



IMPROVING
EDUCATION

the
Fellowship



Teacher Improvement Fellowship

Engaging teacher leaders to collaborate, design, and lead change

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Introduction

History

At Improving Education, we work to improve educational systems by harnessing the creative power of individuals to develop, test, and implement innovative and efficient solutions to complex problems. We focus on improving Early Childhood outcomes for children age birth through grade two using strategic, high leverage approaches that help schools, parents, teachers, and leaders learn to improve. Our teams design, test, and develop new ways to solve systemic problems through a rigorous quality improvement process.

Since its inception in 2105, Improving Education has worked with a subset of schools, teachers, and school leaders as part of a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) in Baltimore to improve early literacy.

Our Networked Improvement Community (NIC) has become the cornerstone for school innovation in grades K-2 and instructional design for Improving Education.

It is a model for the nation in how to achieve sustained results while scaling effective practices within a district. Our classrooms are hubs of activity where teachers develop and test new ideas for educational improvements

tailored to their students' needs. Over the years we have provided direct support to Baltimore City instructional staff by facilitating team meetings, modeling lessons, and generating data visualizations that assist schools and teachers in learning about the changes they are implementing and the improvements they are creating. We have facilitated learning across the Network through collaborative professional development, meetings, and school visits. Our work has become part of the larger City Schools strategy to improve Pre-K through Grade 2 literacy in Baltimore, and we assisted in the process of securing a Gates Foundation grant for High Schools with a similar NIC structure. The Fellowship itself was adopted by the district and has been used as a mechanism for improvement in their secondary literacy work.

It was through this close partnership with schools and teachers that we learned early on, the voice and expertise of teachers is instrumental in solving the critical issues in education. At that time, however, no platform existed for their voices to be heard and often teachers were working in isolation. In January 2020, we expanded upon our current work with teachers in our NIC and launched a Teacher Improvement Fellowship (or iFellowship), engaging a cohort of 10 PreK to Grade 2 Baltimore City Public School teachers in a year-long Fellowship. Throughout the year, iFellows worked collaboratively on problems ranging from Home Learning, Birth to age 5 supports for children, ESOL, and Social/Emotional Learning (SEL).

Our Improvement Work

Timeline 2015 - 2021

2015 - 2016

- » Launched and supported a 4 school NIC to improve K-2 Literacy Outcomes in Baltimore
- » Tested, revised, and scaled our Bedtime in a Box program to 1,000 families across Baltimore

2017-2018

- » Expanded our NIC to 11 schools. Worked on replication processes and protocols to improve Literacy Outcomes in K-2
- » Bedtime in a Box moved from testing to scale, reaching an additional 2,500 households

2019

- » Our 11 school NIC outperformed other Baltimore schools by 12 points on K-2 Literacy Outcomes
- » Bedtime in a Box expanded to Denver Colorado, serving over 6,000 households

2020

- » We transitioned our NIC to support improvement work with the central office in Baltimore.
- » We launched our iFellowship with 10 teachers in January 2020
- » Learning in a Box was created in response to school closures

2021

- » We supported the creation of a Teacher Fellowship program in Baltimore City Schools
- » iFellows revised our Learning in a Box program and worked other ideas for improvement
- » Learning in a Box reaches 13,000 students with over \$1 million in materials

Why a Fellowship?

We believe that by empowering teachers to lead change at schools and in the community, we are seeding new ideas for improvement in student outcomes.

We believe that by empowering teachers to lead change at schools and in the community, we are seeding new ideas for improvement in student outcomes. Our Fellowship engages teacher leaders from across Baltimore to collaborate, design, and lead change efforts in schools and the community. They inspire and fundamentally influence the way work is done and how we teach students and engage families and their communities. Teachers are closest to the problems and are able to systematically identify and mitigate barriers to student achievement. The iFellowship allows teacher voice to be heard beyond the four walls of a classroom, to elevate key learning and positively change the landscape of early childhood education and the trajectory of our youngest learners.



Design & Development

Initial design and development came out of key learnings from our historical work with teachers within the NIC. We sought to develop a way to empower teachers and build leadership capacity through strategic learning sessions and opportunities to engage with experts in the field. A year-long scope of work was designed, which allowed us to engage deeply around the tools of improvement science, learn about complex problems in education,

and intentionally collaborate with colleagues through weekly learning sessions. In addition to weekly sessions throughout the school year, iFellows participated in a four week summer intensive that included academic learning, engagement with other organizations and individuals and project based work to design solutions to problems in early childhood. Fellows earned a stipend of \$5,000 for their participation in weekly sessions and the summer intensive.

- **Fellowship Design and Development** **Summer / Fall 2019**
 - » Developed a year long calendar of professional learning
 - » Identifies iFellows through a rigorous application process
- **iFellowship Launch** **January 2020**
 - » The inaugural group of iFellows were announced and met for their first collaborative learning session
- **iFellowship Event and Fundraiser** **Early - March 2020**
 - » iFellows were introduced to the broader community
 - » iFellows shared the power of teacher voice and collaboration
- **Schools closed due to the Pandemic** **Mid - March 2020**
 - » Within 2 days, iFellows convened and created Learning in a Box to provide materials and resources to children PK-2
- **iFellows engaged in a 4 week Summer Intensive** **July 2020**
 - » iFellows deeply engaged in researching, ideating, and design Capstone Projects in 4 areas: ESOL, SEL, Birth-5, home learning
- **Implemented Capstone Plans** **Fall 2020**
 - » iFellows responded to the ever changing needs to meet the demands of virtual instruction
 - » Decision to extend into Spring 2021

Inagural Fellows



Following a citywide application and interview process, 10 Pre-K to Grade 2 Baltimore City Public School teachers were selected to participate in the inaugural cohort of the iFellowship. The iFellowship launched in January 2020 and iFellows were formally introduced to the broader community in March 2020 during an iFellowship showcase event.

The iFellows came from a variety of backgrounds, professional education programs and experiences and all have a mindset for growth and learning. Fellows were immediately engaged in the work of improvement and quickly identified three key areas to focus their learning throughout the fellowship; Identifying and streamlining supports for children ages birth through five, support for social emotional learning (SEL) and ESOL.

Pandemic Response

Just two weeks after our event in March, schools closed due to the pandemic. There was a great deal of uncertainty around how students were to engage in virtual learning and how teachers were going to be able to meet the ever changing needs of their class. The iFellows saw an immediate need for learning materials, resources and developmentally appropriate activities. A fourth focus, home learning, quickly emerged and the iFellows began designing and developing Learning in a Box.

The iFellows strongly believed that learning shouldn't stop while schools are closed. Within days of schools closing, the iFellows had selected age appropriate materials and resources that could be used in the home without the requisite need for technology. Four levels of Learning in a Boxes (pre kindergarten through second grade) were developed to ensure that our youngest learners would have access to high quality materials necessary for successful learning. Within two weeks, materials were purchased and packed, and our initial distribution of 250 boxes were delivered by to iFellows to their own students.

Testing an Idea

Refining the Idea

Spreading the Idea



Initial Change Idea

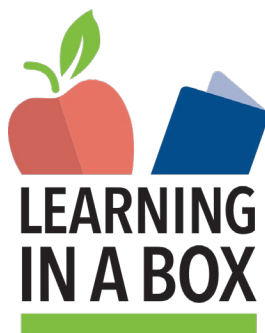
iFellows understood the need and created 250 boxes. One for each of their students.

Revising the Change

Through daily use, iFellows identified the most useful items, activities, and processes that engaged students.

Larger Scale Testing

1500 boxes were provided to teachers at the iFellow's school.



Revision from Learning

iFellows worked to create activity cards alligned to state standards, videos for easy access, and streamlined the materials bulk distribution.

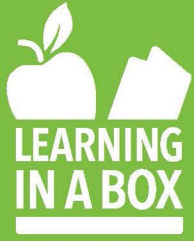
Spreading the Idea

School districts from across the country reached out to learn more and order boxes. We limited distributions to Maryland. Over 12,500 more boxes were delivered.

Pandemic Response

at home: day

44% of low income households in the United States do not have access to broadband *



Learning in a Box provides critical learning materials to underserved students with little or no access to online tools. The wide range of interactive resources keep students learning and engaged.



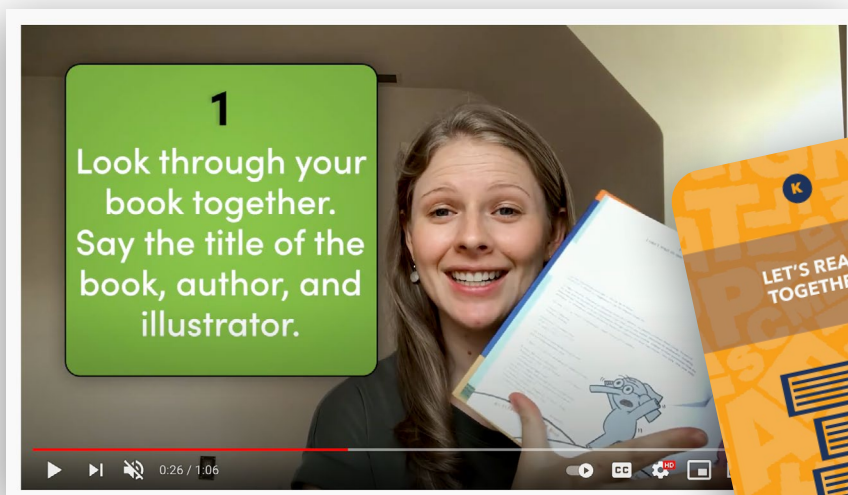
Learning Doesn't Stop When Schools are Closed

We can't allow the technology divide to prevent students from learning. Children need access to learning opportunities that engage and challenge them with developmentally appropriate activities from home.

IMPACT

Since the first box was provided, we have seen increased engagement from children and requests from cities around the country to bring boxes to their homes.

Since the first distribution, the learning boxes have evolved based on teacher, student and family feedback. The contents and activities are all aligned to state standards for each grade level, over 40 grade level, family friendly activity cards were designed and accompanying videos were created. To date, this work of the iFellows has reached nearly 15,000 children across the state of Maryland and beyond with the potential for significant demand in the coming months.



Screenshot of youtube learning video



Summer Intensive

Capstone Learning

The summer intensive was strategically designed to engage the iFellows in deeper learning around previously identified focus areas; supports for children ages birth through five, social emotional learning, ESOL and home learning. Throughout the four week intensive, the Fellows worked collaboratively in self selected capstone project groups and participated in structured learning sessions to meet milestones around three distinct areas,

- 1. Researching the problem**
- 2. Ideation and design**
- 3. Planning for implementation and spread**

Each of these areas had tools and templates to support and guide the groups in documenting their learning and ideas to implement. Each week, with support from the Improving Education coordinators, iFellows completed tasks to reach identified milestones for each of these distinct phases of learning.

Researching the Problem

Prior to undertaking any work on solutions, we wanted the iFellows to examine the underlying causes, speak with experts, understand what was being done or had been tried, and generate knowledge of the focus area that could have significant impact on the problem being solved. The iFellows learned about and used a series of Quality Improvement tools to help guide them through this phase of work and document learning from interaction with others and research on the topic. They developed

fishbone diagrams to identify root causes, conducted empathy interviews with various stakeholders to learn from people closest to the problem and completed process maps to identify steps in the current process.

Ideation and Design

The second phase of learning, Ideation and Design, allowed the iFellows to take the learning from their research and develop ideas around how to solve the problem. A key component of this phase was answering the question, "What are we trying to accomplish?" and defining a specific goal of "what, by when and by how much?" Getting clear a measurable goal for the work allowed the iFellows to develop ideas that could be refined and focused.

Planning for Implementation and Spread

The third phase of learning was planning for implementation and spread. It was our expectation that the work of the iFellows did not stop with the creation of ideas, but was the actual work to try these new ideas in the context of their school or community. Each capstone group, **Birth-5**, **Home Learning**, **ESOL**, and **SEL** created a pitch deck with an implementation plan and budget to showcase their learning and the work completed to develop their ideas. iFellows had multiple opportunities to share their learning with experts in the field, organizations across the City and key stakeholders within Baltimore City Public Schools. Many of the learnings elevated during the summer began to inform decisions at the school and district level around how to best meet the needs of our youngest learners.

Shifting Focus

Virtual / Hybrid Learning

The iFellowship far exceeded our expectations and also spurred a continuation of our work during the spring. The Fellowship was set to end in December 2020, but the teachers saw many more challenges to address. We extended the iFellowship through the spring and provided each teacher with a \$1,000 stipend to design instructional improvements for small groups of students as they returned in in person or hybrid learning. Similar to the initial Fellowship, the iFellows worked in focus areas to test instructional changes in math, literacy and ESOL. Each iFellow conducted 2 structured learning cycles following a Plan- Do- Study- Act model for improvement.

iFellows collaboratively designed tools and protocols to use during small group instruction, tested the change and collected data to see if the change resulted in improvement. During weekly meetings, iFellows would reflect on their process and make small adjustments as needed. As a final project, each iFellow completed a consolidation of learning document which allowed for key learnings to be elevated to the district level. Additionally, a Spring Learning slide deck was created to share the changes, highlight conditions necessary for improvement, and student successes.

**PLAN.
DO.
STUDY.
ACT.**

Shared Learning

Carnegie Foundation Summit

During fall 2020, Improving Education was selected by the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching to present a live session during their annual National Summit in April. During our session, The Everyday PSDA: Engaging Teachers to Address Complex Problems, three iFellows shared their Fellowship experience and the power of using improvement science to address complex problems in education and health. Faced with a global pandemic, which quickly exposed the disparities of students' access to sufficient basic services, up-to-date digital tools and technology, and quality instruction, the iFellows shared how they were able to leverage this learning and respond by designing, testing and scaling new ideas to address these disparities. This work elevated the value and importance of teachers leading change efforts and demonstrated a powerful process that other teachers and practitioners can utilize to solve similar challenges in education.

Feedback provided to us by the Carnegie Foundation was overwhelmingly positive. The session was attended by 171 participants with 77% reporting that it was worthwhile or very worthwhile. Session participants appreciated hearing directly from teachers and learning how improvement science can be applied in education. Below are some sample quotes that highlight the importance of teacher voice and agency.

“Clear and pitched to practitioners, from practitioners. Makes improvement accessible, encouraging, possible.”

“I liked hearing from the teachers, particularly early childhood teachers. I appreciate centering teacher agency and knowledge.”

CARNEGIE FOUNDATION SUMMIT
on
IMPROVEMENT IN EDUCATION **2021**
VIRTUAL

APRIL 19-28, 2021



Reflection

What did we learn?

When we launched the iFellowship in January 2020, we had a clear goal and focus to improve outcomes in early education by leveraging the tools of improvement science and empowering teachers to be agents of change. We knew that we would have to make adjustments along the way, but never would we have anticipated being faced with a global pandemic just a few months into the Fellowship. The pandemic, however, provided us with a unique opportunity to swiftly respond to the needs of students, schools and the greater community. The iFellows were quickly embedded in working collaboratively to shift their focus in order to respond to the demands of virtual learning. This effort by the iFellows confirmed our theory

teachers, those closest to the problem, are integral in solving complex problems in education.

Shifting to all virtual provided some additional challenges with the summer intensive and fall capstone implementation, but again highlighted the abilities of the iFellows to adjust and design new solutions to improve virtual and hybrid instruction. The learning derived from this work has been shared with district level personnel and has begun to inform some shifts in practice within Baltimore City Schools specifically with regard to literacy and ESOL. Additionally, design work completed by the birth through five capstone groups has been integral

in helping shape a potential Head Start Networked Improvement Community focused on improving outcomes for 3 and 4 year old children. The work of the home learning capstone team has already had a direct impact on over 15,000 children across the state of Maryland and beyond. Learning in a Box is currently utilized at scale, with all pre kindergarten through grade two students, in three local educational jurisdictions in Maryland with a potential fourth being added this summer.

The iFellowship has had a dramatic impact on not only our organization as a whole, but the broader community. A tremendous amount of learning has occurred in such a short amount of time, but is already having a significant impact on changing the landscape of early childhood education and improving outcomes for our youngest learners. The work of the Fellowship and the iFellows has begun to transform the way we do work in education and shift towards empowering teachers to make change. When given the tools, supports and space to make change, the power and passion of teachers can shine.

When the iFellowship concluded in June 2021, iFellows were given an opportunity to share their experiences and provide feedback to help shape future cohorts.

100%
"highly agreed" The Fellowship helped them grow professionally as a learner and an educator

100%
"highly agreed" They felt confident using data to inform decisions

100%
"highly agreed" They would recommend the iFellowship to others

Reflection

Experience Feedback

“My experience in the Fellowship was empowering. There are so many things we do as teachers on a regular basis that just need a little more structure and collaboration to be elevated within our profession. We are the experts on the ground and being supported as such is an amazing experience. I felt heard and valued throughout my experience in the Fellowship.”

~**Jenn Wendler**

“The iFellow experience is a unique opportunity to grow as an educator. You will embark on finding solutions to problems that will better your instruction and support scholars both short and long term.”

~**Teacher Fellow**

“It is an amazing network to grow and learn with other educators. You develop skills that can be applied to so many applications and really dive deep into the problems we are facing in education today!”

~ **Erika Stern**

“Being an iFellow provides you a safe space to collaborate, learn, and grow with other amazing educators without micromanaging. Instead it is an encouraging space with high levels of support and trust.”

~**Teacher Fellow**

“My experience as an iFellow allowed me to learn and grow as an educator. It was incredible to work alongside other amazing Baltimore City educators who are passionate about creating positive change for our students and school communities. I was also able to learn a lot about data analysis too, and how to properly approach developing a solution to a big challenge/ problem. What I learned as an iFellow was invaluable!”

~**Kelsey Kodak**

“This fellowship came at the perfect timing. The pandemic brought complete change in the teaching world and the collaboration with dedicated and passionate teachers was beyond supportive. It provided great growth in a time of great need both for teachers and students. Thank you for taking a little bet on us!”

~**Teacher Fellow**

Thank you

Our work would not be possible without the committed teachers and leaders in Baltimore City Public Schools. Special thanks to educators at Lakeland Elementary/Middle, Liberty Elementary, Curtis Bay Elementary, Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle, Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle, and Thomas Jefferson Elementary/Middle for their dedication and commitment to improving early education in Baltimore.

Finally, we'd like to thank our many friends at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who pioneered quality improvement in education and have been a valuable sounding board and contributor to these ideas. They set the foundation for us to learn and we are eternally grateful

For more information about this document or our work at Improving Education,
please visit us at www.improvinged.org

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