



CENTER FOR URBAN AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

School of Education
IUPUI

Evaluation of Bridges to Success Final Report

Prepared by

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There are many people who contributed to the success of the BTS evaluation process and we are greatly appreciative of their efforts. These include members of the BTS administrative council, the Solutions Center, the BTS site coordinators, members of the Organizational Effective Team at Eli Lilly, and most importantly each participant who so kindly and effectively articulated their perceptions of BTS in their school.

Introduction

The evaluation of Bridges to Success (BTS) and its relationship to academic success in elementary schools within the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) included three interrelated components. The first component looked at the context by examining changes in academic achievement and poverty over the past seven years. Next, we examined achievement in BTS at the school level, and finally we conducted in depth case studies of four BTS schools. The purpose of the case studies was to better understand the opportunities and barriers to fostering effective school-community partnerships. In a preliminary report to the BTS Council in April 2007 the research team provided a preliminary description and set of recommendations (see Appendix A). The report focused on our current understanding of the impact of BTS on helping students to succeed academically via fostering effective school-community partnerships. As reported in that document, early in the evaluation process we determined that student level data was not readily available. Therefore, we were not able to undertake a statistical analysis to determine the impact of a varying “dosage” of participating in programs and/or receiving services for individual students in a BTS school. Additionally, we reported preliminary findings of the case study schools. The current report summarizes the major findings of the overarching inquiry while simultaneously presenting ideas and recommendations for furthering the work of BTS.

Context for the Study

There are a number of challenges associated with measuring the impact of a specific intervention and/or program on student outcomes. The BTS evaluation presented some unique challenges because BTS is not a program or intervention. Rather BTS’s stated mission is to help all students succeed by creating enduring partnerships between families, schools, and community. One way to address the challenge is to situate the inquiry within the larger context of education in Indiana generally and Indianapolis specifically. Since the turn of the century, schools in Indiana have been increasingly held accountable for academic achievement. Requirements for improving test scores from state and federal legislation has steadily increased as well. A cursory read of the local newspapers and other outlets suggests that education is failing our students and communities. It is beyond the scope of the evaluation to address the complexities of increased accountability on achievement. However, it is appropriate to look at achievement in the context of other social indicators such as poverty. Tables 1 and 2 display an interesting phenomenon that appears to defy several decades of research. That is, as poverty increased over the past four years, tests scores have also increased. Compared with the 2002-2003 academic year, the percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch increased by 3%, while the percentage of elementary students in the state passing both English/Language Arts (E/LA) and Math increased by 7%.

Table 1.

Average % Passing E/LA and Math ISTEP- All Grades Tested in BTS and Non-BTS Schools

Schools	<i>N</i>	ISTEP 2002-2003	ISTEP 2006-2007
Non-BTS schools	22	47.13 (13.06)%	63.55 (8.52)%
BTS schools	25	44.1 (15.94)%	60.78 (9.81)%
Total	47	45.69 (14.87)%	62.07 (9.24)%
Elementary schools' state average		60.0%	67%

Note: (*SD*)

During the same time frame, the percentage of students attending IPS elementary schools who received free/reduced lunch increased by less than 4%. Under great economic distress students' academic achievement in IPS improved substantively, increasing from 45% passing both E/LA and Math to 62%. BTS schools as a whole experienced higher levels of poverty in 2002-2003 and the rate of poverty was slightly, but not significantly higher in non-BTS schools. The percent passing both E/LA and Math increased 16% in BTS and non-BTS schools.

Table 2.

Average Percent Receiving Free/ Reduced Lunch Over Time in BTS, Non-BTS, and All Schools In Indiana

Schools	<i>N</i>	Free/Reduced Lunch 2002-2003	Free/Reduced Lunch 2006-2007
Non-BTS schools	21	78.09(12.09)%	84.16(7.93)%
BTS schools	24	86.75(6.14)%	88.12(5.9)%
Total	45	82.51 (10.39)%	86.29(7.14)%
K-12 state average		31.1%	35.11%

Changes in academic achievement within BTS schools were not uniform across the four years (see Table 3). Twenty-one schools showed improvement and four experienced a decrease in academic achievement as measured by this indicator. Eighteen schools experienced an increase of 10% or more. The average increase in the percent of students passing both E/LA and Math from 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 was 16.7% with a range of +38.3% at Booth Tarkington (92) and Parkview (81) to -28.9% at Charity Dye (27). It is impossible to isolate the effects of the overall improvement.

Table 3.

Percentage Passing E/LA and Math ISTEP in BTS Schools

School Name	School Number	ISTEP Pass 2002-2003	ISTEP Pass 2006-2007	Gain % from 2002 to 2006
Booth Tarkington	92	21.6	59.9	38.3
Parkview	81	14.5	52.8	38.3
Lew Wallace	107	34.1	68.3	34.2
Eliza A. Blaker	55	32.6	66.2	33.6
Riverside	44	21.1	54.2	33.1
Robert Lee Frost	106	26.7	57.3	30.6
T. C. Steele	98	27.0	57.4	30.4
Harriet Beecher Stowe	64	16.7	47.1	30.4
Washington Irving	14	42.4	72.6	30.2
George H. Fisher	93	26.0	53.5	27.5
William Penn	49	40.0	63.3	23.3
Daniel Webster	46	57.6	79.9	22.3
Frances W. Parker	56	59.0	80.3	21.3
Otis E. Brown	20	47.2	63.9	16.7
Elder W. Diggs	42	36.8	52.6	15.8
George S. Buck Elementary	94	63.3	76.8	14.5
Theodore Potter	74	51.9	64.2	12.3
Susan Roll Leach	68	34.0	45.6	11.3
Charles W Fairbanks	105	59.3	66.0	6.7
Thomas D. Gregg	15	57.3	61.2	3.9
Hazel Hart Hendricks	37	60.3	63.8	3.5
Louis B. Russell Junior	48	63.6	59.8	-3.8
Brookside	54	67.9	57.0	-10.9
Francis Scott Key	103	64.7	47.7	-17.0
Charity Dye	27	76.9	48.0	-28.9
BTS Total Mean	N = 25	44.1 (SD =15.94)	60.8 (SD = 9.8)	16.70 (SD = 14.11)

The district implemented several programs and changes throughout the time and given that non-BTS schools also enjoyed similar increases in achievement, it cannot be said with certainty that

BTS contributed or did not contribute to changes in academic achievement. However, we contend that all other things being constant, it is likely that BTS schools would not have kept pace with the rest of the district if partnerships were not embedded in the schools. Stated another way, it is our contention that school-community partnerships fostered by BTS and maintained by BTS schools served as a safety net for students and families that offset the academic, behavioral, and health challenges associated with increased poverty in the school and community at large.

We find further support for our beliefs in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis presented in Table 4. The baseline model shows that achievement in 2002-2003 was not a significant predictor of achievement in 2006-2007, suggesting that factors other than assessment scores early in the ISTEP testing process contribute to the variance in ISTEP scores in BTS schools. Variables added in Model 2 include: (a) the number of years a school has been associated with BTS and (b) their current phase (from 1 to 4, with higher numbers representing increased levels of self-sufficiency and evidence of strong and lasting partnerships). Adding these two variables explains an additional 4% of the variance in 2006-2007 ISTEP scores.

Table 4.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting % Passing E/LA and Math ISTEP in BTS Schools (N = 22)

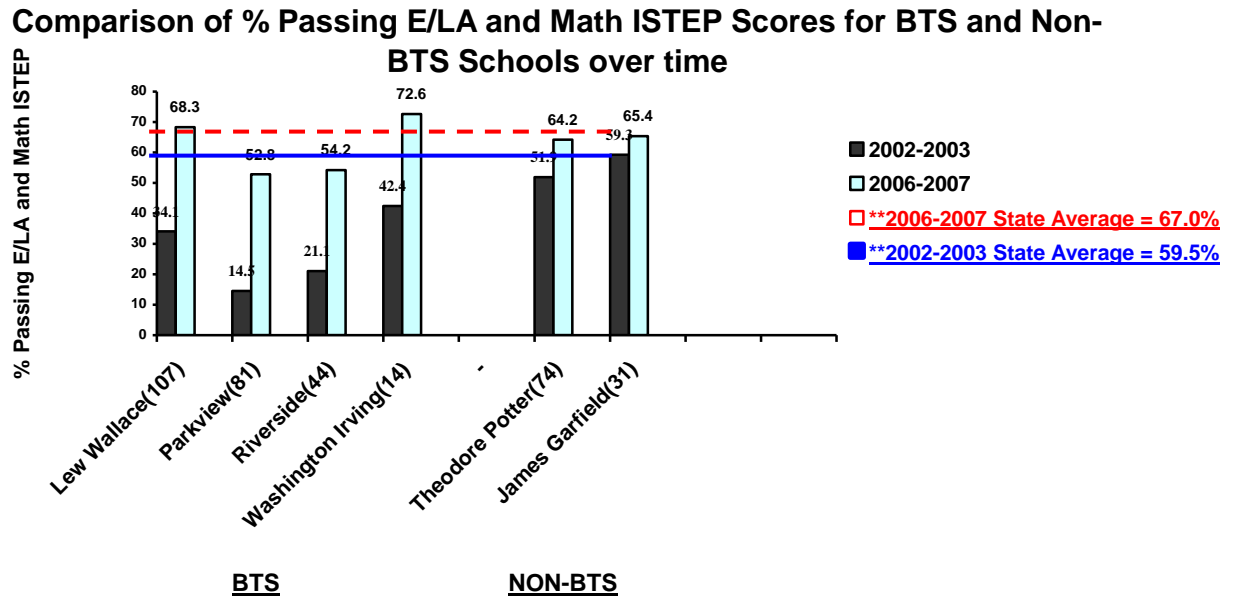
Variable	Model 1		Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Constant	42.535	5.257	-	40.118	9.040	-
ISTEP_2002	.102	.107	.204	.108	.108	.215
(a) Years	-	-	-	2.947	2.812	.275
(b) Current Phase	-	-	-	-.962	.804	-.314
<i>R</i> ² or <i>R</i> ² change		.041			.076	
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²		.907			.814	

Case Study Findings

A major component of the evaluation, the case studies, probed relative stakeholders associated with BTS in the school to uncover a deeper understanding of the impact of BTS on school and student outcomes. The case studies were conducted in six schools, four of which were BTS schools. The schools, as displayed in Figure 1, were selected to represent different categories including BTS schools above the state average on ISTEP that have strong partnerships (Schools 14 and 107), BTS schools performing below the state average that have not managed to build strong and lasting partnerships (Schools 44 and 81), non-BTS schools that have strong partnerships (School 31), and non-BTS schools that have not managed to build and maintain

strong partnerships (School 74). The goal of the case studies was not to generalize specifically to similar schools within or outside the district. Instead the goal was to elicit stakeholder perspectives on the extent to which BTS is related to academic achievement and to understand the ways in which schools connect and maintain community partnerships. Each of the BTS schools in the case study have enjoyed increases in ISTEP over the past four years, while the two non-BTS schools experienced slight (School 31) and more significant decreases respectively (School 74).

Figure 1.



The prominent source for the case study was in-depth interviews and follow-ups with key stakeholders in the school. Members of the CUME research team interviewed BTS site team members, teachers, and partners. Follow-ups to clarify or verify new information derived from other sources were conducted via email and personal contact. In addition to formal interviews, informal interactions, school visits, and a careful review of relevant BTS materials (i.e., Covenant, School Improvement Plans, BTS School Plans and Budget, and materials from partners) helped to further our understanding of opportunities and barriers to maintaining partnerships. All formal interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Members of the research team read and re-read the transcripts looking for patterns within each interview and across the interviewees at the schools. The researchers shared their insights of the themes with the Principal Investigator who probed their discovery and asked for evidence to support the generation of each theme. Once we were in agreement on a theme, we determined the salient quotes from the interviews that best captured the essence of the findings.

The findings paint a mixed picture of the role of BTS and its impact in the four schools. The analysis presented below reports the salient findings that were consistent across schools, as well

as unique characteristics of specific schools. These unique characteristics created opportunities for fostering and maintaining school-community partnerships. In addition for the summary of findings across schools a building level report was generated for the four BTS schools. The building level reports describe the findings and recommendations for each school so the site team can incorporate the findings as part of their planning for the future (see Appendix B for Parkview 81 report).

Examining findings across all schools revealed several positive factors and opportunities for growth. In all schools participants spoke highly of the BTS coordinators and there was an overwhelming sense that BTS helped students and families. Leadership in the form of the principal, site team coordinator and an individual coordinator (Washington Irving 14) represented distinctive factors that contributed to BTS having a prominent role in school functioning. Common challenges emerged across all schools including a lack of depth in understanding the role of BTS in the school/community and a lack of systematic ways of identifying and maintaining partners.

Creating and maintaining partnerships. The stated mission of BTS is to create school-community partnerships that ultimately improve student achievement. The mission is supported by research across the country and BTS has adapted some of the well-tested approaches to facilitating partnerships. However, the expansion of BTS to over 20 elementary schools, combined with increased pressure on schools to focus internally on math and reading, appears to have placed a strain on the schools and the BTS team's ability to create and maintain partnerships. For example, one participant stated, "It's just hard to find people that can make the commitment to it. But I definitely think it's something that we need to brainstorm, or we need to... just compared to the one other school that I work with. The community partnership isn't as present." She noted that there are varying levels and types of partnerships. Some partnerships are evidenced by providing resources (e.g., eye exams and glasses, dental care, school supplies, and financial donations), direct services to students (e.g., mentoring and tutoring), and/or planning/sponsoring events (e.g., health fair and resource/services information fair). All of these partnerships are valued and valuable. The best scenario appears to be a combination of these services targeted specifically to the needs of the students and families in the school and surrounding community. A principal summed up this point cogently:

We're binding together for one goal, and that is to, several goals actually in our school, increase literacy in our schools, reading comprehension in our schools, family participation, parent participation, we work together in tandem to accomplish those goals, and to me that's what a partnership is, it's a binding situation where everybody is working for a common goal.

Another participant noted the importance of bringing families into the school as partners. As she reviewed the BTS Covenant, she noted an area the school was lacking:

We must become stronger. And that is what I say when I look at the BTS Covenant when it discusses parental involvement, we must bring more parents on board. I would really like the community to come on board, but I really need the parents to come and stay on board.

The notion of becoming strong was not simply couched as more, but she was referring to consistent and deeper levels of parent and community involvement. This finding points to the challenges of measuring the amount and intensity of supports families receive and the subsequent impact on important outcomes. The site team member and others expressed concern about the lack of consistency within and across partnerships. Another site team member added:

I think our best partners are those who see that they have a long term benefit to being part of families. I like partnerships to be two way, it should be beneficial in more ways than one. I am not looking for organizations or individuals who do not want get anything out of the relationship. I feel that we are able to give back in some way.

This statement points to the importance of the bidirectional component of a true partnership. Effective school-community partnerships include strong teacher support and buy-in. Although teachers were included on all case study site teams, there was general agreement that teachers as a whole were not actively involved or even knowledgeable about the role of BTS in the school. One teacher referring to the extent to which teachers are involved in BTS stated, “I don’t think that we have a lot of information about it, I think that it is assumed that we know what it is all about. Where it has never really been explained, it has just been assumed.” BTS has been actively involved in that school for almost 10 years and yet many teachers are not aware of its role. The finding points to a need to revisit the Covenant and BTS site team goals with teachers, partners, and the community. A site team member echoed that sentiment regarding the community, “People have little to no clue about what is happening in schools. Until we get that message out we are going to continue to have a problem. The other side is that it is very difficult to get qualified volunteers.”

Impact on student/family outcomes. As stated above, assessing the effects of school-community partnerships on student outcomes is challenging. The evaluation discovered what was previously assumed, that schools and programs are not keeping accurate and consistent records of who receives services. Therefore it is impossible to generate statistical models to measure the extent to which varying levels of treatment (e.g., the number and types of services received) are associated with changes in academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and other non-cognitive factors. The case studies provided an opportunity for site team members to share the perspective on the relationship between BTS and student outcomes. All 50 participants agreed that BTS positively impacted students and families. The general finding was that BTS indirectly affected student achievement by at least providing basic needs to students and families, and at best providing targeted services to students at greatest risk of failure. It makes sense that services of the latter kind would be related to measurable changes in achievement.

One participant described the role that events played in supporting families. “I think it [the events] makes the students want to work harder. I think it motivates the parents, and I think it motivates the children.” The statement reflects the feeling of many participants who shared the idea that these events represented a way for the school and community to show families that someone cares, that they believe in their children. Another impact of school partner events was articulated this way, “The first event, the purpose of the resource fair is primarily for parents, so that parents know what resources are out there. We were approaching winter and we did not

want students absent due to lack of resources in the home.” This statement represents another aspect of a caring community, one that sees the school as a place to connect with families.

The relationship between BTS as a mediator for improved achievement was clearly stated by the participants. One participant answered a question about the relationship by saying, “Indirectly probably. Directly, no... Most of it [the services] improves student achievement because we’re working on the skills that they need to be successful.” Some participants noted that the skills were affective in addition to academic skills. For example, a teacher described how students improved in their ability to work with others and take pride in their achievements.

I started to see them taking more pride in their work. They were working together with a lot of team work activities. We would have contests between the teams. Then it started to carry over in other assignments, where they would have to work with partners. I saw that getting way better after they had the practice with those activities.

Another teacher believed that supports and resources foster student achievement via motivation to learn.

Anytime you give kids something that they didn’t have before it helps with their critical thinking skills and it helps with socialization. All of that has an impact on test scores. Anytime you give a kid confidence their achievement is going to go up.

Few participants talked about the relationship of BTS to ISTEP scores. The following quote exemplifies a unique characteristic of one school leader’s perspective, “I am aware of our ISTEP scores [increasing] and I can’t help but think that our ISTEP scores might be a little higher than expected, because we have a lot of community support. I think that we are unique in that we have a lot more than other schools do.” Indeed Washington Irving (School 14) reported over 60 program, events, and resources sponsored by many community partners. The other unique characteristic of School 14 is the school-community coordinator who has responsibility for coordinating and monitoring partnerships. All participants in the school pointed to the Principal and the coordinator as being an essential element of their success.

Summary

The mixed method evaluation of BTS provides many more questions than answers. We are interested in better understanding the impact of programs and services facilitated by BTS on student and family outcomes. How much (dosage) and what types (resources vs. events vs. direct academic services) and what combinations of each predict changes in academic and social outcomes? These questions can be addressed with a greater emphasis on data collection and a commitment of school, families, and community partners. The analysis can help schools, BTS, and IPS determine the relative effectiveness of their efforts and to better inform the BTS approach. However, there is a strong note of caution associated with data-informed decision-making. In recent years the accountability and high stakes testing movements have usurped the value of data-informed decision making and has morphed the approach into data-driven. The major problem with that approach is that it typically lacks context. The reason the evaluation spent considerable time on understanding and reporting context was to point to the elephant in

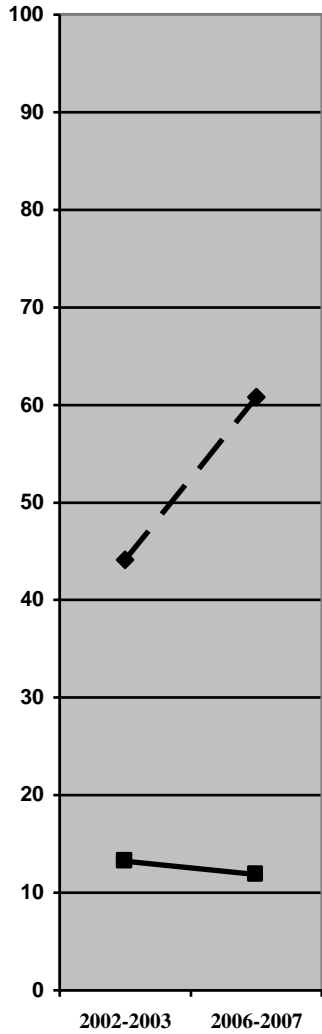
the room: IPS as a district has experienced substantial increases in poverty level and simultaneously improved academic achievement. BTS schools have kept pace with non-BTS schools and the state as a whole even under increasing levels of poverty. Figure 2 tells a story that does not make the front page of the newspaper. Over the past 4 years the state as a whole has experienced a decrease in the number of students who do NOT receive free/reduced lunch, hovering around 65%. In IPS the number is shocking, with only about 13% of the student body NOT receiving free/reduced lunch. These statistics are important because they are evidence that school-community partnerships are needed along with an economic policy that provides jobs and a living wage for families who live in the city of Indianapolis. BTS and the United Way of Central Indiana play an important role, primarily on the former and they can continue affecting changes by examining their goals and objectives in the coming years. Based on the findings of the evaluation, we recommend BTS consider making changes in the following areas of their operation.

Recommendations

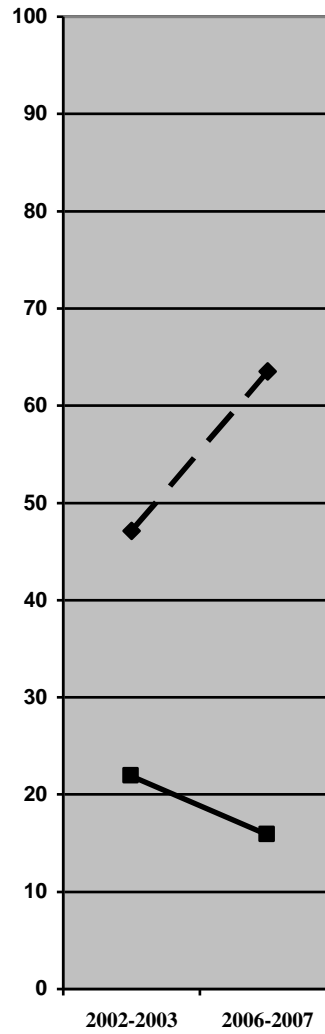
- Define and continually revisit partnerships in BTS. It is not clear how schools and staff at BTS differentiate between extensive programs and single events sponsored in part by community members. Clarify the process for soliciting and accepting new partnerships and clearly communicate purpose, benefits, and expectations of being a BTS partner.
- Teachers provide an essential element in referring students and families to services/programs/resources. Therefore it is essential that teachers are aware of and knowledgeable of BTS. Publicize the responsibilities and expectations for teacher representatives and other school personnel who sit on the site team.
- Partner with CUME or other vendors to offer technical assistant to support schools' and partners' ability to keep records of attendance and participation in programs/events.
- Define proximal metrics/benchmarks to help make the distinction between direct and indirect effects of BTS on student-level outcome measures. Examples of proximal measures include attendance, attitude toward school, behavior referrals, number of services received (dosage/intensity), report card grades, and so forth.
- Consider adapting BTS as a community school model with a single coordinator per school. Clarify the coordinator role so that it compliments, not duplicates parent liaison responsibilities and other natural partners in each school (e.g., Boys and Girls club after-school coordinator or 21st Century Learning Center coordinator).
- Define the role(s) of school coordinator, BTS site coordinators, and BTS site team in light of requisite changes in BTS mission and objectives.
- Work with CUME or other universities/vendors to develop formative evaluation mechanisms for monitoring the impact of structural changes on future BTS work.

Figure 2.

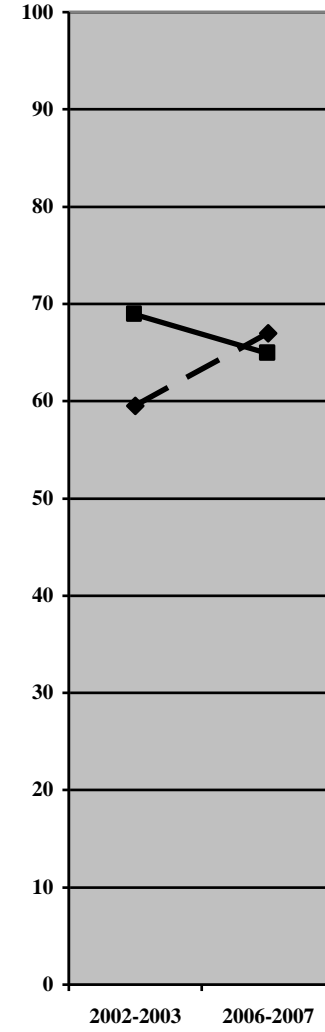
**% Passing E/LA and Math
ISTEP and
Non-Free/Reduced Lunch in
BTS**



**% Passing E/LA and Math
ISTEP and
Non-Free/Reduced Lunch
in NonBTS**



**% Passing E/LA and Math
ISTEP and
Non-Free/Reduced Lunch in
State**



—◆— ISTEP —■— Non-FR-Lunch

Appendix A

Evaluation of Bridges to Success Executive Summary and Preliminary Recommendations

Background of Evaluation

The evaluation of the impact of Bridges to Success (BTS) on helping students to succeed academically via fostering effective school-community partnerships included three related processes. First we examined the availability of student level data that might be incorporated to measure “dosage” of intervention for individual students within BTS schools. Next CUME researchers created several statistical models estimating the impact of BTS on changes in ISTEP compared to non-BTS schools in IPS. The procedure models can be applied to other outcomes including attendance, discipline referrals, and annual promotion. In anticipation of schools collecting student level data in the future, we created a multi-level model to estimate the effects of students within schools. The final components of the evaluation involved a case study within six IPS schools. The purpose of the case studies were to examine the perceived success and barriers to creating partnerships in four Covenant Schools and two schools that are not currently BTS schools. Within case and cross case analyses of interviews with school principal, parent liaisons, community partners, teachers, and BTS site coordinators resulted in important patterns that inform the work of creating partnership between schools, families, and communities.

Preliminary Findings by Deliverable

Availability of Student-level Data

With a few exceptions (e.g. Riverside and Lew Wallace have a sign up sheet as some events), most BTS partners are not keeping track of student and family attendees at events or program. There is evidence that providers log health services. Based on interviews and follow-up inquiries with multiple stakeholders it appears that there has not been a requirement or recommendation to collect such information. Challenges cited include taking time to keep track of multiple programs/events, lack of systematic record keeping methods, and intrusiveness for families during events. People seemed receptive to the idea and the development of a template and a rationale for collecting names format that would be helpful to get schools and partners on board.

Relationship of BTS to Academic Achievement

Based on the findings of the first component, it is not possible to conduct statistical analysis on the impact of BTS on individual student outcomes. We have created a model for future analysis that attempts to capture the dosage of intervention. In other words, there is a belief that the number of contacts, amount of intervention time, and/or receipt of services/resources over time has a multiplicative impact on the outcomes.

The analyses will examine the impact of BTS on student and school level outcomes while the controlling for differences across schools in the district. The outcome variable of interest in the model academic achievement as measured by the percentage of students passing both English

Language Arts and Math of the ISTEP+. Level one in the model represents the amount of intervention each student received. Level two represents the characteristics of the school including % of student receiving free/reduced lunch (2006-2007), mobility rate, BTS vs. non-BTS school, and school climate data derived from the InSAI force field survey. Figure 1 shows the current status of the analysis. There is no statistically significant achievement difference between BTS and non-BTS schools in IPS controlling percentage of student receiving free/reduced lunch. BTS schools have made considerable gains in academic achievement despite the increasing rate of students living in poverty in Indianapolis. We will continue to populate the database with additional indicators in the coming weeks.

A second ordinary least square regression analysis consisting of data for BTS schools only will look at the extent to which BTS phases of implementation, years of being a BTS school, predicts changes in ISTEP+ scores in 2006-2007. Data including ISTEP+ scores in 2002-2003, % of student receiving free/reduced lunch (2006-2007), mobility rate, and school climate data derived from the InSAI force field survey will be included as control variables in this model.

Opportunities and Barriers to Creating School and Community Partnerships

To date the results of the case study are contained to the four BTS schools. The research team experienced challenges gaining access to the two non-BTS schools. This was in stark contrast to the relative ease of access and availability of the stakeholders in the four BTS schools. Preliminary analysis of formal interviews and informal follow-up data (phone, email, and/or conversation) gleaned from BTS site team members, building principals, BTS area school coordinators, and several community partners reveal important patterns.

Participants indicated that the relationship between BTS and academic achievement was indirect, but essential. They described BTS as providing the necessary foundation for supporting students and families so that their child is ready to learn. Each provided pointed examples of individual students and families who benefited from services ranging from receiving glasses, to mentoring, to receiving information about health and community organization in the neighborhood.

There was a distinct difference in the makeup and impact of the site teams at the schools. Buildings where the leadership demonstrated investment in BTS appeared to have more active and lasting partnerships. One school has a full-time coordinator that fosters meaningful interaction between external partners and school personnel. In the other three schools, partners and teachers are peripherally involved in site team meetings and decisions.

It is likely that the current year is atypical due to the current changes (real or perceived) in the role of BTS in IPS schools. Site team members were concerned that BTS was ending and/or the small monetary support will not be available. According to area coordinators and confirmed by numerous interview participants, this perception has negatively impacted attendance and effort within the BTS site teams.

Recommendations

- Define and continually revisit partnerships in BTS. It is not clear how schools and staff at BTS differentiate between extensive programs and single events sponsored in part by community members. Clarify the process for soliciting and accepting new partnerships and clearly communicate purpose, benefits, and expectations of being a BTS partners.
- Ensure that teachers are aware and knowledgeable of the BTS and the roles and expectations for school personnel.
- Provide technical assistant to support schools' and partners' ability to keep records of attendance and participation in programs/events.
- Define proximal metrics/benchmarks to help make the distinction between direct and indirect effects of BTS on outcome measures such as achievement.
- Consider community school model with a single coordinator per school. Clarify the role with that of parent liaison and other natural partners in each school (e.g. Boys and Girls club after-school coordinator or 21st Century Learning Center coordinator).

Appendix B

Bridges to Success School-Level Evaluation Report

School 81 Parkview

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June 1, 2007

Introduction

As you are aware, researchers in the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME) partnered with Bridges to Success (BTS) to examine how BTS is working in the elementary schools in the Indianapolis Public School system. Part of this overall evaluation looked at the ways in which BTS has helped students succeed academically. We were interested in understanding how stakeholders defined BTS, the extent to which school-community partnerships were evident, and identifying barriers and opportunities to promote meaningful partnerships in your school. Your school was one of the cases in the study, and the data collection included extensive interviews (school principal, community partners, teachers, and BTS site coordinators), descriptive statistics of the school population, and informal observations of the school climate. This report briefly describes the case study findings for your school and provides key recommendations for strengthening school-community partnerships.

Setting

In order to understand how partnerships are fostered and maintained it is essential to understand the setting and context for the school and the community. Table 1 displays some of the basic demographics and achievement indices for School 81. The school has been part of BTS for 10 years and is currently considered as operating at Phase II out of a possible four phases of development. Over 91% of students in the school qualified for free and reduced lunch in the 2002-2003 school year. The percentage has increased to 95% in the 2006-2007 academic year. School achievement has also increased, from 14% of students passing both E/LA and Math to almost 53% in the 2006-2007 administration of ISTEP.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Parkview (School 81).

Enrollment 2006-07	2002- 2003 Free Reduced Lunch	2006- 2007 Free Reduced Lunch	2002- 2003 % passing both ISTEP	2006- 2007 % passing both ISTEP	Years a BTS School	Median Income of the Zip Code	Phase
284	92.1%	95.1%	14.5%	52.8%	10	26,554	II

A second component of the case study involved identifying the number and types of school-community partnerships. Table 2 displays the partners and their respective roles as identified by the Parkview BTS site team. The partners (Clarion Health and Martin University) are currently active and the resources devoted to the new playground continue to positively impact children and families enrolled in Parkview.

Table 2. Partners and Program in Parkview (School 81).

Partner	Role/Function in the school	Status
Clarian Health	Injury Free Coalition for Kids-presentations	Active
Brookside Park	After school athletic programs	Inactive
Brookside United Methodist Church	Sports recreational program	Inactive
Martin University	Incentives program	Active
Allstate	Provided resources for playground	Inactive

Data Collection and Analysis

A major source for the case study included in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the school. Members of the CUME research team interviewed BTS site team members, teachers, and partners. Follow-ups to clarify or verify new information derived from other sources were conducted via email and personal contact. In addition to formal interviews, informal interactions and school visits helped to further our understanding of the opportunities and barriers to maintaining partnerships. All formal interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Members of the research team read and re-read the transcripts looking for patterns within each interview and across the interviewees at your school. The team shared their insights of the themes with the Principal Investigator who probed their discoveries and asked for evidence to support the generation of each theme. Once we were in agreement on a theme, we determined the salient quotes from the interviews that best captured the essence of the findings. These are described below.

Findings

Several themes emerged during the data analysis procedures: defining BTS, the relationship between BTS and student success, leadership, and barriers.

Defining BTS. One of the major themes was the varying definition of BTS and its function in the school and community. Most people reported knowing generally what BTS was and could provide a definition of the guiding philosophy. According to one partner, “The purpose of it is to connect our school with community agencies that in some way can help us do a better job in educating the children.” Another person described it as, “It is my understanding that it is the people from the community that are bringing resources into the school to give the children lots of things, help and time doing activities that they wouldn’t normally have access to.” While these were generally accurate others members of the school and community were less clear and could only name one partner. One example of this is a statement from a BTS site team member, “This year I would have to say Clarian Health and Allstate Insurance. But that was this year. They are not continuing partners. Clarian Health I think will be a continuing partner, but Allstate was just here because of the playground.” Another person stated,

I think that we have a problem with that. We haven't had a lot of community interaction in our building because we have been trying to get another community thing going. We have had a lot of difficulty. I know of one partner, the Brookside Park after school program.

Another aspect of defining BTS that was striking was the lack of knowledge about the BTS School-Community Covenant. Only one person interviewed at Parkview was familiar with the covenant and could elaborate on its content. All other participants were either unfamiliar with the covenant and/or had seen it. However, none could talk about it further. For example, one teacher who was a member of the site team stated, "I am not familiar with the covenant. Not recently. Unless I stuck it in my folder maybe."

Relationship between BTS and student success. The overall evaluation was interested in understanding the connection between effective school-community partnerships and academic success. The interviewers probed stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the relationship of BTS to academic achievement. The vast majority of the people interviewed felt that the program positively impacted students. However, they stated that the relationship between BTS and student achievement was indirect, providing students and families with basic needs that in turn helped students focus on the academics. One person clearly articulated this finding when they responded that BTS impacts achievement, "Indirectly probably. Directly no... Most of it improves student achievement because we're working on the skills that they need to be successful." Participants furthered their understanding of the relationship by citing ways in which BTS helps create a sense of belonging to the school for students and to the community for families. One person stated,

I can't say specifically about academic achievement but in general the more that a student is attached to the school the more they have a sense of belonging, fun and connection. They generally achieve more and feel better about themselves and their school if they have some other bonds to the school.

Leadership. Another important factor that emerged from the inquiry was the importance of the role of the principal. All people interviewed agreed that it was essential to have a strong principal that believed in the goals and purpose of BTS and was committed to helping it continue and grow. The site coordinator was named as an important leader in BTS at Parkview. One person described the site coordinator as the "outside connection to the community." Another person elaborated on her role and stated, "I think we depend on her to organize, set it up and get us going. I think that she is supposed to graduate the school and move on but that has not happened here." The quote speaks to the fact that Parkview was not ready to move into a higher phase, whereby the site coordinator steps back, an indication that the site team has become largely self-sufficient. Many felt that without the BTS coordinator that the BTS program would not be as successful and possibly non-existent.

Barriers. The largest barrier to fostering and maintaining effective school-community partnerships was "time." All participants realized the extensive amount of time that is required to communicate the role and goals of BTS within the school and then to make lasting connections with current partners outside of the school. Additionally, participants pointed to a

lack of parental involvement as another limitation. Many felt that parents were not responding to the few activities that were provided. Finally, many individuals felt that the INSAI process usurped some of the energy and focus from the BTS site team. While participants recognized some potential for overlap in objectives, they felt BTS was reduced in importance at the expense of InSAI's objective and role in the school.

Recommendations for Strengthening Partnerships

Based on the findings of the case study at Parkview, we recommend that the site team make a concerted effort to clearly define their active partnerships. We also recommend clarifying the process for soliciting and accepting new partnerships and clearly communicate purpose, benefits, and expectations of being a BTS partner. It may be beneficial to review the School-Community Partnership Covenant periodically to ensure that both the school, partner, and BTS are meeting their respective obligations and everyone is benefiting from the partnership. What are the key needs in the school and how are community partners addressing those needs? Once identified, it is essential that all teachers and families are aware of and invited to participate in activities, programs, and/or receive resources and services provided. Researchers in CUME hope to be able to provide technical assistance to support Parkview's ability to keep records of attendance and participation in programs/events. Having these records will enable us to assess the impact of student/family participation on student-level outcomes such as academic achievement, behavior, sense of school belonging, and attendance.