

Teacher Impact Grants: Case Study
Fauquier County, VA Cedar Lee Middle School, Bealeton, Virginia
FCPS Collaborative Teacher Leaders

TEACHER IMPACT GOALS STRATEGIC AREA OF FOCUS #1

Identifying teacher leaders to build the solutions necessary to change and strengthen the profession, and drive transformation in schools, districts, and states

TEACHER IMPACT GOALS STRATEGIC AREA OF FOCUS #2

Asking teacher leaders to embrace and lead necessary reform change, such as changes to existing structures and mindsets

OVERVIEW

Collaborative time for teachers has traditionally been during school or district professional development activities or shared planning time on a grade level, resulting in a minimum of collaborative exchange. Teachers share many instructional and organizational concerns and would benefit from the opportunity to meet during the school day to collaboratively plan research and problem-solving strategies to try during the school year. This ASCD Teacher Impact Grant funded collaborative time during the school day throughout the year and financed professional books and conference opportunities for participants from the five Fauquier County Public Schools (FCPS) middle schools. Four of the five schools had representatives volunteer to explore facets of a student engagement question: "What can we do to help students develop independent learning engagement skills?" Many students know how "to do" school, yet others do not—for a variety of reasons. Each participant took the idea of engagement in different directions, and a Google Drive folder was established as a repository for reflections and shared materials. Participants created a podcast at the end of the school year that summarized their explorations and common outcomes. Professional development sharing and activities will be ongoing as the group moves into the 2017–18 school year.

THE CHALLENGE

What was the challenge you were facing? What goals were you trying to achieve?

The challenge was—and continues to be—to increase communication among middle school teachers. The collaborative question for 2016–17 centered on student engagement with a focus on what teachers do to help students develop independent engagement skills.

Summarize three points of frustration you faced.

It was difficult to balance the grant exploration with everything we (teachers) do on a day-to-day basis. Although grant goals were kept in mind throughout the year of planning and implementing instruction, the avenues for communicating were minimally accessed. We had a shared file on Google.Docs but found it difficult to establish a routine of checking it and adding to it. Second, the grant expectation of social media tweets and postings did not happen regularly simply because of time. Last, the grant provided funds for participants to attend a conference of their choice. Participants were veteran teachers and finding conferences that were appealing and manageable to attend proved to be difficult for several reasons. Conference time frames need to match both specific learning objectives and the timing of being away from the classroom during the school year. Several participants are planning to attend a conference this coming year using the grant funds because it's more manageable to fit it in when approaching the instructional year rather than looking at it during an instructional year.

It's important to keep a balanced frame of reference in mind. A teacher's first and foremost responsibility is high-quality teaching. Developing different avenues for teaching student self-engagement skills is a creative process that happened within the framework of the entire school year. That gradual progress, along with balancing teaching with research and professional development, pushed limits on our collaboration.

What strategies were you attempting to use before to solve this problem?

Student engagement has typically focused on “what is the teacher doing.” Typically, teachers examine their lesson planning and look for creative ways to meet student needs. We were pushing the edge and trying to focus more on “what is the student doing.” The two go hand in hand, and it takes a measured analysis of a lesson or the teacher’s interactions with students to pinpoint what supports each individual student needs for both managing and building engagement skills. As our related arts teacher found, some classes and teaching methods automatically increase student engagement due to high student motivation factors. The subject areas where students experience difficulty or disinterest present more complexity regarding individual student engagement skills. Hence, our participants who worked with project-based learning, Accelerated Reader, teaching specific study skills/work habits, and teaching with choices embedded in the student work explored an array of methods that commonly depended upon really knowing the individual student strengths and weaknesses and developing productive relationships with students.

What was the big “aha” moment when you decided you needed to try something new?

Each time we met, our conversations centered on individual nuances of interactions with both individual students and instructional groups. We shared stories of what we would say to coach a student, what we would say to prompt redirection, or what we would say when a class needed thinking or learning connection prompts. Students don’t necessarily connect their performance to specific skills or learning. They simply want to know, “What is my grade?” The “aha” is that some students need to be explicitly taught that their engagement and effort have an influence on learning. Part of this understanding is dependent upon maturity. Many students truly believe the teacher “gives” grades, not understanding that the grade is a reflection of everything done both in and out of class. Although we were all working with different types of student activities, we commonly were coaching students for behavioral or social development learning engagement skills. There was a lot of affirmation exchanged as we shared stories of how we respond to students who are not engaged to their best ability.

What was the top reason you selected this grant?

This grant really allows teachers the opportunity to shape their own professional development. The flexibility to move at a pace that matches the instructional pace of the classroom, the opportunity to collaborate with teachers at other middle schools within the county, and the shared focus of a professional development question—all supported with funding for release time and professional materials/conferences—was a great opportunity.

THE RESPONSE**How has the Teacher Impact Grant work helped you achieve your goals or solve a problem?**

The TIG funding enabled one of our group to attend the ASCD Empower17 conference in Anaheim, California. Two members of our group are planning on attending a national social studies conference in the fall (2017), and other group members are also appreciative of conference funding. The chance to go to a professional conference at the state or national level is notable in so many ways.

Second, the shared collaboration of a common research question among members of our group is an unusual opportunity, especially to have release time during the school day funded for such activity.

The grant support truly kept everyone moving along with the shared professional inquiry.

How has it affected your school/district/teachers/principals/students?

We all have conversations with colleagues about student motivation, and it may seem silly, but saying that we’re working with a grant on the subject gives it more weight. Interesting, yes? People pay attention more when they realize that there is an interest beyond our grade level, school system, and county in investing in work on the topic.

Thus, the grant work prompted more conversation!

Our group wouldn’t have put together a podcast as an end product if it weren’t for the grant. The grant gave more direction and weight to our collaborative work.

The grant work is sustaining itself as continuing conversations are scheduled with administrators at FCPS Central Offices.

How has it helped you to overcome the challenges you had before?

Having the TIG as a foundation and support for our work with student motivation has contributed to sustained attention and follow through. Our work has been individual, yet with the opportunity to meet during the year, attend conferences and purchase professional books, and create a podcast as the end product, we maintained a strong collaborative process. We all have our eyes on opportunities for next year, and our role as teacher leaders has developed.

THE RESULTS**What specific metrics can you share about the impact it had (having data for a graph/chart/figure or two is greatly preferred)?**

In addition to the chart included here, a podcast has been posted to the TIG folder on ASCD Edge.

ASCD Teacher Impact Grant Fauquier County, VA 2016-2017 (Budget Extension to Dec. 2017)		June, 2017 Summary Output Points by Participant Group Focus: Student Engagement
Lanelle Hilling Librarian Marshall Middle School	Student Engagement: Self Concept Promotion Instructional Practice: Motivating the Individual Reader Outcome: End of the year specific support for AR goals - majority of those previously not achieving goal met the goal due to personal intervention	
Brian Lindenberg Related Arts Marshall Middle School	Student Engagement in the Related Arts Classroom Instructional Practice: Knowing the Individual Student and Identifying the Motivational Factors of an Elective Class Outcome Observation: The majority of students are motivated because it's an elective; individual intervention for those who are not	
Margie Riley English 6 Cedar Lee Middle School	Student Engagement: Social Skills and Work Habits Instructional Practice: Individual Coaching and Motivating of Students with Social Skills and/or Work Habit Weaknesses Outcome: Chart attached at end of report used for individual student intervention - support seminar classes planned for next year.	
Mandie Sayers Civics 7 Auburn Middle School	Student Engagement: Study Skills Instructional Practice: Explicit Instruction of Study Skills Outcome: Worked year-long with study skills: see attached list	
Jan Scolforo Geography, English 8 Auburn Middle School	Student Engagement: Project Based Learning Instructional Practice: Putting Project Based Learning to Use in the Geography Classroom Outcome: Presented opt outs w/in county on PBL	
Karen Yergin English 7 Auburn Middle School	Student Engagement: Accelerated Reader - Student Teams Instructional Practice: Implementing Peer Managed Accelerated Reader Teams Outcome: Student engagement and AR goal acquisition increased with the implementation of AR teams	

Note: We ended up with 3 of 5 middle schools represented. One participant, not listed above, dropped out due to starting a doctorate program. He was the only participant from his school. The 5th middle school was engaged in Administrative-led professional development, consequently no teachers volunteered to work with this TIG opportunity.

What is the single biggest reason you would recommend applying for a Teacher Impact Grant in the future?

A TIG gives monetary support for professional projects that a county may not otherwise be able to fund. Second, it goes directly to the teachers, so it's funding ideas at the front line of our profession.

How has this project grown over a year's time with regard to collaboration between teachers and administrators and the two chosen strategic goals.

To be honest, we've taken only a baby step toward greater collaboration. Teaching takes such an incredible amount of focus and work that collaboration falls in priority, even if we want to keep it higher on the to-do list. It may be a general perception that teachers have a lot of time because of the shorter student day; however, curriculum work, lesson planning/prep, and all the tasks that go into making a class/course run productively over a year's time take a huge amount of time beyond being with students in the classroom. Collaboration drops off as those tasks consume a teacher's focus.

However, when we met as a group, there was an immediate strong connection between us and keen collaborative thinking. One of the things the group suggested as a change for next year would be to meet 1/2 days once a month. That's the next step!

CALL TO ACTION

My colleagues and I have always had open mindsets about trying new ideas. Our project compliments professional development in our county. The option for teacher research has been there, but hasn't been used. When it was, it was on your own time, which limited teacher engagement. We've exchanged ideas about directions for next year. We're all committed to promoting continued collaboration and we are taking our thoughts to our central administration. The true "call to action" will be to keep the collaboration happening—on all levels.

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Learning Skills Engagement - Self Assessment

Review the categories and skills listed. Highlight strengths. Underline skills that need improvement. Prioritize needs and set goals. Review weekly.

Body Language - Nonverbal Behavior

I keep my eyes on the speaker
I keep an appropriate posture
I show my response by nodding, following cues, etc.

Social Skills

I am aware of my peers
I do not dominate the group
I give respect
I can make friends
I use teamwork skills

Learning Focus

I pay attention to the topic
I stay focused on the topic
* I ignore distractions
I participate in discussion by listening, repeating, contributing

Building Learning Connections

I can identify the learning skill
I can explain connections to real world

Learning Participation

I volunteer appropriately
I attend to speakers
I follow directions in a timely manner
I follow classroom routines

Class or Group Discussion

I participate by listening and speaking
I ask on-topic questions
I can partner/group discuss
I make connections
I analyze details
I recall appropriate information
I infer/predict
I sequence information

Self Evaluation

I know when I don't understand something
I can state my level of understanding:
 I am at a beginning level
 I understand
 I can explain it to someone else

Personal Skills

I understand that I am responsible for myself
I manage my behavior
I understand/set goals
I handle my stress
I make appropriate decisions
I use study skills
I recognize problems that arise

Student Confidence

I work independently
I am self-starting
I problem solve to get needed help
I am willing to share ideas
I have an opinion and feel like it matters

“Study” is an action verb!

List of Study Resources

Tests require that you not only know factual knowledge, but that you can **apply** that knowledge to a scenario like we do in classroom activities. Therefore, it's helpful to study your notes, but also to reflect on the class activities and how the facts were used to complete those activities.

Here are the study methods you all came up with:

Independent	Interpersonal	Technological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flash Cards Study Guide - use it as a GUIDE to help you cover all topics. It is NOT a list of questions on the test. Clean, quiet workspace Make a chart of your notes Read your notes again and Write them into a summary Memorize tough information Self-quizzing - cover the answer and speak outloud Repetition - do a little bit every night and repeat topics Set priorities so you have time Check for updates on Blackboard Use the relevant chapters of your textbook Create an outline of your notes Find other resources if you don't understand - the internet and textbook are good options “Brain Dump” on blank paper - write down everything you DO know then compare your notes to see what you DON'T. Then you know what to study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz games - hangman Create a mock test with a friend and switch Have a family member quiz you from your notes Act out situations where you can APPLY the factual knowledge of civics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz games- iCivics Quizlet SOLpass Access study tips on Blackboard under “Homework/Assignments” Mr. D's Civics & Economics Games <p>See Resource List Below</p>

Online resources for studying civics:

Use Marshall Middle's library page for Civics & Economics study tools, <https://www.smores.com/r2nk7>. It has HEAPS of great information and websites to help you.

SOLpass.com can be accessed through our library website. Password: AMS

Quizlet - anyone can use. Search the topic we are studying in class.

iCivics.com - all games are free, no registration required. Choose the games that match with our current unit.

Mr. D's Civics & Economics Games <http://mrd2012.weebly.com/>. This teacher created great review games for the basics, like definitions, vocab, etc. Remember the test includes application questions where you'll have to use these facts to solve an analytic question.