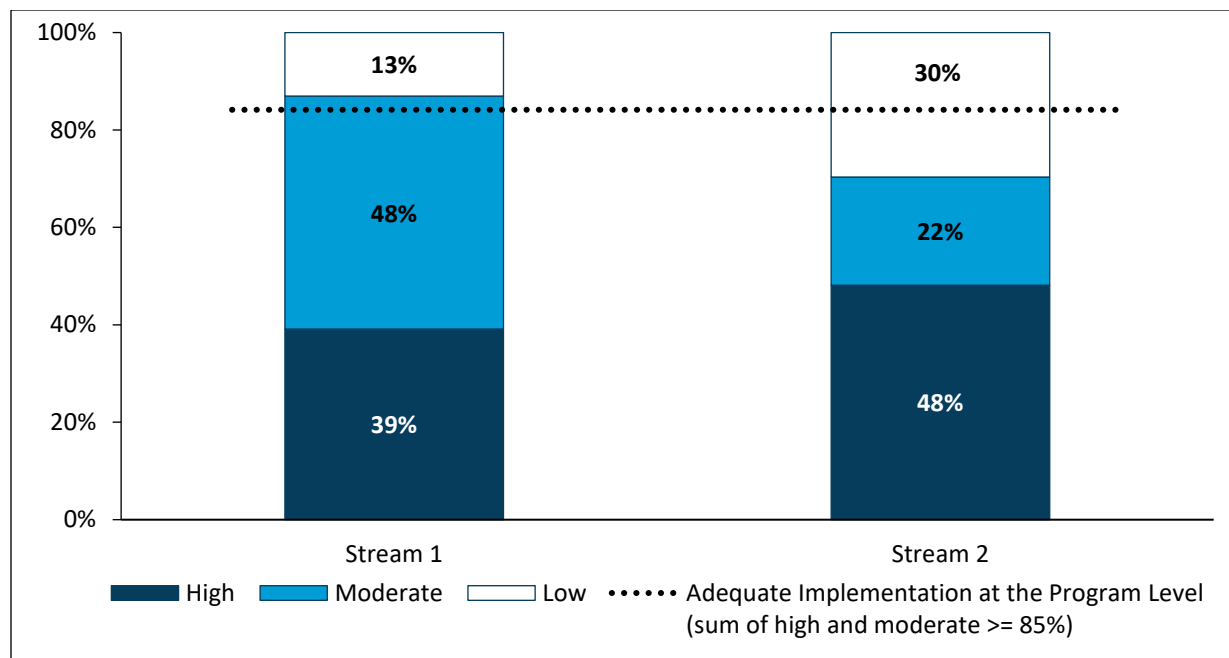


Note. Because the Capstone Project component includes only one activity, the implementation threshold for the Capstone activity is equivalent to the implementation threshold for the Capstone component at the program level. The dotted line indicates the threshold for adequate implementation of the Capstone component at the program level. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Completion Tracker, Cohort 1 ($n = 42$).

Figure 22 presents the percentage of Stream 1 and 2 participants in Cohort 2 who completed a Capstone Project at high, moderate, and low levels of fidelity. Overall, in Cohort 2, 87% of Stream 1 participants and 70% of Stream 2 participants met or exceeded the threshold for adequate Capstone Project implementation at the individual level. Therefore, in Cohort 2,

Stream 1 participants met the threshold for adequate implementation at the program level, but Stream 2 participants did not.

Figure 22. Percentage of Cohort 2 Participants Who Met Fidelity-of-Implementation Thresholds for the Capstone Project



Note. Because the Capstone Project component includes only one activity, the implementation threshold for the Capstone activity is equivalent to the implementation threshold for the Capstone component at the program level. The dotted line indicates the threshold for adequate implementation of the Capstone component at the program level. Data are from the TFA RSLA Data Dashboard, Completion Tracker, Cohort 2 ($n = 50$).

RSLA Participant Interview Respondents’ Perspectives on the Capstone Project

TFA staff indicated that the Capstone Project was an option that was “strongly suggested for RSLA participants to complete” but was not an “explicit requirement.”²⁷ To illustrate, only half of the Cohort 2 RSLA participants (four out of eight) interviewed while they were in the program stated that they chose to participate in and complete their Capstone Projects; for some, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented them from making meaningful progress toward completing their Capstone Projects. In addition, Capstone presentations did not occur because TFA RSLA in-person gatherings were canceled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the Capstone Projects were completed, RSLA participants noted that their proposed projects were focused on cultural identity and biases, DEI, and schoolwide

²⁷ Two out of four TFA senior staff indicated that the Capstone Project was strongly suggested for RSLA participants to complete but was not an explicit requirement, and one staff member believed the Capstone Project was mandatory. One TFA senior staff member elaborated, “We expect them [RSLA participants] to complete their Capstone Project, but . . . I wouldn’t say that they get kicked out of RSLA if they don’t do it.”

strategies that aligned with their school’s needs or goals (e.g., systems for communication, flipped classroom model, International Baccalaureate assessments).

The small subset of Cohort 2 RSLA participants who completed or made significant progress on their Capstone Projects prior to the COVID-19 pandemic discussed what they indirectly gained from the experience. For example, they revealed that their Capstone Projects helped them “learn a lot about leading in a virtual world.” Moreover, they recognized the importance of building trusting relationships, establishing effective structures for communication, and obtaining buy-in from faculty and staff when adopting new initiatives.

Appendix E. Interview and Focus Group Participants

Table 15 presents the number of respondents who participated in focus groups and completed American Institutes for Research (AIR) surveys from Cohort 2 through Cohort 4. In 2019–20, during the implementation evaluation, AIR interviewed four Teach For America (TFA) staff directly involved in the design and execution of the Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) to examine the factors that influenced implementation fidelity. Five BetterLesson coaches who provided Stream 2 RSLA participants one-on-one virtual coaching also participated in AIR interviews. In addition, AIR interviewed eight of the 27 Stream 2 RSLA participants to explore different personal and school-level factors that affected their engagement in key RSLA program components. AIR conducted interviews with TFA staff, BetterLesson coaches, and Stream 2 RSLA participants virtually and within the context of COVID-19–related school closures and shifts to remote learning.

In 2020–21, AIR interviewed three TFA senior staff who oversaw the implementation of RSLA. Similar to the previous year, TFA staff interviews focused on the factors—facilitators and barriers—that shaped implementation fidelity. Four Learning Cycle facilitators and five BetterLesson coaches and staff participated in virtual interviews with AIR, sharing their perceptions of and experiences with RSLA. Moreover, 13 of 46 RSLA participants—four from Stream 1 and nine from Stream 2—and eight stratified randomly sampled alumni participated in focus groups to discuss the factors that affected their engagement and identify the most helpful program components. In addition, 37 of 46 RSLA participants—22 from Stream 1 and 15 from Stream 2—and 144 of 279 alumni completed AIR surveys about their experiences in TFA’s RSLA program. As RSLA shifted to an entirely virtual format in Year 4, AIR conducted data collection activities virtually.

Finally, in 2021–22, AIR data collection efforts focused on gathering the perceptions and experiences of RSLA participants and alumni. AIR did not interview TFA staff, Learning Cycle facilitators, or BetterLesson coaches; specifically, in 2021–22, AIR conducted both surveys and focus groups with RSLA participants and alumni. In particular, AIR surveyed 33 of 35 Cohort 4 participants and facilitated six focus groups with six of 35 participants about their shared perceptions of as well as the utility and value of the different RSLA program components. In addition, AIR surveyed 131 of 269 alumni and conducted in-depth interviews with 22 participants to gather their insights into the influence of RSLA participation on their career trajectory. The survey and interview also gathered data on the relevance of the training and support that alumni received and how they applied the knowledge and skills they gained to their professional roles.

Table 15. Number of Focus Group, Interview, and Survey Respondents Per Year

Data Sources	Number of Respondents		
	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 TFA Staff • 5 BetterLesson Coaches • 8 Stream 2 RSLA Participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 TFA Staff • 4 Learning Cycle Facilitators • 5 BetterLesson Coaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 RSLA Alumni from Cohort 1 of the pre-EIR grant (2013–14) to Cohort 4 of the current EIR grant (i.e., 2020–21)
Focus Groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 RSLA Cohort 3 Participants • 8 RSLA Alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 RSLA Cohort 4 Participants
Surveys		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37 RSLA Cohort 3 Participants • 144 RSLA Alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33 RSLA Cohort 4 Participants • 131 RSLA Alumni

Appendix F. Alumni Career Trajectories

Between February 7 and March 4, 2022, AIR administered a survey to 252 (of 268) listed alumni recruited between 2013–14 and 2020–21. The survey completion rate was 52%, representing alumni from 31 states and one foreign country. Survey participants were asked to provide information on both their current work position and their position while in the Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA). Findings on Stream 1 participants' career trajectories, as reported on this survey, are presented in [Table 16](#), and findings for Stream 2 participants are presented in [Table 17](#). Among 67 Stream 1 participants who responded to the survey, 49 were classroom teachers while in RSLA. One third of these 49 participants continued to serve as classroom teachers in early 2022, but five had moved up to become a principal, assistant principal, director, or dean. Overall, 90% of all Stream 1 participants who responded to the survey continued to work in education in early 2022, and seven out of 67 had moved into a school leadership role (principal, assistant principal, director, or dean). Among 64 Stream 2 participants who responded to the survey, all but one continue to work in education, and 24 have attained the role of principal, assistant principal, director, or dean.

Table 16. Stream 1 Participants’ Roles During RSLA and in February–March 2022

Stream 1 RSLA Role (n=67)	Stream 1 Role in February–March 2022								
	Classroom Teacher (n=17)	Lead Teacher (n=12)	Director or Dean (n=3)	Assistant Principal (n=2)	Principal (n=2)	Instructional Specialist (n=5)	Teach For America Staff (n=4)	Other Education (n=16)	Not Currently in Education (n=6)
All Positions	25%	18% ^a	4% ^a	3% ^a	3% ^a	7%	6%	24%	9%
Classroom Teacher (n=49)	33% ^c	12% ^b	4% ^b	4% ^b	2% ^b	8%	8%	20%	8%
Lead Teacher (n=13)	8%	46% ^c	0% ^b	0% ^b	0% ^b	8%	0%	23%	15%
Director or Dean (n=1)	0%	0%	0% ^c	0% ^b	0% ^b	0%	0%	100%	0%
Assistant Principal (n=1)	0%	0%	0%	0% ^c	0% ^b	0%	0%	100%	0%
Instructional Specialist (n=1)	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0% ^c	0%	0%	0%
Other Education (n=2)	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	50% ^c	0%

Note. Because of small *n* counts and for the purpose of reporting, four additional positions were combined to the “other education” grouping. Among Stream 1 participants, four are in a central/district office role, one is in a state/regional education service organization role, five are in a nonprofit organization that is education-focused, and six categorized their current positions as “other education.”

Each row sums to 100%. For example, of the 49 Stream 1 participants who were classroom teachers while in RSLA, 33% are currently classroom teachers, 12% are currently lead teachers, 4% each are in the position of director, dean, or assistant principal, 2% are principals, 8% each are either instructional specialists, or TFA staff, and the remaining 20% are in other educational positions.

^a Data in these cells represent the current positions that the RSLA program aims to elevate RSLA participants to.

^b Data in these cells represent the RSLA participants who made the targeted elevations.

^c Data in these cells represent those RSLA participants who had no change in their initial position as of 2022.

Table 17. Stream 2 Participants’ Roles During RSLA and in February–March 2022

Stream 2 RSLA Position (n=64)	Stream 2 Position in February–March 2022							
	Classroom or Lead Teacher (n=6)	Director or Dean (n=1)	Assistant Principal (n=13)	Principal (n=10)	Instructional Specialist (n=4)	Teach For America Staff (n=7)	Other Education (n=22)	Not Currently in Education (n=1)
All Positions	9.4%	1.5% ^a	20.3% ^a	15.6% ^a	6.2%	11%	34.4%	1.5%
Classroom or Lead Teacher (n=14)	36% ^c	0% ^b	7% ^b	14% ^b	7%	0%	36%	0%
Director or Dean (n=1)	0%	0% ^c	0% ^b	100% ^b	0%	0%	0%	0%
Assistant Principal (n=15)	0%	0%	47% ^c	27% ^b	7%	7%	13%	0%
Principal (n=2)	0%	0%	0%	100% ^c	0%	0%	0%	0%
Instructional Specialist (n=7)	14%	0%	43%	14%	29% ^c	0%	0%	0%
TFA Staff (n=16)	0%	0%	13%	0%	0%	38% ^c	44%	6%
Other Education (n=9)	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	89% ^c	0%

Note. Because of small *n* counts and for the purpose of reporting, four additional positions were combined to the “other education” grouping. Among Stream 1 participants, four are in a central/district office role, one is in a state/regional education service organization role, five are in a nonprofit organization that is education-focused, and six categorized their current positions as “other education.”

Each row sums to 100%. For example, of the 15 Stream 2 participants who were assistant principals while in RSLA, 47% are currently assistant principals, 27% are currently principals, 7% each are either instructional specialists or TFA staff, and the remaining 13% are in other educational positions.

^a Data in these cells represent the current positions that the RSLA program aims to elevate RSLA participants to.

^b Data in these cells represent the RSLA participants who made the targeted elevations.

^c Data in these cells represent those RSLA participants who had no change in their initial position as of 2022.

Appendix G. School Leadership Competency (SLC) Survey Components, Categories, and Descriptions

Table 18 highlights the eight key components (i.e., Acts Strategically, Builds Culture, Context, Drives Innovation [Breaks Limits], Equity, Facilitates Learning, Manages People and Systems, and Vision) that comprise the Teach For America (TFA)-designed SLC survey and the associated 26 categories and descriptions that should inform Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) participant leadership practice.

Table 18. School Leadership Competency Survey Components, Categories, and Descriptions

Components	Category	Definition
Acts Strategically	Strategic Decision-Making	Makes timely decisions, informed by analysis and prioritized based on time-sensitive importance and impact on others, which are in the best interest of the school and students when stakes are high and decisions are visible.
	Interpersonal Understanding	Navigates structures and relationships to gain support across a wide array of stakeholders for complex and varied initiatives.
	Systems Thinking	Manages the change required for systemic action and improvement while navigating the relevant power dynamics.
Builds Culture	School Culture	Articulates and builds a school culture that celebrates unique contributions, unites people around shared values, and actively centers all habits, systems, and approaches on living into the school vision.
	Fosters Team	Structures roles, responsibilities, initiatives, projects, and opportunities that maximize the talent and impact of a diverse team.
	Relationship Building	Develops authentic, enduring relationships across all lines of difference.
	Self-Care and Sustainability	Promotes an emotionally, physically, and mentally safe environment where teams and individuals see themselves able to work together for a long time.
	Family and Community Engagement	Forges and sustains meaningful connections with families and community members across lines of difference, and expands and leverages networks for the good of the school.
	Effective Communication	Develops, effectively utilizes, and maintains systems of exchange among members of the school and external communities.
Context	Commitment to Place	Stays proximate to the impact of educational inequity while constantly seeking to recognize and respect the community’s narrative, history, and asset.
	Self-Awareness	Cultivates self-awareness about identity, strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, values, and impact on others while examining how privilege and oppression inform my worldview and influence my interactions with others.

Components	Category	Definition
	Continuous Learning	Regularly reflects on alignment of values, decisions, action, and impact while modeling the pursuit of continuous self-improvement.
Drives Innovation (Breaks Limits)	Disrupts Status Quo	Promotes innovation and informed risk taking to envision new ways of operating that disrupt oppressive systems and practices.
	Creating Value	Identifies and acts on opportunities to create extraordinary value through new practices and approaches.
Equity	Values Diversity	Fosters an inclusive and brave community grounded in a belief that diversity in every respect is a necessary condition for achieving transformational change in schools.
	Leads for Equity	Interrupts inequitable practices rooted in historic injustices and discrimination. Eliminates biases and structural barriers to access and opportunity, and makes the necessary adjustments to ensure an equitable outcome.
Facilitates Learning	High Standards for Student Learning	Ensures that there are individual, team, and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning.
	Curriculum and Instruction	Ensures that effective instructional practices maximize student academic and social learning of rigorous and meaningful content.
	Data-Driven Instruction	Facilitates a culture oriented around using data to define meaningful performance goals, analyze progress, and constantly problem-solve to generate aligned solutions to improve learning.
	Grows Strong Teachers	Implements a cycle of professional development tailored to improve teachers' impact.
	Learning Mindset	Builds systems and structures within teams and schools to create a culture of feedback, ownership, and growth.
Manages People and Systems	Develops Talent	Interrupts inequitable practices rooted in historic injustices and discrimination. Eliminates biases and structural barriers to access and opportunity, and makes the necessary adjustments to ensure an equitable outcome.

Components	Category	Definition
	Performance Management	Stays proximate to the impact of educational inequity while constantly seeking to recognize and respect the community’s narrative, history, and assets.
	Planning and Forecasting	Cultivates self-awareness about identity, strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, values, and impact on others while examining how privilege and oppression inform my worldview and influence my interactions with others.
	Resource and Operations Leadership	Regularly reflects on alignment of values, decisions, action, and impact while modeling the pursuit of continuous self-improvement.
Vision	Vision Focused	Creates and centers of all efforts on a vision informed by an understanding of community, pursuit of equity, and clear personal values.

Table 19 provides a brief description of the specific subcompetencies or categories in which RSLA Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 and their corresponding Stream 1 and Stream 2 participants showed the highest rating and growth. Specifically, AIR conducted paired *t*-test analyses by stream and in aggregate. The self-ratings ranged from a score of 1 (*Unfamiliar*) to 5 (*Executing Proficiently*). We calculated average ratings pre-and post-RSLA participation, rating growth and probability value for each competency and category.

Table 19. School Leadership Competency (SLC) Components, Definitions, and Areas of Highest Growth for Cohorts 2–4

RSLA Participant Cohort and Stream Affiliation	SLC Components	SLC Subcategory	Category Definition	Mean Growth	P-Value
Stream 1 (Teachers and other student-facing educators with little or no school leadership experience)					
Cohort 2	Drives Innovations (Breaks Limits)	Creating Value	Identifies and acts on opportunities to create extraordinary value through new practices and approaches.	Mean growth = 0.77	P-value = .00
Cohort 3	Facilitates Learning	High Standards for Student Learning	Ensures that there are individual, team, and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning.	Mean growth = 0.90	P-value = .00

RSLA Participant Cohort and Stream Affiliation	SLC Components	SLC Subcategory	Category Definition	Mean Growth	P-Value
Cohort 2 and Cohort 3	Builds Culture	Fosters Teams	Structures roles, responsibilities, initiatives, projects, and opportunities that maximize the talent and impact of a diverse team.	Mean growth = 0.86 <i>(both cohorts, each respectively)</i>	<i>P-value = .00 (both cohorts, each respectively)</i>
Cohort 4	Manages People and Systems	Performance Management	Stays proximate to the impact of educational inequity while constantly seeking to recognize and respect the community narrative, history, and assets.	Mean growth = 1.07	<i>P-value = .00</i>
		Develops Talent	Interrupts inequitable practices rooted in historical injustices and discrimination. Eliminates biases and structural barriers to access an opportunity and makes necessary adjustments to ensure an equitable outcome.	Mean growth = 1.07	<i>P-value = .01</i>
Stream 2 (Teacher leaders and other midlevel school administrators)					
Cohort 2	Facilitates Learning	Grows Strong Teachers	Implements a cycle of professional development tailored to improve teachers' impact.	Mean growth = 0.84	<i>P-value = .00</i>
	Context	Continuous Learning	Regularly reflects on alignment of values, decisions, action, and impact while modeling the pursuit of continuous self-improvement.	Mean growth = 0.64	<i>P-value = .00</i>
Cohort 3	Context	Commitment to Place	Stays proximate to the impact of educational inequity while constantly seeking to recognize and respect the community's narrative, history, and assets.	Mean growth = 0.76	<i>P-value = .03</i>

RSLA Participant Cohort and Stream Affiliation	SLC Components	SLC Subcategory	Category Definition	Mean Growth	P-Value
		Self-Awareness	Cultivates self-awareness about identity, strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, values, and impact on others while examining how privilege and oppression inform my worldview and influence my interactions with others.	Mean growth = 0.65	<i>P</i> -value = .04
	Drives Innovation (Breaks Limits)	Disrupts Status Quo	Promotes innovation and informed risk taking to envision new ways of operating that disrupt oppressive systems and practices.	Mean growth = 0.65	<i>P</i> -value = .08
Cohort 4	Acts Strategically	Interpersonal Understanding	Navigates structures and relationships to gain support across a wide array of stakeholders for complex and varying initiatives.	Mean growth = 1.40	<i>P</i> -value = .00
		Systems Thinking	Manages change required for systemic action and improvement while navigating the relevant power dynamics.	Mean growth = 1.20	<i>P</i> -value = .00

Appendix H. Additional Details on the Impact Analysis

This appendix presents additional details on the American Institutes for Research’s (AIR’s) analysis of the impact of the Rural School Leadership Academy (RSLA) on schoolwide student English language arts (ELA) and math proficiency.

Outcome Measures

Table 20 presents the grades that were included as baseline and outcome measures in each state. Student proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics were measured in Grades 3–8 in all four states using the state’s end-of-grade (EOG) assessment. Mathematics proficiency rates were measured using the Algebra I end-of-course (EOC) assessment in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas, and the Math I assessment in North Carolina. ELA proficiency rates were measured using the English I EOC assessment in South Carolina at the baseline year. ELA proficiency rates were measured using the English II EOC assessment in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina (at the outcome year), and Texas. EOC data for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas were reported for composite grades only, not by grade. Therefore, the EOC data for these states may include results for Grades 9–12, but most of the results represent one grade. In Louisiana, mathematics proficiency rates were measured using the Grade 10 English II EOC assessment and the Grade 9 Algebra I EOC assessment.

Table 20. Baseline and Outcome Measures by Grade, State, and Subject

State	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	High School
English Language Arts							
Louisiana	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	English II EOC
North Carolina	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	English II EOC
South Carolina	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	English I or II EOC
Texas	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	English II EOC
Math							
Louisiana	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	Algebra I EOC
North Carolina	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	Math I EOC
South Carolina	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	Algebra I EOC
Texas	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	EOG	Algebra I EOC

Note. EOG = end of grade; EOC = end of course.

^a The English assessment required for accountability purposes in South Carolina changed from English I in 2018–19 to English II in 2020–21.

Numbers of Schools in the Analysis Sample

The numbers of intervention and comparison schools included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and mathematics by cohort and school level are presented in Table 21 and Table 22, respectively. Across the three cohorts, the ELA analysis sample includes a total of 68 schools (17 intervention and 51 comparison schools), and the math analysis sample includes a total of 64 schools (16 intervention and 48 comparison schools). Of the intervention schools, two to three schools participated in RSLA in 2018–19, nine schools participated in 2020–21, and five schools participated in 2021–22. In addition, eight intervention schools were elementary schools, five to six were middle schools, and nine were high schools.

Table 21. Number of Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact on Schoolwide ELA Proficiency, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 2018–19	Cohort 3 2020–21	Cohort 4 2021–22	Total
Elementary Intervention	1	5	2	8
Elementary Comparison	3	15	6	24
Middle Intervention	1	3	2	6
Middle Comparison	3	9	6	18
High Intervention	1	1	1	3
High Comparison	3	3	3	9
Total Intervention	3	9	5	17
Total Comparison	9	27	15	51

Table 22. Number of Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact on Schoolwide Math Proficiency, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 2018–19	Cohort 3 2020–21	Cohort 4 2021–22	Total
Elementary Intervention	1	5	2	8
Elementary Comparison	3	15	6	24
Middle Intervention	0	3	2	5
Middle Comparison	0	9	6	15
High Intervention	1	1	1	3
High Comparison	3	3	3	9
Total Intervention	2	9	5	16
Total Comparison	6	27	15	48

Numbers of Schools in the Analysis Sample by State

The numbers of intervention and comparison schools in Louisiana included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and mathematics by school level are presented in Table 23 and Table 24, respectively. Schools in Louisiana were only in Cohort 1. The ELA analysis sample includes a total of 12 schools in Louisiana (three intervention and nine comparison schools), and the math analysis sample includes a total of eight schools in Louisiana (two intervention and six comparison schools). In addition, one intervention school in Louisiana was an elementary school, one was a middle school for the ELA analysis only, and one was a high school.

Table 23. Number of Louisiana Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact on Schoolwide ELA Proficiency, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 (2018–19)	Cohort 3 (2020–21)	Cohort 4 (2021–22)	Total
Elementary Intervention	1	0	0	1
Elementary Comparison	3	0	0	3
Middle Intervention	1	0	0	1
Middle Comparison	3	0	0	3
High Intervention	1	0	0	1
High Comparison	3	0	0	3
Total	12	0	0	12

Table 24. Number of Louisiana Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact on Schoolwide Math Proficiency, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 (2018–19)	Cohort 3 (2020–21)	Cohort 4 (2021–22)	Total
Elementary Intervention	1	0	0	1
Elementary Comparison	3	0	0	3
Middle Intervention	0	0	0	0
Middle Comparison	0	0	0	0
High Intervention	1	0	0	1
High Comparison	3	0	0	3
Total	8	0	0	8

The numbers of intervention and comparison schools in North Carolina included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and mathematics by school level are presented in Table 25. Schools in North Carolina were only in Cohorts 3 and 4. Across the two cohorts, the analysis sample includes a total of 36 North Carolina schools (nine intervention and 27 comparison schools). Of the North Carolina intervention schools, six schools participated in RSLA in 2020–21, and three

schools participated in 2021–22. In addition, six intervention schools in North Carolina were elementary schools, two were middle schools, and one was a high school.

Table 25. Number of North Carolina Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 (2018–19)	Cohort 3 (2020–21)	Cohort 4 (2021–22)	Total
Elementary Intervention	0	4	2	6
Elementary Comparison	0	12	6	18
Middle Intervention	0	2	0	2
Middle Comparison	0	6	0	6
High Intervention	0	0	1	1
High Comparison	0	0	3	3
Total	0	24	12	36

The numbers of intervention and comparison schools in South Carolina included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and mathematics by school level are presented in Table 26. Schools in South Carolina were only in Cohort 3. The analysis sample includes a total of four schools in South Carolina (one intervention and three comparison schools). In addition, all analysis schools in South Carolina were high schools.

Table 26. Number of South Carolina Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 (2018–19)	Cohort 3 (2020–21)	Cohort 4 (2021–22)	Total
Elementary Intervention	0	0	0	0
Elementary Comparison	0	0	0	0
Middle Intervention	0	0	0	0
Middle Comparison	0	0	0	0
High Intervention	0	1	0	1
High Comparison	0	3	0	3
Total	0	4	0	4

The numbers of intervention and comparison schools in Texas included in the analysis of program impact on ELA and mathematics by school level are presented in Table 27. Schools in Texas were only in Cohorts 3 and 4. The analysis sample included a total of 16 schools in Texas (four intervention and 12 comparison schools). In addition, one intervention school in Texas was an elementary school, and three were middle schools.

Table 27. Number of Texas Schools in the Analysis of Program Impact, by Cohort and School Level

School Level and Group	Cohort 1 2018–19	Cohort 3 2020–21	Cohort 4 2021–22	Total
Elementary Intervention	0	1	0	1
Elementary Comparison	0	3	0	3
Middle Intervention	0	1	2	3
Middle Comparison	0	3	6	9
High Intervention	0	0	0	0
High Comparison	0	0	0	0
Total	0	8	8	16

Numbers of Students in the Analysis Sample

The numbers of students included in the ELA achievement analysis by year and cohort are presented in Table 28. For the analysis of program impact on ELA achievement, the number of students in intervention schools included in the analysis for Cohort 1 ranged from 1,921 in 2017–18 to 1,899 in 2018–19, and the number of students in comparison schools included in the analysis for Cohort 1 ranged from 624 in 2017–18 to 581 in 2018–19. Among Cohort 3, the number of students in intervention schools included in the ELA achievement analysis ranged from 9,996 in 2018–19 to 8,964 in 2020–21, and the number of students in comparison schools included in the analysis ranged from 3,220 in 2018–19 to 2,286 in 2020–21. Finally, the number of students in intervention schools included in the ELA achievement analysis for Cohort 4 ranged from 4,904 in 2020–21 to 4,978 in 2021–22, and the number of students in comparison schools included in the analysis ranged from 802 in 2020–21 to 1,554 in 2021–22.

Table 28. Number of Students in the Analysis of Program Impact on ELA Achievement, by Cohort and Year

Cohort	Group	2017–18	2018–19	2020–21	2021–22
1	Comparison Schools	1,921	1,899		
1	Intervention Schools	624	581		
3	Comparison Schools		9,996	8,964	
3	Intervention Schools		3,220	2,286	
4	Comparison Schools			4,904	4,978
4	Intervention Schools			802	1,554

The numbers of students included in the math achievement analysis each year and by cohort are presented in Table 29. The number of students in intervention schools included in the analysis for Cohort 1 ranged from 1,190 in 2017–18 to 1,082 in 2018–19, and the number of students in comparison schools in Cohort 1 included in the analysis ranged from 515 in 2017–18

to 407 in 2018–19. Among Cohort 3, the number of students in intervention schools ranged from 10,119 in 2018–19 to 9,014 in 2020–21, and the number of students in comparison schools included in the analysis ranged from 3,216 in 2018–19 to 2,309 in 2020–21. Finally, the number of students in intervention schools included in the ELA achievement analysis for Cohort 4 ranged from 4,523 in 2020–21 to 4,720 in 2021–22, and the number of students in comparison schools included in the analysis ranged from 877 in 2020–21 to 1,557 in 2021–22.

Table 29. Number of Students in the Analysis of Program Impact on Math Achievement, by Cohort and Year

Cohort	Group	2017–18	2018–19	2020–21	2021–22
1	Comparison Schools	1,190	1,082		
1	Intervention Schools	515	407		
3	Comparison Schools		10,119	9,014	
3	Intervention Schools		3,216	2,309	
4	Comparison Schools			4,523	4,720
4	Intervention Schools			877	1,557

Representativeness of Students Within Schools

To demonstrate that students included in the analytic sample in the outcome year were representative of all Grades 3–9²⁸ and students in intervention and comparison schools, AIR calculated overall and differential rates of “attrition”—the percentage of students in Grades 3–9 who were enrolled in intervention and comparison schools but were not tested—in both ELA and math in the outcome year. The results are presented in Table 30. The overall attrition rate was 7% in ELA and 10% in math, and the differential attrition rates were 5 percentage points in ELA and 10 percentage points in math. These rates meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards for representativeness at both the optimistic and cautious boundaries (WWC, 2022).

Table 30. Student ELA and Math Assessment Participation Rates in the Outcome Year

Group	ELA			Math		
	Enrolled	Tested	Attrition	Enrolled	Tested	Attrition
Intervention Schools	5,545	4,931	11%	5,449	4,462	18%
Comparison Schools	17,573	16,535	6%	16,323	15,055	8%
Overall	23,118	21,466	7%	21,772	19,517	10%

Note. Grade 9 enrollment data were not available for 10 schools, two treatment schools and eight comparison schools, and these schools were excluded from the analysis.

²⁸ We used Grade 9 to represent students tested in EOC assessments. However, states may include EOC results for Grades 9–12, but most of the results represent one grade.

Baseline Equivalence

Each Stream 2 participant school included in the intervention sample was matched to three comparison schools. Comparison schools were identified using nearest-neighbor matching. Comparison schools were “exact matched” on school type and cohort, and matches were based on the following baseline characteristics: Grade 3–5 student ELA and math proficiency rates for elementary schools, Grade 6–8 student ELA and math proficiency rates for middle schools, EOC ELA and math proficiency rates for high school urbanicity (rural or not rural), school enrollment, and percentages of student who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program.

To meet WWC standards with reservations, a quasi-experimental research design (such as this one) must establish baseline equivalence between intervention and comparison groups in the analytic sample, among other criteria (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020). For each outcome of interest, the absolute value of the standardized mean difference (SMD) between intervention and comparison schools must be less than 0.25.

To test baseline equivalence for our analysis of student proficiency, we estimated the model below using student proficiency rates in treatment and comparison schools during the baseline year. The baseline measures are from spring 2018 for Cohort 1, spring 2019 for Cohort 3, and spring 2021 for Cohort 4. Baseline equivalence was calculated separately by cohort and by subject (ELA and math).

$$y_{sg} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Treat_s + \mathbf{x1}'_s \boldsymbol{\beta}_2 + \gamma_s + \varepsilon_{sg}$$

The variables in the model are as follows:

- y_{sg} represents the proficiency rate of grade g school s .
- $Treat_s$ is a binary variable indicating whether school s is a treatment school.
- $\mathbf{x1}'_s$ is a vector of state fixed effects.
- γ_s is a school random effect.
- ε_{sg} is the error term.

The coefficient and standard error estimates from the statistical models measuring baseline equivalence of student ELA and math proficiency between treatment and comparison schools are presented in Table 31 and Table 32, respectively.

Table 31. Student ELA Proficiency Baseline Equivalence Model Coefficient and Standard Error Estimates

Model Covariate	Coefficient Estimate	Standard Error	P-Value
Treatment School	0.003	0.026	.893
School is in North Carolina	0.020	0.037	.585
School is in South Carolina	-0.104	0.066	.116
School is in Texas	0.012	0.038	.762
School is in Cohort 3	0.18	0.027	.000
School is in Cohort 4	-	-	-
Intercept	0.249	0.028	.000

Table 32. Student Math Proficiency Baseline Equivalence Model Coefficient and Standard Error Estimates

Model Covariate	Coefficient Estimate	Standard Error	P-Value
Treatment School	-0.009	0.028	.754
School is in North Carolina	-0.089	0.047	.059
School is in South Carolina	-0.349	0.092	.000138
School is in Texas	0.026	0.046	.570
School is in Cohort 3	0.304	0.028	.000
School is in Cohort 4	-	-	-
Intercept	0.236	0.040	.000

Across all cohorts, intervention schools’ proficiency rates were 0.3 percentage points higher in ELA (Table 33) and 0.9 percentage points lower in math (Table 34) than comparison schools at baseline. The absolute values of the SMDs in baseline ELA and math were 0.008 and 0.023, respectively, which are lower than the threshold set by WWC to demonstrate baseline equivalence between intervention and comparison groups.

The SMDs in baseline proficiency between intervention and comparison schools by cohort also were lower than the threshold. Among Cohorts 1 and 3, intervention schools’ proficiency rates were between 0.3 and 2 percentage points higher in ELA, and between 1.3 and 2.8 percentage points lower in math than comparison schools at baseline. Among Cohort 4, intervention schools’ proficiency was 0.4 percentage points lower in ELA and 0.6 percentage points higher in math than comparison schools at baseline.

Because WWC standards require only that intervention and comparison schools are balanced at baseline on the outcome of interest (in this case, ELA and mathematics proficiency rates), we

do not expect that these differences will prevent the AIR study from receiving a rating of Meets Standards With Reservations.

Table 33. Baseline Equivalence of Student ELA Proficiency

Cohort	Comparison Observations			Intervention Observations			Difference	SMD
	N	Mean	SD	N	Adjusted Mean	SD		
Cohort 1	18	22.5%	0.117	6	24.5%	0.151	2.0%	0.068
Cohort 3	75	44.2%	0.095	25	44.5%	0.100	0.4%	0.009
Cohort 4	36	25.7%	0.118	12	25.3%	0.127	-0.4%	-0.011
All Cohorts	129	36.0%	0.143	43	36.3%	0.149	0.3%	0.008

Note. N is the number of school-by-grade observations. Mean is the mean baseline proficiency rate across comparison schools. Adjusted mean is the regression-adjusted mean baseline proficiency rate across intervention schools. SD is the standard deviation of outcomes across schools. Difference is the difference between the regression-adjusted mean proficiency rate in intervention schools and the mean proficiency rate in comparison schools. SMD is the standardized mean difference in outcomes at baseline as measured by Cox’s index. See Appendix A for additional details.

Table 34. Baseline Equivalence of Student Math Proficiency

Outcome	Comparison Observations			Intervention Observations			Difference	SMD
	N	Mean	SD	N	Adjusted Mean	SD		
Cohort 1	12	24.1%	0.112	4	21.3%	0.098	-2.8%	-0.096
Cohort 3	78	47.4%	0.146	26	46.1%	0.168	-1.3%	-0.032
Cohort 4	39	20.6%	0.219	13	21.2%	0.225	0.6%	0.024
All Cohorts	129	37.1%	0.211	43	36.2%	0.217	-0.9%	-0.023

Note. N is the number of school-by-grade observations. Mean is the mean proficiency rate across comparison schools. Adjusted mean is the regression-adjusted mean proficiency rate across intervention schools. SD is the standard deviation of outcomes across schools. Difference is the difference between the regression-adjusted mean outcome in intervention schools and the mean outcome in comparison schools. SMD is the standardized mean difference in outcomes at baseline as measured by Cox’s index. See Appendix A for additional details.

Characteristics of schools included in the student proficiency impact analysis for the baseline year are reported in Table 35. Although WWC does not require intervention and comparison samples to be equivalent on background characteristics, demonstration of similarity on these types of characteristics provides reassurance that the comparison schools resembled the intervention schools and constituted an appropriate comparison group. SMDs are less than 0.25 in absolute value across all characteristics reported in the table for both ELA and math.

Table 35. Characteristics of Schools Included in the Student Achievement Impact Analysis at Baseline

School Characteristic	ELA			Math		
	Comparison Mean	Intervention Mean	SMD	Comparison Mean	Intervention Mean	SMD
Number of students in analysis	130.4	106.7	0.012	122.7	108.4	0.012
Percentage of students who are English learners	16%	18%	0.083	17%	18%	0.063
Percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program	72%	73%	0.052	72%	74%	0.077
Percentage of students with a disability	12%	9%	-0.228	12%	8%	-0.234
Percentage of students who are female	49%	49%	0.017	49%	49%	0.005

Note. Reported means are unadjusted means across students in intervention and comparison schools during the baseline year. Numbers of schools included in the ELA and math student proficiency impact analyses are reported in Table 21 and Table 22, respectively. SMD is the standardized mean difference as measured by Hedges’ *g* (row 1) and Cox’s index (rows 2 through 5).

Correlations Between Baseline and Outcome Proficiency Rates

The correlations between (school-by-grade) baseline and outcome proficiency rates are .49 in math and .37 in ELA.

Impact Analysis

We used a difference-in-differences design with a matched comparison group to estimate program impact on ELA and math proficiency among Cohorts 1, 3, and 4 of RSLA Stream 2 participants. The model accounts for state, cohort, school level (elementary, middle, or high), and urbanicity, and the following school-grade-test subject-level characteristics: number of students tested and student demographics (percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program, percentage of students who are English learners [ELs], percentage of students who are disabled, and percentage of students who are African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, or in multiple ethnic groups).

The difference-in-differences model we used to estimate the impact of the RSLA program on student learning outcomes following 1 year of program participation can be represented as follows:

$$y_{sgt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Treat_s + \beta_2 Post_{st} + \beta_3 Treat_s * Post_{st} + x1'_s \beta_4 + x2'_{sgt} \beta_5 + x3'_s \beta_6 + x4'_t \beta_7 + \gamma_s + \varepsilon_{sgt}$$

Although the model was estimated separately for ELA and math, we present one model here, and we exclude “subject” subscripts. The analysis includes the schools of three cohorts of RSLA stream participants who started the program in summer 2018, 2020, and 2021 as well as matched comparison schools.

The variables in the model are as follows:

- y_{sgt} represents the proficiency rate of grade g of school s in year t .
- $Treat_s$ is a binary variable indicating whether school s is ever a treatment school.
- $Post1_t$ equals one if the year is 2018–19 for Cohort 1, 2020–21 for Cohort 3, and 2021–22 for Cohort 4.
- $x1'_s$ is a vector of the following school characteristics:
 - State indicator variable
 - State school type (e.g., elementary, middle, or high)
 - School rural status
- $x2'_{sgt}$ is a vector of the following school-by-grade-level characteristics:
 - Number of students tested
 - The percentage of students who are Black
 - The percentage of students who are Hispanic
 - The percentage of students who are Asian or Pacific Islander
 - The percentage of students who are Native American
 - The percentage of students who are two or more races
 - The percentage of students who are Black is missing
 - The percentage of students who are Hispanic is missing
 - The percentage of students who are Asian or Pacific Islander is missing
 - The percentage of students who are Native American is missing
 - The percentage of students who are two or more races is missing

- The percentage of students who have a disability
- The percentage of students who are ELs
- The percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program
- $x3'_s$ is a vector of state fixed effects.
- $x4'_t$ is a vector of cohort fixed effects.
- γ_s is a school random effect.
- ε_{sgt} is the error term.

Student proficiency rates from each grade were only included in the sample if the sample includes proficiency rates in that grade from at least one treatment school and one comparison school.

The estimates of the impact of RSLA on student ELA and math proficiency are presented in Table 36. After controlling for other factors included in the statistical model, we estimate that ELA proficiency was 2 percentage points higher in intervention schools than in comparison schools, which is equivalent to an effect size of 0.05. Math proficiency was 1 percentage point lower in intervention schools than in comparison schools, which is equivalent to an effect size of 0.026 after controlling for other factors included in the statistical model. We are unable to reject the null hypothesis of no program impact on student proficiency in ELA or math with a *p*-value less than .05.

Table 36. Program Impact on Student ELA and Math Proficiency

Proficiency Measure	Comparison Observations			Intervention Observations			Difference	Effect Size	P-Value
	N	Mean	SD	N	Adjusted Mean	SD			
English language arts	129	35.1%	0.137	43	37.0%	0.166	1.9%	0.050	.408
Math	129	33.4%	0.207	43	32.5%	0.220	-1.0%	-0.026	.806

Note. *N* is the number of (school-by-grade-by-year) observations. Mean is the mean proficiency rate across comparison schools in the outcome year. Adjusted mean is the regression-adjusted mean proficiency rate across intervention schools in the outcome year. SD is the standard deviation of outcomes across schools. Difference is the difference between the regression-adjusted mean outcome in intervention schools and the mean outcome in comparison schools in the outcome year. Effect size is the standardized mean difference in proficiency as measured by Cox’s index. See Appendix A for additional details.

Coefficient and standard error estimates from the statistical models used to measure the impact of RSLA on schoolwide ELA and math proficiency can be found in Table 37 and Table 38.

Table 37. ELA Proficiency Impact Model Coefficient and Standard Error Estimates

Model Covariate ELA	Coefficient Estimate	Standard Error	P-Value
Treatment school	0.005	0.023	.835
“Post” year (2018–19 for Cohort 1, 2020–21 for Cohort 3, and 2021–22 for Cohort 4)	0.008	0.011	.500
Treatment school during the “post” year	0.019	0.023	.408
The school is in North Carolina	0.083	0.059	.157
The school is in South Carolina	0.061	0.073	.410
The school is in Texas	0.160	0.068	.019
The school is in Cohort 3	0.032	0.024	.183
The school is in Cohort 4	-	-	-
The school is an elementary school	-0.076	0.051	.139
The school is a middle school	-0.105	0.045	.019
The school is in a rural region	0.086	0.025	.001
The number of students tested	0.000	0.000	.597
The percentage of students who are English learners	-0.267	0.074	.000
The percentage of students who have a disability	-0.198	0.124	.110
The percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program	0.191	0.059	.001
The percentage of students who are Black	-0.385	0.068	.000
The percentage of students who are Hispanic	-0.233	0.094	.013
The percentage of students who are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander	0.953	0.966	.324
The percentage of students who are Native American	-1.221	1.763	.488
The percentage of students who are or two or more races	-1.521	0.552	.006
The percentage of students who are Black is missing	-0.055	0.032	.087
The percentage of students who are Hispanic is missing	-0.010	0.029	.720
The percentage of students who are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander is missing	0.047	0.075	.535
The percentage of students who are Native American is missing	-	-	-
The percentage of students who are two or more races is missing	-0.095	0.053	.075
Constant	0.424	0.068	.000
Observations	344		
Number of groups	68		

Table 38. Math Proficiency Impact Model Coefficient and Standard Error Estimates

Model Covariate Math	Coefficient Estimate	Standard Error	P-Value
Treatment school	0.0153	0.0297	.608
“Post” year (2018–19 for Cohort 1, 2020–21 for Cohort 3, and 2021–22 for Cohort 4)	0.0260	0.0196	.184
Treatment school during the “post” year	-0.00955	0.0389	.806
The school is in North Carolina	0.120	0.0964	.213
The school is in South Carolina	-0.00813	0.0950	.932
The school is in Texas	0.295	0.0921	.00137
The school is in Cohort 3	0.0750	0.0276	.00667
The school is in Cohort 4	-	-	-
The school is an elementary school	0.0389	0.0595	.513
The school is a middle school	-0.00145	0.0563	.979
The school is in a rural region	0.0936	0.0348	.00710
The number of students tested	-0.000505	0.000157	.00133
The percentage of students who are English learners	-0.501	0.0890	1.86e-08
The percentage of students who have a disability	-0.561	0.179	.00177
The percentage of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program	0.185	0.0955	.0528
The percentage of students who are Black	-0.355	0.0919	.000114
The percentage of students who are Hispanic	-0.198	0.112	.0784
The percentage of students who are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander	1.673	0.821	.0415
The percentage of students who are Native American	-1.669	2.836	.556
The percentage of students who are two or more races	-1.217	0.887	.170
The percentage of students who are Black is missing	-0.0428	0.0458	.349
The percentage of students who are Hispanic is missing	-0.0301	0.0380	.429
The percentage of students who are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander is missing	-0.0187	0.124	.880
The percentage of students who are Native American is missing	-	-	-
The percentage of students who are two or more races is missing	-0.0565	0.0887	.524
Constant	0.329	0.103	.00134
Observations	344		
Number of schools	64		

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AIR® Headquarters

1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

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