

The Impact of Focusing on Student Identity

September 2021, back to school - this time in person. Deep breath, 7th grade, never been in this building, first time on the subway by myself, new teachers, new kids. Do I remember how to do this? Will I make friends? Everyone has masks on... is mine straight? How is this going to work, how am I going to fit in?

Sounds pretty terrifying right? All around the country, middle school students had similar thoughts running through their heads as they returned to in-person classes in the middle of a nation-wide pandemic. Pre-pandemic, student feelings towards classroom belonging, relationships and trust in middle school were hard enough topics to address; now they are critical as our students rebuild their social muscles and re-engage with teachers and classrooms.

This has been the focus of schools in the Teaching Matters Network, in the form of a change idea we call "Identity Questions." The concept is simple: Middle school ELA teachers will purposefully adapt and adopt a practice of including questions that connect identity and content at key junctures in their lessons. Over the course of 6-8 weeks teachers work together to tweak this practice. Through an improvement science process (PDSA cycle), the timing, the phrasing, the measuring is all adapted to see what works best in their context - as teachers know, the devil is in the details. Interested in what that looks like? Take a look at an early teacher [meeting agenda](#) laying out their strategies for the week and [take a closer look at the Identity Questions change idea](#).

Top 3 Takeaways:

1. There appears to be positive relationship between the "Identity Questions" change idea and student perceptions of a more inclusive classrooms
2. There is a positive relationship between student perception and meeting ELA growth goals
3. The positive relationship between student change in perception of inclusive classrooms and students meeting their ELA growth goal is strongest in classrooms where teachers are implementing "Identity Questions" with high integrity

The network-level measurement of the process focused on two driver measures and a measure around the integrity of the change idea in the classroom. Our theory of action was, essentially, if we focus on student identity and can tie it to ELA content then we will create a more inclusive classroom and see a change in student perception of their classroom. That will, in turn, cause a positive change in ELA student outcomes.

At the beginning of the year, prior to the intervention all our students completed:

1. A nationally-normed anonymous student perception survey that focused on 6 domains related to inclusive classrooms:
 - a. Classroom Belonging
 - b. Classroom Engagement
 - c. Cultural Awareness in Action
 - d. Valuing of Subject
 - e. Rigorous Expectations
 - f. Teacher / Student Relationship

[Here are the questions we asked students](#)



2. An ELA screener assessment - either iReady or Map Growth. Each assessment set a growth goal for the student at the beginning of the year

At the end of the intervention, Feb-March 2022, students completed a mid-year administration of the same student perception survey and completed a mid-year ELA assessment in iReady or Map Growth to see if they met their growth goal.

At the end of the intervention, Teaching Matters coaches reported back on the integrity of implementation of the change idea in each classroom using a 5-point likert ranging from very low integrity to very high. In all, 13 schools were able to capture pre and post results for the ELA screener and student perception. Of those 13, 7 schools implemented the change idea with 11 teachers ranked at a “high or very high” (total of 425 students) level of integrity, and 15 teachers with an “average, low or very low level of integrity” (total of 595 students). 33 teachers did not do the change idea (total of 995 students).

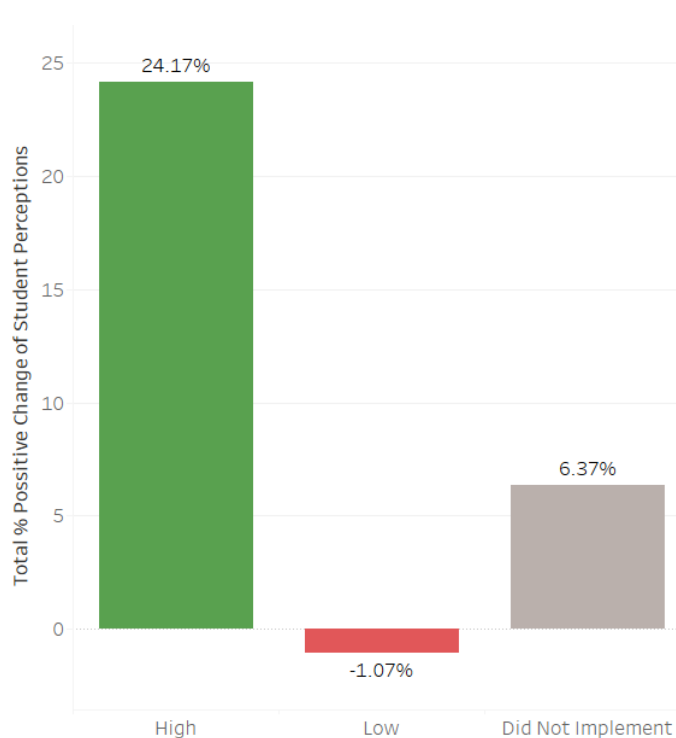
- 13 Total Schools, 59 Total Teachers, 2,015 Students
- All students took a pre and a post ELA screener (either MAP or iReady)
- All students took a pre and a post student perception survey on inclusive classrooms
- 7 Schools did the “Identity Questions” change idea, 6 Schools did not
- 11 teachers were ranked by their coaches as having completed the Identity Questions change idea with “High Integrity” and 15 teachers as “Low Integrity”

Did Teachers Doing This Change Idea Create a More Inclusive Environment?

Did teachers doing this change idea create a more inclusive environment? What was the relationship between “Identity Questions” and a change in student perception?

It is worth noting that the average % positive responses for teachers in all 6 student perception domains in the Fall (1st administration) were all relatively equal regardless of the future integrity of implementation. Indicating that teachers all started from relatively the same level.

For teachers implementing “Identity Questions” with a high level of integrity (n=11) we see a 24 percentage point total improvement in student perception of the classroom. Compared that to +6% for teachers who did not do the change idea and a -1% for teachers with an average or low level of integrity.

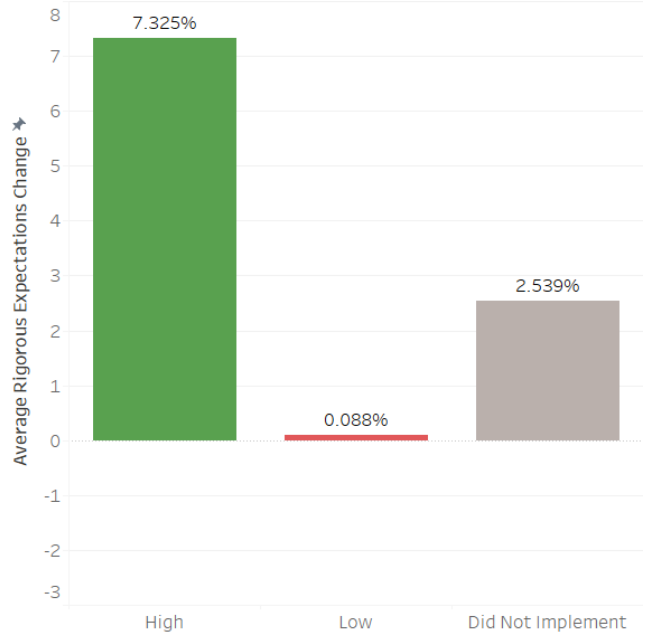


The domains in the inclusive classrooms student perception survey that saw the biggest differences in positive change between integrity of implementation:

<p>Classroom Belonging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +4% for High Integrity • -.8% for Low Integrity • -.2 for not implementing 	<p>A bar chart titled 'AVG[(Classroom Belonging Change (Teachers))*100]'. The y-axis ranges from -3 to 8. The x-axis categories are High, Low, and Did Not Implement. The bars show values of 3.890% for High (green), -0.798% for Low (red), and -0.154% for Did Not Implement (grey).</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Integrity Level</th> <th>Change (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>3.890%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>-0.798%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Did Not Implement</td> <td>-0.154%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Integrity Level	Change (%)	High	3.890%	Low	-0.798%	Did Not Implement	-0.154%
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<p>Cultural Awareness in Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +6% for High Integrity • +.3% for Low Integrity • +2% for not implementing 	<p>A bar chart titled 'Average Cultural Awareness Change'. The y-axis ranges from -3 to 8. The x-axis categories are High, Low, and Did Not Implement. The bars show values of 6.440% for High (green), 0.380% for Low (red), and 1.679% for Did Not Implement (grey).</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Integrity Level</th> <th>Change (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>6.440%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>0.380%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Did Not Implement</td> <td>1.679%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Integrity Level	Change (%)	High	6.440%	Low	0.380%	Did Not Implement	1.679%
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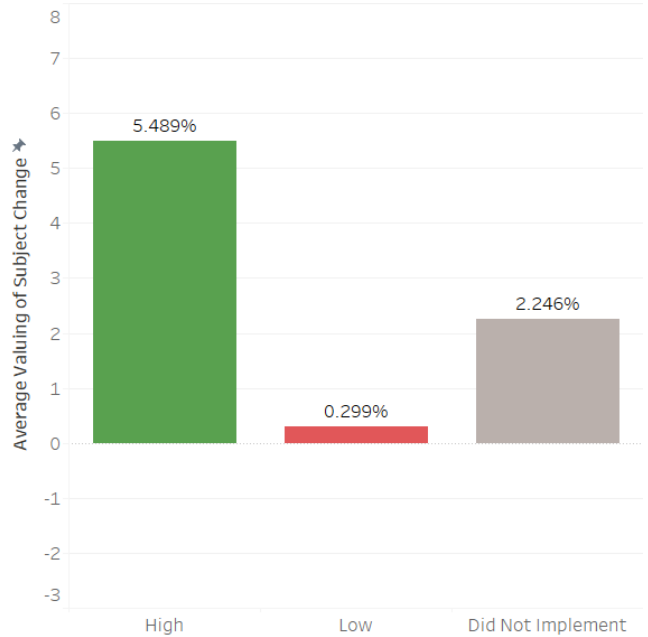
Rigorous Expectations

- +7%* for High Integrity (p=0.0348)
- No change for Low Integrity
- +3% for not implementing



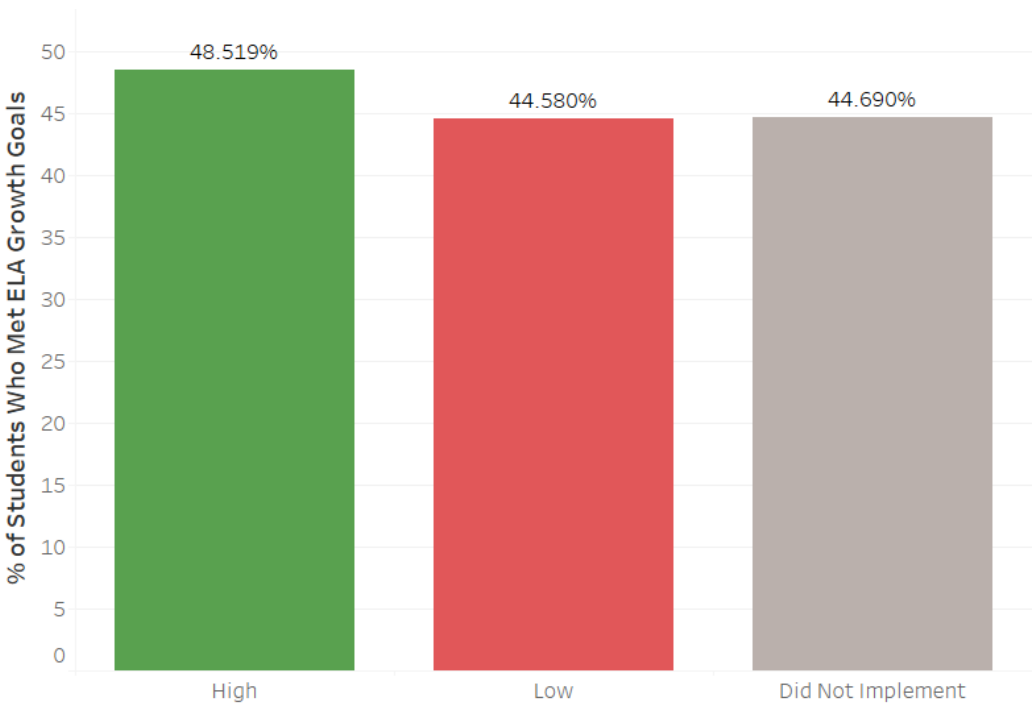
Valuing of Subject

- +5% for High Integrity
- +.2% for Low Integrity
- +2.2% for not implementing



Is There a Relationship Between “Identity Questions” and ELA Outcomes?

Having seen positive indicators for the relationship between the “Identity Questions” change idea, and student perception of the classroom, particularly in the domain of Rigorous Expectations, our second question was is there a relationship between “Identity Questions” and ELA outcomes? We are able to see a higher percentage of students meeting their ELA growth goals in high-integrity “Identity Questions” classrooms (+4% comparatively).



If Teachers are able to Create an Inclusive Classroom, does it Impact ELA Outcomes?

Turning next to looking at ELA performance, regardless of Identity questions, when you plot ALL the teachers in our network by their % of students who met their ELA screener growth goal by the overall change in classroom perception by their students shows a positive slope. While not significant at .1037, it does indicate a positive relationship between student perception of inclusive classrooms predicting their performance on the ELA screener. This allows us to finally ask what the relationship is between Integrity of “Identity Questions” is to students meeting their growth goals.

