



Classroom Modernizations: Cohort 5 (2021-22) Evaluation Report

Key Findings

- 133 PreK-Grade 3 classrooms in nine schools were renovated in summer 2021. This was the fifth cohort of classrooms to receive renovations. Teachers in Cohort 5 also received professional development as part of the classroom modernization project.
- Cohort 5 teachers rated professional development sessions positively.
- Cohort 5 teachers found using the new technology to be a challenge and would have liked more input into what materials were in their rooms.
- Cohort 5 teachers felt the project provided benefits to their teaching, the classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction.
- Cohorts 1-4 teachers who have been teaching in the renovated classrooms for multiple years also found lasting benefits from the modernizations but rated items slightly less positively at the end of the 2021-22 school year than Cohort 5 teachers did.

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Contents

About the Program.....	3
What we examined.....	3
Data collection and analysis.....	3
District administrative data.....	3
Teacher PD survey data.....	4
Teacher end-of-year survey data	4
What we found.....	4
SDP renovated 133 classrooms.	4
Cohort 5 teachers rated PD sessions positively.	5
Cohort 5 teachers found using the new technology to be a challenge and would have liked more input into what materials were in their rooms.....	8
Cohort 5 teachers felt the project provided benefits to their teaching, the classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction.	11
At the end of the 2021-22 school year, teachers from previous cohorts also found benefits from the modernizations but rated items slightly less positively than Cohort 5 teachers did.	14
Conclusions.....	17

About the Program

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) redesigned 133 pre-kindergarten to third-grade classrooms into interactive learning environments. Physical renovations and classroom set-ups were completed by the end of summer 2021. Program staff at SDP identified nine schools to receive renovations in all of their PK-3 classrooms in 2021: Anderson, Blankenburg, Bregy, Carnell, Cramp, Houston, Longstreth, Sheridan, and Vare-Washington. This was the fifth cohort of classrooms to receive renovations; the previous cohorts received their renovations over the summer each year from 2017 (cohort 1) to 2020 (cohort 4). As part of the classroom modernization project, teachers participated in professional development sessions throughout the 2021-22 school year on incorporating the new equipment (and related topics) and received access to sample units and lesson plans for the learning centers. Sessions occurred after school, on Saturdays, or during grade group meetings. Some larger sessions were offered once during the year, and smaller sessions were offered in grade group meetings with teachers at each school until all teachers received the information.

What we examined

This evaluation extends the previous evaluations conducted over the past six years¹ by examining five primary research questions over the 2021-22 school year:

- 1) Which classrooms were renovated?
- 2) To what extent were classroom teachers satisfied with the professional development?
- 3) To what extent were classroom teachers satisfied with the renovations?
- 4) How did Cohort 5 teachers perceive changes to their instructional practices and student outcomes associated with the project at the end of the first year?
- 5) How did teachers from previous cohorts perceive long-term changes to their instructional practices and student outcomes associated with the project after multiple years?

Data collection and analysis

We used three primary sources of data for this report.

District administrative data

To answer Research Question 1, we used records provided by the Office of Early Childhood Education that tracked the renovation process of the Cohort 5 schools.

¹ Previous reports are <https://www.philasd.org/research/2019/04/01/2017-18-literacy-and-learning-centers-evaluation-report/>, <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/01/16/literacy-and-learning-centers-2018-19-evaluation-report/>, and <https://www.philasd.org/research/2021/05/24/literacy-and-learning-centers-19-20/>. A full report was not completed for virtual learning during the 2020-21 school year although classrooms did receive renovations that year.

Teacher PD survey data

Teacher survey data was used to answer Research Question 2. The facilitators administered professional development (PD) survey(s) to teachers after each session, in which teachers were asked to rate the presenters and the content of the session. We received 131 surveys for sessions given throughout the school year. Survey responses were anonymous, and participants attended multiple sessions, so teachers may have completed more than one survey. Descriptive statistics are presented for survey results provided by teachers after attending PD sessions throughout the year.

Teacher end-of-year survey data

Teacher survey data were used to answer Research Questions 2-5. ORE administered surveys in May and June 2022 to teachers in the current cohort (Cohort 5) as well as teachers in previous cohorts (1-4). The surveys asked questions about satisfaction with program supports, satisfaction with the renovations/new materials, and teacher perceptions of program influence on instruction and student/teacher interactions. Thirty-one Cohort 5 teachers responded, resulting in a 26% response rate. Eighty previous cohort teachers responded, resulting in a 21% response rate of Cohort 1-4 teachers.² Descriptive statistics are presented for survey data, and open-ended items were analyzed for common themes.

What we found

SDP renovated 133 classrooms.

SDP used internal funds to renovate 133 PK-3 classrooms at nine schools in the summer of 2021 (Table 1). Work in the classrooms included physical renovations, new furniture, and new materials and resources. Examples of renovations included painting, updated electrical fixtures, and new flooring. New furniture included new chairs and desks for students, new bookshelves and other storage, and new learning centers. Centers varied by grade level, but examples include a play kitchen, art center, listening center (where students can listen to an audiobook and follow along in a physical book), writing center, library/cozy corner, dramatic play center (with puppets), small group instruction table, and dry erase center (for students to practice writing). While centers were different for each grade level, classrooms in the same grade levels across schools received the same set of centers. Examples of new materials and resources included technology (panel boards and iPads), audiobooks, and classroom manipulatives.

² This list was created by taking lists of previous cohorts and removing any teachers who no longer taught at that school. However, except in a few cases, we did not have lists of new teachers who are now teaching in modernized classrooms.

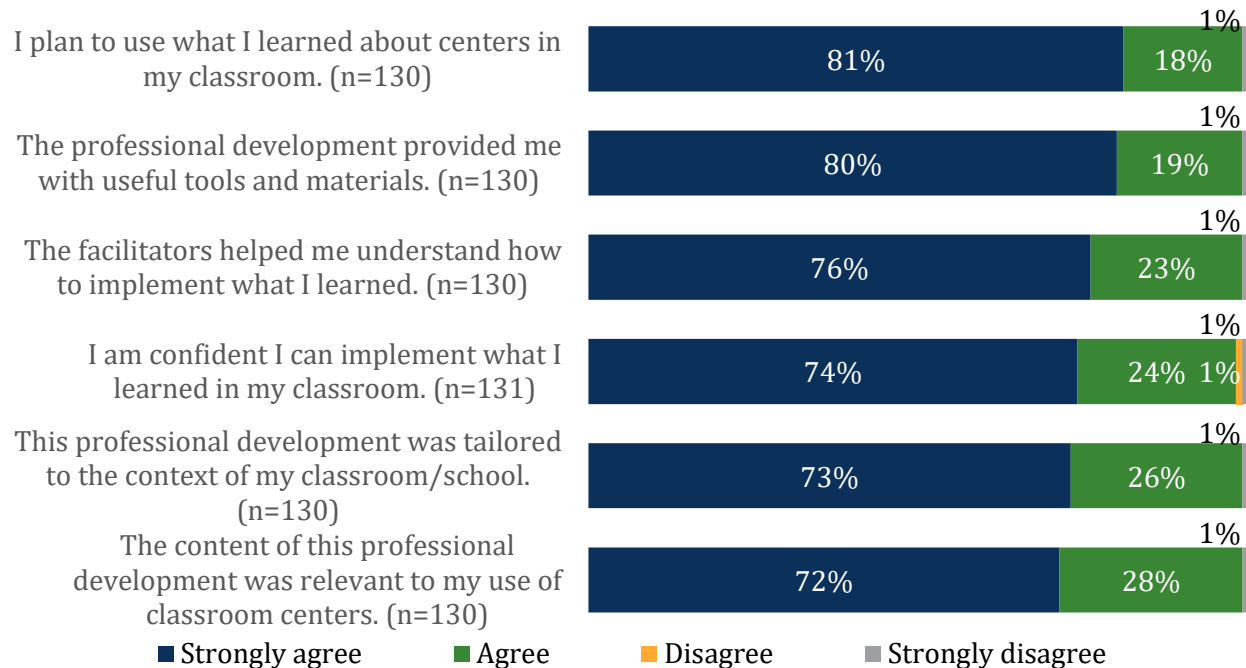
Table 1. Number of renovated PreK-grade 3 classrooms by school in summer 2021

School	Number of Classrooms
Anderson	13
Blankenburg	12
Bregy	9
Carnell	27
Cramp	17
Houston	8
Longstreth	11
Sheridan	21
Vare-Washington	15
Total	133

Cohort 5 teachers rated PD sessions positively.

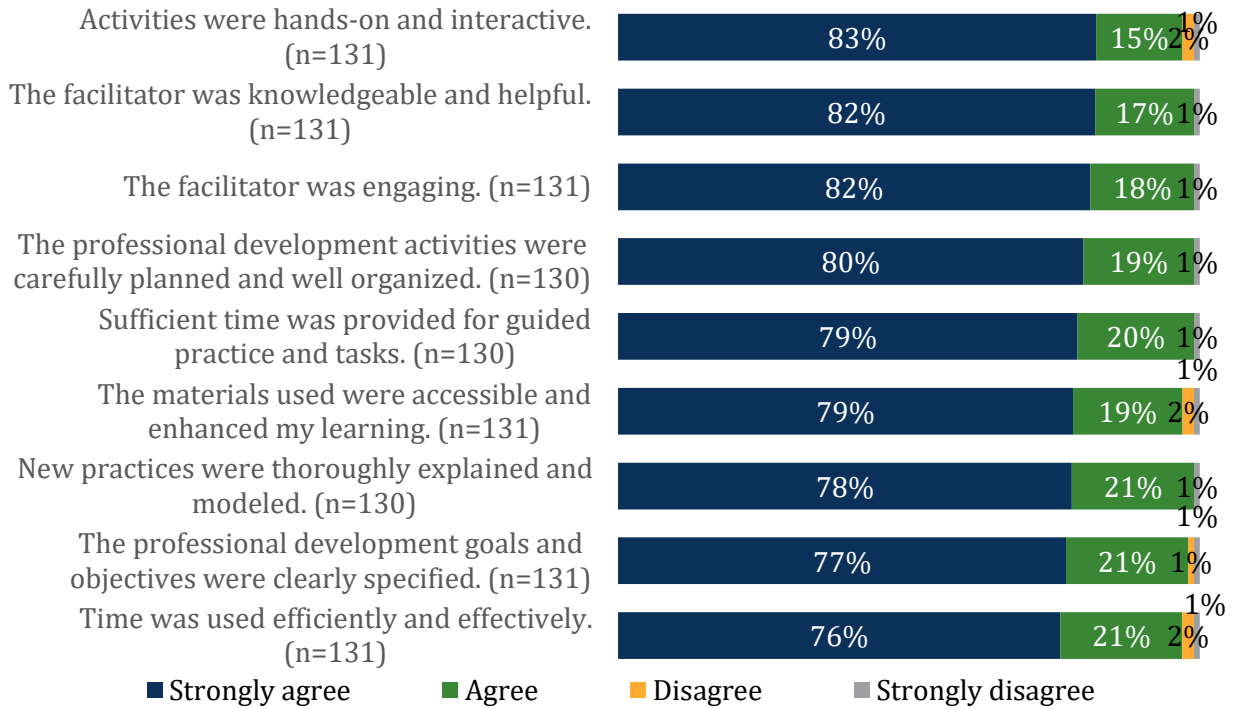
After each PD session, teachers were asked to complete a survey that asked them questions about the content, process, and their knowledge. On average, participants rated their knowledge of the session topic prior to the training a 3.0 (out of 5) and after the training a 4.4. Respondents overwhelmingly rated both the content and process of the sessions positively (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Respondents overwhelmingly rated the session content positively



Note: These questions combine responses from surveys for each session, so respondents may repeat over time.

Figure 2. Respondents overwhelmingly rated the session process positively



Note: These questions combine responses from surveys for each session, so respondents may repeat over time.

In the end-of-year survey, Cohort 5 respondents felt they could have used more training on using the new manipulatives in their classroom, creating classroom routines for center-based learning, and setting expectations for student behavior during center-based learning (Figure 3). When asked what additional PD would have been helpful, respondents asked for more training on the iPads, including potential in-class support to set them up and demonstrate how to use them. Most (80%) respondents said the Apple and Legos training they received was useful (Figure 4). About half of respondents said their preferred time to receive PD was after school, followed by grade group meetings (Figure 5).

Figure 3. Percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they received sufficient PD in each area

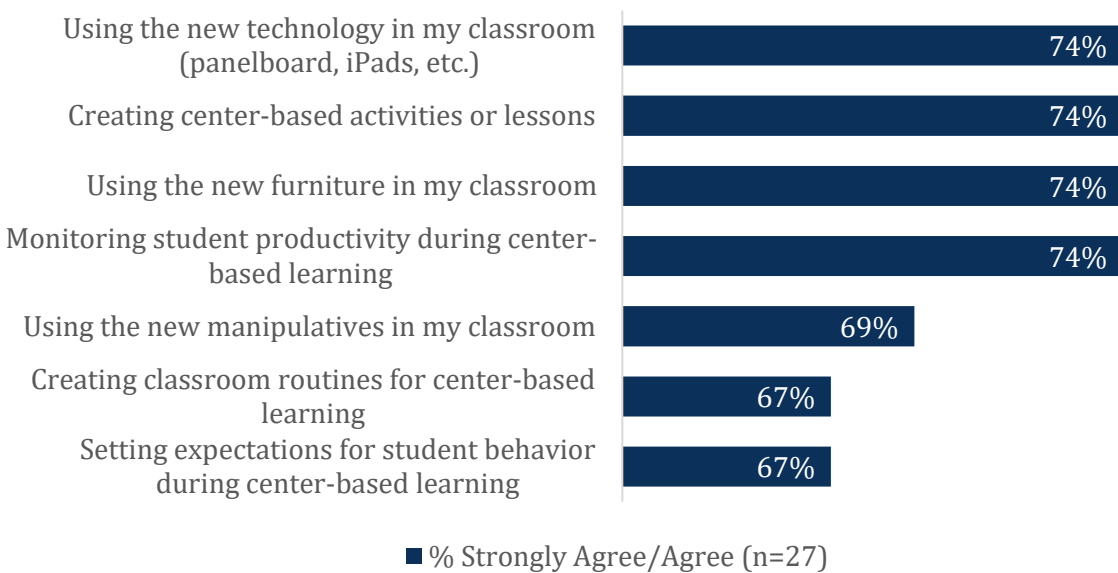


Figure 4. 80% of respondents said the Apple and Legos training they received was useful

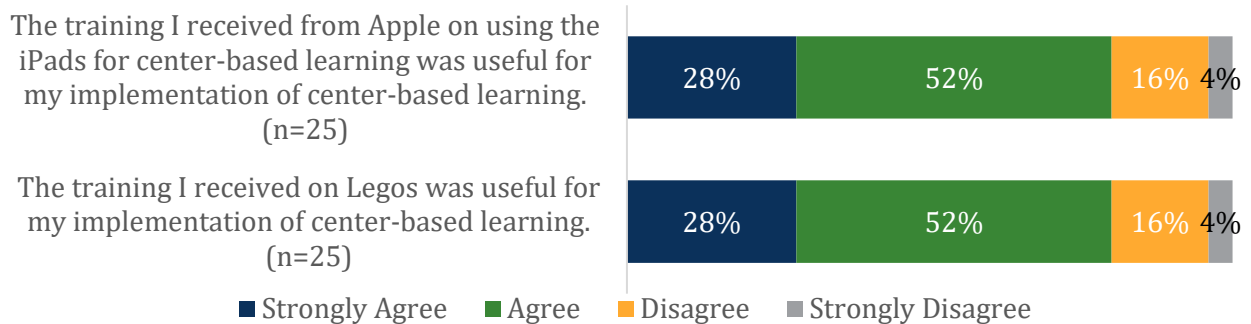
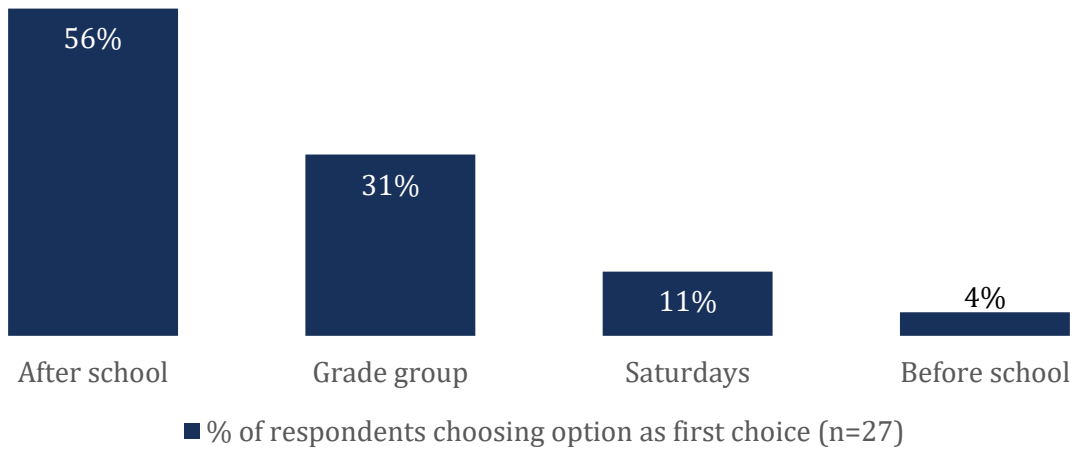


Figure 5. The highest percentage of respondents identified after school as the preferred time to receive PD, followed by grade group meetings, Saturdays, and before school



Cohort 5 teachers found using the new technology to be a challenge and would have liked more input into what materials were in their rooms.

On the end-of-year survey, more than three-quarters of teachers (79%) said that they use centers daily. Additionally, two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that their principal was very or somewhat involved in the project. When asked about challenges they experienced, the main challenge that Cohort 5 teachers cited was using the new technology (panelboards and iPads) in their classroom (Figure 6). While most teachers (75%) said they received all the manipulatives they needed to use the new centers, 59% said they received all the supplies they needed, 58% said there was adequate teacher space, and 48% said there was adequate storage space after the renovation (Figure 7).

Figure 6. 73% of Cohort 5 respondents said using the new technology was at least a slight challenge

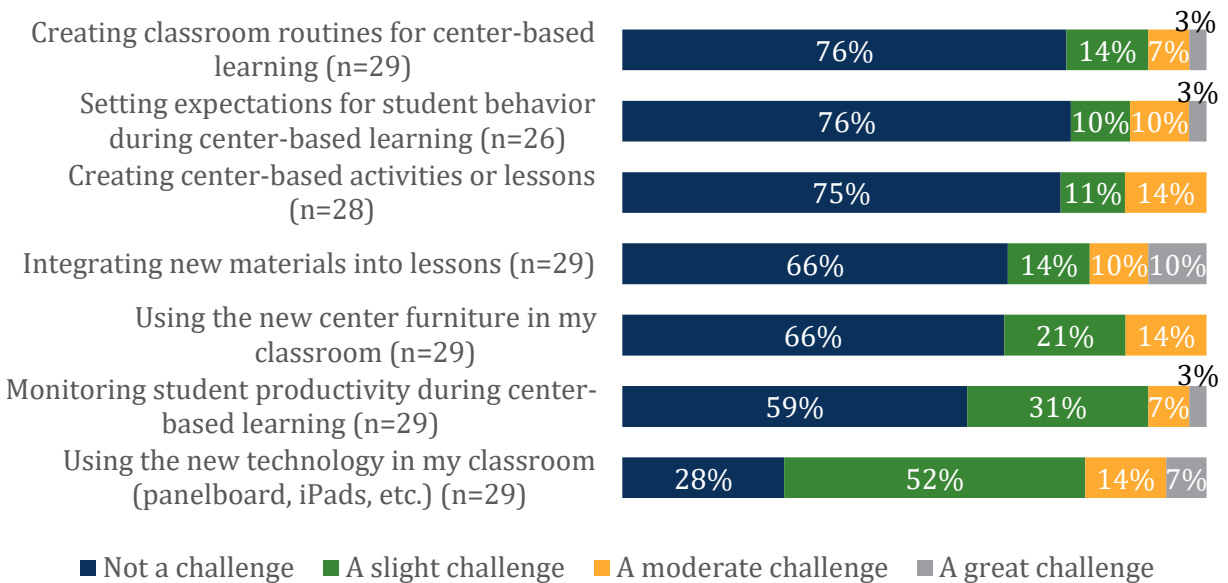
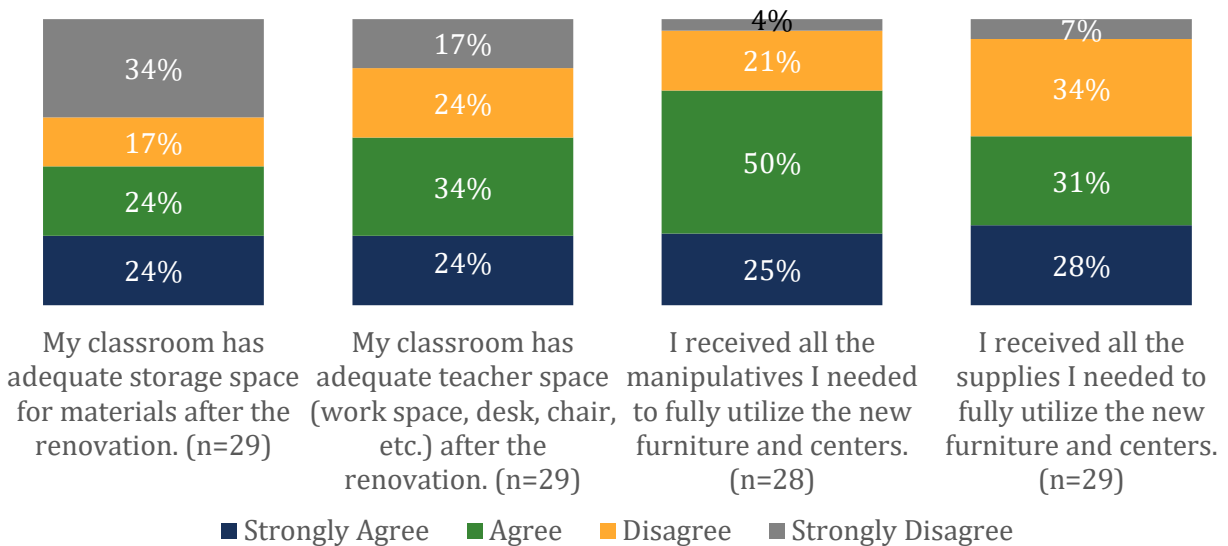


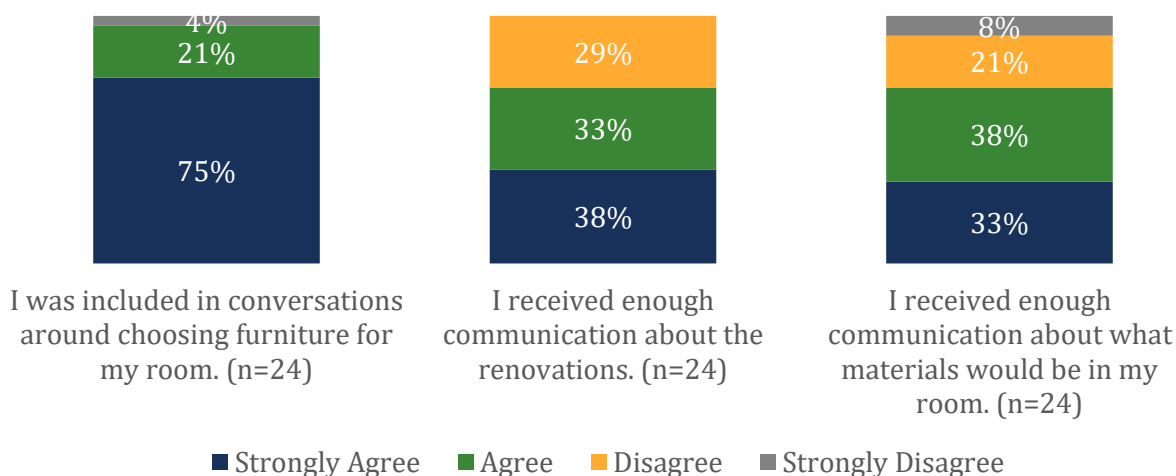
Figure 7. Cohort 5 teachers responded to questions about storage space, teacher work space, manipulatives, and supplies



About two-thirds of respondents (65%) said that they prefer a sit/stand desk (what they received) rather than a small teacher desk. Items that teachers mentioned as being most useful in their classroom were the iPads, Smartboards, the small group table, cork/bulletin boards, student desks, and the writing center desk. However, teachers also mentioned student desks as being the least useful items, citing that they can be too big for a small classroom and the fact that they roll can be a distraction for younger students. Other items mentioned as least useful were wobble stools and the shelves/storage for large books.

Although 96% of teachers said they were included in conversations around choosing new furniture, 71% said they received enough communication about the renovations and what materials would be in their room (Figure 8). Similar to previous years,³ the main suggestion teachers had for how to create future modernized classrooms was to incorporate more teacher input, particularly around choosing materials/furniture and the placement of the Smartboard (one teacher mentioned not all students could see the Smartboard from their seats, and one teacher said their Smartboard was installed in front of a whiteboard). This year teachers also mentioned items arriving late or not at all (likely due to supply chain issues) which made it hard to adjust mid-year, especially if new furniture arrived unexpectedly.

Figure 8. Cohort 5 teachers responded to questions about being included in conversations about furniture and receiving enough communication about the renovation and the materials



Respondents also had positive feedback about the project in the open-ended comments. One teacher wrote, “Having taught in a severely deteriorating building with broken furniture where I worked a 2nd job to buy what I needed this is incredible. 20 years with SDP and this makes me feel respected.” Another said, “The students come to school every day with a smile on their faces. They learn the importance of taking care of what we have to keep it nice. They are excited to use the new materials and have learned a great deal.” Another teacher expanded on students wanting to take care of the new materials by saying, “We had one incident of a child defacing a chair with a marker the first month of school. His classmates were really upset about it, and it hasn't happened since.”

Additionally, we asked teachers from previous cohorts about items that they felt did not hold up well or that they received but are no longer using. The items that teachers in previous cohorts mentioned as not holding up well were student desks, the furniture, seat sacks, bouncy chairs, the

³ See <https://www.philasd.org/research/2019/04/01/2017-18-literacy-and-learning-centers-evaluation-report/>, <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/01/16/literacy-and-learning-centers-2018-19-evaluation-report/>, and <https://www.philasd.org/research/2021/05/24/literacy-and-learning-centers-19-20/>.

puppet theater, and whiteboards. Teachers said the student desks needed more space to hold materials, were not the right size, had edging that fell off easily, had feet that fell off easily, were too big for their space, were not conducive for students to move desks into other configurations, and name tags and other items had trouble sticking to the desks. Teachers also said some of the furniture was wobbly or otherwise not built properly (which they felt could be a safety issue) and either fell apart or were not able to be used. The seat sacks and puppet theater fell apart and bouncy chairs deflated. Teachers said the white boards were scratched, did not erase well, or only held up for one year. Finally, a few teachers said they did not use the easel (no space or no time) or the listening center (either missing materials, hard to implement during the pandemic, or that students struggled to use the CD player independently). Similar to the current cohort of survey respondents, teachers appreciated the upgrades but would have liked more input on choosing materials and the way their classroom was laid out, particularly the amount of furniture and the Smartboard placement.

Cohort 5 teachers felt the project provided benefits to their teaching, the classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction.

Almost all Cohort 5 respondents (97%) said their students now have more opportunities to be creative after the modernization (Figure 9). Teachers also reported that their students are more engaged academically (90%) and demonstrate increased self-regulation (80%). Teachers felt the project provided several benefits to their teaching, including improving the classroom environment (97% said a great or moderate benefit), working with students in small groups (81%), more opportunities to differentiate instruction (80%), and working with students one-on-one (80%; see Figure 10).

Figure 9. 97% of Cohort 5 respondents said their students have more opportunities to be creative

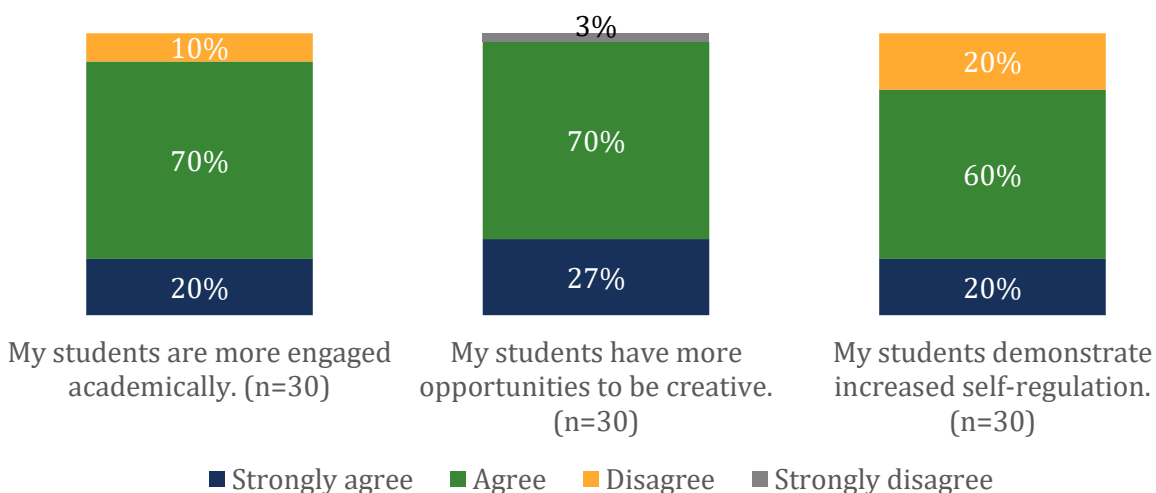
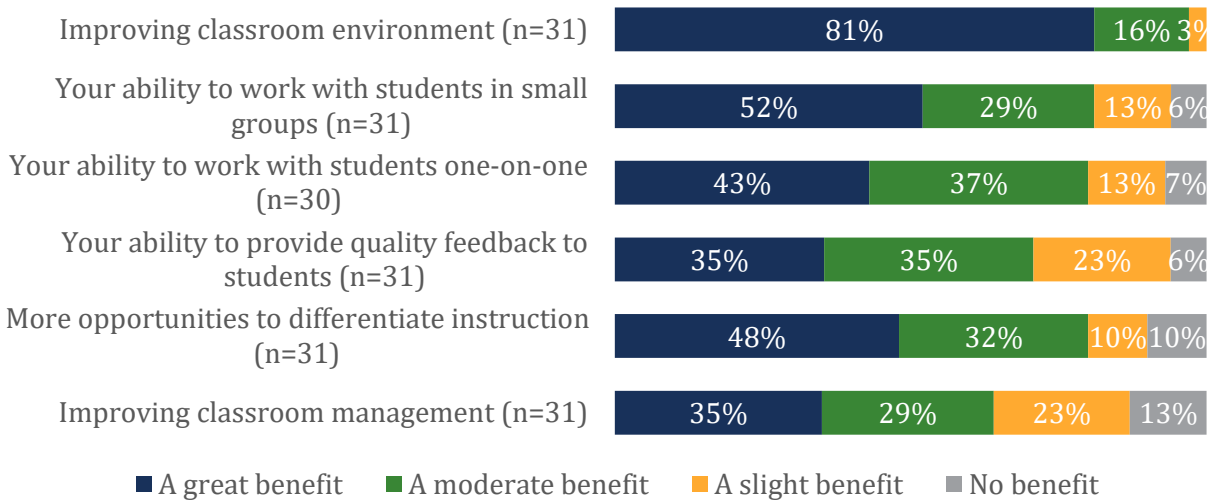


Figure 10. Cohort 5 teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to their teaching



We also asked teachers to rate the benefits the project provided to classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction. All teachers said the project provided at least a slight benefit to promoting and supporting a physically safe classroom environment, and almost all said there was at least a slight benefit to teaching children procedures for materials, processes, and spaces (Figure 11). In terms of the learning environment, all teachers agreed there was some benefit in setting up the classroom to allow for student mobility and using manipulatives for differentiated instruction (Figure 12). Finally, most teachers also felt there was at least a slight benefit for items related to small group instruction (Figure 13).

Figure 11. Cohort 5 teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to classroom culture

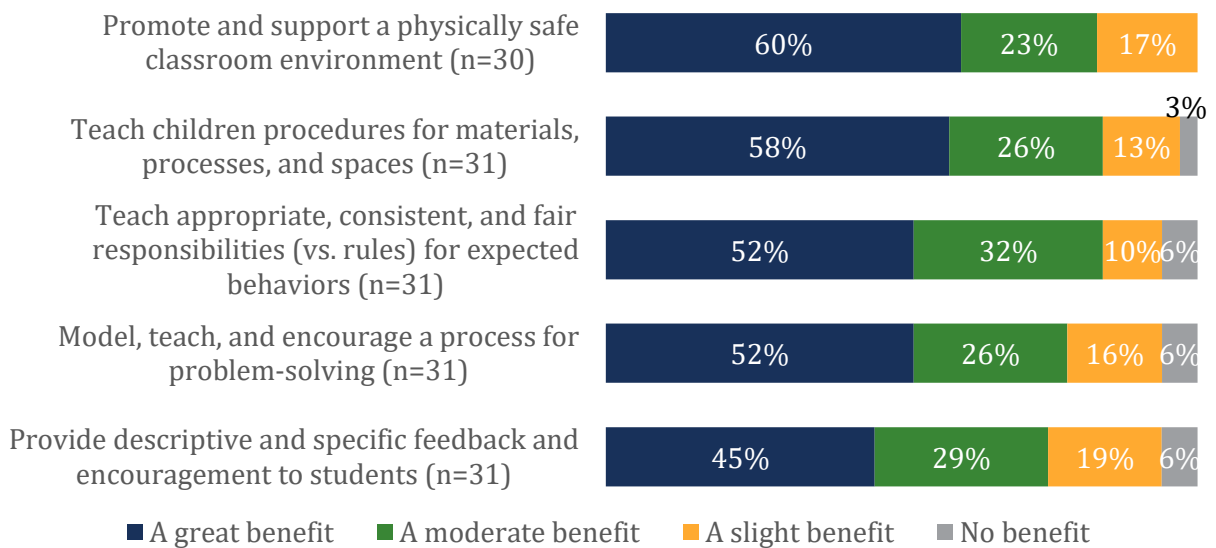


Figure 12. Cohort 5 teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to the learning environment

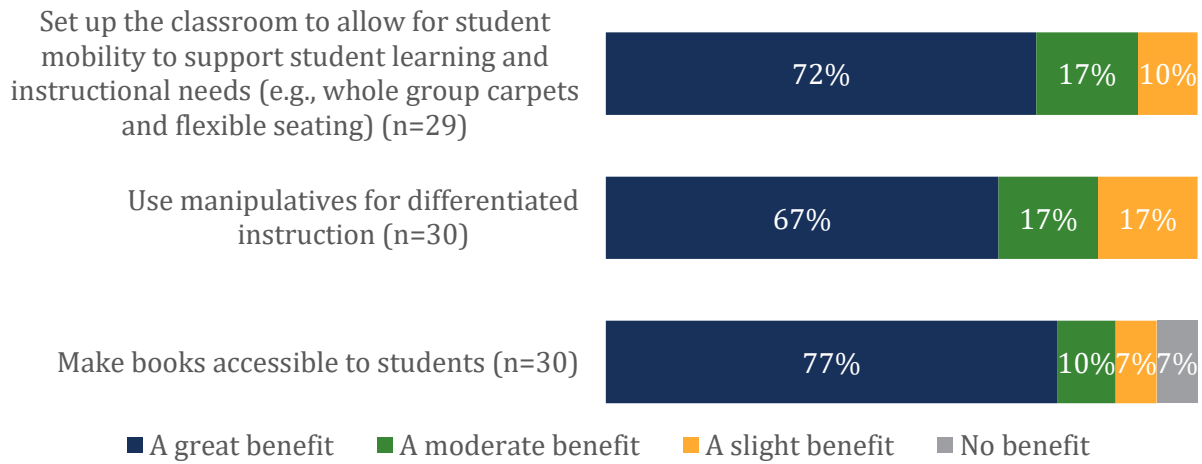
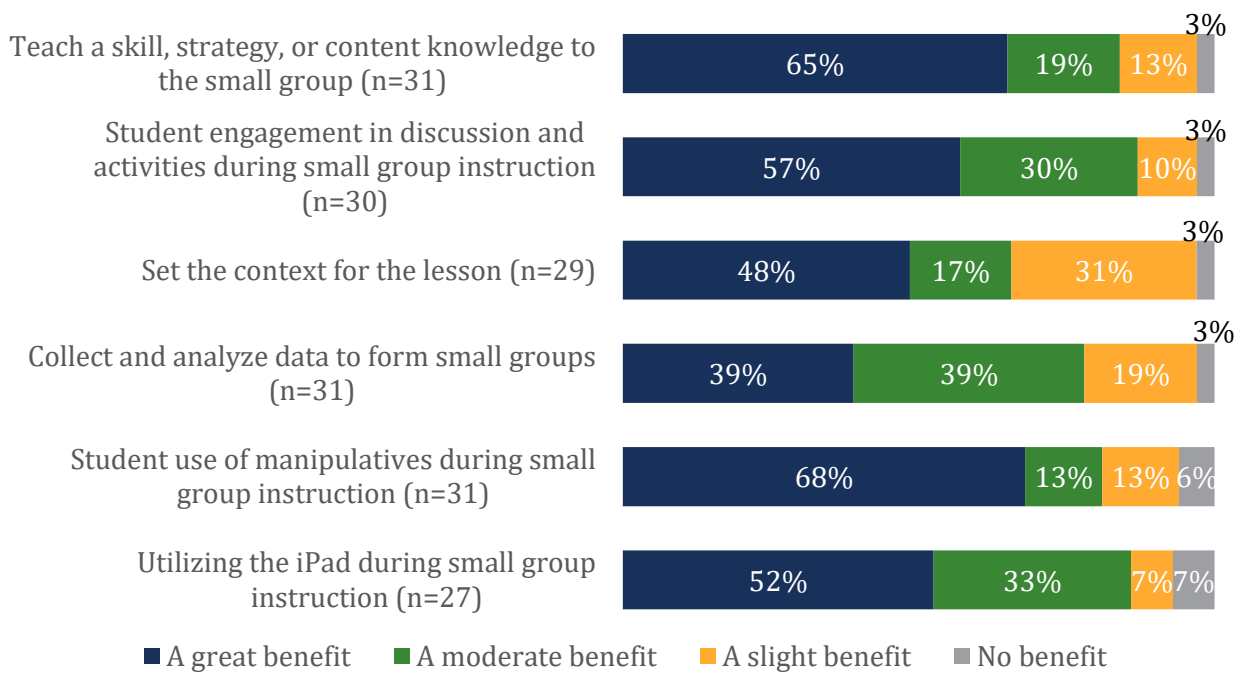


Figure 13. Cohort 5 teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to small group instruction



At the end of the 2021-22 school year, teachers from previous cohorts also found benefits from the modernizations but rated items slightly less positively than Cohort 5 teachers did.

Similar to Cohort 5 teachers, most respondents from previous cohorts also said the project provided at least a slight benefit to improving the classroom environment, their ability to work with students in small groups, more opportunities to differentiate instruction, and their ability to work with students one-on-one (Figure 14). Previous cohort teachers were slightly less positive about classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction. However, 89% of teachers still said that the modernizations provided at least a slight benefit towards promoting and supporting a physically safe classroom environment (Figure 15). Additionally, 95% of respondents said making books accessible to students was at least slightly beneficial to the learning environment, and 92% said using manipulatives for differentiated instruction and setting up the classroom for student mobility (Figure 16) were at least slightly beneficial. Finally, respondents found the most benefit to small group instruction around student use of manipulatives, teaching a skill to the small group, and student engagement (Figure 17).

Figure 14. Previous cohort teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to their teaching

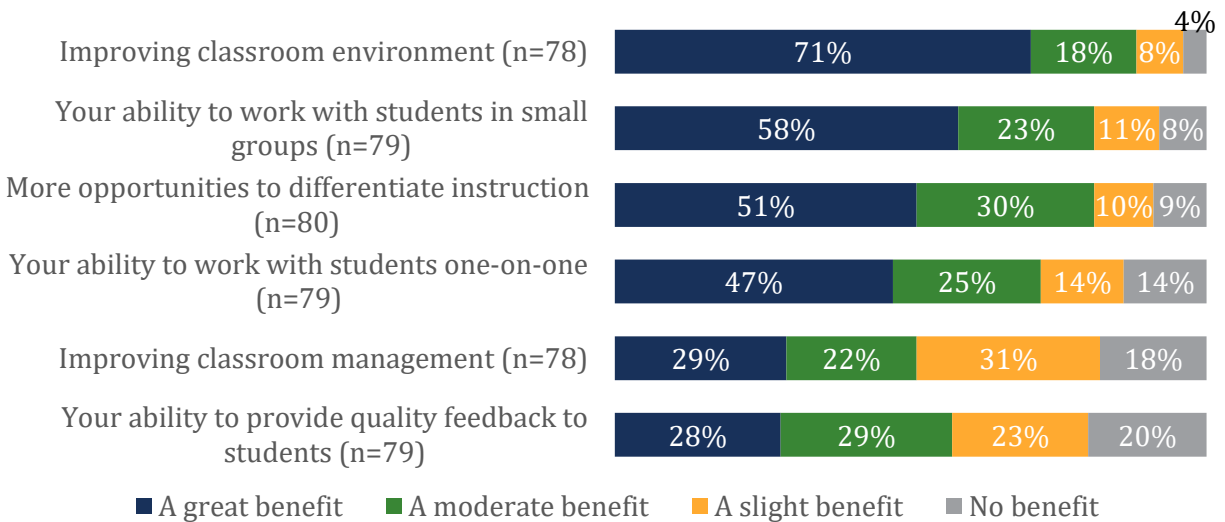


Figure 15. Previous cohort teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to classroom culture

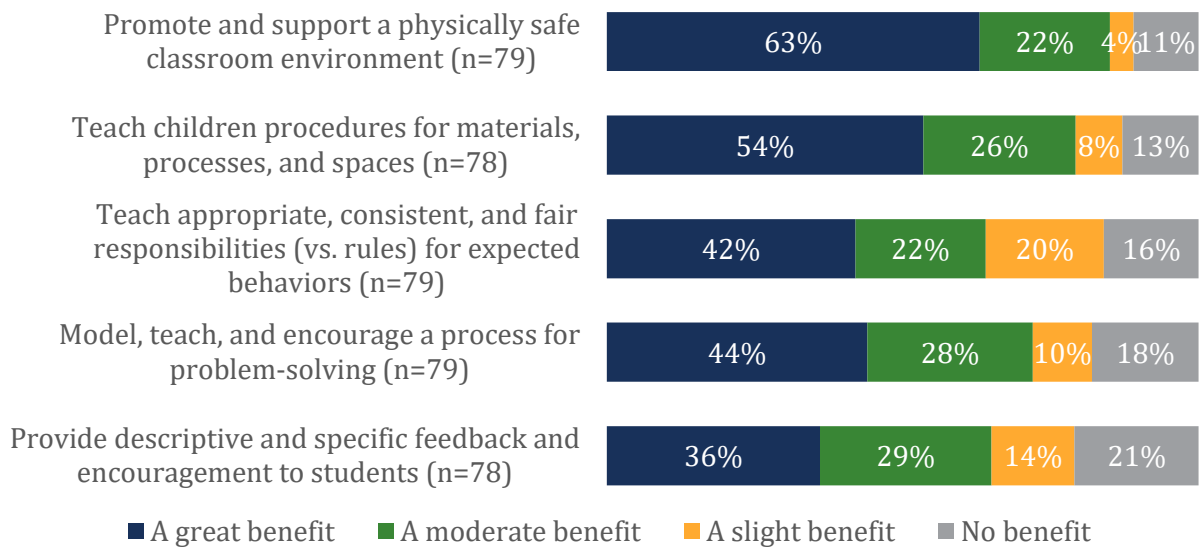


Figure 16. Previous cohort teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to the learning environment

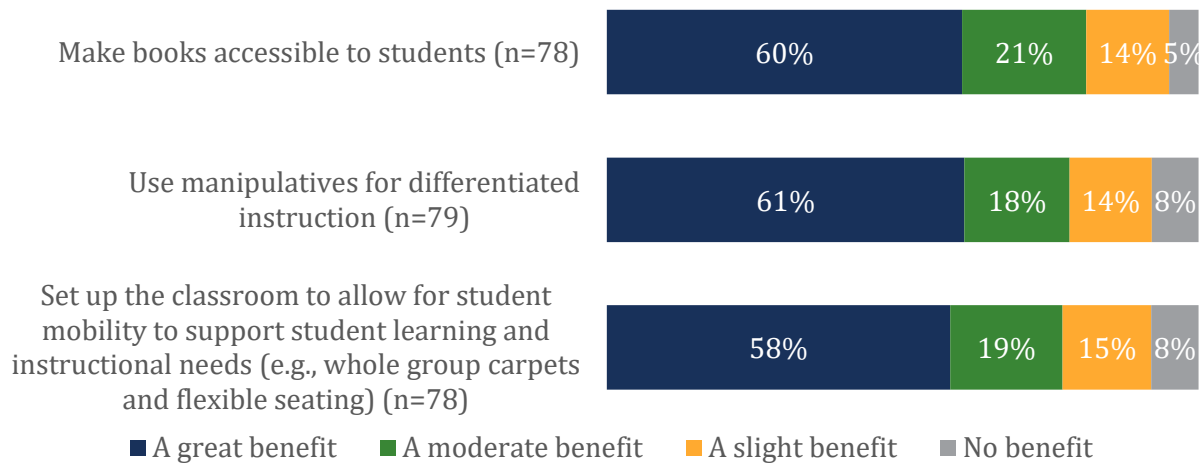
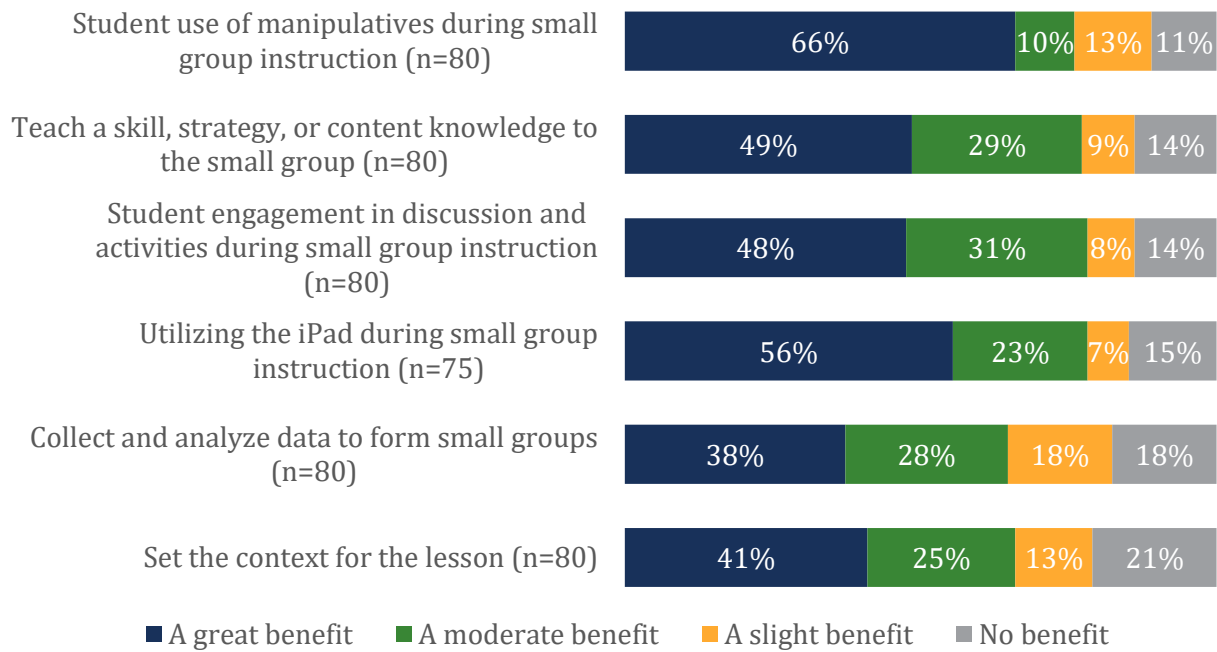


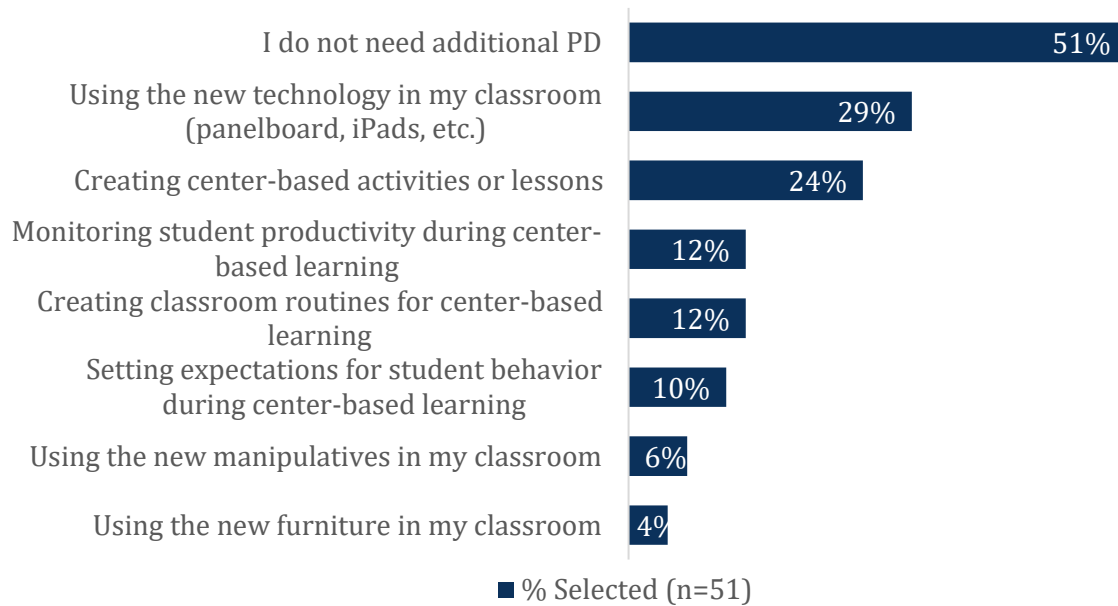
Figure 17. Previous cohort teachers rated how much benefit the project provided to small group instruction



We also asked previous cohort respondents to select areas where they needed additional PD. About half (51%) said they did not need additional PD, followed by requests for PD in using the new technology and creating center-based activities and lessons (Figure 18).⁴

⁴ This question was only asked of teachers who identified in the survey that they were teaching in the classroom when the modernization happened and therefore would have received project-related PD.

Figure 18. Percent of previous cohort respondents who said they need additional PD in the following areas (respondents could select more than one area)



Conclusions

In summer 2021, SDP redesigned 133 pre-kindergarten to third-grade classrooms into interactive learning environments. Throughout the 2021-22 school year, teachers participated in professional development sessions on incorporating the new equipment (and related topics) and received access to sample units and lesson plans for the learning centers. Respondents overwhelmingly rated the sessions positively, and also asked for more training on using the new manipulatives in their classroom, creating classroom routines for center-based learning, and setting expectations for student behavior. Cohort 5 teachers found using the new technology to be a challenge and, similar to previous cohorts, would have liked more input into what materials were in their rooms. Both the current cohort respondents and those from previous cohorts found the project to provide benefits to their teaching, the classroom culture, the learning environment, and small group instruction.