

Teacher Perspectives on the Literacy and Learning Centers Project

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Summary of Key Findings:

- Teachers are implementing centers daily during the literacy block and are seeing benefits to the literacy environment in their classroom and student creativity.
- Teachers identified using the new technology in their classroom and monitoring student productivity as challenges.
- Teachers wanted more of a voice in the design of their classroom, especially around choosing the furniture/materials in their room.

About the Literacy and Learning Centers Project

In May 2016, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) received a grant from the William Penn Foundation to redesign 31 pre-Kindergarten to second grade classrooms into interactive, center-based learning environments. SDP funded renovations in an additional 33 classrooms. These much-needed upgrades provided SDP with the opportunity to examine how play-based learning environments are related to student-teacher interactions and student learning. Physical renovations were completed in summer 2017. Teachers received training on the new equipment and using centers in the 2017-2018 school year.

As part of the Literacy and Learning Centers project evaluation, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) surveyed all teachers who received classroom renovations and new furniture/materials. The survey was open from February 12, 2018 to March 2, 2018. Teachers received an email invitation to the survey and two reminder emails. ORE asked questions about benefits and challenges during the project, professional development, and the furniture and materials that teachers received.

Survey Participants

ORE surveyed all 64 teachers participating in the project. Of these, 32 teachers responded for a 50% response rate. Almost two-thirds (65.6%) of participants had more than ten years of experience teaching.

Findings

Teachers are using centers daily during the literacy block

All respondents said they use centers daily during the literacy block. Additionally, 81% of respondents said they use centers during another part of the day. Almost all (92%) of the respondents who use centers outside of the literacy block use them during math. Other subjects that teachers mentioned were science and social studies.

Teachers identified centers as beneficial to several components of literacy block implementation

More than half (59%) of teachers rated improving the literacy environment as a great benefit from the Literacy and Learning Centers project (Figure 1). Almost half (46%) of teachers said that there was no benefit or only a slight benefit to their ability to work with students one-on-one. Teachers also rated the literacy environment as the component of the literacy block where the project provided the greatest benefit (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Teachers Rated Improving the Literacy Environment as a Great Benefit

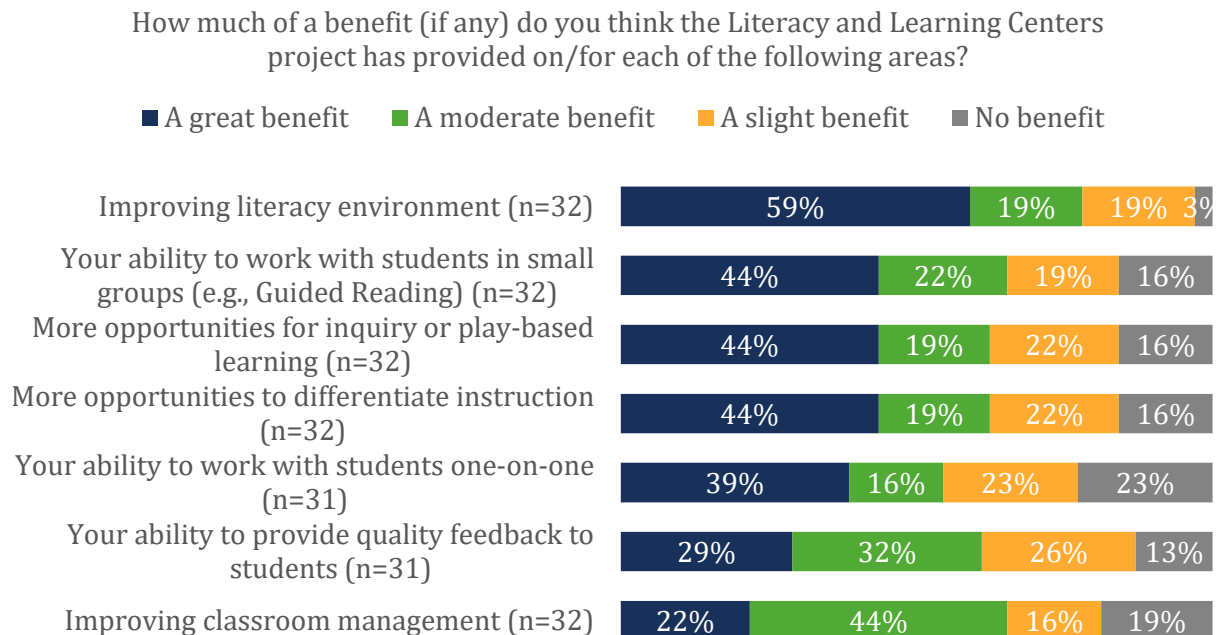
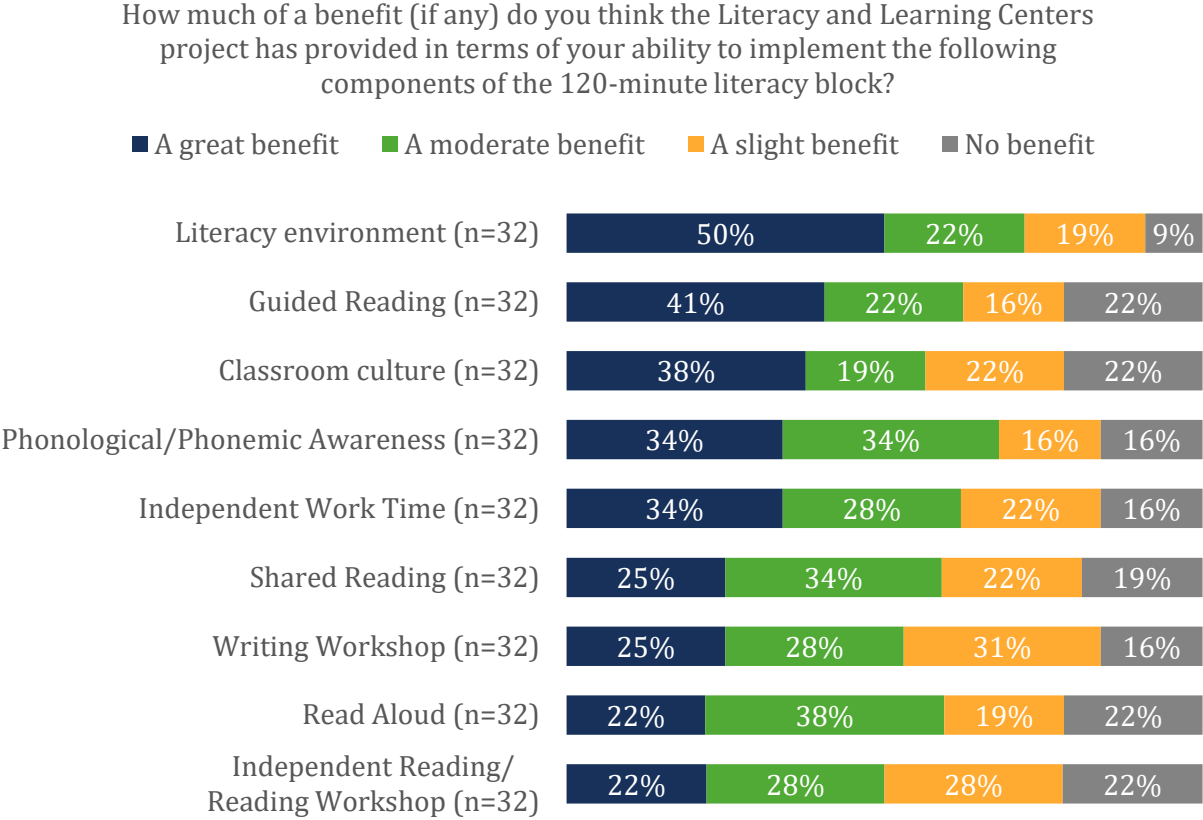


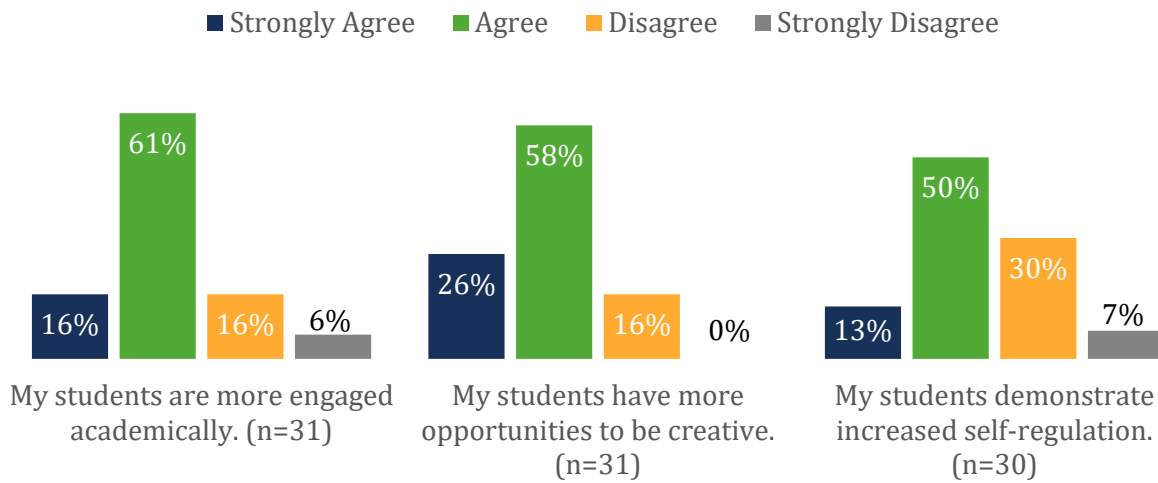
Figure 2: Teachers Said the Project Provided a Great Benefit to Their Ability to Implement the Literacy Environment Component of the Literacy Block



Teachers said their students have more opportunities to be creative and are more academically engaged

When asked specifically about benefits the project provided to their students, 84% of teachers said their students have more opportunities to be creative (Figure 3) in the new center-based classrooms. Most teachers (77%) also said their students are more engaged academically after the renovations and new furniture/materials project, and a slightly smaller amount (63%) said their students demonstrate increased self-regulation.

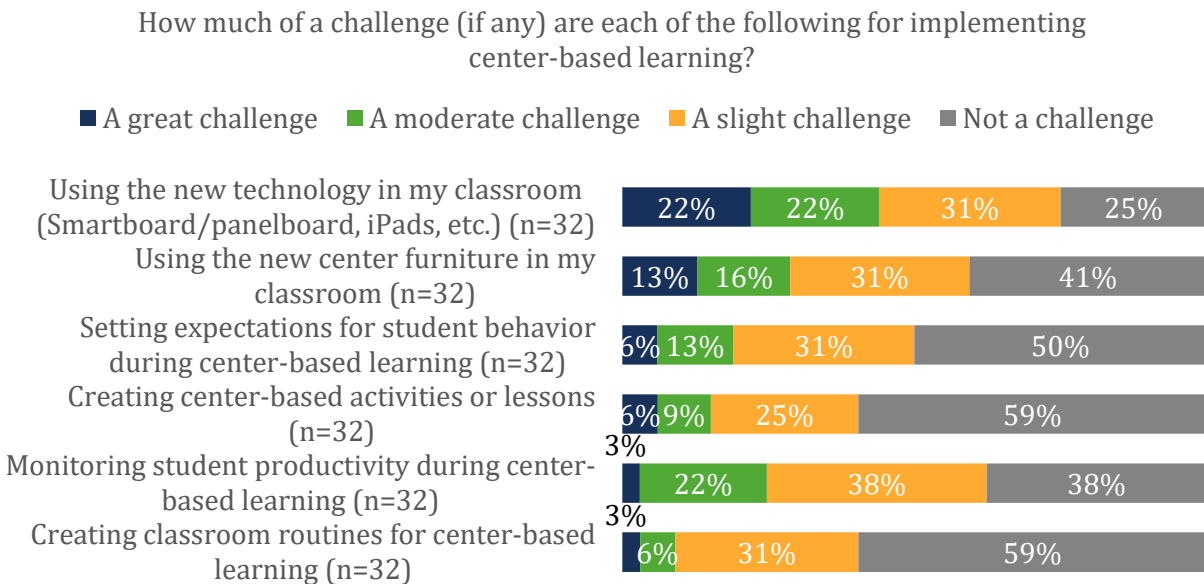
Figure 3: 84% of Teachers Said Their Students Have More Opportunities to Be Creative



New technology was a challenge for teachers in their classroom

Teachers identified using the new technology in their classroom as a challenge (75% of teachers identified technology as at least a slight challenge; Figure 4). In addition, 62% of teachers said that monitoring student productivity during centers was at least a slight challenge. More than half of teachers (59%) said that creating center-based activities and classroom routines were not challenges.

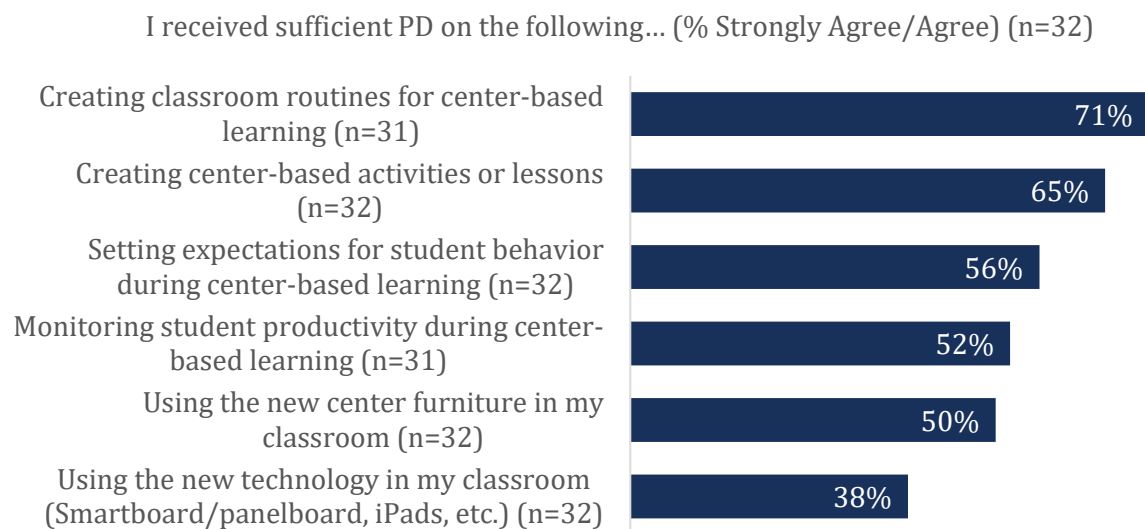
Figure 4: 75% of Teachers Said Using the New Technology Was at Least a Slight Challenge



Teachers would have liked more training on using new technology in their classrooms

Teachers said that they received the most sufficient professional development (PD) in creating classroom routines for center-based learning (Figure 5) and also rated this area as the least challenging in terms of implementation. However, teachers rated technology as the area where they did not receive enough PD, which coincides with teachers identifying this area as the greatest challenge. When asked for additional feedback about professional development, teachers continued to mention wanting additional PD on technology (specifically iPads and SMARTboards).

Figure 5: Teachers Rated Using the New Technology as the Area Where They Did Not Receive Sufficient PD



Teachers had positive feedback about the project but wanted more of a voice in planning

ORE asked teachers what one thing they would recommend changing if the District implements this project in other schools. The most common theme was including teacher voice in the project planning, especially around designing classrooms. This theme also arose in the question asking teachers for overall suggestions for center-based classrooms. Example comments included “Talk more with teachers about finalized furniture to be ordered to see if they agree it will work well in their classrooms” and “There should be an early childhood or elementary ed teacher involved in the planning. Not just to be visible, but to have a voice that is heard, listened to, and valued.”

Teachers also had positive feedback about the project and the renovations. One teacher said, “Very grateful for the opportunity to have these beautiful classrooms for our students- it is the first time that they've been able to walk in to a classroom that felt so warm, clean, and adequate!” Another

teacher mentioned the benefit to her students by saying, “Overall I love the literacy centers project and feel that it can enhance student learning socially and academically.”

Conclusions

- Teachers are implementing centers daily during the literacy block and are seeing benefits to the literacy environment in their classroom and student creativity.
- Teachers rated using the new technology in their classroom as a challenge and identified this as an area where they needed more PD.
- Another challenge identified by teachers was monitoring student productivity during centers. Additionally, 37% of teachers said their students did not demonstrate increased self-regulation.
- Teachers wanted more of a voice in the planning, especially around choosing the furniture/materials in their room. It may be helpful to give teachers more choice or personalization in their classroom materials.