

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For donors seeking to improve student outcomes, the critical question is:
How can my funds improve teaching quality?

Why this, why now?

Over the past twenty years, despite increases in per-pupil spending, dropout rates remain alarmingly high, achievement gaps persist, and U.S. students rank behind their peers in many other countries.

Researchers, educators, and funders across the political spectrum increasingly agree that change is needed, and that teachers are the single most crucial lever for accomplishing that change.

What's in this report?

This report outlines high impact philanthropic models based on our analysis of available evidence from academic research, expert advice, and practitioner information:

Part 1: Improving individual teachers' skills discusses models that:

- Improve training for teacher candidates before they are fully employed, through apprenticeships in high-need schools where theory is linked to real-world practice.
- Provide support to new teachers, through in-school mentoring focused on improving the skills of novice teachers.
- Invest in teachers' ongoing professional development, through programs that integrate district and school goals with the learning needs of individual teachers.

Part 2: Creating an environment for great teaching discusses models that:

- Improve principal leadership in high-need schools, through more selective principal recruitment, increased hands-on preparation, and on-the-job support especially during the critical first few years.

- Reform schools by removing existing constraints to good teaching. These whole-school models foster high expectations for teacher and student performance and redesign the school to achieve them. Introducing more rigorous curricula and extending learning time for students and teachers are examples of reform strategies.

In each of these two sections, donors will find:

- Analysis of the current situation.
- Descriptions of what to look for to identify high impact models.
- Models in Practice that provide details of how nonprofits are implementing these models, including estimates of the impact and cost of each model. These estimates were derived from our team's analysis of available data.
- Additional resources to identify other organizations implementing similar models.

Part 3: What donors should know about the broader policy environment provides:

- Guidance about how policy affects a donor's investments.
- A discussion of hot topics in education policy.
- Tips and resources for those who wish to influence policy change directly.
- Examples of impact at the district level, in district turnaround profiles.

In Parts 1 and 2, our analysis of available evidence found no differences among the high impact models that were meaningful enough to warrant a ranking based on impact and cost. In fact, these solutions are mutually reinforcing: investments in one area enable impact in another. As a result, donors who invest in a solution where other effective strategies are already being implemented will likely see the greatest impact. Additionally, just as some business climates are more favorable for certain investments, some policy environments are more favorable for certain philanthropic efforts.

As with all of our work, we have vetted the content of this report with experts and practitioners in the field, individual philanthropists, and advisors to ensure that our guidance is both smart and actionable. It represents the best advice we can offer at this time. We welcome continued input and are exploring ways to update our material to incorporate new information and new developments. To receive notices of updates to this report, please contact impact@sp2.upenn.edu.